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PUNJAB: INSURGENTS FOMENTING TROUBLE

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TRUMP SET TO BE ARRAIGNED TODAY

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY RISE FOR THIRD STRAIGHT SESSION

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY APRIL 4, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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KLOPP NOT AFRAID OF LOSING JOB
11 SPORT

Rahul gets bail; stay hearing on April 13

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/SURAT

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was granted bail by a Surat sessions court on Monday after he filed an appeal against his conviction in a criminal defamation case over his "all thieves have Modi as the common surname" remark in which he has been sentenced to two years in jail leading to his disqualification as a Lok Sabha member.

Rahul reached Surat in the afternoon, accompanied by his sister and party general secretary in Priyanka Gandhi, senior party leaders, battery of lawyers that made the day-long episode earning the former Congress chief criticism from the BJP.

The court of Additional Sessions Judge RP Mogera said it will hear Rahul's plea for suspension of conviction on April 13 after issuing a notice to complainant Purnesh Modi, a BJP MLA and former Gujarat cabinet minister. The court asked Purnesh to file his reply by April 10.

Rahul will not be required to appear in the court during the hearing of the case and the matter is being led by noted lawyer RS Cheema.

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Congress leader Rahul Gandhi waves at supporters as he leaves from Surat District Court after filing an appeal challenging his conviction and sentencing in the 2019 criminal defamation case over 'Modi surname' remark, in Surat on Monday PTI

Cong trying to exert undue pressure on court, says BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Accusing the Congress of its effort to browbeat the judiciary, the BJP on Monday said the Congress is indulging in a show of strength before a Surat court, where Rahul, accompanied by party leaders, filed an appeal against his conviction in a defamation case. The BJP said the show of strength highlights his "arrogance" and is

also morally as well constitutionally wrong.

Law Minister Kiren Rijiju alleged that the decision of the Congress leaders to accompany Rahul to the Surat court was a way of trying to exert "undue pressure" on the judiciary a charge rejected by party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, who said it was a symbol of support and not a show of strength.

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Don't spare the corrupt: PM to CBI

Today, there is no dearth of political will to act against corruption: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indicating that graft is likely to be a major plank in the 2024 Parliamentary polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said CBI's key responsibility is to free India from corruption, which is the biggest roadblock to democracy and justice.

The PM advised the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) that it should not be distracted by those trying to tarnish its image and instead the agency should go the whole hog against the corrupt.

Addressing a gathering at the diamond jubilee celebrations of the CBI here, the PM stressed, "Today there is no dearth of political will to take action against corruption in the country."

Modi exhorted the officers to take action against the corrupt, however powerful, without any hesitation. It is the desire of the people of the country that no corrupt person should be spared, Modi emphasised.

Modi said wherever there is corruption, the youth do not get equal opportunities, and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Minister Jitendra Singh, NSA Ajit Doval, CBI Director Subodh Kumar Jaiswal and others during diamond jubilee celebrations of Central Bureau of Investigation, in New Delhi on Monday PTI

just one special eco-system gets emboldened.

Dubbing corruption as the biggest enemy of merit, Modi said corruption gives encouragement to nepotism and dynastic rule. When nepotism and dynastic rule increase, the country's strength gets affected, and when the country's strength gets weakened, it hampers development, he said.

"Corruption is not just a small crime. It snatches the

rights of the poor, and that leads to the birth of many criminals," he said.

He further said those who benefitted from corruption have created an ecosystem which attacks probe agencies. But the agencies should not be deterred by stories about the power of the corrupt and their ecosystem to tarnish them.

"These people will keep distracting you, but you have to focus on your work. No corrupt

person should be spared. There should be no laxity in our efforts. This is the wish of the country; this is the wish of the people of the country. The country, laws and Constitution are with you," Modi asserted.

The Prime Minister's assertions came against the backdrop of the Opposition's charges against the Modi Government of misusing the investigative agencies against the political opponents. A

number of Opposition leaders are facing heat from the CBI and Enforcement Directorate.

Referring to international transactions and the movement of people, goods and services on a large scale, even outside geographical boundaries, Modi said that India's economic power is growing while those who create obstacles are also rising.

He warned that attacks on India's social fabric, its unity and brotherhood, and its economic interests and institutions would also increase. "Corruption money will be spent on this," Modi said, adding there is a need to understand and study the multinational nature of corruption.

The PM said India got a legacy of corruption at the time of Independence and instead of removing it, some people kept nourishing this malady.

He said that while a discussion on trillion dollars refers to a strong economy these days, a decade ago, when the CBI celebrated its golden jubilee, such figures were used to describe scams in the country. "There was a competition underway on who will set a new record of corruption."

The scams and the prevailing sense of impunity led to the destruction of the system, and an atmosphere of policy paralysis brought development to a standstill, he said.

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CAPSULE

FIVE MAOISTS GUNNED DOWN IN JHARKHAND

Chatra/Ranchi: At least five Maoists, including four who were carrying a total bounty of ₹60 lakh on their heads, were killed in a gunfight with security forces in Jharkhand's Chatra district on Monday, State DGP Ajay Kumar Singh said.

PROHIBITORY ORDERS ON, NO NET IN HOOGHLY YET

Rishra/Kolkata: Prohibitory orders continued, internet services remained suspended overnight in some areas of the violence-hit Hooghly district in West Bengal and the BJP State president was stopped from entering Rishra by the police on Monday.

HIGH AMMONIA LEVEL IN YAMUNA TO HIT SUPPLY

New Delhi: Water supply in parts of Delhi will be hit with high ammonia levels in the Yamuna causing up to 50 per cent decrease in production at the Wazirabad and the Chandrawal water treatment plants, the Delhi Jal Board said.

SURFACE OF GATEWAY OF INDIA CRACKED: GOVT

New Delhi: Few cracks were found on the surface of the Gateway of India in Mumbai, Parliament was informed on Monday.

3 killed as Noida man pours petrol, sets train travellers on fire in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Kerala Police is on the lookout for Noida resident Sharouf Zaifi, a construction worker, who poured petrol over passengers and set them on fire in an Alappuzha-Kannur Executive Express compartment, leading to the death of three passengers — a woman, her infant niece and a man on Sunday. The three passengers had jumped off the running train to escape blaze but to no avail.

Nine passengers suffered burns in the incident and are admitted in various hospitals in Kozhikode. The deceased have been identified as Mattannur natives Rahmath, her sister's daughter Sahara (2) and Soufeeq.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday announced a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the crime. A team of forensic experts rushed to the accident site and collected all relevant materials.

The Ministries of Home and Railways have asked for a report from the Government of



Kerala. Aswini Vaishnav, Minister for Railways, told reporters that he would speak to Vijayan and other Railway officials in the State.

A Railway Police officer said some other agencies too are looking into the matter to ascertain whether it has any terror links. "No other details can be shared presently. The investigation is going on," the officer said.

He also said a sketch of the accused based on the statement of one of the passengers has been released.

The Kerala CM, in a state-

ment, said the police have been instructed to carry out a thorough investigation into the incident. He said the police are trying to nab the assailant and the probe was being supervised by State Police Chief Anil Kant.

The CM said the State Government will take strong measures to ensure the safety of rail passengers.

"The Railway Ministry of Railways will be requested to take all possible steps for passengers safety," said Vijayan.

A case of murder has been lodged against the accused.

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Chorus of demand for caste census at DMK's Opp meet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Top Opposition leaders on Monday strongly pitched for a caste census at a DMK-convened conference on social justice which also saw calls for forging unity to take on the BJP in the run-up to the 2024 general election. The conference was seen by many as a show of strength by the Opposition with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, his Jharkhand counterpart Hemant Soren and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav joining in to raise their voice against oppression of backward classes.

The meeting saw a chorus from Opposition leaders demanding a caste census, with Tejashwi making a strong case for caste census, citing that the Mahagathabandan Government in Bihar has already announced a caste-based survey which has begun.

He said it was a concern that when governments in



Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand want to provide more reservation for OBCs, the governors stall it. "This is done at the behest of whom, everyone knows," Yadav said.

He urged the Opposition parties to come together setting aside their egos and said the best way to beat the BJP's politics of "polarization" was through social justice-based politics. Manoj Jha, also of the RJD, went to the extent of calling for a boycott of the census, if there is no caste census. "We should give a call — no census,

if no caste census," he said.

Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien said there are still some parties that do not want to fight the BJP and asserted that it is not the time to remain in the grey but it is time to be white or black.

He called on Andhra Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik to join efforts to take on the current government. Aam Aadmi Party MP Sanjay Singh also called for a caste census and alleged that the BJP is running away from it because

its ideological mentor RSS wants the 'varna system' to continue.

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah said if a future of India is to be envisioned, then people, irrespective of their caste, class, religion and creed have to be taken along. "For India to really shine, everyone needs to be taken along. We are all behind (MK) Stalin and support him in his efforts to make this India for everyone," he said.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said while reservation for the backward classes is a significant step to open windows of opportunity for them, it has to be accompanied by economic development.

"Economic development cannot be restricted to a few. Over the last two years, 40.5 per cent of wealth generated has been cornered by one per cent of the population. We have to fight the corporate communal nexus," he said.

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Shot at by neighbour for objecting to loud music, woman suffers miscarriage

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 30-year-old woman suffered a miscarriage after she was shot at by her neighbour in Northwest Delhi's Siraspur on Monday when she objected to loud music being played by a DJ during a function at his house, police said.

Harish, who fired at the pregnant woman, and his friend Amit, whose gun was used in the commission of the crime, have been arrested, they said. The condition of the woman is stated to be critical.

Around 12.15 am, a PCR call was received regarding a firing incident in Siraspur, a senior police officer said.

After reaching the spot, it was found that a woman, Ranju, a resident of Siraspur, was admitted to Max Hospital in Shalimar Bagh. Doctors at the hospital told police that she



had sustained a gunshot injury in her neck and was unfit for giving a statement, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer north) Ravi Kumar Singh.

Later, the statement of an eyewitness, the victim's sister-in-law, was recorded.

On Sunday, there was a "kuan puja" ceremony for Harish's son and a DJ was playing music during the function. Ranju came out in her balcony and asked Harish, who lives across the street, to stop the music, according to the eyewitness' statement.

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Modi emerges as world's most popular leader again: Survey

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has once again emerged as the most popular leader across the world, according to Morning Consult, a global decision intelligence firm that tracks the major decisions of global leaders.

The rankings released by the firm place Modi at the top leaving behind US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal shared the news on Twitter saying Modi is the "most loved and admired" leader.

According to Morning Consult, Modi ranked number one with an approval rating of 76 per cent while Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador grabbed the second spot.

Continued on Page 2

Frame charges against IM's Yasin for planning N-attack in Surat: Court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Delhi court has ordered framing of charges against banned terrorist organisation Indian Mujahideen's (IM) co-founder Yasin Bhatkal and several of its operatives in a case of conspiring to wage war against India in 2012, noting that he was planning to plant a nuclear bomb in Surat town.

Additional Sessions Judge Shailender Malik observed that the digital data extracted from

the devices seized from Bhatkal showed several video clips of jihadi literature, including writings, justifying killing of non-Muslims in the name of jihad. The court said there was enough evidence to put the accused on trial.

In an order on March 31, the court said prima facie the accused, who were members of the IM, entered into criminal conspiracy to wage war against India.

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China gives Arunachal Pradesh Mandarin name to assert its claim over Indian State

PTI ■ BEIJING

China has released a third set of names in Mandarin, Tibetan and pinyin characters for Arunachal Pradesh, as part of its efforts to re-emphasise its claim over the Indian State. China's Ministry of Civil Affairs on Sunday released the standardised names of 11 places for Arunachal Pradesh, which it calls "Zangnan, the southern part of Tibet" in accordance with regulations on geographical names issued by the State Council, China's cabinet.

The official names of the 11 places were released on Sunday by the ministry, which also gave precise coordinates, including two land areas, two residential areas, five mountain peaks and two rivers and listed the category of places' names and their subordinate administrative districts, state-run Global Times reported.

This is the third batch of standardised geographical names for Arunachal Pradesh



issued by China's civil affairs ministry. The first batch of the standardised names of six places in Arunachal was released in 2017, and the second batch of 15 places was issued in 2021.

India has previously dismissed the Chinese move of renaming some places in Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that the State has "always been" and will "always be" an integral part of India and that assigning "invented" names does not alter this fact. "This is not the first time China has attempted such a renaming of places in the state of Arunachal Pradesh," External Affairs Ministry

Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said in December 2021.

"Arunachal Pradesh has always been, and will always be an integral part of India. Assigning invented names to places in Arunachal Pradesh does not alter this fact," he had said.

The Global Times, which is part of the ruling Communist Party's mouthpiece People's Daily group of publications, quoted Chinese experts as saying that the announcement of names is a legitimate move and China's sovereign right to standardise the geographical names.

The first set of names was announced by China in 2017 days after the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh. China was sharply critical of the Tibetan spiritual leader's visit. The Dalai Lama fled from Tibet through Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and sought refuge in India in 1959 after China took military control of the Himalayan region in 1950.

Dhami seeks ₹3-K cr relief for Joshimath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Uttarakhand Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Monday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "one hour" and asked him to sanction a ₹2,942.99 crore package for relief and rehabilitation for people in Joshimath affected due to land sinking and slides in Joshimath.

According to a statement from the government, the package was sought mainly for "the construction of 150 pre-fabricated houses, the sight development and disaster allowance" for the people in the area impacted by the land sinking.

Dhami also sought a Vande Bharat train between Haridwar and Varanasi, saying that this would make it easier for pilgrims to travel between the two holy towns.

He also invited Modi to the Char Dham yatra, Adi Kailash and the Mayavati Ashram in Lohaghat.

The Chief Minister said interim relief, compensation for



damage to residential and commercial infrastructure, compensation for lands of families falling in the unsafe zone, permanent rehabilitation of affected people and acquisition and development of land and repair and restoration of affected departmental infrastructure are other tasks which require financial assistance.

Dhami said "the work of stabilisation and redevelopment of Joshimath has also to be done", according to a state government statement.

He also told the PM that the State has set up the Uttarakhand Landslide Mitigation and Management Centre, which will advise on landslide mitigation and management at the national level.

Cracks found on surface of Gateway of India: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A few cracks were found on the surface of the Gateway of India in Mumbai during an inspection but the overall structure was found to be in a "good state of preservation", Parliament was informed on Monday. Union Minister for Culture G Kishan Reddy said this in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha.

He was asked whether a recent structural audit of the Gateway of India has revealed cracks along the facade.

"The Gateway of India, Mumbai, is not a centrally-protected monument. It is under the protection of Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra. Few cracks were found on the surface during the inspection. Overall structure was found to be in a good state of preservation," he said.

In response to a query on whether any report has been submitted to the Union government in this regard and if so, what are the findings of the said report, the minister said, "No report has been submitted to Union government in this regard."

Delhi logs 293 Covid cases; positivity rate soars to 18.5%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded 293 fresh Covid-19 cases on Monday, with the positivity rate rising to 18.53 per cent which meant nearly one out of every five people tested turned out to be positive, according to data shared by the city health department.

Two Covid-related deaths were reported. The health bulletin, however, mentioned that the primary cause of the deaths was not coronavirus.

The city's Covid-19 death toll now stands at 26,532. Delhi saw 429 Covid cases on Sunday, the highest in over seven months, with a positivity rate of 16.09 per cent and one death.

It logged 416 cases on Saturday with a positivity rate of 14.37 per cent. The city recorded 295 coronavirus cases on Thursday with a positivity rate of 12.48 per cent.

On Wednesday, the national capital logged 300 cases and two deaths, while the positivity rate was 13.89 per cent.

Delhi had recorded 214 cases with a positivity rate of 11.82 per cent on Tuesday, 115 cases with a positivity rate of 7.45 per cent on Monday, and



153 cases with a positivity rate of 9.13 per cent on last Sunday.

The Delhi Government is keeping an eye on the spurt in Covid cases in the national capital and is "prepared to face any eventuality", Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had said on Friday.

Addressing reporters after chairing a review meeting on the Covid situation in Delhi, Kejriwal had said there was no need to worry for now and that the city government was taking all required steps.

Delhi has witnessed an increase in the number of fresh Covid cases over the last few days amid a sharp rise in the figure of H3N2 influenza cases in the country.

The number of fresh cases had seen a decline over the last few months in Delhi, and it had dropped to zero on January 16, the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic.

'TV ads for packaged food should have nutrition specific warnings'

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Noting that a majority of teenagers and their parents prefer eating outside such as packaged foods, do not look at expiry dates on food labels and were also clueless on quality certification on food items, a study has batted for adequate family-centric nutrition specific warnings and regulation on TV ads which are fuelling such unhealthy food habits.

The cross-sectional study conducted by doctors from AIIMS Bhatinda and AIIMS Raebareilly among school-going children aged 14-18 and their parents in Malwa region in Punjab last year found that almost half of the participants did not look at expiry dates on food labels, and 40% were not aware of quality certification on food items. Thus underscoring the fact that poor diets contribute to the rising global burden of overweight/obesity and associated comorbidities, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancers.

The study involving 722 school children and their parents concluded that food labels and TV ads significantly impact the eating habits of the young and increase their propensity to eat out. Only a quarter of the parents in the study cared about the accuracy of facts in TV food advertisements.

"The most preferred food choices by the students included packaged snacks, followed by packed foods like ready-to-eat noodles, while carbonated drinks and salads were the least preferred. The preference when eating from the market was the same across urban and rural areas, except that a higher proportion of children from urban areas preferred proper meals than those from rural areas," noted the study. It warned that such behavior will make teenagers



obese. Of all the ingredients of the food, cholesterol was the most common food component (53.9%) that affected the buying behavior of the student, followed by proteins (47.1%) and fats (38.8%).

Through a questionnaire, Dr Madhura Verma, Dr Rakesh Kakkar and Dr Ramnika Aggarwal from AIIMS Bathinda and Dr Bhola Nath from AIIMS Raebareilly found that most students did not find the food labels noticeable (61.9%) or readable (55.8%).

Regarding impact of TV ads on food habits, more than one-third of the parents expressed their deep concerns about the timing of the advertisements when children watch television (37.8%) and regarding the advertisements for food products that they perceived to be unhealthy at the time when their children are watching tv. Only one-fourth of the parents were concerned about the accuracy of the information regarding the advertised product's nutritional quality.

The endorsement of unhealthy food products by a famous personality in the food advertisement bothered nearly 45% of the parents, and 34% did not like the idea of offering freebies with the food products. Almost 40% said that the number of advertisements about perceived unhealthy food aired during the prime-time should be evaluated.

Man arrested for masquerading as PMO official's kin, threatening SHO

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

A 30-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly masquerading as a relative of a Prime Minister's Office (PMO) official and making indecent remarks and threatening a station house officer (SHO), police said on Monday.

The arrested accused has been identified as Satyaprakash Arya alias Siddharth, who was arrested from Sector-58 Gurugram on Monday.

According to the police, on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, SHO of Sector-65 police station Gurugram Inspector, Sudhir Kumar received a phone call on his official mobile number and the caller introduced himself as a relative of a higher official of PMO and asked him to get a free entry in a Byob (Agatha) located in Police Station Sector-65 jurisdiction. But the SHO refused the accused to help him to get free entry into the premises of the Byob.

Following this, the caller started pressuring the SHO on the name of the senior police officers and said that he is a relative of a high official posted in PMO and threatening the SHO with dire consequences.

On this, an FIR was registered. "During the probe, the accused disclosed that he works as a telecaller in a private company located in Sector-18, Gurugram", Preet Pal Sangwan, ACP (crime) said.

Frame charges against IM's Yasin for planning N-attack...

From Page 1

The bodies of a woman, an infant and a man, who went missing from the train after the fire, were recovered from the tracks near the Elathur railway station here, late on Sunday night.

Police believe they fell off the train or attempted to get down after seeing the fire. "A forensic team is inspecting the site," police said earlier. It also said a bag believed to be that of the accused was recovered from the tracks and it contained a bottle of petrol. "Besides that, there were no other clues in the bag. It is not believed to be an act of terror. There is no information or links regarding that presently," it said. The incident occurred around 9.45 pm on Sunday, when the train reached the Korapuzha railway bridge here after crossing Kozhikode city.

Initially, it was believed that the incident was an outcome of an altercation between the accused and another passenger.

Subsequently, police and a passenger present in the compartment have said the accused did not have any altercation with anyone. The accused poured an inflammable liquid, believed to be petrol, on the passengers and set them on fire resulting

in burn injuries to nine persons, police said.

"None of the passengers said they had an altercation or argument with the accused," the Railway Police officer said.

One of the injured passengers, who suffered minor burns, told a TV channel that the man suddenly came without a word or sound and sprayed petrol on several persons and set fire to them.

"It was very unexpected. There were few people in the compartment. Everyone panicked and started running when he set fire to people," he said. Ahammed Devarkovil, State Minister of Ports and an MLA from Kozhikode South constituency, told reporters that the incident was tragic and shocking.

He said that according to information received from police, the assailant is said to be around 25 years old.

"Police are trying to nab the accused with the help of CCTV footage," the Minister said.

Former Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly and senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala said there was a need to increase the security in trains and from now everyone should be checked before being permitted to board

a train.

"It would be unfortunate if people cannot travel safely in trains. It is an unprecedented incident. The state and central governments should take up the issue seriously," he said.

Chennithala also claimed that the incident was an example of the ineffectiveness in the functioning of the Railway Police Force (RPF).

"The incident should open our eyes to the need for increased security in trains," he added.

Earlier in the day, Railway police said some of the injured had suffered 50 per cent burns, but their health condition was stable. The bodies found on the tracks did not have any burns, it said.

The accused had escaped soon after the incident, while the injured were shifted to hospitals after passengers pulled the emergency chain. When the train reached Kannur, a few passengers complained that a woman and a child were missing after the incident. "A man, who was injured, kept looking for a woman and a child. We found footwear and a mobile phone of that woman," a passenger told the media at Kannur. Soon after the news of the missing persons came out, the city police inspected the tracks and found three bodies, including the woman and the child and a middle-aged man.

"We have found CCTV visuals of the suspect. Investigation is on," a senior police official of the district had said.

Chorus...

From Page 1

CPI general secretary D Raja also strongly pitched for a caste census and called for reservation in the private sector. Other attendees included former Uttar Pradesh CM and Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, former Union minister and senior Congress leader Veerappa Moily, Chhagan Bhujbal (Nationalist Congress Party), E T Muhammad Basheer (Indian Union Muslim League), K Keshava Rao (Bharat Rashtra Samithi) and MDMK leader Vaiko.

Bhujbal said parties should pass a resolution to conduct a caste census along with the national census. Basheer alleged that the BJP is working to remove the quota regime and the first step was by bringing in the EWS law and scrapping of 4 per cent quota for Muslims in Karnataka.

This is the second attempt of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) to unite the Opposition, rallying around Stalin. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Tejashwi Yadav and Farooq Abdullah were among those who were part of the DMK chief's 70th birthday celebrations recently.

Shot at by neighbour...

From Page 1

Thereafter, Harish took a gun from his friend Amit and opened

Cong trying...

From Page 1

Dubbing the Congress leaders' move to accompany the former party chief to court as "sycophancy of one family", Rijju wondered whether the family was above the country.

"My point is very simple — why is the Congress party trying to put this kind of undue pressure on the judiciary? There are means and ways to deal with judicial matters. But is this the way?" Rijju asked while talking to reporters in

the Parliament premises. He wondered whether there has ever been a case in the past where an entire political party tried to "gherao" a court. "When former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao was convicted Congress was quiet. P Chidambaram and DK Shivakumar didn't get support against charges for which they are out on bail," the law minister wrote on Twitter.

Only for Rahul Gandhi, the Congress is staging this "drama" as it considers a family and a person above the country and its laws,

he added.

Kharge said the decision taken by the party leaders to accompany Rahul Gandhi to the court was personal. "Even in a small case, family members join and go to court. Here, it is about an entire party and he (Gandhi) is fighting for the country," Kharge said.

BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra also accused the Congress of behaving as if he and his family are above the law of the land. Patra at a BJP press meet said, "Rahul must not think he is India and India is Rahul."

Rahul gets...

From Page 1

Cheema is also handling Rahul's and his mother Sonia Gandhi and others in the National Herald case.

"We had filed an application for Rahul Gandhi's bail and suspension of sentence along with his appeal against conviction by a lower court. The court heard the matter and granted him bail. The court kept the matter for hearing on the 13 of his conviction for April 15," briefed KC Panwala,

advocate for the Congress leader.

Besides Priyanka, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and his Chhattisgarh counterpart Bhupesh Baghel, Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhinder Singh Sukhu were also present and accompanied Rahul in the bus from airport to the court where the matter came up for hearing around 3 pm.

Several Congress workers and leaders headed to the

Gujarat city to extend support to the Gandhi scion but they claimed their vehicles were stopped, they were asked to pull over, and police were ensuring they did not capture the videos. Congress MLA Yashomati Thakur claimed the Gujarat Police stopped her vehicle multiple times and inspected it in the name of security checks and they also prevented the Gujarat party workers from expressing solidarity enroute.

Soon he was granted bail, Rahul took to social media and expressed this is a fight against "Mitrkaal" to save democracy and truth is his weapon in this struggle. "This is a fight against

'Mitrkaal' to save democracy. In this struggle, truth is my weapon, and truth is my support!," tweeted Rahul. Rahul has been taking the 'Mitrkaal' jibe at the central government, accusing it of working to benefit its "crony capitalist friends".

Congress leader and former Union Minister Shahshi Tharoor and Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh too responded saying it was an absurd allegation. Tharoor said Rahul is the principal political leader of a major Opposition party, so it is appropriate to put up a show of strength but ultimately, the soundness of the arguments of lawyers inside the courtroom is what prevails.

Modi emerges as world's...

From Page 1

"PM @NarendraModi remains the most loved, admired and trusted global leader," Goyal said in his tweet, sharing the survey.

Morning Consult, meanwhile, said the survey is based on data collected from March 22-28.

"Approval ratings are based on a seven-day moving average of adult residents in each country, with sample sizes varying by country," the firm said on its website.

The last in the list of 22 leaders is South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, who has an approval rating of 19 per cent.

Morning Consult said all interviews it conducted were online among nationally representative samples of adults. "Surveys are weighted in each country by age, gender, region and, in certain countries, education breakdowns based on official government sources... respondents complete these surveys in languages appropriate for their countries," the firm further said on its website.

The list is updated regularly with US President Joe Biden ranking number eight this year, slipping by one place. Out of the 22 countries, Czech Republic Prime Minister Petr Fiala, France's Emmanuel Macron and South Korean President Yoon Seok-yool ranked among the last three.

Don't spare...

From page 1

While Internet banking and UPI stand in stark contrast to the earlier "phone banking" malaise, wherein loans worth thousands of crores of rupees were sanctioned on the basis of phone calls from influential people, the PM said, adding, the beneficiaries scooted away with the public money.

The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act has so far enabled the confiscation of ₹20,000 crore worth of properties of fugitive offenders, he said.

Modi said the corrupt would even go to the extent of looting the aid given to beneficiaries of government schemes, be it rations, homes, scholarships or pensions, and the original beneficiary would feel conned every time. "Even a Prime Minister once said that for every rupee sent out to the poor, only 15 paise reached them," he said.

Modi said the beneficiaries of government schemes are

now getting their full entitlement due to the trinity of Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile, and more than eight crore fake beneficiaries have been removed from the system. "Due to DBT (direct benefit transfer), about ₹2.25 lakh crore has been saved from falling into the wrong hands," he said.

The PM also exhorted the CBI to devise ways to fast-track its investigations against the corrupt because a languishing probe gives a sense of safety to the corrupt while the innocent people keep suffering.

"CBI's name is on everyone's lips. It is like a brand for truth and justice. Even at the panchayat level, if some major crime happens, people want it to be referred to the CBI," he said.

During the event, an investiture ceremony for recipients of the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service and Gold Medal for Best Investigating Officers of CBI was held where Modi conferred the medals.

The PM also inaugurated the newly constructed office complexes of CBI in Shillong, Pune and Nagpur, released a postage stamp and commemorative coin, and launched the Twitter handle of the agency.

DU forms panel to probe harassment of IP College students

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

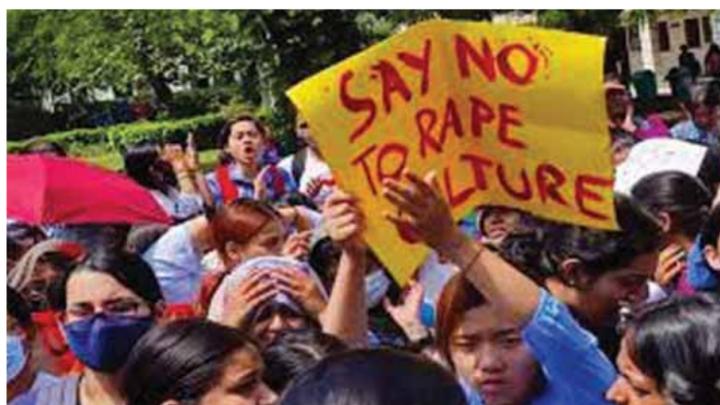
Delhi University on Monday constituted a five-member committee to inquire into alleged harassment of Indraprastha College for Women students during a cultural festival last week. The committee will be headed by Prakash Singh, director of South Delhi Campus, and has been asked to submit its report within a week, a notification issued by Delhi University Registrar Vikas Gupta stated.

Students at Indraprastha College for Women alleged that some men scaled the walls of the college during a fest last week and "harassed several students". "The Competent Authority has constituted the committee to inquire into the incident that happened on 29th

March, 2023 in the Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi during the college cultural festival," the registrar said. The committee was also asked to suggest measures to curb such incidents in future.

Members of the committee are Proctor Rajni Abbi, Dean of Students Welfare Pankaj Arora, Joint Proctor Geeta Sahare and Professor, Department of Hindi, Manju Mukul Kumble. "The Chairperson of the Committee is authorised to co-opt any additional member as and when needed," the registrar said.

Earlier, the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) on Monday said it has launched an inquiry into repeated incidents of inappropriate behaviour towards women during college festivals, days after Indraprastha College for Women students alleged sexual harassment during a fest. The women's panel has issued summonses to Delhi Police and Delhi University (DU) officials, asking them to appear before it on April 6.



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issued summonses to Delhi Police and Delhi University (DU) officials, asking them to appear before it on April 6.

"This inquiry is on the overall issue so that strong systems are created to deter such incidents in the future. Earlier, the DCW

had issued notices to Delhi Police and IP College to inquire into the specific case of harassment," the commission said. Students at DU's Indraprastha College for Women alleged that some men scaled the walls of the college during a fest on March 28 and "harassed several students".

Similar incidents have also been reported in some DU colleges in the past. In 2020, some people forced their way into Gargi College premises during a fest and molested the girl students, the DCW noted.

Again, in 2022, some male students forced their way into Miranda College and harassed the girl students. These incidents are happening repeatedly in DU colleges and raise serious concerns regarding the safety of girl students, especially during college fests, it said.

Taking action in the matter, the DCW chief has issued summonses to the registrar of Delhi University and Joint Commissioner of Police, Special Police Unit for Women and Children (SPUWAC), seeking an action taken report in the matter, it added.

The DCW asked DU to provide inquiry reports on incidents that took place in Gargi College, Miranda House and Indraprastha College along with details of action taken by the university against college administrations for any security lapse.

Meanwhile, a students' group on Monday claimed that around of its 15 activists were detained from outside the Indraprastha College for Women, where they had gathered to stage a protest against the alleged harassment of girl

students during a fest last week. Delhi Police, however, has denied the charge.

Led by the All India Students' Association (AISA), the agitators had gathered to protest against the alleged incident and the administration's response to it. Police personnel were deployed in large numbers while the gates of the college were barricaded.

"About 15 AISA activists have been detained from the college gate and are being taken to Burari police station," the students' body's Delhi unit president Abhigyan alleged. A senior police officer, however, denied the allegation.

"Around 10-15 protesters had gathered outside the college gate. They were removed peacefully," he said. No one has been detained, the officer added.

55 more retail, trade outlets to operate round-the-clock in city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena has approved the operation of 55 more e-commerce and retail outlets round-the-clock in the national Capital, months after he gave a nod to over 300 establishments to operate 24x7. These 55 outlets situated at various locations in Delhi include e-commerce, retail garments and accessories outlets. The proposal, given by the Labour Department and endorsed by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, was made to exempt another 55 establishments from Sections 14, 15 and 16 of the Delhi Shops and Establishments Act, 1954.

"Taking grave exception to the delays ranging up to seven years in disposing of applications for exemption by the Labour Department, the LG in October last year noted on file that the basic purpose of according exemptions under Section 14, 15 and 16 of the Delhi Shops & Establishment Act, 1954 is to enable the various establishments to carry on with their businesses on a 24x7 basis," a Raj Niwas official said.

Their round-the-clock functioning will facilitate employment generation and promote a positive business environment for future investment in the national capital. The LG had flagged the "unprofessional attitude and lack of due diligence" on the part of the Labour Department on the subject matter and underlined that some pick-and-choose policy has been adopted by the department in processing such applications, which could be indicative of corrupt practices.

Saxena noted the inordinate delay in the processing of such routine applications also neg-



atively affects the confidence/sentiments of the business community at large. The LG has also directed the department to dispose of such applications within a prescribed timeline so that a conducive and investor-friendly business environment, promoting economic growth, can be created and positive confidence can be instilled in the business community at large.

In order to ensure transparent and effective monitoring, an online system has been developed for the receipt of applications for exemption under sections 14, 15 and 16 of the Delhi Shops and Establishment Act, 1954. The Raj Niwas official informed that the applications are only accepted through online mode.

Kejriwal urges PM to restore Railway fare concessions for senior citizens

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days after a parliamentary standing committee recommended the resumption of the fare concession offered to senior citizens by the Railways, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to restore the Railway fare concession for senior citizens, saying no society and country can progress without the blessings of its elderly.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, he said the Centre has a budget of Rs 45 lakh crore and would incur a cost of Rs 1600 crore, which was just a "drop in the ocean," if it extends the concession to senior citizens. It was "unfortunate" to terminate the rail ticket concession scheme for the elderly and monetary constraints cannot be the reason for it, he said and cited his government spending Rs 50 crore in the annual budget on a scheme for free pilgrimage.

"Please do not stop the concession given to the elderly in the railways. Crores of elderly people are benefiting from this concession," Kejriwal, who sent the letter on Saturday, tweeted.



By stopping the facility, a message was being given to senior citizens that the government did not care for them which was against the culture of the country, he said, adding that no person, society or country can progress without the blessings of the elderly.

Delhi was seeing progress in all areas due to the blessings of the elderly for whom free pilgrimage of religious places has been arranged by his government, he said. "Please restore the concession to the elderly in the railways, crores of elderly people were benefiting from this scheme: Our progress is possible only with the blessings of our elders, but we often become arrogant that whatever we have achieved in life is the result of our hard work alone," Kejriwal wrote to the prime minister, appealing him for restoration of 50 per cent rebate

to elderly in railway fare.

The Centre had in 2020 discontinued the concessions granted to senior citizens to discourage the movement of the public to arrest the spread of COVID-19. Kejriwal also said that the reason cited by the central government to stop the scheme was its financial implications and added that in reality, this does not make any sense.

"Monetary constraints cannot be the reason for stopping this concession. This is about intentions. By paying Rs 50 crore for the Mukhyamantri Teerth Yatra scheme from its annual state budget of Rs 70,000 crore, the Delhi Government does not become poor. "The central government recently cited in Lok Sabha that it was spending Rs 1600 crore on the railway concession for senior citizens. The budget presented by the Central Government this year was of Rs 45 lakh crore. This cost of the railway concession is just a drop in the ocean," he said.

Saving such a small amount of money by inconveniencing crores of the elderly will not be beneficial to the country, Kejriwal said.

CBI court extends Sisodia's judicial custody, AAP protests outside BJP HQ

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A designated CBI court on Monday extended the judicial custody of former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia till April 17 in the Delhi excise case. The CBI told the court the investigation is at a crucial stage case.

The CBI had arrested Sisodia on February 26 in connection with its probe into alleged corruption in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped liquor policy for 2021-22. He has also been arrested by the ED in the same case; his bail hearing in the ED case will be on April 5.

The senior AAP leader was produced before the Rouse Avenue court in a case pertaining to alleged irregularities in the framing and implementation of the State's now scrapped excise policy.

Meanwhile, the AAP workers staged a protest outside the BJP headquarters on Monday to express solidarity with jailed party leader Sisodia, while his court hearing was underway. There was heavy police deploy-



ment on the stretch of road leading up to the BJP office in view of the protest.

Carrying placards that read "Manish Sisodia Tujhe Salaam", the protesters raised slogans, such as "Manish Sisodia ko rihakaro" (free Sisodia) and "jail ke taale tootenge, Manish Sisodia chootenge". AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar said, "Manish Sisodia has brought a great revolution in Delhi's education sector. The public is with him. Those who dedicate their lives for public welfare, the BJP government puts them in jail. Those who cheat the country like (industrialist Gautam) Adani get protection."

MCD discontinues services of 3 'third parties' from April 1

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the standing committee of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi is yet to be elected, services of three 'third parties' have been discontinued by the civic body from April 1 onwards, and they have been directed to withdraw data entry operators and other contractual workers engaged through them. Earlier, a group of BJP councillors protested at the Civic Centre — MCD's headquarters — and alleged that "services of contract workers have been discontinued".

"A delegation of the opposition party in the AAP-led MCD submitted a memorandum to the Delhi mayor's OSD, demanding service contract renewal of all contract employees," the Delhi BJP said in a statement. It also claimed that services of DBC (dengue breeding checking) workers have also been discontinued.

A senior official, however, when asked about the claim, said, "As far as I know, only data entry operators and some 'maalis' will get impacted." "The standing committee is authorised to extend the contract of services of third parties engaged with the MCD. As the standing committee of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi is yet to be elected, services of three third parties have been discontinued by the civic authorities, with effect from April 1," said an official source.

Authorities have also issued orders to that effect on March 31, he said. One of the orders issued regarding a third party firm reads, "In continuation of this department's work order No. AO/SO-IV/CED/2023/4098 dated 10.01.2023 vide which your service was extended till 31.03.2023. The Competent Authority vide its approval dated 29.03.2023 has discontinued its services



from the MCD beyond March 31 to provide data entry operators (DEOs)."

The order also directed the firm to "withdraw data entry operators (DEOs)" engaged through it from the work of MCD beyond March 31 and do not deploy these

DEOs for the work of MCD, with effect from April 1. No payment will be made by MCD to the third party, if any work is carried out by the data entry operators of the firm, it says, adding, the order has been issued with approval of the competent authority.

Fresh mayoral poll may be held in April, Oberoi to hold post till election

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The fresh mayoral poll in Delhi is likely to be held late April, and incumbent Shelly Oberoi will continue to hold charge of the top post till a new mayor is elected. Officials said that the next mayoral poll is likely to be held around late April. Mayor Oberoi will continue to hold the post till a new mayor gets elected. Tenure of mayors have been extended terms in the past too, officials said.

Oberoi, an AAP councillor, was elected as the mayor of Delhi on February 22. She defeated BJP's Rekha Gupta by a margin of 34 votes. Oberoi polled 150 votes, while Gupta received 116 votes out of the total 266 votes polled.

liar elections were stalled amid ruckus over voting rights being given to nominated members. The city gets a new mayor after the end of financial year.

The post of mayor in the national capital sees five single-year terms on a rotation basis, with the first year being reserved for women, the second for open category, third for reserved category, and the remaining two again for the open category.

Meanwhile, Oberoi on Monday held a special meeting with councillors and officers of City-Sadar-Paharganj Zone to review development-related work, the mayor's office said in a statement. The objective of the meeting was to be aware of the local issues of the respective wards so that those could be resolved with better coordination between the councillors and officers.

Senior officers of the corporation and Leader of the House Mukesh Goel were present during the meeting, it said.

Atishi slams BJP for spreading misinformation about Govt school results

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Education Minister Atishi slammed the BJP for spreading misinformation about the results of the Government schools of Delhi and challenged them to show one such school in Delhi where over 90 per cent of the children have failed in any grade. The leaders of the BJP are only capable of spreading misinformation in the media and concocting lies, she said.

Atishi said that the BJP does not bother to fix the government schools in the states that are run by them and pointed out how the schools in BJP-ruled states function under classrooms made of tin sheds and with the least amount of basic facilities.

She added that the Kejriwal Government is doing everything in its control to improve the government schools in Delhi and children over here have been leaving private schools to join government schools in the National Capital.

"Therefore the BJP has nothing else to do besides



spreading misinformation about our schools. The issue with the leaders of the BJP is that if these leaders were themselves educated, then they would be able to read the order of the Department of Education," she said.

She explained that if the leaders of the BJP had just read the simple order of the DoE, then they would have understood that there is a very simple process of rechecking. This is done to ensure that there is no error in uploading the marks given to the system. She added that the process of correction of marksheets is such that the marks are first written on the answer sheets, then written in the records and later also updated online.

Poor edu model of Delhi has been exposed: BJP, Cong hit out at AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and Congress on Monday hit out at the AAP saying that the education model of Delhi has been exposed. BJP leaders called the chief minister Arvind Kejriwal as the biggest liar of Indian politics and dishonest chief minister of the country. Delhi Congress president Ch. Anil Kumar said that it was shocking that 96 per cent students of classes 9 and 11 in government school have failed to pass the muster in their final year exams, thus thoroughly exposing the Arvind Kejriwal Government's so-called "Delhi Model of Education".

In a joint press conference, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari and MLA Ajay Mahawar exposed with evidence the false statement given by Arvind Kejriwal regarding jobs, in Assam. Tiwari said that Kejriwal kept telling lies in every department, be it Yamuna cleaning, purchase of buses, drinking water and everyone has seen the video of the plight of the education system.

Seeing the video, it can also



be said that Kejriwal kept lying on the education system as well. He said that the whole of Delhi should know that Kejriwal is the most corrupt and liar Chief Minister.

Addressing the press conference, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said, "Kejriwal has claimed that 12 lakh jobs were given by his government, but only 440 jobs were given to the aspirants during his rule since 2015."

"Kejriwal is the biggest liar and the most corrupt and dishonest chief minister in the country. It sounds good that 12 lakh jobs have been given, but it is a false claim as has been proved by a RTI reply of his

government itself," he added.

During his visit to Assam on Sunday, Kejriwal promised jobs for all unemployed youngsters if the AAP is voted to power in the northeastern state and said his party has given employment to 12 lakh people in Delhi in seven years and 28,000 people in Punjab in a year. BJP MLA Ajay Mahawar said of the 440 jobs given by the AAP government in Delhi from 2015 to 2023, 176 were given in 2015, 102 in 2016, 66 in 2017, 68 in 2018 and 28 in 2020. The Kejriwal government failed to provide a single job in 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023, he added.

CM directs DJB to give him daily reports on water availability, supply

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal directed the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) on Monday to give him daily reports on water availability and supply and prepare a comprehensive plan to ensure that treated wastewater is reused in the city. The DJB supplies 995 million gallons of water a day for the consumption and daily needs of around two crore residents of Delhi, against the demand of around 1,300 MGD.

The government is aiming to increase the water availability in the national capital to 1,240 MGD by March 2025. Kejriwal held a meeting with DJB officials to review the preparations for the summer



season. "DJB will now have to give daily report of total availability and supply of water in Delhi to Honorable Chief Minister," the chief minister's office wrote on Twitter. "Complete plan for re-use of STP water should be made, water will also be given to nearby parks," it said in another tweet.

Delhi's sewage treatment plants discharge 514 MGD of

treated waste water, of which 267 MGD is returned to the Yamuna river for downstream use and 90 MGD is used for horticulture purposes. The CMO said more than 450 places have been identified in Delhi where arrangements will be made to provide clean and pure water to the public through reverse-osmosis systems.

The groundwater table at a number of places in Delhi is high but the water is not fit for drinking purposes owing to high salinity levels. The government plans to draw groundwater in such areas and clean it using modern RO systems, according to officials.

The CMO also said the government will ensure an

early approval for all the DJB schemes from different departments.

During the meeting, DJB officials stated that in the first phase, they plan to set up 500 RO plants along with tubewells in water-deficient areas, including unauthorised colonies, where piped water supply is not available, and water is currently supplied through tankers.

DJB will set up 500 RO plants in first phase with tube wells in water-scarce areas including unauthorised colonies; land earmarked for 471 ROs. The DJB is setting up 30 RO plants of 50,000 litres per day (50 KLD) capacity as a pilot project, and two RO plants have already been installed at the Jharoda

Government School and Shakur Basti. Meanwhile, work on two more RO plants is ongoing in the Hari Nagar assembly constituency. Land surveys for the remaining RO plants are being finalised in coordination with elected representatives to identify available land. After the installation of the RO plants, RFID cards will be issued to local people to ensure they receive an adequate supply of clean water.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast above-normal temperatures in most parts of the country this summer season, which could strain the water supply in parts of Delhi, which depends on neighbouring states for water.

Rain damaged 8-10% wheat, late-sowing to offset loss: Agri Min

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The Ministry of Agriculture on Monday said about 8-10 per cent of the wheat crop is estimated to have been damaged due to recent untimely rain and hailstorms in key producing States, but better yield prospects in late-sown areas are expected to make up for the production loss. Despite the recent inclement weather, Agriculture Commissioner P K Singh asserted that the country's total wheat production will touch a record 112.2 million tonnes this year as per the second estimate of the agriculture ministry. India is one of the major pro-

ducers of wheat, a key staple for a significant population, and the crop damage scenario also comes against the backdrop of persisting high inflation and food security woes globally amid geopolitical uncertainties. Since the last few weeks, major wheat-growing states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have received unseasonal rains accompanied by thunderstorms, hailstorms and gusty winds due to the Western disturbances at a time when the crop was almost ready for harvesting. After a review meeting with senior officials of the major wheat-growing states on the extent of crop damage,



Singh said: "The untimely rains and hailstorms have caused both the crop loss at some places as well as yield gains in late sown areas." About "8-10 per cent wheat crop damage" is estimated in areas that were affected by lodging (falling of plants to the

ground) due to hailstorms, thunderstorm and high-velocity winds, he said. The extent of damage to wheat acreage is not much considering the country's total wheat sown area of 34 million hectares this year, he said. In other places where there were no hailstorms and strong winds, the Agriculture Commissioner said untimely rains have improved the soil moisture and further boosted the yield prospects of the wheat crop. The fall in temperature during the grain filling stage further improves the yield, he said. Singh further said: "More area has gained from untimely rains and the crop yields are

likely to be higher by 10-15 per cent in late sown areas." In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, 80 per cent of the wheat crop has been harvested, therefore there has not been much damage to the crop in these two states, he said. In other states, about 25 per cent of the area under wheat in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana was sown late and the untimely rains in these places are helping the crop growth, he added. "So, the likely dent to be caused due to the crop damage will be offset by the gains in yields. We will no doubt achieve the record wheat production as per the second advance esti-

mate of the agriculture ministry," Singh said. The ministry has pegged a record 112.2 million tonne wheat output in the ongoing 2022-23 crop year (July-June). Last year, unseasonal rains and heat waves led to a fall in domestic wheat production, forcing the government to ban exports to check rising domestic prices. According to state official data, about 5.23 lakh hectares of wheat crop is estimated to have been damaged in three states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh due to the inclement weather. The assessment of damage in Punjab and Haryana is under-

Make diaspora feel Missions home away from home: Parl committee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
In an effort to reach out to the Indian diaspora especially students abroad, Indian embassies and consulates should be very proactive in their respective countries to make them feel that Indian missions are really a 'home away from home'. Making this assertion in its report, the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs also noted that the profile and geographical distribution of the Indian diaspora presents a great opportunity to promote the country's soft power and cultural diplomacy abroad. The committee recommended in its report tabled in Parliament on Monday that potential of the diaspora community should be harnessed to serve as an effective tool in furthering India's interest and influence globally. "The committee also recommends that the ministry should prepare a policy framework in this regard and work out an action plan to implement the same in a time-bound manner," the panel said. The report said the ministry told the committee that it



is exploring the possibility of creating a facility for compulsory online registration of all emigrants who are proceeding abroad for employment through various airports and check posts in India. The committee desired that "Indian embassies/consulates should be very proactive in reaching out to our students in their universities/institutes so that they are made to feel that our Missions/Posts are really a 'home away from home'". Referring to return to the country by Indians from the Gulf region following job losses in view of the Covid pandemic, the panel said a rehabilitation scheme should be initiated to ensure livelihood security for them. The committee recom-

BJP expands its rainbow caste coalition to maximise draw in next year's polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
BJP is moving fast to expand its 'rainbow caste coalitions' in states to maximize its draw in Lok elections, next year. The fast-track moves of the BJP have showed up not only in its nation wide OBC 'Gao Gaon Ghar Ghar Chalao' campaign starting April 6 but manifesting in more concrete terms in political moves in Bihar, UP and in Southern Karnataka. On March 30, the government in Karnataka notified a decision taken by the cabinet to scrap the 4% backward classes quota for Muslims - recognised as a backward class in Karnataka - and to reallocate the Muslim OBC quota to the two most influential communities in the state, Lingayats and Vokkaligas. This apart the BJP's Basavaraj Bommai government provided internal reservation for the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes. In 2019, the BJP had won 25 seats out of total 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka which is also to for assembly polls on May 10. In Bihar where opposition



RJD-JDU combine is in saddle, the BJP is wooing non-Yadav Kushwaha community - claiming to be the inheritor of emperor Ashok's lineage. The BJP only recently appointed Samrat Choudhary, a Kushwaha, as its state unit with a hint that they would be soon replacing Yadavs in the top in the state. Estimated to be around 7-8 per cent of the state's population - the second highest after the Yadavs - the backward caste has often supported CM Nitish Kumar in the polls. In Bihar which elects 40 Lok Sabha members the BJP is trying to expand its voter base among diverse - smaller castes -- under the extremely backward class - that may together with the traditional

Jaishankar receives King of Bhutan as he begins 3-day visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Wangchuk arrived here on Monday commencing his three-day visit to India. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar received him at the airport reflecting the importance New Delhi has attached to the visit. Later, Jaishankar took to Twitter saying the King's visit will further strengthen the "close and unique ties" between the two countries. "Honoured to welcome His Majesty the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, on his arrival in India. His visit will further strengthen the close and unique India-Bhutan partnership," the external affairs minister said. The King is undertaking the visit at the invitation of President Droupadi Murmu. The Bhutan monarch is accompanied by the country's foreign minister Tandi Dorji and other senior officials. During the visit, the King is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Murmu, where high-



level exchanges between the two nations will take place on Tuesday. The King of Bhutan had a transit visit to Delhi in September last year. "Warm welcome to India, Your Majesty! His Majesty the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck arrived in India a short while ago. His Majesty was received by EAM @DrJaishankar at the airport," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted. Bhutan is a strategically important country for India and the defence and security ties between the two sides have witnessed significant expansion in the last few years.

Impart education in Indian languages, says President at IGNOU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
President Droupadi Murmu on Monday advocated for imparting education in Indian languages which will result in world-class knowledge and science. Speaking at the 36th convocation of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Murmu lauded the progress made by women in several sectors, including education, and noted that 55 per cent of the students who received their degrees, certificates and diplomas were women. "I am happy to note that there are 55 per cent girl students among those who received their degrees, certificates and diplomas at the university. Girl students account for more than half of the students who have received gold medals today. "I am happy to see the progress of women in various sectors, including edu-



cation," she said. On Monday, 2,79,918 students received their degrees, certificates and diplomas. The president said that IGNOU has played a commendable role in promoting "access to higher education". "The university has played a significant role in providing opportunities for higher education to students from far-flung areas, rural areas and economically weaker groups. With the help of flexibility in IGNOU's academic programmes, many students have pursued higher studies while managing their work, family and other responsibilities," she said.

India upheld global image during Covid: Army Vice-Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
India has upheld its global image at various occasions especially during the pandemic and the Indian Army stands fully committed and prepared to fulfil the country's expectations wherever possible, Vice-Chief of Army Lieutenant-General Suchindra Kumar said here on Monday. He made these observations during his keynote address at the third General Sundarji Memorial Lecture organised by the Indian Army to commemorate the memory of one of India's foremost military thinkers. The lecture was organised under the aegis of Mechanised Infantry Centre and School (MIC&S) and Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS). The event was attended by serving and retired officers of the three Services as well as literati and various think tanks. The



lecture remembered the dynamic and visionary General K Sundarji, the 13th Chief of the Army Staff, who is also fondly called as the 'Father of the Mechanised Infantry Regiment'. The speakers for the event were India's former Foreign Secretary, Ambassador Shyam Saran and Lieutenant General Raj Shuka (retired), Member

Social Justice Ministry pinning hopes on GST Council for relief on disability aids

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI
With the Union Finance Ministry turning down its request to remove the 5 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) on aids and appliances used by people with disabilities such as wheelchairs and Braille papers, the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry is now pinning hopes on the GST Council to give relief to the sector. Submitting before a Parliamentary panel headed by Lok Sabha MP Rama Devi, Rajesh Agarwal, Union Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities recently shared that they had requested the Union Finance Ministry before the Budget announcement to remove the 5 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) on aids and appliances used by the PwDs, but in vain. "Now we will approach the GST Council at the higher level with a similar request," Agarwal submitted before the



panel which has tabled its report in Parliament recently. Supporting the Ministry's move, the panel noted that aids and appliances are critical for persons with disabilities to pursue independence, literacy and employment with dignity. It also said that the Department has an enormous social responsibility on their shoulders, and a national obligation as well, to mainstream disability, remove stigma and negative stereotyping and lay the foundation of a truly inclusive society through their schemes and initiatives, and contribute directly and indirectly to the nation's welfare.

The Committee further noted that as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), India has enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 which seeks to empower persons with disabilities to live independently and with dignity. While the Government of India aims to create an inclusive society for persons with disabilities, there are numerous hurdles faced in this regard such as lack of economic opportunities, lower educational achievements, poorer health, and higher rates of poverty. The Committee is of the opinion that the biggest stumbling block would be the high prevalence of social stigma attached to disability. "They are of the opinion that persons with impairments become 'disabled' only when the society denies them an enabling environment that gives them a chance to lead a dignified life," said the panel in its report.

As cases rise, SII urges Health Min to include Covovax in CoWIN portal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Amid rising coronavirus cases, the Hyderabad-based Serum Institute of India (SII) has written a letter to the Union Health Ministry seeking the inclusion of its COVID-19 vaccine Covovax on the CoWIN portal as a heterologous booster dose for adults, official sources said on Monday. The letter was written by Prakash Kumar Singh, Director, SII last week, they said. Last month, COVID-19 Working Group headed by Dr N K Arora had also recommended to the Ministry for inclusion of Covovax on the CoWIN portal as a heterologous booster dose for adults who have been vaccinated



with two doses of either Covishield or Covaxin. The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had on January 16 approved the market authorisation for Covovax for those who have been administered two doses

Covovax for restricted use in emergency situations in adults on December 28, 2021, in the 12-17 age group on March 9, 2022, and in the 7-11 age group on June 28, 2022, subject to certain conditions. Covovax is manufactured through technology transfer from US-based vaccine maker Novavax. It has been approved by the European Medicines Agency for conditional marketing authorisation. It was granted emergency-use listing by WHO on December 17, 2021. In August 2020, Novavax Inc. had announced a licence agreement with the SII for the development and commercialisation of NVX-CoV2373, its COVID-19 vaccine candidate in India, and low and middle-income countries. The DCGI had approved

Researchers link mysterious acute hepatitis in kids to co-infections from multiple common viruses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The mysterious acute severe hepatitis cases that began appearing in otherwise healthy children post Covid-19 lockdowns last year in many countries have been now unraveled by the researchers. They have linked the disease to co-infections from multiple common viruses, in particular a strain of adeno-associated virus type 2 (AAV2). The researchers explained that AAVs are not known to cause hepatitis on their own but they need "helper" viruses, such as adenoviruses that cause common childhood respiratory conditions like colds and flus, to replicate in the liver. There have been about 1,000 cases to date; 50 of these



children needed liver transplants and at least 22 have died. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had also launched an investigation into the causes. The study, published in journal Nature, suggests that for a small subset of these children, getting more than one infection at the same time may have made them more vulnerable to severe hepatitis.

pathogens," said Charles Chiu, professor of laboratory medicine and medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases, director of the UCSF Clinical Microbiology Laboratory, and senior author of the paper. "That's what led us to speculate that the timing of the outbreak was probably related to the really unusual situations we were going through with Covid-19 related school and daycare closures and social restrictions," Chiu said. To conduct the study, which was backed by the CDC, researchers used polymerase chain reaction (PCR) along with various metagenomic sequencing and molecular-testing methods to examine plasma, whole blood, nasal swab and stool samples from the 16 pediatric cases.

Appealing to Hindu brothers to ensure peace: Mamata

Bengal CM accuses BJP of planning more trouble on Hanuman Jayanti

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday accused the BJP of making sinister plans to provoke riots once again on Hanuman Jayanti, alleging that the saffron party did the same on Ramnavami. She launched a scathing attack on the BJP Government at the Centre calling it a Government of sinners who were starving lakhs of poor people of Bengal by not clearing their dues.

Banerjee also appealed for peace and asked "Hindu brothers" to ensure that minorities are protected as prohibitory orders remained in force after post-Ram Navami violence in two towns of the densely populated Hooghly district.

Banerjee who was speaking at a rally at Khejuri in East Medinipur, questioned why processions were continuing to be staged days after the festival of Ram Navami, dedicated to Lord Ram and claimed there was a deliberate attempt at "inciting violence and create tension".

"Why will the processions continue for five days after Ram Navami? Do it on the day of the festival. We have never had objections... But they cannot do rallies with guns and bombs, or without necessary permissions from the police," the firebrand Chief Minister asserted.

"They are desperately entering minority areas to incite violence and create tension," she claimed without naming anyone.

"They (goons) are setting fire to food carts of poor vendors and dancing with guns... On April 6 (Hanuman Jayanti), they are planning to do another round of violence. I have asked

the DMs and the police to be alert. Not just Bengal, they have created this scenario throughout the country," the Chief Minister claimed.

She added that she was "appealing to my Hindu brothers to make sure that no violence takes place against minorities... No one wants these cases of atrocities and violence." Slamming the BJP Government for stopping central funds Banerjee said that "unlike the yesteryear the Centre takes away all the taxes in the new GST regime... but when it comes to giving back the State's share they block those funds."

Today the situation was such that "they have made our 17 lakh poor labourers work in various projects in MNREGA scheme but are not paying their wages... they have blocked the funds meant for housing projects," Banerjee said adding "this is a Government of looters and beiman (traitors) who promise one thing and do something else... they are a Government of sinners... because it is a sin to starve the poor which they are doing. "They have made people construct roads, dig ponds, build houses in 100-days' work scheme and now they are not paying their wages... it is a crime to hold back wages... more than that it is a sin to starve the poor which they are doing," she said.

Attacking the BJP for orchestrating riots in the State Banerjee said, "they are bringing people from outside to provoke violence... The BJP is trying to stay afloat and relevant in Bengal politics by programming festivals for five days and inciting communal riots in the name of religious processions."



A shopkeeper looks through a window in his shop shutter after the imposition of Section 144 in the Sandhya Bazar area a day after clashes broke out between two groups during a Ram Navami procession, in Hooghly district. PTI

Apprehending similar situations on Hanuman Jayanti, too, Banerjee said "the people of Bengal should watch out and remain careful for there could be attempts at provoking riots during Hanuman Jayanti also."

Asking the people not to support the BJP in 2024 general elections Banerjee said, "The people should take a pledge that they would oust the BJP from Bengal and India. I request you not to support BJP, the party that instigated riots."

Meanwhile, the Left and the Congress hit out at both the BJP and the TMC for trying to create a TMC-BJP binary by pro-

voking riots in the State.

CPI(M)'s Biman Bose who demanded immediate deployment of central forces and Congress' Adhinar Chowdhury said that both the parties had understood from the Sagardighi Assembly by-elections — where the Left-backed Congress candidate defeated both TMC and the BJP — that the people were getting gradually alienated from them which was why they were trying to divert the attention of the people by creating communal foment. "The more they do this the more they will get alienated from the people," Chowdhury said.

Bengal in danger, resembles erstwhile J&K, alleges BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA/PNS ■ RISHRA/KOLKATA/NEW DELHI

Bengal is in danger and the condition of the State can only be compared to what it was like in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) which was identified by rioting and stone-pelting incidents.

This is how the Bengal BJP has depicted the deteriorating law and order situation in Bengal demanding Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's resignation.

Senior State leader and Hooghly MP Locket Chatterjee accused Banerjee of playing "appeasement politics," at the cost of the majority Hindu population.

Her statement on "police inaction and administrative connivance" came hours after communal riots during a Ramnavami procession left several people, including a saffron MLA injured and properties including road-side stalls torched. "Two riots happened

at Howrah Shibpur and Rishra in a matter of a couple of days... But the Chief Minister did not take any action... instead of taking action she sat on a dharna in Kolkata to divert the attention of the people knowing full well that plans were afoot to trigger riots," Chatterjee said adding Banerjee's Trinamool Congress was trying to play divisive politics so as to polarise the Muslim population before the panchayat elections.

"This was because her party had been defeated in an Assembly by-election at Sagardighi which had almost 67 per cent minority voters the saffron," MP said.

"It is strange that despite being the Chief Minister of the whole State Mamata Banerjee has sympathy for only those who observe Roja and has no eye for the Hindu festivals like Ramnavami and Navratri... Even the Hindus keep fast for nine days during this period," Chatterjee said adding, "in

Bengal, Hindus are in danger... today the situation of the State is like the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir where rioting and stone-pelting were an everyday affair... The Chief Minister who is patronising such unrest in Bengal must resign from her post."

Chatterjee's statement came almost at a time when a band of saffron workers led by State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar on Monday noon jammed the busy GT Road off Konnagar in Hooghly district — where they were stopped by the police on their way to the riot-hit areas of Rishra barely 30 km from Kolkata.

Majumdar said, "The Chief Minister does not have the courage to arrest those who are bombing and attacking the members of other communities because they are her voters... instead of arresting the attackers she is arresting those who were attacked." She demanded "immediate deployment of central forces in Howrah."

Adhikari gives 'No vote to Mamata' call

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader B. Suvendu Adhikari on Monday called for removal of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee from power, because she had not only presided over a thoroughly corrupted Government but also failed to preserve the interests of the citizens. Adhikari who donned a T-Shirt inscribed with the slogan: 'No Vote To Mamata,'

called out to the people in a massive rally at Chandrakona in East Midnapore district saying, "Let us defeat Pishi (paternal aunt) and Bhaipo (nephew)" implying the Chief Minister and her nephew and Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

Referring to an earlier speech by Banerjee warning people against communal disturbances that could be provoked by the BJP, he said "a Chief Minister who provokes people into taking part in riots has no right to continue in power."



B. Suvendu Adhikari speaking at a rally at Chandrakona in East Midnapore district. PTI

CPI(M) which was trying to resurrect with the help of the Congress again Bengal needed a double-engine Government aided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said.

"The Pishi and the Bhaipo have stolen everything that the State had... they have driven out industries, stolen government jobs and now they are igniting riots... so there should be "No Vote to Mamata," Adhikari said.

Bihar Assembly paralysed as netas trade charges over riots

PTI ■ PATNA

The Bihar Assembly plunged into turmoil on Monday with the BJP and the ruling grand alliance trading charges over the violence that broke out in parts of Bihar following Ram Navami celebrations, forcing the speaker to adjourn the House for the day.

Earlier, Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary had adjourned the House till 2 PM within minutes of commencement at 11 AM due to uproarious scenes. Tuesday is a holiday in Bihar on account of Mahavir Jayanti. No sooner than the House had assembled, Leader of the Opposition and other BJP members were on their feet, raising the issue of the riots that began on Thursday evening, during Ram Navami festivities, and continued till Friday, forcing Union Home Minister Amit Shah to cancel his visit to Sasaram on Sunday.

The Opposition members, though, were soon outnumbered and outshouted by those in the 'Mahagathbandhan', who accused the BJP-RSS of involvement in the riots, and also deplored Shah's remarks at a rally in Nawada district on Sunday, where he had vowed to "hang upside down" the rioters if the BJP came to power in the state. The riots had broken out in Sasaram and Bihar Sharif on



Security personnel detain protesters following clashes between two groups during Ram Navami procession, at Bihar Sharif in Nalanda district on Monday. PTI

the evening of Ram Navami, when processions were taken out across the state.

The state government, however, asserted that "administrative promptness" foiled "full-blown" communal conflagration in the two towns.

"We had hoped that as the home minister of the country, he will make an appeal for peace. But the language he used, expressions like hanging upside down ('ulta latka denge') showed that top BJP leaders are losing their sense of propriety as the Lok Sabha elections are nearing," alleged Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, the State's Parliamentary Affairs Minister. Chaudhary had made an offer of a statement on the

riots, on the floor of the House, which, however, could be of no avail in the face of the raucous scenes. The senior JD(U) leader, nonetheless, spoke to the media outside the assembly and charged Shah with having courted "sasti lokpriyata" (cheap popularity) in his Nawada speech, besides trying to undermine the chief minister by choosing to have a word with the governor on the situation in the state. "We follow the Nitish model wherein nobody is framed on false charges and no one who is guilty of wrongdoing is spared. There were attempts to disrupt communal harmony but, administrative promptness prevented full-blown riots," the Minister said.

Sibal calls Shah's 'No riots in BJP rule' claim a jumla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Monday termed as "another jumla" Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks that "riots don't take place under BJP rule," and cited the number of instances of communal violence under a BJP Government at the Centre and in some States.

During his Bihar address at the rally, Shah said, "Let Prime Minister Narendra Modi return to power in 2024 with majority, giving 40 out of 40 seats (in Bihar), and help the BJP form its own Government in the Assembly polls in 2025. The job of straightening rioters by hanging them upside down ('ulta latka kar') will be done by the BJP." "Riots don't take place under our rule," he added.

Reacting to the remarks, Sibal said, "Amit Shah: 'Riots don't take place under our rule.' Yet another 'jumla' (rhetoric)."

The former Union Minister said, "5415 communal riots reported between 2014-2020 (NCRB data). 2019 alone - 25 communal riots UP (9), Maharashtra (4), MP (2). Communal violence: Haryana



(2021) highest cases, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh (April 2022). In the wake of communal violence in West Bengal and Bihar, Sibal had on Sunday questioned the "silence" of Prime Minister Modi over the matter, and said "let not 2024 general elections be the reason" for the violence.

Sibal's remarks had come after communal violence rocked Sasaram and Bihar Sharif towns during Ram Navami festivities.

Sibal, who was a Union Minister during the UPA 1 and 2 regimes, quit the Congress in May last year and was elected to the Rajya Sabha as an independent member with the Samajwadi Party's support. He recently floated a non-electoral platform 'Insaaf' aimed at fighting injustice.

BSY says son Vijayendra will contest from Shikaripura

PTI ■ SHIVAMOGGA

Former Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa on Monday said his son BY Vijayendra will contest the May 10 Assembly elections from Shikaripura in this district, which he represented in the Lower House six times.

The BJP strongman, who had already announced his retirement from electoral politics, again ruled out the possibility of his son being fielded from Varuna in Mysuru against Congress stalwart Siddaramaiah. Vijayendra, who is a BJP State vice-president, sought the people's blessings to contest from Shikaripura.

"There was a pressure on Vijayendra to contest from Varuna constituency but I decided that he should contest from Shikaripura because this was the constituency which gave me a political life, recognition and honour," Yediyurappa said addressing a public meeting. Yediyurappa's statement came even though the BJP's Central Parliamentary Board, the party's highest decision-making body of which he is a member, has not yet cleared the list of candidates.

Last week, Yediyurappa hinted that his son may contest from Varuna but, the very next day, ruled out that possibility.

BJP, JD(S) leaders trying to shift loyalty to Cong: Shivakumar

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Several BJP and JD(S) leaders joining the Congress voluntarily is a "big evidence" that people have decided for a change, after the "failure of the double engine government," the KPCC chief further said.

"There is a big list of people wanting to join the Congress... The party has not assured tickets to anyone. We will screen every name, only if we are able to accommodate them we will consider," he said, adding that there are also some who are willing to join the party unconditionally to work for it.

Meanwhile, Bommai said on Monday that the ruling party already has the survey report of each constituency but it has sought the opinion of each District Core Committee on shortlisted candidates.

"We will discuss the names recommended by the district committees during the State Core Committee meeting on Tuesday and then send it to the Central Parliamentary Board. The Parliamentary Board is likely to meet on April 8 where the names will be finalised after discussion," Bommai said.

The Parliamentary Board is the BJP's highest decision-making body. Shivakumar was speaking after inducting Kudligi BJP MLA NY Gopalakrishna, who had resigned as a legislator on Friday, into the party. "Several BJP and JD(S) leaders are knocking our door, this is evidence to show that the voice of the people of the state is in favour of the Congress and that our march is on a right track, towards power," Shivakumar said. Speaking to reporters here, he noted Gopalakrishna resigned as BJP MLA and joined the Congress; similarly JD(S) MLA K M Shivalinge Gowda too has resigned and will be joining the party soon.

'Plants under stress found to emit sounds'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers recording and analysing sounds emitted by plants under stress have found that they are emitted at a volume similar to human speech, but at high frequencies, beyond the hearing range of the human ear. The scientists at Tel Aviv University, Israel, found that each type of stress was associated with a specific identifiable sound. "While imperceptible to the human ear, the sounds emitted by plants can probably be heard by various animals, such as bats, mice, and insects," they said in a study published in the journal *Cell*.

"From previous studies we know that vibrometers attached to plants record vibrations. But do these vibrations also become airborne soundwaves - namely sounds that can be recorded



from a distance?" said lead researcher Lilach Hadany. The first stage of the study, focussing mainly on tomato and tobacco plants, involved the researchers placing plants in an acoustic box in a quiet, isolated basement with no background noise. Ultrasonic microphones recording sounds at frequencies of 20-250 kilohertz (humans cannot hear beyond 16 kilo-

hertz) were set up at a distance of about 10 centimetres from each plant.

"Before placing the plants in the acoustic box we subjected them to various treatments: some plants had not been watered for five days, in some the stem had been cut, and some were untouched. "Our intention was to test whether the plants emit sounds,

and whether these sounds are affected in any way by the plant's condition. "Our recordings indicated that the plants in our experiment emitted sounds at frequencies of 40-80 kilohertz. Unstressed plants emitted less than one sound per hour, on average, while the stressed plants - both dehydrated and injured - emitted dozens of sounds every hour," said Hadany.

The recordings collected were analysed using specially developed machine learning algorithms, a kind of artificial intelligence, which learned how to distinguish between different plants and different types of sounds. These algorithms were ultimately able to identify the plant and determine the type and level of stress from the recordings. Further, the algorithms identified and classified plant sounds even when the

plants were placed in a greenhouse with a great deal of background noise, where the plants had been subjected to dehydration over time.

Here, the researchers found that the quantity of sounds they emitted increased up to a certain peak, and then diminished.

"We assume that in nature the sounds emitted by plants are detected by creatures nearby, such as bats, rodents, various insects, and possibly also other plants - that can hear the high frequencies and derive relevant information. "We believe that humans can also utilize this information, given the right tools - such as sensors that tell growers when plants need watering. Apparently, an idyllic field of flowers can be a rather noisy place. It's just that we can't hear the sounds!" said Hadany.

Patra chawl case: ED attaches two plots of HDIL promoters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said it has attached two Goa plots of HDIL promoters Rakesh Wadhawan and Sarang Wadhawan worth over Rs 31 crore in connection with a money laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the redevelopment of Patra 'chawl' in Mumbai.

The money laundering case stems from an FIR registered by the Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) against Guro Ashish Construction Pvt Ltd, and others. The Wadhawans were the directors of this company.

Earlier, the ED had arrested Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) MP Sanjay Raut and his "close associate" Pravin Raut in this case. The case relates to an alleged land scam worth Rs 1,034-crore involving the redevelopment of the Patra "chawl" in Mumbai's Goregaon.

Guro Ashish Construction Private Limited was involved in the re-development of this "chawl", which had 672 tenants living in tenements on 47 acres belonging to the Maharashtra Housing Area Development Authority (MHADA), the ED had said earlier.

"Rakesh Kumar Wadhawan, Sarang Wadhwan

and others were the directors of Guro Ashish Construction Pvt Ltd and a tripartite agreement was signed between tenants, MHADA and Guro Ashish Construction Pvt Ltd."

"According to the agreement, the developer was to provide the flats to 672 tenants and develop flats for MHADA and thereafter remaining area to be sold by the developer," the ED said. The directors of Guro Ashish Constructions "misled" MHADA and sold the Floor Space Index (FSI) to nine developers and collected a net amount of Rs 901.79 crore without constructing the rehabilitation part for 672 displaced tenants.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Doctrinaire approach

Tharoor wants Opposition unity but Rahul's coterie is obsessed with Savarkar

Senior Congress leader Lok Sabha member Shashi Tharoor offered some good counsel to the bosses of his own party on Sunday. First, he expressed dismay at Congress leader Digvijaya Singh's thank-you-Germany tweet after Berlin said that it took note of Gandhi's disqualification, Tharoor said he would have advised his senior party colleague not to say what he did. "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 asserted. This is in tune with his staunch anti-colonial stance. The recent remark by Singh, and his earlier ones, is not something that the rank and file of the grand old party may cherish. Why should the GOP look for endorsement for its position from a foreign country? The Government dislikes such commentary from Western nations. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said, "The West thinks it has a God-given right to comment on internal matters of other countries." But Singh — and maybe some other Opposition leaders — sees an opportunity in Western nations' criticism of the Narendra Modi Government.

Tharoor "would actually encourage one of the smaller parties to play the role of convener of an Opposition alliance. Unity is far more important than pride of place, in my view." This view is in accordance with the objective political reality. The Congress may be the largest Opposition party with

pan-India presence and the second largest vote share, but it is very weak in terms of organisational muscle and morale. The story of the GOP in the last one decade has been the story of decline and electoral defeats (both in the general and state elections), with very few successes. Further, its leaders have not made great efforts to unite the parties opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party. Even Rahul Gandhi's high-profile Bharat Jodo Yatra, though it boosted his personal image, did little to bring anti-BJP parties together. Worse, his own statements on Savarkar have antagonised an ally, the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray). In such a milieu, the GOP stands to lose nothing if the leader(s) of a smaller party take the initiative and forge an alliance. There is a precedent: earlier, leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) cobbled together anti-BJP alliances — the United Front in 1996 and the United Progressive Alliance in 2004. This brings us to the critical question: would the Congress top brass allow that? From the Opposition's perspective, it is here where the shoe pinches, for it looks like the approach of some advisors to Rahul Gandhi is doctrinaire rather than political. They seem to be more interested in pursuing their Leftwing agenda than strengthening the party or the Opposition. Hence Rahul's obsession with Savarkar — even at the expense of Opposition unity.

PICTALK



A procession during celebrations of Mahavir Jayanti in Ajmer

Punjab: Insurgents fomenting trouble



BRIJENDER SINGH PANWAR

The divisive elements are lurking around to take advantage of the adverse situation. It calls for strong counteraction from the enforcement agencies

Despite launching search operations in Amritsar, Moja and Jalandhar districts in Punjab and later in Kurukshetra and Karnala districts of Haryana, the Punjab Police failed to arrest "Waris Punjab De" chief Amritpal Singh, who could dodge the police at will. At a crucial time when Punjab is facing multiple challenges like pitfalls of farm laws, drug menace, the exodus of Sikh youth to foreign lands, migration of labour from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and denial of justice to Bandi Sikhs, events unfolded swiftly when a well-built and clean-shaven Dubai based trucker suddenly emerged on the horizon of Punjab like a meteor, mimicked the demeanour, attire and oratory of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and was overnight groomed as Bhindranwale 2.0.

However, in spite of all efforts of the organizers, he couldn't fit into the role of fire-breathing preacher and rabble-rouser reformer which Bhindranwale was. Fortunately, the majority of Punjabis didn't fall into the trap and quickly realized that it was a well-designed effort to create trouble in Punjab. They could make out that Amritpal was a plant in the fertile soil of Punjab to create secessionist unrest.

They realized that Amritpal was a bitter reminder of the dark phase of militancy during the 80s and immediately rejected its repetition. The appeal of Akal Takht Jathedar, and Giani Harpreet Singh to Amritpal through a video message "He should surrender and join the investigation" was a welcome message at the right time. Now, the question is who is behind popping up Amritpal and what were the Intelligence agencies doing while the "enemies of India" were on their job to create trouble in Punjab?

The inability of Punjab Police to immediately arrest Amritpal has given credentials to the suspicion that he is being protected by some vested interests and powerful people within and outside the country. Initially, it appeared that the Central Intelligence agencies were using him to destabilize the state government paving way for President's rule.

Now, with the cracking down



of state and central agencies on Khalistani elements by arresting more than 122 of them, imposing of National Security Act and Centre providing all support by shifting the arrested suspects to Dibrugarh jail in Assam has diffused this theory.

It stands proved by the recent incidents of Amritpal moving into Mercedes Benz owned by a drug kingpin; his associates are supposed to have raised Rs 35 crores from donors abroad; reports of innumerable calls made by the fundraiser to contacts in Pakistan; the violent demonstrations of Khalistani elements outside the High Commissions in Great Britain, San Francisco and Time Square, New York in USA goes to prove a foreign hand in all the recent happenings.

All said and done, the present situation needs to be analysed keeping in mind the prevailing situation in Punjab. The first factor is that the Punjab farmers after emerging from the long protest movement and its aftermath are facing a major crisis in agriculture. They are still in protest mode because most of their demands have not been met and seem to be major recruits for secessionist activities by vested interests. The second



THE INABILITY OF PUNJAB POLICE TO IMMEDIATELY ARREST AMRITPAL HAS GIVEN CREDENTIALS TO THE SUSPICION THAT HE IS BEING PROTECTED BY SOME VESTED INTERESTS

factor is the alienation of the voters from the major political parties like the Akali Dal, BJP, Congress and even AAP whom they voted to power so enthusiastically, but, are now disillusioned. The vacuum created by moderate political parties is being occupied by fringe elements like Waris Punjab De and other sections of pro-khalistani political outfits with the support and money power of Diaspora Punjabi having Khalistani leanings to create trouble in Punjab.

Amritpal is being used as a pawn in the hands of these vested interests to create unrest in the minds of the people by using religious fervour and exploiting the unrest amongst the youth of Punjab. The irresponsible commentary and coverage in myth-making of Amritpal in print, TV and social media have been a dangerous trend that seems to be a repeat of the 80s in the case of Bhindranwale. The wide coverage of his attention-seeking actions followed by a series of interviews, exaggerations and distortions in reportage enormously inflated Amritpal's actions providing him with a platform that he hardly deserved.

However, despite the planned projection of Amrit-

pal, the Sikh community has seen through his game. With the violence in Ajnala and the attack on the police station, Amritpal's visible efforts to shield himself behind the motorized Palki on which Guru Gobind Sahib was being carried, even while his associates broke through the police barricades, his brave declarations challenging the police to arrest him and at the same time abandonment of his supporters and flight in the face of actual arrest, many social media clips demonstrating panic and desperation on his part and that of his supporters, clearly indicates his cowardice and opportunism which has not gone well with the Punjabis. This is apparent from the fact that there has been no genuine protest or opposition to police action and arrests.

Undoubtedly, Punjab is on a boil. The situation is under control for the time being, but, the divisive elements are lurking around to take advantage of the adverse situation and it calls for strong counteraction from the enforcement agencies.

(The writer is a senior journalist and Chairman, Panwar Group of Institutions, Solan, Himachal Pradesh. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DIRECT SELLING

Sir — So far, only eight states have formed committees in the country to monitor direct selling, in efforts to strengthen the regulatory framework to weed out entities operating fraudulent schemes and protect the interests of direct sellers and their business continuity. This will help protect the direct selling industry in the respective states and provide policy clarity for the industry.

Rules and Regulations are required for direct selling companies to own, hold, and licence a trademark/service mark for the goods or services in the remaining states of the country. Furthermore, it requires direct selling companies to upload all important details such as balance sheets and FSSAI licenses, as well as appoint Grievance Redressal officers to resolve consumer complaints.

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

PM'S EDUCATIONAL CERTIFICATES

Sir — The controversy surrounding Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's educational qualifications has refused to die down for nearly eight years now. The plot thickened after Gujarat High Court quashed a 2016 order of the Chief Information Commission (CIC) and said that Indians need not know about the educational qualification of the PM officially. The High Court also imposed costs of ₹25,000 on the Delhi Chief Minister (CM) Arvind Kejriwal who had sought details of the PM's degree (PM Modi completed his graduation from Delhi University in 1978 (Third division) and post-graduation (Entire Political Science, First Class) from Gujarat University in 1983) certificate.

Immediately after both Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) held press conferences to aggressively target each other over the issue. Accepting Modi's degree is not fake, even if that agrees with Delhi CM Kejriwal: "Entire country is stunned by the High Court's order because there should be a freedom of seeking information and asking questions in a democracy." But the big

Salim Durrani was an ionic cricketer



Former Ace Indian cricketer Salim Durrani who passed away on Sunday at Jamnagar at the age of 87, was an all-rounder cricketer who played a pivotal role in several memorable victories for India in international cricket matches in the 1960s and early 70s, he was a great all-rounder who had a unique ability to finish game either as a batsman or bowler.

Durrani who had played 50 Test innings for India, was a slow left-arm orthodox bowler and

a left-handed batsman famously known for his six-hitting prowess, as a batsman who had scored 8545 runs in first-class cricket matches and also took mind-boggling 484 wickets with left-arm spinner, though he had made one century during his lifetime his uncanny ability to score Sixers raised his stature with cricket fans. Prime Minister Narendra Modi while paying respect to the departed soul said he was an institution himself who immensely contributed to India's rise in the world of cricket. Cricket legend also had an inning with Bollywood and appeared in the film Charitra with Parveen Babi in 1973. For his immense contribution to Cricket, he was honoured with an Arjuna Award first as any cricketer and the C.K. Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award by the BCCI in 2011. Slim Durani leaves behind a Legacy that will remain unmatched for generations to come, he has inspired a generation of cricketers. The true and inspiring legacy of an iconic cricketer will continue to inspire young cricketers. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family during this difficult time, RIP

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bangalore

COMMUNAL DISHARMONY

Sir — It is a matter of concern that festivals are being weaponized to attack other religions. The processions taken out have become like a battlefield. The police who should be ideally doing other things to nab criminals are forced to act like a sentry on duty to see nothing untoward happens. In spite of all these communal clashes took place on Ram Navami. Sometimes provocative slogans are deliberately raised in order to annoy other groups. Every time festivals of two religions come at the same time there is considerable tension around the religious symbols at these places. GB Shaw rightly said that a man will do anything for his religion; fight for it, kill for it or even die for it; everything except live!

Anthohny Henriques | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Fight viral infections with vitamins

Vitamins and minerals which boost immunity are our best defence against viral infections. They should be replenished before it is too late

COVID-19 emerged as one of the most challenging periods in human history. The pandemic disrupted lives globally, causing unprecedented health crises, economic turmoil, and social upheaval. Healthcare systems were pushed to their limits, and communities faced isolation. As the world rises from the ashes of the COVID-19 devastation, a sharp rise in H3N2 influenza cases has been reported in India. Additionally, the country is also witnessing a surge in COVID-19 infections again.

One of the preventive steps taken by individuals around the world — besides from social distancing, face covering, and reduced contact — was the use of vitamins and minerals to boost the immune system and increase a person's chance of fighting off the virus. Considering the current situation, this practice must be maintained. The Indian dietary supplements market, for instance, has grown exponentially in the last few years to reach INR 436.5 billion in 2022, according to IMARC. There are also



projections that the market will surpass INR 958.1 billion by 2028 at a CAGR of 13.5%; a climb that will see India become one of the global leaders in pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals, reaching approximately Rs. 148 crores by 2025.

Immunity boosters

There are several options available to keep the immunity level high. From pharmaceuticals to nutraceuticals, and other modern ranges, there's certainly a choice for everyone. In India, for instance, nutraceuticals have grown tremendously in popularity and acceptance, especially when it has to do with immune enhancement. The bioactive derivatives from sources like phytochemicals, antioxidants, amino acids, fatty acids, probiotics, etc., found in nutraceuticals make them a viable defence against viral attacks.

Nutraceuticals containing Vitamins C, Zinc and D, as well as selenium are active against COVID-19. The physical barriers that our body puts up against such viruses can be enhanced by Vitamin D, while also boosting antimicrobial peptides. When combined with the anti-viral and anti-inflammatory capabilities of Vitamin C and the action of selenium on the cytotoxic effector cells, the herbs, processed foods, beverages, diets, and nutrients that make up nutraceuticals help in enhancing immune functions and preventing viral infections. Also, Zinc plays a supportive role in COVID-19 management by bolstering the immune system and potentially reducing the severity of the illness.

Another unique option is the plethora of D3 formulations that can be found across the country and the rest of the world. Beyond muscle movement and bone health, D3 is also considered an effective immune booster. Supplements and Nutraceuticals made from fatty fish flesh or fish liver oils, along with other derivatives from organic D3 sources are useful

options for immune enhancement. The good thing is, they come in different forms, including soft gel capsules, gummies, dissolvable tablets, powders, and so on.

Modern-day Nutraceutical manufacturers have become more creative than ever before, owing to so many reasons. The emergence of gummies came about as a result of the need to make drug consumption easier and more convenient. What this indicates is that anyone can take immune boosters on the move without the need for water or a break just to take a drug.

Defences against viral

Tweaking one's diet to include more vitamins and minerals is also extremely important. Supplementation is the most convenient way to achieve a balance in our diet. Emphasising the importance of safety, always consult a doctor before taking supplements, as this can help prevent potential side effects and ensure compatibility with one's specific health conditions.

(The writer is, joint managing director, of Akums Drugs & Pharmaceuticals)



SANJEEV JAIN



FIRST COLUMN

YOU ARE THE AWARD WINNER

Awards can be fulfilling, so give yourself one for what you are, writes Hingori

Life is like a movie, and just like the Oscars or music awards, there are a host of self-awards that you can bestow upon yourself to recognize your worth or caliber. If you think you don't deserve these awards, don't worry. Keep working towards it until you reach the point of "I do." It's like marriage, but with yourself.

But let's take a deeper look at the concept of self-awards. On one level, it can be seen as a way of recognizing and celebrating our accomplishments in the physical world. However, on a deeper level, self-awards can also be seen as a way of recognizing the growth and development of our spiritual selves.

Of course, it's important to note that self-awards are not meant to be an expression of ego or selfishness. The ego, or the sense of 'I', is the biggest obstacle in realizing the true nature of the self. Instead, self-awards should be seen as a means of acknowledging and celebrating one's journey toward self-realization. It is a recognition of the hard work and dedication that has gone into reaching a particular milestone in one's life.

Our journey towards self-improvement and personal growth is an essential part of recognizing the divinity within ourselves, as we strive to overcome our limitations and connect with the deeper essence of our being. The process of self-improvement can be challenging, but it is worth it in the end. And what better way to celebrate our victories than by giving ourselves a pat on the back in the form of a self-award? But how do we know which self-award to give ourselves? Well, it depends on the attributes we develop and the purpose we align ourselves to.



Let us examine some of the award categories:

THE BEST DIRECTOR AWARD: This award recognizes individuals who align their life's philosophy and practices with their purpose. They guide and direct others to overcome their ego and understand the illusion of the self. You know, like a guru or spiritual teacher, but cooler. The director is like the Gandalf of the movie of your life, guiding and directing you through challenges and obstacles. And who wouldn't want to be compared to Gandalf?

THE BEST ACTOR AWARD: Life on earth is a series of acting gigs, and this award recognizes those who can curate their behaviour to meet the expectations of those who feel a sense of entitlement. Satisfying the expectations of those to whom you are related in these characters makes it easier to focus on what matters and that is the growth of the spirit. It recognizes the importance of empathy and the ability to understand and connect with others. Actors are like chameleons, able to blend in and adapt to their surroundings. Good actors make better husbands, parents, children, and corporate leaders. So, if you're a good actor, you're basically a superhero in disguise.

There is a red flag here though. Acting is an art form that involves embodying a character and portraying their thoughts, emotions, and actions convincingly. Actors immerse themselves in their roles, sometimes to the point where it becomes challenging to separate themselves from the characters they are playing. This phenomenon has been observed in various actors, and some have even required psychiatric help to transition back to their real-life personas like Marlon Brando in *Godfather*.

This immersion in a character can be seen as a temporary state of Maya. The actor is creating an illusion, which they will eventually have to transcend when the performance is over. However, in some cases, actors may have trouble separating themselves from the role, leading to potential psychological issues.

It is important to understand, the goal is not to reject maya entirely but to transcend it. In the context of acting, this means that actors must learn to step into and out of roles without getting lost in the illusion.

To be continued...

Reforms pay in long run, must be pursued

It will be worthwhile to explore if direct taxes could further be lowered and the exemptions done away with



SUMET BHASIN



The full-year foods and services tax collection in 2022-23 is pegged at Rs 18.1 lakh crore. There is a reasonable estimation that the country may net Rs 24 lakh crore in 2023-24. The monthly GST collections have consistently been above the Rs 1.5-lakh crore threshold for a number of months.

The March collection at Rs 1.6 lakh crore, on the back of a 13 per cent growth rate, is reassuring. It's also comforting that the robust growth in indirect tax collections has come on the strength of domestic consumption growth. This is also captured in the numbers of the automobile sector.

The index of prosperity could be measured from the date of the sales of SUV vehicles, which reported 27 per cent in the last fiscal. This is being hailed by business observers as the best-ever performance of the automobile sector. Clearly, more people are hitting the road in their SUVs.

The extent of road development in the country in the last nine years has already been well documented. Now, people have the confidence that they can slip behind the steering wheel for a long journey on well-developed and maintained roads all across the country. This augurs well for the economy. Roads are the key drivers of the economy, as the movement of logistics with ease and speed will help not only in making India into a well-knit and unified market but also help the country take the rightful position in the global supply chains.

This is captured in the GST data. The interstate trade is growing fast. Month-on-month growth in the integrated GST, which is the measure of interstate trade, is growing at close to a 20 per cent rate, accounting for the largest kitty in the overall collections at Rs 82,907 crores in March. More than half of the GST collections are accounted for by the IGST. This should boost the confidence of the traders.

At the same time, the Central Government has unveiled the new foreign trade policy for 2023, which aims for India to hit

the \$2-trillion trade by 20230. An integrated Indian market, backed by the seamless movement on the strength of robust infrastructure consisting of roads, ports, and railways, would surely make the target of \$2 trillion in trade by 2030 a realistic goal.

By 2030, India should be within striking distance of becoming the fourth largest economy in the world. Fast-faced geostrategic developments may work as the force multiplier for India to take a central position in the global supply chains. The ongoing Indian presidency of the G20, with five more months remaining, should help India raise its stake in the global supply chain order.

Yet, it's worthwhile to look back at the challenges which were littered all along the journey of reforms that Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured India undertook despite strident opposition from all quarters. The rollout of the GST was decry by the Opposition. The Congress egged on the Opposition parties to fan several ill-informed notions about the GST rollout.

It was stated that States will lose out in revenue, and the GST rollout was an attack on the federal structure and spirit of the country. Within the stipulated time frame of the GST compensation regime for States on account of revenue losses, the rate of the growth of the collections went beyond the 14 per cent threshold set for the compensations.

In fact, the GST Council has emerged as a consensus-based body with the best of the federal spirit driving the functioning of the whole architecture. Time has indeed vindicated the Modi Government for staying firm with the GST rollout. Also, a democratic spirit guided the

evolution of the GST architecture, as the window to allow feedback and suggestions for improvement was also kept open.

Reforms alone can guide India to the path of prosperity. Digital India has also been India's remarkable achievement in recent years, which is being documented the world over for the depth of democratisation of the digital payment system. Now even hawkers have embraced the digital mode of payment. People are even paying for samosa and chai with UPI. This mainstreaming of the informal economy has the strength to take India on a fast lane towards becoming a developed country in the near future. The UPI transactions in March month went past the Rs 14-lakh crore mark.

The digital payment system adoption by the stakeholders of the economy has not only improved the ease of doing business but opened new avenues for several enterprising individuals to walk on the path of self-employment.

The Government e-Market (GeM) reported over Rs 2 lakh crore of transactions in 2022-23. This technological intervention in democratising government procurement in a transparent manner at the lowest cost, with the guarantee that any product sold here could not be sold anywhere at a lower cost, has been a remarkable reform in the way government departments function. Reforms with the help of technology adoption have weeded out the scope of corruption and human error.

The success of the indirect tax reforms must be carried to the direct taxes as well. There is no denying the fact that the direct tax base needs expansion. This can be done on the

basis of some bold steps. Some measures have already been taken with the unveiling of the new direct tax regime which incentivises taxpayers not availing the benefits of exemptions.

But, still, there exist two systems for direct taxation. This may not be tenable in the long run. To ensure that India moves fast on an exemption-less direct taxation regime, there must remain only one option for the taxpayers. Empirical data shows that lower tax rates bring more revenues and result in greater compliance on the part of people.

Thus, it will be worthwhile to explore if direct taxes could further be lowered and the exemptions done away with, heralding a single system for the taxpayers. This is not an era of forcing people to buy savings products just to save taxes. Tax-saving financial products should not be a compulsion but a choice for the people in the country. This is doable, and must urgently be done.

At the same time, policymakers must take a hard look at the list of exempted categories from the direct taxation net. The people earning income above a particular and reasonable threshold must be part of the direct tax architecture to make their contributions to the development of the nation and also to make available world-class public education and health infrastructure all across the country. This calls for a firm political resolve to deal with the vested interests that always seek to block reforms in the country.

Reforms in the next few years may bring tax buoyancy to fuel an accelerated march of India towards self-reliance in a host of areas such as defence, while also spurring the clean energy transition at a faster pace.



THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HAS UNVEILED THE NEW FOREIGN TRADE POLICY FOR 2023, WHICH AIMS FOR INDIA TO HIT THE \$2 TRILLION TRADE BY 20230

(Author is a policy analyst)

Climate-informed farming can be a boon for women farmers

By empowering women farmers, we can promote sustainable and resilient agriculture, and contribute to a more equitable and just society

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time, with far-reaching impacts on agriculture and food security. The current practices in agriculture are not only adding to the global greenhouse gas emission, drought, flood, and extreme weather events but threatening the livelihood. To address these challenges, there is a growing need to promote climate-informed agriculture that incorporates best practices and technologies to increase resilience and reduce emissions.

Women farmers play a critical role in agriculture, yet they are often overlooked and underserved. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women comprise 43 per cent of the agricul-



RAJESH R SINGH

(The writer is CEO and Country Director, Child Fund India)



tural labor force in developing countries, and up to 80 per cent in some regions. However, they often lack access to resources such as land, finance and information that are essential for their productivity and resilience. This is particularly true for women in rural areas, who may face

additional challenges related to gender norms and cultural biases.

To promote climate-informed agriculture, it is important to engage women farmers and address their specific needs and challenges. Climate-smart agriculture combines adaptation and mit-

igation measures. Furthermore, it has emerged as a solution to address critical challenges in the space such as enhancing agricultural productivity, making agriculture resilient and contributing to climate change mitigation. Hence, certain measures we need to keep in mind while training women towards climate-informed agriculture are as follows.

Increase access to climate information and advisory services: Women farmers often lack access to weather forecasts, early warning systems, and other climate information that is critical for decision-making. By providing tailored climate services and training programs, women can better plan and manage their farms, reduce losses from extreme

weather events, and improve their yields.

Promote gender-sensitive technologies and practices: Women farmers may have different needs and preferences than men and may face unique barriers to adopting new technologies and practices. By designing technologies and practices that are gender-sensitive, such as low-cost irrigation systems or improved seed varieties that are easier to manage, women farmers can improve their productivity and resilience.

Increase access to finance and markets: Women farmers often lack access to credit and markets, which can limit their ability to invest in their farms and earn a decent income. By providing financial and market support, such as microfi-

nance loans or access to value chains, women farmers can improve their economic status and contribute to sustainable agriculture.

However, business development services, such as business management training, networks, mentorship opportunities, and market information, as well as financial services, are key to the success of women entrepreneurs. Many of these services are, however, gender neutral, or do not cater to the specific needs and realities of women entrepreneurs. Many NGOs and social organizations are working to provide inputs to women farmers keeping their specific requirements.

Address gender norms and stereotypes: Gender norms and stereotypes can

limit women's participation in agriculture and hinder their access to resources and decision-making power. By promoting gender equality and challenging gender stereotypes, women farmers can have a greater voice in agricultural policies and practices and contribute to more resilient and sustainable agriculture. Indeed, climate-informed agriculture is essential for addressing the challenges of climate change and ensuring food security for all. To achieve this goal, it is important to engage women farmers and address their specific needs and challenges. By empowering women farmers, we can promote sustainable and resilient agriculture, and contribute to a more equitable and just society.

Trump set to be arraigned today

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump is set to be arraigned on Tuesday after being indicted last week by a Manhattan grand jury on charges arising from hush money payments made to a porn star during his 2016 campaign, making him the first former US president to face a criminal charge and upending his bid to retake the

White House in 2024. The 76-year-old is expected to fly to New York City from his Mar-a-Lago home on Monday and plans to return back to his resort in Florida following his court hearing, where he will address his supporters on Tuesday night, his office said Sunday.



"I will be leaving Mar-a-Lago on Monday at 12 noon, heading to Trump Tower in New York. On Tuesday morning I will be going to, believe it or not, the Courthouse. America was not supposed to be this way!" Trump wrote on his social media account on Truth Social Sunday, as the city braces for demonstrations from his supporters and protestors in the wake of the unprecedented criminal indictment of a former president. Trump, who is the first former US president to face a criminal charge, will be arraigned on Tuesday. The

proceeding is expected to be brief. The charges in the indictment will be read to him at the hearing, which is set to last about 10-15 minutes. He has denied all wrongdoing in connection with the payments made to Daniels, 44, ahead of the 2016 presidential election. Trump will appear before Judge Juan Merchan at 2.15 pm EST (11:45 pm IST) on Tuesday. American media has quoted Trump's attorneys as saying that the former president will plead not guilty. After his court appearance, Trump will immediately fly back to Florida where he will deliver remarks at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach later Tuesday. The grand jury on Thursday voted to indict Trump, a Republican, for his role in paying money to porn star Stormy Daniels in an attempt to buy her silence over an alleged affair. The indictment remains under seal and it is not clear what crimes and how many criminal counts Trump has been charged with. CNN reported that the former president has been charged with more than 30 counts.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The general public is informed that the cars with the following car numbers which have completed their life Petrol Cars 15 Years Diesel Cars 10 Years. The MCD drive was confiscated by Pine View Technology Pvt Ltd and has not been claimed by anyone till now. All these vehicle owners are informed to come to the company's office and claim the scrap value of the vehicle. Otherwise, all these vehicles will be scrapped in the next three days.

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- DL4S_0J1678, DL8SAF2063, DL4S_0J4028,
- DL4S_0J1678, DL8SAF5885, DL4S_0J0455,
- DL4S_0J2499, DL8S_0J4660, DL3S_0J0409,
- DL4S_0J8722, DL8SAE8519, DL4S_0J3823,

Rights group urges eastern Libya to free singer, blogger

Cairo (AP): A global rights group on Monday urged authorities in eastern Libya to release a singer and a blogger arrested for allegedly violating a widely-criticised cybercrime law.

According to a statement from Human Rights Watch, both women - popular folk singer Ahlam al-Yamani and blogger Haneen al-Abdali - were arrested in February allegedly for violating "honour and public morals". The Interior Ministry in the eastern city of Benghazi alleged that both women insulted "the status of the chaste and dignified Libyan woman in our conservative society with acts and behaviours that are foreign to us and offend our customs, traditions and true religion". They have since been held "in connection with cases against honour and public morals" and for violating the anti-cybercrime law which the east-based House of Representatives adopted in September, it said. A spokesman for the east-based government did not respond to a request for comment. UN-backed investigators on Libya and other global rights groups criticised the law, which allows prison terms up to 15 years for violators.



The Anti-Cybercrime Law adds to the slew of existing laws in Libya that violate basic rights and freedoms and that need to be reformed, including on freedom of speech, assembly, association and so-called crimes against the state," said Hanan Salah, HRW's associate Middle East and North Africa director. The group criticised "vague and overbroad definitions" of crimes in the law. It states that the use of the internet and new technologies is lawful only if "public order and morality" are respected without clear definition of offenses. It said the law allows the blocking of websites and censoring online content without a judicial order in cases of "security requirement or urgency" or when the content in question is counter to "public morality". It called for the east-based parliament to repeal the legislation and authorities in eastern Libya to free anyone detained in connection to that law. Libya has plunged into turmoil after a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 toppled dictator Moammar Gadhafi, who was later killed. For most of the past decade, the country has become divided between rival governments on the east and west, each is backed by an array of militias and foreign powers. Eastern Libya is controlled by forces of commander Khalif Hifter, who is allied with the government of Prime Minister Fathi Bashagha.

UK teachers reject govt pay offer amid labour unrest

London (AP): Teachers in England rejected the government's latest pay offer on Monday, raising the specter of more strikes and further disruptions for parents and children as double-digit inflation sparks labour unrest across the country. News that teachers had voted to reject the offer came as U.K. passport workers kicked off a five-week strike that threatens to cause headaches for travellers ahead of the summer holiday season. Immediately after announcing the results of the ballot, the National Education Union scheduled one-day strikes for April 27 and May 2. The walkouts are the latest in a wave of strikes that has disrupted Britons' lives for months. Public-sector workers including doctors, train and bus drivers, airport baggage handlers, border officers and postal workers are demanding pay increases to keep pace with inflation, which stands at 10.4%. A cost-of-living crisis fueled by sharp rises in food and energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine has left many struggling to pay their bills. Unions say wages, especially in the public sector, have fallen in real terms over the past decade. The government had offered teachers an average 4.5% pay increase, plus a one-time payment of 1,000 pounds (\$1,233), which it described as "fair and reasonable".

But the offer was rejected by 98% of the teachers who took part in a ballot on the proposal. The offer was unacceptable and did nothing to address the shortage of teachers in England, NEU Joint General Secretaries Mary Boustead and Kevin Courtney said at the union's annual conference.

UK passport office workers kick off strike

London (AP): British passport office workers kicked off a five-week strike on Monday, as the latest group of civil servants to demand a pay raise in response to double-digit inflation threatened to cause headaches for travellers ahead of the summer holiday season. The walkout for more than 1,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services union is taking place as Britons seek to renew their travel documents in preparation for their summer vacations.

Despite fears of delays, the government hasn't changed its estimate that it will take up to 10 weeks to get a passport. The walkout is the latest in a wave of strikes that has disrupted Britons' lives for months. Public-sector workers including doctors, teachers, train and bus drivers, airport baggage handlers, border officers and postal workers are demanding pay increases to keep pace with inflation, which stands at 10.4 per cent.

Meghan to receive Ms Foundation's Women of Vision Award in May

AP ■ NEW YORK

Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, and Black Voters Matter co-founder LaTosha Brown will receive the Ms. Foundation's Women of Vision Award in May, the nation's oldest women's foundation announced on Monday. The awards will be handed out at the Ms. Foundation's annual gala on May 16 at New York City's Ziegfeld Ballroom, part of its 50th anniversary celebration where funds raised will go toward the organisation's equity-centred initiatives.



The foundation will also honour Wanda Irving, co-founder of Dr. Shalon's Maternal Action Project, and Kimberly Inez McGuire, executive director of URGE, as well as emerging leaders abortion rights activist Olivia Julianna and

Foundation president and CEO, said in a statement. "We are grateful to be able to shine a light on their many accomplishments and tireless work on behalf of gender and racial equity across the country and the world." Meghan will receive the award for "her global advocacy to empower and advocate on behalf of women and girls" from Gloria Steinem, Ms. Foundation co-founder. With her husband, Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, Meghan directs their philanthropy through their Archewell Foundation. According to its 2022 annual report, the organisation provided 12.66 million COVID-19 vaccines with partner Global Citizen and helped resettle nearly 175,000 refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan in the United States with partner Welcome.US.

Sunak creates new task force to go after 'vile' child abusers

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday condemned the political correctness which has prevented action against "vile" criminals behind the sexual abuse of children and young women, as he unveiled plans for a new task force to go after such gangs. The new Grooming Gangs Taskforce will involve specialist officers parachuted in to assist police forces with live child sexual exploitation and grooming investigations for stricter action against those who groom children for sexual abuse. Sunak's announcement came a day after his Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, said that the perpetrators of such crimes are "groups of men, almost all British Pakistani" but authorities have turned a "turn blind eye to these signs of abuse out of political correctness, out of fear, of being called racists, out of fear, of being called bigoted". "The safety of women and girls is paramount," Sunak said



in a statement ahead of a planned visit to Leeds and Manchester to launch the new task force. "For too long, political correctness has stopped us from weeding out vile criminals who prey on children and young women. We will stop at nothing to stamp out these dangerous gangs," he said. Led by the police and supported by the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA), Downing Street says the task force will consist of officers with extensive experience in undertaking grooming gang investigations. They will provide critical support to

forces countrywide to root out grooming gangs and put more perpetrators behind bars. Data analysts will work alongside the task force using cutting-edge data and intelligence, including police-recorded ethnicity data, to identify the types of criminals who carry out these offences.

"This will include better data on the make-up of grooming gangs, including ethnicity, to make sure suspects cannot hide behind cultural sensitivities as a way to evade justice," Downing Street said. It follows Braverman's announcement to bring in "mandatory reporting" for adults working with children if they suspect or identify that a child is being abused.

Mandatory reporting was a key recommendation in a crucial Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. "The protection of children is a collective effort. Every adult must be supported to call out child sexual abuse without fear," Braverman said. "And the despicable abusers must be brought to justice."

Spy balloon gathered info from sensitive US military sites: Report

Washington (PTI): A Chinese spy balloon that flew across the US was able to gather intelligence from several sensitive American military sites and transmit it back to Beijing in real-time, despite the Biden administration's efforts to block it, a media report said on Monday.

A suspected Chinese spy balloon said to be the size of three buses, was spotted over the airspace of the United States in late January. China was able to control the balloon so it could make multiple passes over some of the sites (at times flying figure-eight formations) and transmit the information it collected back to Beijing in real time, NBC News reported, quoting three unnamed officials. The intelligence China collected was mostly from electronic signals, which can be picked up from weapons systems or include communications from base personnel, rather than images, the officials were quoted as saying in the

report. The three officials said China could have gathered much more intelligence from sensitive sites if not for the Biden administration's efforts to move around potential targets and obscure the balloons' ability to pick up their electronic signals by stopping them from broadcasting signals, the report said. The balloon first entered US airspace from Alaska on January 28, according to the Biden administration. Over the next four days, it was flying over the Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana, where the US has some of its nuclear assets. The development further strained the already tense bilateral ties between the US and China, with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken abruptly postponing his key visit to Beijing in February this year. The US National Security Council has referred NBC News to the Defence Department for comment.

Burkina Faso expels two French journalists

Dakar (Senegal): Burkina Faso's military junta has expelled two journalists working for French media without reason, said the outlets. bSophie Douce, a French correspondent for Le Monde, and Agnes Faivre, correspondent for Liberation, were given 24 hours to leave the West African country with no explanation, said articles by both newspapers on Sunday.

The correspondents were each questioned separately about their work by state security on Friday. Faivre was ordered to leave that evening and Douce the following day, they both arrived in Paris Sunday. "Le Monde condemns in the strongest terms this arbitrary decision which forced the two journalists to leave Ouagadougou in less than 24 hours," said Jerome Fenoglio, director of Le Monde.

"These two expulsions mark another major setback for the freedom to inform about the situation in Burkina Faso," he said. Jihadi fighters linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have been waging a violent insurgency in Burkina Faso for seven years, that's killed thousands and displaced nearly 2 million people.

The violence has destabilised and divided the once peaceful country in the Sahel region leading to two coups last year. Since the second coup when Capt. Ibrahim Traore seized power in September, civic freedoms have shrunk, say rights groups and residents.

The expulsions come less than a week after the junta suspended French broadcaster, France 24, for interviewing a top jihadi rebel and months after the government suspended French broadcaster Radio France Internationale for having relayed an "intimidation message" attributed to a "terrorist", according to a statement from the junta.

In March, Mathieu Pellerin, the Sahel consultant for the International Crisis Group, was arrested and detained for two days by authorities and questioned about his work, said Murithi Mutiga, the group's Africa program director.

32 dead as tornadoes torment from Arkansas to Delaware

AP ■ WYNE

Residents across a wide swath of the US raced Sunday to assess the destruction from fierce storms that spawned possibly dozens of tornadoes from the South and the Midwest into the Northeast, killing at least 32 people. The storms tore a path through the Arkansas capital and also collapsed the roof of a packed concert venue in Illinois, stunning people throughout the region with the scope of the damage. The number of deaths continued to grow Sunday. "While we are still assessing the full extent of the damage, we know families across America are mourning the loss of loved ones, desperately waiting for news of others fighting for their lives, and sorting through the rubble of their homes and



businesses," President Joe Biden said in a statement. Biden earlier declared broad areas of the country major disaster areas, making federal resources and financial aid available for recovery. Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders in Arkansas, where at least five people were killed, already had declared a state of emergency and activated the National Guard. Confirmed or suspected tornadoes in 11 states destroyed

homes and businesses, splintered trees and laid waste to neighborhoods. The National Weather Service confirmed Sunday that a tornado was responsible for damage to several homes near Bridgeville, Delaware. One person was found dead inside a house heavily damaged by the storm Saturday night, Delaware State Police reported. It may take days to confirm all the recent tornadoes.

Finland turns to right, prepares to enter NATO

AP ■ HELSINKI

AP ■ HELSINKI
Finnish voters have given a boost to conservative parties in a weekend election, depriving left-wing Prime Minister Sanna Marin of another term as the country prepares to make its historic entry into NATO in the coming days. Marin won popularity for her Cabinet's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and for her European Union nation's strong support for Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion last year. But Sunday's election was largely fought over economic issues, with voters in the nation of 5.5 million people shifting their allegiances significantly to parties on the political right as they seek solutions to rising state debt, inflation and other economic problems. The bloated debt will pose a challenge for the new government, particularly since NATO membership will require Finland to increase its defense spending. Finland could finally join NATO this week after Turkey ratified its membership last week, lifting the last hurdle to membership for the Nordic nation that shares a long border with Russia. The centre-right National Coalition Party, or NCP, won 20.8 per cent of the vote, which is more than any other party and puts it in a position to try to form a government. The right-wing populist party The Finns won 20.1 per cent and Marin's Social Democrats 19.9 per cent. Juhana Aunessuoma, a professor of political history at the University of Helsinki, noted that about one-third of the votes went to left-wing parties and two thirds to parties on the right. It was "a big swing from left to right", he said in an interview on Monday with The Associated Press. Marin's defeat is the latest setback for the left amid a larger shift to conservative and nationalist parties across Europe in recent times. Sweden ousted its left-wing government in a rightward shift last year, followed by

an election in Italy that resulted in the first far-right-led government since the end of World War II. Meanwhile Spain's left-wing government is under pressure, with the right-wing Popular Party and far-right Vox party ahead as the country heads to a vote in December.

The winning party in Finland traditionally kicks off government formation talks, and National Coalition led by Petteri Orpo — a 53-year-old former finance minister — is expected to start negotiations next week with the goal of putting together a Cabinet enjoying a majority in the 200-seat parliament, the Eduskunta. Orpo told the AP late Sunday that he intends to negotiate with all parties in order "to find the best possible majority government for Finland".

If Orpo, the most likely candidate to be the next prime minister, ends up choosing the Social Democrats as a coalition partner, that could mean Marin could theoretically get a post — albeit not the prime minister's job — in the next government. Still, for now, a coalition with other conservatives appears to be the most likely outcome.

Finnish media touted the The Finns, which ran on an anti-immigration and anti-EU agenda, as the biggest winner of the election. The populists scored the best result of their history under the leadership of Riikka Purra, who took over the party only in 2021. Orpo has said his party is open to cooperation with The Finns as the two parties largely share views on developing Finland's economy though have differences in climate policies and EU issues. The biggest losers of the election were small and mid-size parties, particularly the Green League and the Left Alliance — both members of Marin's outgoing coalition Cabinet — which were left in the shadow of the big three. Aunessuoma noted that Marin's coalition partners, who shifted to the left during their years of alliance with the Social Democrats, lost votes.

'Russia to put nuclear weapons near Belarus'

AP ■ MOSCOW

Tallinn (AP): Russian tactical nuclear weapons will be deployed close to Belarus' borders with NATO neighbors, the Russian ambassador to Belarus said Sunday amid simmering tensions between Russia and the West over Moscow's war in Ukraine. Ambassador Boris Gryzlov's comment followed Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent statement about plans to station tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Russia's neighbor and ally. The announcement marked another attempt by the Russian leader to dangle the nuclear threat to discourage the West from supporting Ukraine.

Putin has said that construction of storage facilities for tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus will be complete by July 1 and added that Russia has helped modernize Belarusian warplanes to make them capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The two neighbors have an agreement envisioning close economic, political and military ties. Russia used Belarusian territory as a stag-

ing ground for invading Ukraine and has maintained a contingent of troops and weapons there.

Gryzlov, speaking in remarks broadcast late Sunday by Belarusian state television, said the Russian nuclear weapons will be "moved up close to the Western border of our union state" but did not give any precise location. "It will expand our defense capability, and it will be done regardless of all the noise in Europe and the United States," he said in a reference to Western criticism of Putin's decision.

Belarus shares a 1,250-kilometer (778-mile) border with NATO members Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

Tactical nuclear weapons, which are intended to destroy enemy troops and weapons on the battlefield, have a relatively short range and a much lower yield compared with nuclear warheads fitted to long-range strategic missiles that are capable of obliterating whole cities.

Russia blames Ukraine for bomb that killed military blogger

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian authorities blamed Ukrainian intelligence agencies on Monday for orchestrating a bombing at a St. Petersburg cafe that killed a Russian military blogger who fervently supported Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and arrested a suspect accused of involvement in the attack. Ukrainian authorities did not directly respond to the accusation, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he doesn't think about events in Russia and a senior official earlier described the bombing as part of Russia's internal turmoil. Vladislav Tatarsky, 40, was killed Sunday as he was leading a discussion at a cafe on the banks of the Neva River in the historic heart of Russia's second-largest city, officials said. Tatarsky, who had filed regular reports from the front lines in Ukraine, was the pen name for Maxim Fomin. He had accumulated more than 560,000 followers on his Telegram messaging app



People lay flowers near the site of an explosion at the "Street Bar" cafe with the St. Isaac's Cathedral in the background in St. Petersburg, Russia on Monday.

channel. Over 30 people were wounded, and 10 of them remain in grave condition from the blast, according to the authorities. Investigators have said they believe that the bomb was hidden in a bust of the blogger that was given to him just before the explosion. A video showed Tatarsky making jokes about the bust and putting it on the table next to him. Russian authorities on

Monday announced the arrest of Darya Trepova, a 26-year-old St. Petersburg resident who has been seen on video presenting Tatarsky with the bust. Last year, Trepova was detained by police for taking part in anti-war rallies. The Interior Ministry released a brief video showing Trepova telling a police officer that she brought the statuette that exploded to the cafe. When asked who

gave it to her, she said she would explain it later.

According to Russian media reports, Trepova told investigators that she was asked to deliver the bust, but didn't know that it was hidden in it. The National Anti-Terrorist Committee, which coordinates counterterrorism operations, said that the bombing was "planned by Ukrainian special services" and noted that Trepova was an "active supporter" of jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Navalny, the Kremlin's fiercest foe who had exposed official corruption and organized massive antigovernment protests, is serving a nine-year fraud sentence that he has denounced as a political vendetta. According to Russian media reports, police tracked Trepova down using surveillance cameras, though she reportedly cut her long blonde hair short to change her look and rented a different apartment in an apparent attempt to escape.

Kosovo ex-president's trial opens

AP ■ THE HAGUE

Kosovo's former president pleaded not guilty Monday to charges including murder, torture and persecution as he went on trial with three other former leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, while a prosecutor insisted that "nobody is above the law." Hashim Thaci resigned from office in 2020 to defend himself against the charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during his country's 1998-99 war for independence from Serbia. "I am fully not guilty," Thaci told judges at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers as the trial opened. The other three defendants also repeated not guilty pleas made at earlier pretrial hearings. The case has stirred an outpouring of support from across the political spectrum in Kosovo. On Sunday, thousands of people took to the streets to show their support for the defendants. Many Kosovars consider the Netherlands-based court an injustice and view it as an



attempt to rewrite the history of their struggle for independence.

Prosecutor Alex Whiting said the KLA, a guerrilla force which battled against the powerful Serbian military, had "a very clear and explicit policy of targeting collaborators and perceived traitors including political opponents." Whiting said prosecutors would prove that the KLA and was responsible for hundreds of murders and illegal detentions across Kosovo and northern Albania in 1998 and 1999 and that the four accused are responsible for those crimes as military leaders of the KLA general staff.

Zelenskyy to visit Warsaw to meet with Poles, Ukrainians

AP ■ WARSAW

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will pay a visit to Warsaw this week that will include talks with political leaders and a meeting with regular Ukrainians and Poles, Polish officials announced on Monday. Zelenskyy will be accompanied by his wife, Olena Zelenska, for the visit, scheduled for Wednesday. It will begin with an official meeting at the Royal Castle between Zelenskyy and his host, Polish President Andrzej Duda. Their talks will include security issues, regional politics, economic cooperation, historical matters lingering between the two neighbours as well as the transit of Ukraine's grain and other farm produce through Poland, according to Marcin Przydacz, the head of Duda's international office. The talks will be followed by a meeting with the public, according to Duda's office. Przydacz told radio broadcaster RMF FM that Zelenskyy will meet with Ukrainians and Poles at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, and that Zelenskyy says he wants to thank Poles for helping Ukrainians. "We are preparing a number of elements that will give this visit a special character," Przydacz said. Zelenskyy is also to hold talks with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki regarding regional security, the situation at the front, and bilateral cooperation

including the situation at border crossings and with Ukrainian grain, according to Morawiecki aide Michal Dworczyk. Poland's farmers have been protesting falling prices for their grain and produce and lack of storage ahead of this year's harvest, blaming the situation on a massive inflow of produce from Ukraine that was intended for transit to third country markets but is lingering in Poland. The historical issues chiefly regard tensions that led to bloodshed between Poles and Ukrainians who lived in what was Poland before World War II and is now western Ukraine. Deputy Foreign Minister Arkadiusz Mularczyk said that there is "more now that unites us, compared to the past, because we see eye to eye on things like geopolitics, security and Russia's aggression."



including the situation at border crossings and with Ukrainian grain, according to Morawiecki aide Michal Dworczyk.

Parisians vote to banish for-hire e-scooters

AP ■ PARIS

Paris (AP): Parisians have overwhelmingly voted to banish the French capital's ubiquitous for-hire e-scooters from their streets, in a mini-referendum the mayor said sent a "very clear message." The 15,000 opinion-dividing mini-machines could now vanish from central Paris at the end of August when the city's contracts with the three operators expire. The question that City Hall asked voters in its citywide mini-referendum on Sunday was "For or against self-service scooters in Paris?" The result wasn't close. City Hall said on its website about 103,000 people voted, with 89 per cent rejecting e-scooters and just 11 per cent supporting them.

Pak FM set to hold talks for bailout with IMF

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar will be leading a high-powered delegation to the US to attend the annual spring meeting of the IMF and the World Bank and for talks with officials which can help the cash-strapped country to ink a much-needed USD 1.1 billion bailout with the IMF. Dar along with an official delegation comprising the Finance and Economic Affairs Division secretaries and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) governor, might present fresh proposals before the IMF and World Bank for providing dollar inflows, Geo news portal reported. The delegation will be attending the upcoming Annual Spring Meeting of the Breton Wood



Institutions (BWIs), known as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, from April 10 to 16, the report added. During the meetings, Pakistan and the IMF would also discuss the possibility of combining the remaining 10th and 11th reviews under the USD 6.5 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme in case the pending 9th review is completed. Cash-

strapped Pakistan is awaiting a much-needed USD 1.1 billion tranche of funding from the Washington-based IMF, which was originally due to be disbursed in November last year.

The funds are part of a USD 6.5 billion bailout package the IMF approved in 2019, which analysts say is critical if Pakistan is to avoid defaulting on external debt obligations. The IMF programme, signed in 2019, is going to expire on June 30, 2023, and under the set guidelines, the programme cannot be extended beyond the deadline.

The pending 9th review was scheduled to be completed in December 2022 and the 10th review should have been kick-started from February 2023.

Pak SC verdict on plea challenging postponing of polls in Punjab today

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Monday said it will announce the verdict within the next 24 hours on the petition filed by former prime minister Imran Khan's party challenging the country's election commission's decision to postpone polls in the Punjab province.

On March 22, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) delayed assembly polls in the politically crucial Punjab province by more than five months, citing the deteriorating security situation in the cash-starved country, a move criticised by Khan, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party chairman. Khan's PTI challenged

the ECP's decision to postpone polls in the Punjab Assembly to October 8, instead of holding it within 90 days as per mandated by the Constitution.

The assembly in the Punjab province was dissolved on January 14 by the erstwhile PTI government.

A three-member bench of Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Ijazul Ahsan and Justice Munib Akhtar heard the petition on Monday.

The judges while hearing the petition observed that the ECP was not empowered to delay the elections.

Pension protests raise tension between police, demonstrators

AP ■ PARIS

French authorities see the police as protectors who are ensuring that citizens can peacefully protest President Emmanuel Macron's contentious retirement age increase. But to human rights advocates and demonstrators who were clubbed or tear-gassed, officers have overstepped their mission. In the months since mass protests against the proposed pension changes began roiling France, some law enforcement officers have been accused of resorting to gratuitous violence. A man in Paris lost a testicle to an officer's club, and a police grenade took the thumb of a woman in Rouen. A railroad worker hit by grenade fragments lost an eye. "Where is your humanity?" a woman shouted at officers who knocked an apparently home-



less man to the ground in Paris, kicked him and used vulgar language while ordering him to get up and go. In a video posted on Twitter, another passerby helped the man to his feet at the scene last month near the Place de la Bastille. The violence adds to the anger in the streets and complicates efforts to invite dialogue between the government and labour unions, who are planning an 11th round of mass demonstrations on Thursday. The protests, which began in

January, gained momentum after Macron's decision last month to push a bill to raise the retirement age through the lower house of parliament without a vote.

The common French reference to law enforcement officers as "forces of order" has been turned on its head. Now the question is whether police represent force or order. Jarrred by the bad publicity, authorities have shifted to damage control by offering accolades for security forces.

McDonald's to close offices briefly ahead of layoffs: WSJ

New York (AP): A report says McDonald's has closed its U.S. offices for a few days as the company prepares to inform employees about layoffs. The Wall Street Journal cited an internal email from the Chicago-based fast-food giant saying U.S. corporate staff should work from home while the company notifies people of their job status. McD did not reply to emailed requests for comment. The report said McD's would inform its employees about staffing decisions that are part of a wide restructuring of the company announced earlier. Though the U.S. labor market remains strong, layoffs have been mounting in the technology sector, where many companies over-hired after a pandemic boom.

Public Notice
This is to inform general public that Mrs. Shalu Sharma has acquired the Property No. 504/15, area measuring 82.50 Sq. Mtrs., i.e., 98.67 Sq. Yds., out of Khassra No. 692, situated at the area of Village Chandrawali Alias Shahdara, in the abadi of main Circular Road, Ilaqa Shahdara, Delhi-110032 vide two separate Gift Deeds dated 20.07.2012, Doc no. 11746 and dated 08.02.2016, Doc no. 819 and Now, Mrs. Shalu Sharma is mortgaging the above said property with Industrial Bank Ltd. & in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 07 days of this publication to Mr. Muneesh Dhawan/Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocates), Law Veritas North, Unit no 907, 9th Floor, GD-TL Tower, (B-08), Netaji Subhash Place, Delhi-110034 or contact at 9066701712/ 9818228636 (M).

PUBLIC NOTICE
My client Mr. Ajay Kumar Gupta, residing at A-2/143, Paschim Vihar, West Delhi, New Delhi-110063 along with Mr. Brij Bhushan Gupta and Mr. Raj Kumar Agarwal intends to purchase Freehold Residential Property bearing No. B-7, measuring 597 Sq Yards, situated at Bhagwan Dass Nagar, Punjabi Bagh West, New Delhi-110026 from Mrs. Sunita Patney and Mrs. Neelam Valecha who inherited the said property after demise of their father Late Sri Devi Dayal Valecha (registered owner by virtue of Sale Deed dated 22.03.1985) by virtue of registered Relinquishment Deed dated 01.11.2003 duly executed by Mrs. Vimla Devi and Mr. Vijay Kumar Valecha and except the above mentioned legal heirs i.e. Mrs. Vimla Devi (wife), Mr. Vijay Kumar Valecha (son) and Mrs. Sunita Patney, Mrs. Neelam Valecha (daughters) no other legal heirs remain of Late Sri Devi Dayal Valecha. If anybody including Bank, Financial Institutions, persons, relative has any claim, right, interest whatsoever in the said property shall inform within 15 days of the undersigned with documentary evidence. In the event of no response to this notice, then our client shall presume that title of the said property is unencumbered and clear.
Karnail Singh, Advocate, K-8, Basement, Jungpura Extension New Delhi Contact No. 9811163363 & 9953683363

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR NOTICE
Mrs. Jasdeep Kaur, Assistant Professor, Department of Electronics Technology, G.N.D.U., Amritsar was sanctioned Ex-India Leave w.e.f. 15.07.2021 to 30.11.2021 to visit Canada. After that her extension in Ex-India Leave was not approved and she was directed to join back her duty vide so many letters but till date she has not joined back her duty. Through this Notice, she is directed to join back her duty with in 30 days from the issuance of this notice, otherwise her post of Assistant Professor will be declared vacant as per G.N.D.U. Calendar-2017 Volume-I, page 59, Statute (77.7)-a-(iii) page 62.
Registrar
NA/12/15489/2022/22736 Dated GHD :- 4/3/2023

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is hereby informed that after receiving directions from UPRERA the name of commercial project **KARYAN CITYWALK**, located at commercial plot no. 1A, Pinewood Enclave, Sector 2, Wave City, NH 24, Ghaziabad being developed by M/s Karyan Infratech LLP and having U.P. RERA registration no. **UPRERAPRJ848589** is being changed to **KARYAN STREET WALK**. This is being done in view of the Trademark Infringement of the word "CITYWALK". Whereas other than the word "STREET WALK" instead of "CITYWALK" in our project name, all other details and structures of the firm/project as well as current contracts & agreements remain unchanged, and will continue as earlier.
If anyone of our allottees or person have any objection/query regarding the change of name of our project from **KARYAN CITYWALK** to **KARYAN STREET WALK** in that case they can raise/file their objection to the secretary of UPRERA on their e mail id **contactuprera@up-rera.in** within 15 days of issuance of this public notice.

Sensex, Nifty rise for third straight session

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed in the green for the third consecutive session on Monday, boosted by buying in auto, banking and capital goods counters despite a rise in crude oil prices fuelling concerns about inflation.

With overall positive investor sentiment in the domestic market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 114.92 points or 0.19 per cent to close at 59,106.44 points with 22 of its components ending in the green and eight closing in the red.

The broader 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 38.30 points or 0.22 per cent to close at 17,398.05 points. As many as 32 Nifty shares closed with gains while 18 stocks declined.

While gains in auto, capital goods and banking and financials shares supported the uptrend, selling in IT, FMCG and metal shares restricted the gains in the key indices.

"Investors were of the view that the easing price pressure would provide the central bank with leeway to pause the rate hike. However, the surprise production cut by OPEC+ has fuelled concerns about infla-



Other gainers include Bajaj Finance (1.74 per cent), Bharti Airtel (1.56 per cent), NTPC (1.4 per cent), Bajaj Finserv (1.26 per cent), HCL Tech (1.12 per cent) and IndusInd Bank (1.03 per cent).

tionary pressure, which may prompt central banks to remain hawkish," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

During the intra-day trade, Sensex moved in a range of 58,793.08 points to 59,204.82 points.

In the last three trading sessions, Sensex has surged 1,492 points or 2.51 per cent while Nifty has climbed 446 points or 2.9 per cent.

Among the Sensex shares, Maruti Suzuki rose the most, gaining 2.52 per cent after the company posted its highest ever sales at 19,66,164 units for the last fiscal.

BSE Midcap rose 86.88 points or 0.36 per cent to 24,152.47 points and the Smallcap jumped 314.26 points or 1.17 per cent to 27,271.27 points. Among sectoral indices, BSE Telecom spurted 1.78 per cent, Auto (1.39 per cent), Consumer Discretionary (1.12 per cent), Realty (0.80 per cent), Financial Services (0.61 per cent) and Bankex (0.54 per cent).

Meanwhile, manufacturing activities in the country touched a three-month high in March boosted by faster expansion in new orders and output amid demand resilience and easing of cost pressures, according to a monthly survey.

On Monday, global markets were mixed as a spike in crude oil prices fuelled fears of high energy prices in Europe and the US. Oil prices jumped around 5 per cent to nearly one month high of USD 84.19 per barrel on Monday after Saudi Arabia and other major oil producers announced a production cut of 1.15 million barrels per day from May until the end of the year.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gained 0.5 per cent, Hong Kong's Hang Seng slipped 0.4 per cent while the Shanghai Composite index rose 0.7 per cent.

Unclaimed deposits of ₹35,012 cr with PSU banks transferred to RBI, says MoS Finance

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

About Rs 35,000 crore unclaimed deposits as of February 2023 were transferred to the Reserve Bank of public sector banks (PSBs) in respect of deposits which have not been operated for 10 years or more, Parliament was informed on Monday.

These unclaimed deposits belong to 10.24 crore accounts transferred to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as of the end of February 2023.

"As per information available with the RBI, as of the end of February 2023, the total amount of unclaimed deposits transferred to RBI by PSBs in respect of deposits which have not been operated for 10 years or more was Rs 35,012 crore," Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha. State Bank of India (SBI) tops the chart of unclaimed deposits worth Rs 8,086 crore followed by Punjab National Bank Rs 5,340 crore, Canara Bank Rs 4,558 crore and Bank of Baroda Rs 3,904 crore.

To a question that if SBI officials do not assist/extend any help to the family of deceased and even they do not contact the family who have submitted death certificates of deceased, the minister said, the bank provides help to family of the deceased in settling all cases of claims.

"Settlement of account (s) of deceased constituent are taken up on priority by SBI. SBI staff has been sensitised and instructions are reiterated in all forums of banks at regular frequency," he said. For the convenience of SBI customers, he said, the details/ process of settlement of claims without legal representation in respect of account(s) of deceased constituents, the specimen of prescribed forms, as well as updated FAQs for easy understanding have been uploaded on SBI's website.

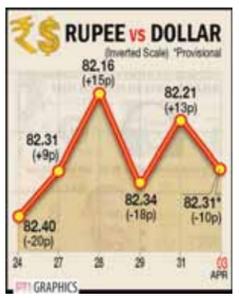


Every application for settlement of the account of a deceased constituent received at the SBI branch is duly acknowledged, the reply said.

Banks have also been advised to consider launching a special drive for finding the whereabouts of the customers/legal heirs in respect of accounts which have become inoperative, i.e., where there are no transactions in the account over a period of two years, it said.

"Further, it said, banks are required to display the list of unclaimed deposits/inoperative accounts which are inactive / inoperative for ten years or more on their respective websites, with the list containing the names and addresses of the account holder(s) in respect of unclaimed deposits/inoperative accounts," it said.

Finally, it said, banks have been advised by RBI to play a more pro-active role in finding the whereabouts of the account holders whose accounts have remained inoperative. Replying to another question, Karad said the government's intent to take up privatisation of two Public Sector Banks and one Public Sector General Insurance Company along with approval of a policy of strategic disinvestment of Public Sector Enterprises was announced in Union Budget 2021-22.



Rupee falls 10 paise to close at 82.31 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 10 paise to close at 82.31 (provisional) against the US currency on Monday as a strong American currency in the overseas market and firm crude oil prices weighed on investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 82.44 against the greenback and closed at 82.31 (provisional), registering a fall of 10 paise over its previous close of 82.21. During the session, the domestic unit touched an intra-day high of 82.31 and a low of 82.46 against the American dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.08 per cent higher at 102.58. Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures advanced 5.28 per cent to USD 84.11 per barrel.

According to Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the rupee depreciated on the back of a strong dollar and weak domestic market. Meanwhile, the decision of OPEC+ to cut crude oil production led to a sharp rise in global crude oil prices, renewing inflation concerns.

"Core PCE (Personal Consumption Expenditures) inflation showed cooling inflation in the US, raising expectations that the US Federal Reserve may be at the end of its rate hike cycle. However, upbeat macroeconomic data cushioned the downside," Choudhary said.

The S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 55.3 in February to 56.4 in March, signalling the strongest improvement in operating conditions in 2023 so far. "We expect Indian rupee to trade with a negative bias on a strong dollar and surge in crude oil prices. This may impact global economic recovery," Choudhary said.

'India Inc's key credit ratio moderated sharply in 2nd half of FY23'

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India Inc's key credit ratios moderated sharply in the second half of FY23 on expected lines and are likely to go down further, Crisil Ratings said on Monday, maintaining that upgrades will continue to outpace downgrades.

The Crisil credit ratio, or the number of upgrades to downgrades, moderated to 2.19 times for the October 2022-March 2023 period, as against 5.52 times in the first half of FY23.

There were 460 companies whose debt got upgraded, as against 210 which saw a downgrade.

Looked at from the outstanding debt perspective, the agency which rates 7,000 entities said the ratio moderated to 2.47 times, as against 7 times in the first half of the fiscal.

The agency's managing director Gurpreet Chhatwal told reporters that it has a "positive bias" on the overall credit scenario quality for FY24, and the upgrades will continue to be higher than the downgrades even

though there can be a further moderation in the ratios.

Going forward, the key risk factors to watch out for, which may have an impact on the credit ratings of local companies, will be the slowdown in global demand and monetary tightening in the global markets, Chhatwal said.

The agency said both the upgrade and downgrades activity was broad-based across sectors, pointing out that domestic demand led to upgrades in auto components and food products, while infrastructure companies were helped by the continued capex push from the government.

The upgrade rate declined to 13.46 per cent for the second half, but is significantly higher than the 10-year average of 10 per cent. The downgrade rate inched up to 6.14 per cent and has reverted back to the 10-year average with this increase.

"Volatile commodity prices have impacted profitability, particularly of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), while export-oriented



sectors face headwinds from slowdown in their major markets," said Chhatwal.

The small business segment, which had benefitted from the favourable policy interventions to

protect them over the last three years since the start of the pandemic, will have to grapple with paying off restructured loans, higher interest rates and higher input costs as commodity prices firm up, the agency said.

On the exports front, the agency said the upgrade rate for export-oriented sectors halved to 12.2 per cent in the second half of FY23 from 21.8 per cent in the first half.

The downgrade rate increased to 7 per cent from 3 per cent.

A senior official said the overall exports growth is expected to slow down to 2-4 per cent in FY24, from the 5-7 per cent estimated to have been witnessed in FY23.

Corporate India continued with its deleveraging activity, and the agency expects the median gearing of its portfolio to correct to 0.45 times by end-FY24 end. The agency expects industrial and infrastructure capital expenditure to kickstart from the second half of the new fiscal.

The agency has placed 19 sectors, including hospitality and auto, accounting for over 41 per cent of the rated debt as buoyant ones, while the remaining 25 sectors will log favourable trends in one of the two parameters — operating profits or leverage — and hence their credit

quality outlook will vary from positive to stable, Crisil said.

Its smaller peer India Ratings said the number of downgrades in the second half were just 0.26 per cent of the upgrades, which is a further improvement from 0.31 per cent in FY22. It upgraded 295 issuers' ratings as against 78 downgrades.

Its senior director Arvind Rao attributed the upgrades to deleveraging, higher revenues and profitability and liquidity availability. Icrs Ratings, another rating agency, said credit quality has persevered even though the operating environment had some headwinds, and added that there were three upgrades for every downgrade in its portfolio.

Careedge Ratings said its credit ratio, which measures the ratio of upgrades to downgrades, normalised to 2.72 in H2FY23 after reaching an all-time high of 3.74 in H1FY23. It upgraded the ratings of 383 entities and downgraded the ratings of 141 entities during the six months, as per an official statement.

Cost of 651 essential medicines down 7% from April as Govt caps ceiling prices

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cost of 651 essential medicines has come down by an average of 6.73 per cent from April with the government capping ceiling prices of a majority of the scheduled drugs, NPPA said on Monday.

In a tweet, the national drug price regulator said the government has been able to fix the ceiling prices of 651 medicines so far out of the total 870 scheduled drugs listed under National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM).

The health ministry had amended NLEM in September 2022 and it now has a total of 870 drugs.

The National Pharmaceu-



tical Pricing Authority (NPPA) noted that with the capping of ceiling prices, the cost of 651 essential drugs on an average had already come down by 16.62 per cent.

"Due to this, the price of 651 essential drugs, which was to go up by 12.12 per cent, has actually come down by 6.73 per cent from April 1," NPPA said.

Consumers will benefit from this decline in prices despite a 12.12 per cent annual hike in prices of drugs based on WPI, it added. Annual hikes in prices of drugs listed in NLEM are based on WPI.

In a statement dated March 25, NPPA had stated that the annual change in Wholesale Price Index (WPI) was 12.12 per cent for 2022.

NPPA fixes the ceiling price of essential medicines of Schedule I under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) 2013.

The calculation for essential drugs is based on the simple average of all the medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1 per cent.

Property market steady in Jan-Mar: Knight Frank

'Housing sales up 1%, office leasing rises 5% annually in 8 cities'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian real estate witnessed steady demand during January-March with housing sales rising by 1 per cent and gross office space leasing growing by 5 per cent year-on-year across eight major cities, Knight Frank India said on Monday.

Housing prices rose in the range of 1-7 per cent annually in the first quarter of this calendar year, while office rentals grew 2-9 per cent, according to real estate consultant Knight Frank

'India Real Estate' report released on Monday.

As per the data, housing sales stood at 79,126 units across eight major cities during January-March 2023, up by marginal 1 per cent from the year-ago period.

The gross office leasing rose 5 per cent to 11.3 million square feet in January-March, from 10.8 million square feet in the corresponding period of the previous year.

"The residential market remained resilient in the face of rising interest rates and prices as sales level sustained in the first quarter of the year," Knight Frank India Chairman & Managing Director Shishir Bajjal said in a statement.

The need for home ownership continues to drive demand even as the homebuyer's ability



to purchase has come under pressure over the past few months, he said.

"The mid and premium (housing) segments have emerged as outperformers in this market and can also be expected to drive volumes for the remainder of 2023," Bajjal said.

According to Knight Frank, all eight cities posted a YoY (year-on-year) growth in per

square feet (sq ft) prices of residential properties during January-March this year.

Prices grew the most in Bengaluru at 7 per cent followed by Mumbai at 6 per cent, whereas Hyderabad and Chennai prices rose 5 per cent each YoY during Q1 2023.

Housing prices appreciated by 4 per cent in Pune, 3 per cent each in Ahmedabad and Delhi-NCR. Kolkata saw a growth of just one per cent in housing prices.

In the office market, rentals in Kolkata rose 9 per cent year-on-year in the January-March period.

Rentals grew by 5 per cent each in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai, while Pune and Mumbai saw a 4 per cent rise in rent each. Ahmedabad and Delhi-

NCR witnessed 3 per cent and 2 per cent increase, respectively, in office rent.

On the office market, Bajjal said, "The relatively stronger economic environment in India has helped the office market to step into 2023 on a positive note.

The proposition of high-quality talent and the cost arbitrage with the appreciation in the USD has served to anchor the Indian businesses of multinational corporations.

As per the data, housing sales in Mumbai during January-March fell 6 per cent to 20,300 units, but office leasing more than doubled to 2.2 million square feet.

In Delhi-NCR, housing sales rose 2 per cent to 15,392 units, while office leasing were up 12 per cent to 2.6 million square feet.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

GOLD FUTURES FALL ON LOW DEMAND
New Delhi: Gold prices on Monday fell by Rs 112 to Rs 59,500 per 10 gram in futures trade as speculators reduced their positions. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, gold contracts for June delivery traded lower by Rs 112 or 0.19 per cent to Rs 59,500 per 10 gram in a business turnover of 18,717 lots. Analysts attributed the fall in gold prices to the trimming of positions by participants. Globally, gold was trading 0.51 per cent lower at USD 1,976.10 per ounce in New York.

IRMA CLOCKS 100% PLACEMENTS
Gujarat: The Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) recently completed the campus placements process for the 42nd outgoing batch of its Post Graduate Diploma in Management (Rural Management) — the PGDM (RM) programme. IRMA takes pride in announcing that the batch of 2021-23 recorded 100 per cent placements.

ASHOK LEYLAND REPORTS 19% RISE IN SALES
Chennai: Hinduja Group flagship Ashok Leyland has reported a 19 per cent rise in its sales in domestic and overseas markets at 23,926 units, the company said on Monday. The city-based heavy commercial vehicle maker sold 20,123 units in the corresponding month of last year. Cumulative sales made by the auto major till March 2023 grew by 50 per cent to 1,92,205 units from 1,28,326 units sold in the corresponding period of last year, Ashok Leyland said in a statement.

Bank NPAs to improve to decadal low of 3.8% by FY24-end: Crisil

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Banks' gross non-performing assets (NPAs) will reduce further to a decadal low of 3.8 per cent by end of FY2023-24, credit rating agency Crisil said on Monday. The agency estimates NPAs to reduce to 4.2 per cent by end of the just concluded FY23 as against 5.9 per cent in the year-ago period. It had earlier estimated NPAs to come at 4 per cent by end of FY24.

Crisil said a major factor influencing the bank NPAs is the improvement in the high-value corporate loanbooks, where the gross NPAs are slated to come below 2 per cent. Corporates have been reducing their leverage through a string of measures, including prepayment of loans as well. Additionally, strengthened risk management and under-



writing is also helping the lenders towards lowering the NPAs, the agency said.

When asked about the growing trend of writing unsecured loans in the retail segment, the agency's deputy chief rating officer Krishnan Sitaraman said they occupy a very small proportion of the overall loans.

He said 26 per cent of the overall banking industry exposure is to the retail segments, of which half is home loans and one-fourth is vehicle. All the remain-

ing loans, including the unsecured credit card and personal loans fall in the remaining one-fourth of the retail book, he explained.

Its senior director Somaskhar Vemuri said the last time the banking system's gross NPAs was at this level was in March 2014 quarter, and underlined that the stressed assets situation was not exactly representative of the underlying challenges because of the existence of myriad schemes like corporate debt restructuring, strategic debt restructuring etc which led to allegations of under-reporting NPAs.

The RBI had to embark on the asset quality review, under which it directed lenders to cleanup their books by asking them to recognise individual assets as NPAs. The agency said the banking sector is better capitalised benefiting from recent capital infusion, but the ability to attract deposits to keep pace with an increasing credit growth will be a monitorable.

AAI has received ₹3,245 cr till Feb from pvt partners of 6 leased out airports

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned AAI has received a total amount of Rs 3,245 crore till February this year from the private partners of Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram and Mangaluru airports, according to the government.

These airports were awarded for operations, management and development under Public Private Partnership (PPP) for a lease period of 50 years. The airports were won by the Adani group through a competitive bidding process.



Private partners of Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram and Mangaluru airports have paid approximately Rs 896 crore to AAI as Per Passenger Fee (PPF) till February 2023. AAI has also received an amount of approximately Rs 2,349 crore from the private partners of these six airports in the form of upfront fee towards the capital expenditure incurred by AAI at these airports," Union minister V K Singh told Rajya Sabha on Monday. Airports at Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Mangaluru were leased out in 2020 while the remaining three were leased out in 2021.

PSG suffer another home defeat

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain suffered a second home defeat in a row Sunday, falling 1-0 to Lyon as their World Cup winning superstar Lionel Messi was jeered by a section of supporters.

After losing 2-0 at home to Rennes two weeks ago, it was Lyon's Bradley Barcola who inflicted the latest loss for PSG at the Parc des Princes.

The goal by Barcola — who had come on as replacement for injured Amin Sarr — made up for a missed penalty by Alexandre Lacazette in the first half.

It is the Parisians' fifth Ligue 1 loss this season, all of them in 2023, and leaves Christophe Galtier's side just six points ahead of both second-placed Lens and Marseille in third.

The night started in controversial circumstances.

As the team line-ups were announced over the loudspeaker, whistling greeted Messi's name in one part of the stadium.

Fans in another area, however, shouted in response "Messi".

Messi, 35, is nearing the end of his two-year contract with the Paris club.

Talks have begun on a possible renewal but he has also been linked with a return to Barcelona.

In two seasons, the veteran has played 67 matches with PSG including Sunday's game against ninth-placed Lyon and scored 29 goals.

"The whistles, I find that hard," said Galtier.

"Leo is a player who gives a lot and who has given a lot since the start of the season."

He added: "With a stroke of genius, Leo is able to deliver the right ball, to provide an assist, to score a goal. I never once thought about taking him off." PSG midfielder Danilo



acknowledged the team had hit "a difficult phase" which they had to find a way out of, given their rivals were closing in.

"We have to wake up. The title is not guaranteed at all, there are still a lot of matches," he said on Prime Video.

"There are lot of things to change, not just the mindset, but it's not up to me to say what."

PSG have been severely hampered by injuries, with Neymar recovering from ankle surgery and their defence decimated.

On Sunday, PSG called up 17-year-old central defender El Chadaille Bitshiabu but he was overawed, giving away the ball

too often. Kylian Mbappe failed to pull off a repeat of his late scoring heroics as he had done in recent games against Strasbourg and Brest.

"We can't expect everything from Leo and Kylian," said Galtier.

"It's our eighth defeat in 2023, it's far too many."

Next up for PSG is a trip to Nice who are undefeated since January 2 before a crucial home clash with second-placed Lens.

Lens will be hopeful of delivering a further blow to their Qatar-owned rivals whose season is threatening to implode after a Champions League exit

at the hands of Bayern Munich and a French Cup loss to bitter rivals Marseille.

'TWO FACES OF MONACO' Monaco kept up their push for a Champions League spot with a rollercoaster 4-3 home win over lowly Strasbourg.

Monaco trailed 2-1 at the interval despite taking an 18th-minute lead through Vanderson. Lebo Mothiba and an own-goal by Chilean defender Guillermo Maripan gave Strasbourg the edge.

Eliessa Ben Seghir and Edan Diop, both just 18 years old, and Youssouf Fofana then hit three goals inside an 11-minute spell

in the second half to give Monaco a 4-2 lead.

Habib Diallo's stoppage-time strike was only a consolation for Strasbourg.

Monaco have 57 points, just three behind third-placed Marseille who were held to a 1-1 draw by Montpellier on Friday.

"As I told the players, we saw two faces of Monaco tonight," said Monaco coach Philippe Clement.

"We started well and for 25 minutes, we were good. But then the aggressiveness fell away and Strasbourg came back and scored twice. At half-time, I was very angry. I didn't recognise my team."

Milan slam brakes on Napoli's title charge

AP ■ MILAN

AC Milan hammered runaway Serie A leaders Napoli 4-0 on Sunday in an incredible performance which slammed the brakes on their opponents' charge to a first league title in over three decades.

Rafael Leao outshone Khvicha Kvaratskhelia in the battle of the wing wizards with a brilliant brace while Brahim Diaz and Alexis Saelemaekers netted the other goals for the rampant defending champions who move up to third.

The biggest win of the Serie A season for Stefano Pioli's side was also a third league defeat for Napoli, whose huge lead at the top of the table has been cut to 16 points after second-placed Lazio beat Monza 2-0 earlier on Sunday.

A difficult 2023 has left Milan 20 points off the pace but they have struck first blood in a trio of matches against Napoli which will conclude this month with the Champions League quarter-final between the two Italian teams.

"It's an incredible feeling, but even if I hadn't scored today, we still played very well," said Leao after his first goals since mid-January.

Napoli were without injured star striker Victor Osimhen but an otherwise first choice line-up was humbled by Milan who have boosted their chances of qualifying for next year's edition of Europe's top club competition.

Milan are however only a point above local rivals Inter Milan and Roma, who sit fifth on goal difference following their 3-0 win over Sampdoria. "It's only the first step... we have another 10 matches left in



the league in which we need to have the same attitude," Pioli told DAZN.

"We threw away chances in the past and that can't happen any more. I'm happy with the win but it's only one game."

"For this to be a good season we need to be playing in the Champions League next season."

Diaz was at the heart of Milan's fast start and it was his delightful pass which slipped through Leao and allowed the Portugal winger to dink the away side ahead in the 17th minute.

And the home fans were stunned into near silence eight minutes later after more brilliant play from Diaz, who collected Ismael Bennacer's cross before cutting inside Mario Rui and then lashing in from close range.

Napoli struggled to get anything out of a well-drilled Milan and Leao struck again just before the hour mark, showing why he is so important

to his team by bursting past Amir Rrahmani and smashing a powerful finish into the top corner.

With Napoli reeling, Saelemaekers took advantage of more sloppy defending, dribbling through weak tackles and nutmegging goalkeeper Alex Meret to cap a perfect night for the seven-time European champions.

Pedro's low finish in the 13th minute and a sensational free-kick from Sergej Milinkovic-Savic 10 minutes after half-time gave Lazio their fifth win in six league matches at Monza.

Milinkovic-Savic's goal was his first since scoring against Milan in January and his 65th for Lazio, making him the club's highest ever foreign goalscorer.

Roma overcame 10-man Sampdoria in Rome thanks to Georginio Wijnaldum's header six minutes into the second half and two late goals from Paulo Dybala and Stephan El Shaarawy.



Klopp not afraid of losing Liverpool job

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Jurgen Klopp says he is not afraid of the axe after a spate of Premier League casualties but admits struggling Liverpool must deliver as he prepares his team to face managerless Chelsea.

Liverpool, who fell agonisingly short of winning an unprecedented quadruple last season, are eight points off the top four after Saturday's painful 4-1 loss at defending champions Manchester City.

Klopp takes his team to Stamford Bridge on Tuesday after the weekend sacking of Graham Potter, hours after Leicester parted ways with Brendan Rodgers. Antonio Conte left Tottenham "by mutual agreement" last week.

There have now been 13 managerial departures in the English top flight this season — a new record.

"I think the elephant in the room is probably why I am still sitting here in this crazy world," Klopp said at his pre-match press conference on Monday. "Last man standing."

The German admitted the current season had been a disappointment for the club, who

are used to winning silverware.

"I'm aware of the fact that I'm sitting here because of the past and not because of what we did this season," said Klopp. "If this was my first season it would be slightly different."

But he said he was not fearful over the future, even though his team, eighth in the table, face an uphill task to qualify for next season's Champions League.

"I don't think that Graham was afraid but there's no need to be afraid," he said. "I'm here to deliver. I'm not here as a talisman or for murals on a house wall."

"I'm here to deliver. I know that 100 percent. There's nothing else in my mind," Klopp, 55, who has been Liverpool manager since 2015, reiterated his commitment to the club.

"I'm fully in," he said. "There's no doubt about that. We have to sort it. We cannot just continue playing like we do from time to time, not always, thank God, but from time to time and that's not allowed really. I'm really disappointed about us that we do these kinds of things but it has happened so now we have to find a way out and that's what we are constantly working on."

Chelsea sack Potter after just seven months in charge

AP ■ LONDON

Coach Graham Potter paid for Chelsea's poor form as the Englishman was sacked on Sunday after just seven months in the job.

The Blues had slipped to 11th in the Premier League table after a 2-0 home defeat to Aston Villa on Saturday despite spending over £500 million (\$616 million) on new signings this season.

Former Brighton defender Bruno Saltor has been placed in interim charge.

Chelsea have won just three games in their last 11 but have progressed to the quarter-finals of the Champions League where they face defending champions Real Madrid.

That tie may have been the decisive factor in the club's new American owners pulling the trigger

now, with the first leg in Madrid just 10 days away.

"We have the highest degree of respect for Graham as a coach and as a person. He has always conducted himself with professionalism and integrity and we are all disappointed in this outcome," co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali said in a statement.

"We have 10 Premier League games remaining and a Champions League quarter-final ahead. We will put every effort and commitment into every one of those games so that we can end the season on a high."

An unlikely run to the club's third European Cup now appears Chelsea's only route back into the Champions League next season as they sit 12 points adrift of the Premier League top four.

Potter becomes the second



manager sacked by the consortium led by LA Dodgers co-owner Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital in their first season in charge.

Thomas Tuchel, who was appointed Bayern Munich boss last week, was dismissed in September, just over a year from leading Chelsea to Champions League glory.

Chelsea paid £21.5m in compensation to Brighton to appoint Potter.

But that sum pales into comparison next to the fortunes the club have spent on players over the past 12 months with little return.

Argentine World Cup winner Enzo Fernandez was signed for a new English transfer record £106 million in January, while huge sums were also spent on Mykhailo Mudryk, Wesley Fofana, Marc Cucurella and Raheem Sterling.

But Potter has struggled to strike upon a winning blend as he switched between formations and personnel without success.

The 47-year-old won just 12 of his 31 matches in charge and was widely booed by the Chelsea support after defeat to Villa at the weekend.

"I don't like to blame anybody, I have to take responsibility," said Potter after that match.

"We can feel the pain of the supporters... I understand when you lose at home, the emotion of the game is such that people are going to be disappointed and frustrated and angry."

"Where we are in the league table, no one's happy with it. Whatever criticism comes I have to accept."

Saltor's first match in charge will be on Tuesday when Liverpool visit Stamford Bridge.

Medvedev wins fourth title of year

AP ■ MIAMI

Russian Daniil Medvedev reclaimed his fourth ATP title of the year with an emphatic victory over Italy's Jannik Sinner in the final of the Miami Open on Sunday.

Sinner had upset world number one and defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in Friday's semi-final, but the 21-year-old struggled in the heat against the fourth seed Medvedev, who triumphed 7-5, 6-3.

The win was Medvedev's 19th career ATP title and his fifth in a Masters 1000 event and confirmed his dominance on hard courts in 2023.

Sinner, also beaten in the Miami final two years ago and now with a 0-6 record against

the Russian, said he had not been at 100%.

"We woke up this morning not at my best, I felt a little bit sick... unfortunately today I couldn't play at my best," said the Italian who, however said there had been no question of him pulling out of the contest.

"No, it was not that bad. But, you know, with the heat, when you run a lot, it gets a little bit worse and worse. Obviously the first half an hour we played in the sun also," he said.

Medvedev, who had already won three titles in three weeks at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai before losing to Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final, started confidently, holding serve to love while Sinner's first service game was a real battle.

"I'm really happy. Today

was a tough match. It was probably the hottest day and the most humid during the day," Medvedev said.

"It was not easy conditions. I don't know if Jannik had a

small injury or cramp. I was also struggling, tried not to show it," he added.

Medvedev's 19 ATP Tour wins have come at 19 different events, but he had not won a



Masters 1000 event since Toronto in 2021.

"I haven't won't such a big title in probably a year and a half. At the end I was quite shaky," he said.

"Not even tight, because I'm not scared to win. But still the hands get a little shaky so the serve is a little bit tougher... I managed to get myself together and close the match."

The 27-year-old has now won five of the six hard-court ATP Masters 1000s and has also reached the final at both hard-court Grand Slams, winning the 2021 US Open.

Now he must turn his attention to the clay courts where he has had much less success.

"I love hard courts, if it would be my choice, there would be only hard courts," he joked.



Atletico, Villarreal win in La Liga

AP ■ MADRID

The race for a top four spot in La Liga intensified on Sunday as Villarreal, sixth, beat fourth-place Real Sociedad 2-0, and Atletico Madrid earned a 1-0 win over Betis in fifth.

Diego Simeone's Atletico, third, and in fine form since the World Cup, snatched a late win over Betis at the Metropolitan thanks to Antonio Correa's goal.

Defender Jose Gimenez hit the bar with a header early in the second half and Koke had a goal ruled out for offside, while Juanmi came close for Betis, who suffered their first league defeat in seven games.

Atletico took the lead with four minutes to go when Correa broke the deadlock after twice getting a lucky break on the edge of the box, before skipping into space and finishing well. The Rojiblancos are five points behind Real Madrid and six points ahead of Real Sociedad.

Villarreal took the lead late on against Real Sociedad when Samu Chukwueze was felled in the area and Dani Parejo slotted home the penalty.

Substitute Nicholas Jackson netted the second but was later sent off for two yellow cards.

Celta Vigo were held 2-2 by Almeria, 18th.

Valladolid and Espanyol fire coaches

AP ■ MADRID

Valladolid fired coach Jose 'Pacheta' Rojo on Monday while Espanyol confirmed they had axed their coach Diego Martinez.

Espanyol have slipped to 17th in the 20-team Liga, after losing four straight league games. They are ahead of Almeria in the first relegation place only on goal difference, Valencia are another point behind with a far superior goal difference.

Valladolid lost 6-0 at Real Madrid on Sunday and are one point and one place better off than Espanyol.

Martinez held a farewell press conference Espanyol on Monday following the club's announcement that he was leaving.

"Results lead our organisation to



make this decision with the sole and clear objective of staying in the top flight," said Espanyol in a statement.

Valladolid, whose president is former Brazil great Ronaldo, echoed the sentiments in a statement posted on their web site as they dismissed the coach who led them to promotion last year in his first season in charge.

"The club recognises the important career of the coach and the role he has played in the team since his arrival but, with the sole objective of achieving survival in the top flight at the end of the current campaign, we have opted to continue in another direction," said the Valladolid statement.

Spanish media calculated that the two firings took the total of coaching changes this season to a Liga record of 11.

Newcastle up to third after beating Man Utd

AP ■ NEWCASTLE

Newcastle avenged their League Cup final loss against Manchester United as Joe Willock and Callum Wilson clinched a 2-0 win that lifted the Magpies into third place in the Premier League on Sunday.

Eddie Howe's side were beaten 2-0 by United at Wembley five weeks ago in their first major final for 24 years.

But Newcastle might swap silverware for a lucrative Champions League berth and second half goals from Willock and Wilson at a raucous St James' Park moved them closer to that ambition.

Newcastle's third successive league win — and their first against United since 2019 — took them above their fourth placed opponents on goal difference.

They sit one point ahead of fifth placed Tottenham, who visit Everton on Monday, as the race heats up to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish.

It is 46 years since Newcastle last finished above United, but the Magpies, fuelled by Howe's astute management and the financial backing of their Saudi owners, now have a rare chance to emulate that feat.





MOEEN, RUTU SHINE IN SUPER WIN FOR CSK

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings defeated Lucknow Super Giants by 12 runs in an Indian Premier League match here on Monday.

Ruturaj Gaikwad slammed his second successive fifty and shared 110 runs for the opening wicket with Devon Conway (47 off 29) as CSK posted a commanding 217 for 7 after being sent into bat.

Chasing the target, Kyle Mayers made a whirlwind 22-ball 53 and shared 79 runs for 5.3 overs with skipper KL Rahul (20).

But once Mayers departed, LSG lost steam as Nicholas Pooran made an 18-ball 32 before CSK restricted them to 205 for seven.

Moeen Ali was the pick of the bowlers for CSK with figures of 4 for 26.

Earlier CSK's opening pair of Ruturaj Gaikwad and Devon Conway shared a scintillating century stand to power Chennai Super Kings to 217 for seven.

While the highly-rated Gaikwad hit a classy half-century to lead CSK's charge, skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni smacked a

89-metre six and another to send the adoring Chepauk crowd into a frenzy.

A delirious crowd had their glimpse of 'Thala', Dhoni as he carted two big sixes before being dismissed, going for a third off Mark Wood's bowling for 12 off 3 balls.

After the initial blitz by Gaikwad (57 off 37 balls; 3 fours, 4 sixes) and Devon Conway (47 off 29 balls; 5 fours, 2 sixes), there were valuable contributions from Shivam Dube (27 off 16 balls; 1 four, 3 sixes) and Moeen Ali (19).

Wood, who picked up five wickets in LSG's demolition of Delhi Capitals on Sunday, was not as effective and finished with 3 for 49 from his four overs.

LSG managed to put the brakes on the free-scoring CSK batters, thanks to a splendid spell by leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (3 for 28 in 4 overs) in the middle overs.

Sent in to bat by LSG captain K L Rahul, Gaikwad and Conway creamed 79 runs in the first six overs taking full advantage of the fielding restrictions as no bowler was spared the stick.

The stylish Gaikwad continued his form from the season opener



where he hammered 92 and in the New Zealand left-hander's company brought up the team's 100 in the eighth over.

Gaikwad made batting look so easy as he effortlessly lofted three sixes in K Gowtham's opening over (5th of the innings). He continued to pile on the runs and a flick for a six off the pacy Wood underlined the supreme form he is in.

The CSK openers were on a roll and brought up the 100-run stand in the eighth over as LSG bowlers looked clueless.

Paceman Avesh Khan, who bowled the second over of the innings, conceded 16 runs from his first four deliveries, including four wides as CSK got off to a rapid start.

Khan finished with figures of 1 for 39 in 3 overs which included the big wicket of Ben Stokes (8). The start was delayed by a few minutes as a dog ran onto the field and required a few ground staff to chase it out.

SHAKIB OPTS OUT
Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan on Sunday reportedly

informed his IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders about his unavailability for the entire ongoing season due to international commitments and personal reasons.

The KKR are now in the process of seeking a replacement for the all-rounder.

According to a report in ESPNcricinfo, Shakib has opted out of IPL 2023 owing to his international engagements with the Bangladesh cricket team as well as some personal reasons.

Shakib had already missed the season-opener for KKR against Punjab Kings last weekend along with wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das, who was picked up by the franchise in the auction last December at his base price of Rs 50 lakh. It was believed that Shakib would be available for selection post the T20I series against Ireland at home which ended on March 31.

However being a part of the Test side for the one-off game against Ireland (April 4-8) meant that the star Bangladeshi would have joined the KKR squad latest by April 9.

Delhi face GT in IPL today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals' Indian pace unit will have to punch above its weight against a formidable Gujarat Titans unit, which will start as overwhelming favourites in its first away match of the season, here on Tuesday.

The defending champions have all their bases covered despite Kane Williamson being ruled out of the tournament after a serious knee injury.

The hosts, on the other hand, are looking like an outfit that is bereft of a Plan B as it became apparent in their 50-run thrashing at the hands of Lucknow Super Giants.

The primary worry is the composition of Indian pace attack, which mildly put is below par when Anrich Nortje isn't there to spearhead the attack.

Chetan Sakariya and Mukesh Kumar are sincere cricketers but both lack the pace and variation required to trouble international quality batters consistently.

They could well be lambs for slaughter against a Shubman Gill, who is in rampaging form or skipper Hardik Pandya, who would feast on friendly medium pacers day in and day out.

Khaleel Ahmed had a decent first game but his fielding has been an issue for years and those who have seen him at fielding sessions now know that he drops more aerial catches than he takes. The drop of Kyle Mayers had the most damaging effect in opening game for Delhi.

The only other notable pacer in the ranks is Ishant Sharma and even DC management knows well that picking him at his base price was more of showing respect to a 100-Test veteran rather than thinking of him as an asset.



Sharma can only be used as an 'impact player' but those who have watched DC training this season would vouch that he has lost pace and the skiddy effect is no longer there.

However, the good news is that both Nortje and his South African compatriot Lungi Ngidi have arrived here and are available for selection on Tuesday.

DC head coach Ricky Ponting will have to rejig the combination a bit.

May be drop Sakariya and get Mustafizur Rahaman, an experienced international campaigner in the bowling unit. In that case, Rilee Rossouw will have to sit out. In the batting department, skipper David Warner would like to see the Indian youngsters like Prithvi Shaw and Sarfaraz Khan handle raw pace better than they did while encountering Mark Wood.

Against DC, Mohammed Shami and Pandya will pose a different challenge. With Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal and ever consistent Rashid Khan for company, it will be a challenge for DC batters. DC's main problem is Indian bench strength and perhaps not having good enough ones to be substituted as 'impact players'.

The likes of Ripal Patel, Lalit Yadav and Aman Hakim Khan are decent domestic players but without X factor.

It will all depend on how well the foreign recruits shape up for Capitals.

OZ WOMEN CRICKETERS GET HEFTY PAY RISE

AP ■ MELBOURNE



Australia's women cricketers secured a huge pay increase Monday, with the top contracted player on course to earn more than Aus\$1 million (US\$666,000) a year.

Payments for professional women will rise 66 percent under a new five-year deal between Cricket Australia and the Australian Cricketers' Association.

They will share in a pool worth Aus\$133 million, up from Aus\$80 million in the previous agreement, rewarding not only members of Australia's world champion team but significantly increasing the value of Big Bash League and state contracts.

According to the deal, the top CA contract holder who also has a WBBL contract — believed to be national captain Meg Lanning — could now earn more than Aus\$800,000 a year. That could break the Aus\$1 million mark with further earn-

ings in India's Women's Premier League and The Hundred in England.

The next six contracted players will earn an average Aus\$500,000.

Those who do not play for Australia, but compete in the Women's National Cricket League and WBBL, will be paid more than Aus\$151,000 annually.

"I am particularly pleased this MOU (memorandum of understanding) represents another major step forward in the rise of women's cricket," said CA chief Nick Hockley.

"(There are) significant increases in remuneration for the inspirational role models of the world champion Australian women's team and the WBBL who are driving substantial growth in female participation.

"Cricket now clearly offers the best earning opportunities of any team sport for elite female sportspeople."

The deal will also see the number of CA men's contracts increase from 17-20 to 20-24, recognising the number of players now selected across various formats.

The value of those contracts will increase 7.5 percent in the first year and two percent thereafter to an average Aus\$951,000 plus match payments in 2023-24.

Heartiest Greetings to all on the occasion of Bhagwan Mahavir Jayanti

April 4, 2023

"Greetings on Mahavir Jayanti.
 Bhagwan Mahavir's message of peace,
 non-violence and harmony is a source
 of great inspiration for us."
 - Narendra Modi

Information, Public Relations, Languages and Culture Department, Haryana

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