

CITY 3
CM: UP TO BE TORCHBEARER OF
INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION 4.0**OPINION 6**
CONGRESS' OBC
PARANOIA IS AGE-OLD**WORLD 10**
UKRAINE MARKS GRIM BUCHA
ANNIV, CALLS FOR JUSTICE

LUCKNOW, SATURDAY APRIL 1, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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DELHI TO FACE
LUCKNOW IN
IPL 2023 TODAY
12 SPORT

Ram Navami clashes go on unabated

6 States hit; cops hurt in Bengal, Sec 144 clamped; Shah reviews situation

PNS ■ HOWRAH/MUMBAI/
NEW DELHI/VADODARA/PATNA

A day after communal clashes broke out over Ram Navami celebrations in West Bengal, Maharashtra and Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Bihar, fresh incidents of violence were reported from Bengal and Bihar, while situation remained tense in all the affected States on Friday.

Another spell of stone pelting were witnessed in Howrah's Kazipara on Friday, a day after violence and arson broke out in this industrial suburb. At least three policemen were injured in stone pelting. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC have been clamped in Kazipara. Altogether 45 people were arrested in connection with the violence since Thursday.

A huge team of Rapid Action Force (RAF) from Kolkata Police was brought into the area on Friday afternoon. The personnel started a route march following the stone-throwing incidents.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Governor CV Ananda Bose reviewed the situation and prohibitory orders were imposed. Union Home Minister Amit Shah also dialled the West Bengal Governor to enquire about the security situation in the town situated across the Hooghly river opposite Kolkata.



Police cordon off an area after clashes broke out between two groups during a 'Ram Navami' procession on Thursday at Kajipara, in Howrah district on Friday

PTI

A press statement from Raj Bhavan said Governor Bose asked the State Government to "ensure fool proof arrangements to maintain law and order effectively" besides action to be taken "against miscreants."

In Bihar's Biharsharif of Nalanda district, vehicles, thatched houses and shops were torched and several people injured in communal flare-ups reported over Ram Navami processions on Friday. On Thursday, Sasaram had seen

communal clashes over Ram Navami procession.

A minor child also sustained gunshot injuries. Four other persons also sustained injuries. They were admitted in Sadar hospital and they are said to be out of danger. The violence was triggered during the Ram Navami Shobha Yatra started from Labour Welfare Centre on Friday evening.

When it reached Kanta area, some persons pelted stones from the rooftops, and this led to stampede-like situation and

then, clashes.

A clash broke out between two groups following a spat during a Ram Navami Shobha Yatra near Shahi Masjid in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Lucknow.

In Gujarat, police have detained 24 persons for allegedly hurling stones at two Ram Navami processions in communally-sensitive areas in Vadodara city, a top official said on Friday. The incidents had occurred on Thursday when Ram Navami was celebrated.

Stones were hurled at two separate Ram Navami processions when they were passing through the city's communally-sensitive areas of Fatehpura and nearby Kumbharwada. At least two persons were injured in stone-pelting by a mob at Kumbharwada, the police said. Local BJP MLA Manisha Vakil was part of the procession which came under attack at Kumbharwada. In some videos of the incident aired by new channels, people can be seen running for shelter during

stone pelting, while a chariot that was carrying a statue of Lord Ram, was also pulled away to a safer place by the devotees to save it from stones.

In Maharashtra, violence erupted in Aurangabad, Malad and Jalgaon. As many as 21 persons have been arrested so far in connection with the stone pelting at a Ram Navami procession in suburban Malad (West), police said on Friday. The tensions on Thursday night began following disputes over the loud DJ music being played in the procession as it was passing through the vicinity of mosques in Malvani area, a police official said. An FIR has been registered against nearly 300 identified and unidentified persons at the Malvani police station, he said.

As the volume of music was not lowered, there was some slogan-shouting and one of the men who had objected to loud music allegedly hurled a stone at the procession and it hit a participant, he added. Police personnel deputed for security along the route immediately took the man who had thrown the stone into custody, he said.

As per the FIR, when the procession was near the Ali Hazrat mosque around 8.45 pm, a mob of 200 to 250 persons began to pelt stones. As police tried to bring the situation under control, some people in the mob hurled stones at them and manhandled some police personnel, the FIR said.

Guj HC quashes Kejriwal's plea for Modi degree info

Imposes ₹25,000 cost on Delhi CM

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD



The Gujarat High Court on Friday set aside the seven-year-old order of the Central Information Commission (CIC), asking the Gujarat University to provide information on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's degree to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Allowing the Gujarat University's appeal against the CIC order, Justice Biren Vaishnav also imposed a cost of ₹25,000 on Kejriwal and asked him to deposit the amount within four weeks to the Gujarat State Legal Services Authority (GSLSA).

"Accordingly, the petition is allowed and the impugned order (of CIC), dated April 29, 2016, is quashed and set aside," said Justice Vaishnav in his order. Justice Vaishnav also refused to stay his order as requested by Kejriwal's lawyer Percy Kavina.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said it would appeal against the order in the division bench.

"With this judgement, citizens have lost their right to seek information about the PM's degrees. The cost imposed

on Kejriwal, who was a respondent in this case, also came as a surprise for us. Since we are not satisfied with this judgement, we will soon approach a division bench against this order," said AAP Gujarat's legal cell president Pranav Thakkar.

In April 2016, the then CIC M Sridhar Acharyulu had directed the Delhi University and the Gujarat University to provide information to Kejriwal on the degrees that Modi received.

Three months later, the Gujarat High Court stayed the CIC order after the varsity approached it against that order.

The CIC order came a day after Kejriwal wrote to Acharyulu, saying he has no objection to government records about him being made public and wondered why the commission wanted to "hide" information on Modi's educational qualifications.

Based on the letter, Acharyulu directed the Gujarat University to give records of Modi's educational qualifications to Kejriwal.

Continued on Page 9

Trump indicted for hush money to porn star, to be arraigned on Tue

First US President to face criminal charge, Trump cries political conspiracy

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump has been indicted by a Manhattan grand jury on charges related to paying off a porn star during his 2016 presidential 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 grand jury on Thursday voted to indict 76-year-old 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. He will be arraigned on Tuesday.

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.

The office of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, who has been pursuing the investigation for years, confirmed that it had contacted Trump's lawyers on Thursday evening to "coordinate his surrender" on unspecified charges.

"This evening we contacted Mr Trump's attorney to coordinate his surrender to the Manhattan DA's office for arraignment on a Supreme

Court indictment, which remains under seal. Guidance will be provided when the arraignment date is selected," a spokesperson for District Attorney Bragg said.

The *New York Times* termed Trump's indictment "a historic development that will shake up the 2024 presidential race and forever mark him as the nation's first former president to face criminal charges."

Continued on Page 9

India on road to \$2 trillion exports in 2030

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday exuded confidence that India's merchandise and services exports will cross \$2 trillion by 2030 from the current level of \$765 billion, as he unveiled a "dynamic and responsive" foreign trade policy.

He said that goods exports have witnessed good growth considering the current global scenario while services exports may see a quantum jump in the current fiscal.

"We have to meet our exports targets going forward," said the minister, adding that "we will need to work a bit harder" on goods exports.

"It shouldn't be that by 2030, services exports cross \$1 trillion while you (merchandise exports) lag behind. I am confident that we will cross \$2 trillion by 2030," Goyal said.

The minister said he has



Union Minister for Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution and Textiles Piyush Goyal addresses at the release of 'Foreign Trade Policy 2023' in New Delhi on Friday

PTI

asked the Department of Commerce to undertake a "massive focused concentrated" outreach globally in the next 4-5 months sectorally as well as country-wise through Indian

Continued on Page 9

RK Vishwakarma to be officiating UP DGP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government, on Friday, appointed Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Raj Kumar Vishwakarma as part-time director general of police (DGP) in the state.

Soon after taking charge, Vishwakarma observed that eradication of mafias, zero tolerance towards crime, techno centric policing and serving the citizens with compassion shall be his top most priorities. He said his priority was also to ensure that urban local bodies polls were conducted peacefully.

The 1988 batch IPS officer has been given the additional charge of DGP till the time a permanent appointment is made for the post of DGP.

Vishwakarma, who would retire in May this year, took charge from DS Chauhan, who retired from services on Friday. Chauhan, however, was given DG rank pay scale on the day of his retirement which would now benefit him financially as he will get an increased pension. Sources said that the gov-



Raj Kumar Vishwakarma (right) taking charge from DS Chauhan, who retired from service on Friday.

ernment also made changes in the postings of senior IPS officers. ADG (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar, who was elevated to special DG rank on Thursday, was given additional charge of ADG (Economic Offences Wing)

while DG (CB CID) Vijay Kumar was given additional charge of DG (Vigilance Establishment). DG (UP Power Corporation Vigilance) SN Sabat has been posted as DG (Prison) in place of Anand Kumar, who has been shifted as DG (Cooperative).

ADG (Crime) MK Bashal, who has also been elevated to special DG rank, has been posted as special DG, UP Power Corporation Vigilance.

The government did not post anyone as DG (Intelligence), the charge so far looked after by DS Chauhan before his retirement.

Meanwhile, the state government could also appoint him as security advisor.

The sources said that Vishwakarma was made officiating DG as he could not be made the state police head as according to the rules, an officer with less than six months of his service left cannot be included in the panel for three top officers to be made DGP.

Notably, the announcement comes just two months ahead of Vishwakarma's retirement, which is slated to take place in May 2023. He is the second senior-most IPS officer after Mukul Goyal.

Meanwhile, the state gov-

CAPSULE

'FISCAL DEFICIT TOUCHES 82.8% OF YEAR-TARGET'

New Delhi: The Central Government's fiscal deficit touched 82.8 per cent of the full-year target at the end of February, according to data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) on Friday.

'PEOPLE IN PAK BELIEVE PARTITION WAS MISTAKE'

Bhopal: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday said people of Pakistan were not happy after more than seven decades of independence and they now believe the partition of India was a mistake.

FOUR KILLED IN GAS CYLINDER BLAST IN UP

Bulandshahr: Four people died in a suspected gas cylinder blast in a house here on Friday, police said. The house where the explosion took place was destroyed, police said.

Interest rates on most small savings schemes hiked up to 0.7%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Friday raised interest rates on most post office savings schemes by up to 0.7 per cent for the April-June 2023 quarter in line with the firming of interest rates in the economy.

While the interest rates for popular PPF and savings deposits have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, there has been an increase between 0.1 per cent and 0.7 per cent in other saving schemes, a finance ministry statement said.

The highest increase was in the interest rate of the National Savings Certificate, which will now attract 7.5 per cent for the April 1-June 30, 2023 period.

IPL begins with glittering ceremony

IANS ■ AHMEDABAD

A dazzling opening ceremony from singer Arijit Singh, actors Tamannaah Bhatia and Rashmika Mandanna set the stage for a tantalising IPL 2023 opener between defending champions Gujarat Titans and four-time winners Chennai Super Kings here on Friday.

As the IPL returns to the home-and-away format after four years, the Narendra Modi Stadium was jam-packed and for a moment, one would have been mistaken for the gathering to be the one from Chepaug in Chennai.

During the broadcast, despite the blue of Gujarat Titans being largely visible, it was thoroughly outsmarted by the yellow of Chennai Super Kings, with the decibel level going high whenever MS



Actress Rashmika Mandanna performs during the IPL 2023 opening ceremony at in Ahmedabad on Friday

PTI

Dhoni's picture appeared on the giant screen, sending the crowd into a frenzy.

As Mandira Bedi gave the opening address, just like she did at the WPL last month, the giant IPL logo was shining brightly in the middle. Around it were the logos of all ten teams, giving it the resemblance of the solar system.

The stadium suddenly began to give the feel of a live music concert with Arijit taking centre stage and the vociferous crowd joining him to sing along to his sensational chartbusters. Arijit began with simple yet melodious vocals and then hit the high notes, followed by taking a round of the ground in a buggy.

Gujarat skipper Hardik Pandya was glued to Arijit's soulful performance while Chennai skipper MS Dhoni, who got the loudest cheers from the capacity crowd, was

calmly seated in the dugout, listening to the trending tracks.

Tamannaah got their energy levels up through her graceful moves. But the Chennai fans, outnumbering Gujarat supporters, had another moment when Rashmika's "Vanakkam Chennai Super Kings" got louder cheers than "Kem cho Gujarat Titans?", followed by her dancing to some popular songs, including the chartbuster Naatu Naatu from the movie RRR.

When the performers as well as dignitaries from the BCCI were called upon the stage to conclude the opening ceremony, Dhoni and Pandya arrived on grand chariots.

Despite Pandya being the home captain, the cheers, the crowd, upwards of 1,00,000, erupted in joy with chants of 'Dhoni, Dhoni, Dhoni', something which will be heard more during Friday's match.

Upset by son’s death, man shoots self

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 47-year-old man of Sitapur ended his life at the house of his brother-in-law in Lucknow on Friday morning. Identified as Suraj Pratap Singh, he was found hanging on Friday morning. He reportedly shot himself with his licenced rifle. Police claimed that Suraj ended his life following the death of his son Krishna Kant (20) under mysterious circumstances on Thursday. Uncle Pankaj Singh alleged that his nephew Krishna Kant was killed by a group of relatives over a domestic dispute. He was living with Pankaj in Lucknow. It was said that Krishna Kant had been suffering from cardiac problem for the past two years

and he could not appear for his annual examinations twice due to that. His father and other family members reached Lucknow from Sitapur on Thursday to perform his last rites. Upset over the incident, Suraj shot himself with his licenced rifle on Friday morning. Police spokesman NK Upadhyay said further probe was underway.

Meanwhile, the body of a 47-year-old man, identified as Moti Lal Rawat of Nigoha, was found in a nearby field. Police said prima facie, there were no external injuries. Son Ajay Kumar Rawat said his father went missing from the house under mysterious circumstances on Thursday afternoon. The family members unsuccessfully searched for

him and then informed police on Friday afternoon. In the meantime, a group of milk vendors spotted the body and informed police. The deceased was later identified by his son.

Meanwhile, thieves broke into the house of Arvind Kumar Tiwari, a resident of Savitri Sadan in Telibagh under PGI police station, and made off with valuables worth lakh and Rs 7,000 in cash. Tiwari, along with his father had gone to New Delhi to meet his son.

Ravi Yadav, who lives on rent in one portion of the house, informed Tiwari about the theft on Friday. The theft was committed possibly on the intervening night of March 30 and 31. A case was registered in this connection.

Mysterious blast in Bulandshahr kills 5

Lucknow (PNS): Five persons were reportedly killed while some other labourers were injured in a mysterious powerful blast in an illegal chemical factory in Bulandshahr on Friday morning. The explosion was so powerful that the people around were shaken and its sound was heard about two kilometres away from the blast site. The glass in the windows and doors of the surrounding buildings was shattered. Even the body parts of the dead were found scattered far and wide due to which the police failed to identify the victims.

According to Senior Superintendent of Police of Bulandshahr, Shlok Kumar, there was information about a cylinder blast on Dial 112. When the police reached the spot, they found four people

killed in the explosion. At present, the fire brigade and forensic teams are investigating the cause of the blast along with carrying on rescue work. The SSP said that the injured were shifted to hospital. Sources said that one injured died later in the hospital. Besides the SSP, District Magistrate Chandraprakash Singh also reached the spot for investigation.

Sources said that a chemical manufacturing factory was being run in the house and some explosive material was being prepared.

The cops said that they were still looking into the matter and trying to identify the owner of the house. They claimed that stern action would be taken against the owner if the factory was found to be running illegally.

Pathak inspects facilities for patients at Balrampur Hosp

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak carried out a surprise inspection of Balrampur Hospital on Friday. A senior doctor said the deputy CM also interacted with patients at the hospital.

The inspection was conducted because Balrampur hospital has qualified state-level NQAS (National Quality Assurance Standard), which is the national certification for the standard of the hospital to meet the best. Balrampur Hospital has qualified by 90 per cent. “After this, we are preparing for the national level. We will be having the national inspection shortly,” he said.

He added that the deputy chief minister visited the hos-



pital to see that there were no pitfalls. “The deputy CM suggested that tiles and wires be updated and made modern.

He appreciated what was being done in the hospital and was satisfied by the feedback,” the senior doctor said.

Woman sets hut on fire, tries to immolate self during anti-encroachment attempt

PTI ■ UNNAO

A woman set her hut on fire in front of a revenue department team that had arrived to remove encroachment from government land in Vikram Kheda area of Itkuti village under Hasanganj tehsil, authorities said on Friday.

The woman also reportedly attempted to commit suicide, along with her children, by pouring kerosene on her but was desisted by locals, said a revenue department official.

According to the official, a team of the department had gone to the village Thursday after receiving several complaints of encroachment.

When the team asked Ajay, a squatter, to clear the spot, his wife set her hut on fire, the official said, adding that the whole exchange took place in the presence of the village head and other villagers.

Hasanganj Sub-Divisional Officer (SDM) Ankit Shukla said several complaints had been received earlier too about a ‘pucca’ construction on gov-

ernment land by Ajay in Vikram Kheda and he was asked to remove it. Ajay removed the encroachment, but after some time raised a tin shed again, the SDM said.

The accused is a beneficiary of a government housing scheme and was constructing that house on government land, he said. On the incident of self-immolation attempt, Shukla said the woman did not do anything as long as the revenue team was in the village.

Later when the team left, however, it was found that she

did make such an attempt and was thwarted by the villagers, he said. On February 13, a middle-aged woman and her daughter allegedly set themselves ablaze in their hut during an anti-encroachment campaign in Madauli village under Rura police station area of Kanpur Dehat district. Both of them died.

After the incident, the state BJP government had come under fire from the opposition parties, which lambasted its use of bulldozers for removing illegal buildings.

KGMU performs 21st liver transplant

Lucknow (PNS): The 21st liver transplant was performed at KGMU on March 29. The patient was a 46-year-old man, a resident of Deoria district in Uttar Pradesh. He was suffering from advanced stage liver cirrhosis. His wife donated a part of her liver to him.

A team of more than 20 residents and 50 OT and other paramedical staff members were involved in the operation. Both the patient and the donor are stable and being monitored in the transplant ICU of KGMU.

Till date, total 21 liver transplants (15 living donor and six cadaveric liver transplants) have been performed at KGMU with a success rate of over 90%. KGMU is at par with the success rate of the most advanced centres in the world.

The transplant team was led by KGMU Vice-Chancellor Dr Bipin Puri. The surgery team was led by head of the department of gastroscopy Dr Abhijit Chandra, and Dr Slevakumar. Other doctors included Ashish, Prithesh, Mahesh, Ravi Patel, Krishna, Yashvardhan, D Mukteshwar, Ravindra, Shweta Singh, Tanmay Tiwari, Rajesh Raman, and Rati Prabha. Other important critical services were provided by Dr SN Sankhwar (CMS), Dr Tulika Chandra (blood transfusion), Dr Amita Jain (microbiology), etc.

Teenaged girl found murdered in Shamli

Lucknow (PNS): An 18-year-old girl was killed and her body was thrown into a tube-well in Banti Khera village under Babri police station of Bulandshahr to conceal the crime. The accused also threw salt on the body so that it could decompose rapidly.

After learning about the incident, the senior officers reached the spot along with the local police and forensic experts. Efforts were also made to ascertain the identity of the victim. According to the police, as salt was thrown on the body to hasten decomposition, the victim could not be identified. There were injury marks on the neck which indicated that she was murdered somewhere else and later the body was dumped in the well. Superintendent of Police Abhishek Jha and Additional Superintendent of Police OP Singh said that they would trace out the killers soon. They also did not deny that the victim could have been sexually assaulted before being murdered.

Meanwhile in Mainpuri district, goons opened fire during a ‘bhandara’ (community feast) after Bhagwat Katha in which a 5-year-old boy was killed. The victim’s father claimed that the accused were creating nuisance in the func-

tion and when objected, they opened fire in which his son died. The incident took place in Mudai village under Bevar police station of Mainpuri district. Sukhran Singh Rajput, father of the deceased child and a resident of Jahan, said that he was the former head of the village and was also an office-bearer of the Bharatiya Janata Party. He claimed that the ‘bhandara’ was organised at the house of Upendra of the village near his house. He identified the goons as Anupam Gupta, Rupendra, Pushpendra, Arvind Yadav, and Raman Rajput. The police arrested one of the accused.

Meanwhile, a youth killed his mother in Banda while in Kushinagar, a youth reportedly murdered his old mother and fled with his family.

Police officer in Naraini in Banda, Nitin Kumar, said that in the early hours of Friday, they received information that Ramanandi, 50-year-old wife of late Mangal of Rajnagar in Naraini town, was beaten with a stick by her son Rambabu. The police reached the spot, opened the door and took the injured Ramanandi to a hospital where she was pronounced dead upon arrival. He claimed that they arrested Rambabu and sent the body for autopsy.

CCSI Airport to manage 15% increase in weekly flights

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

More domestic and international flights will be the flavour of the season at the Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in Lucknow. The airport is all set to manage 15 per cent increased weekly flights in the upcoming summer schedule.

Commenting on the rise in the number of flights, CCSIA spokesperson said, “During the summer schedule effective from March 26 till October 28, the total weekly air traffic movements from here will increase to 926 (15%) this summer, as compared to current 808 per week. The domestic annual traffic movement will increase by 16% in April to 823 as compared to the current level of 706 weekly flights. The international air traffic movement will increase by 3% to 104 per week in April.”

“Moreover, during the summer schedule, there will be additional services to seven domestic destinations (Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata, Indore, Delhi, Mopa (Goa) and Ahmedabad) and three international destinations (Bangkok, Muscat and Jeddah),” the spokesperson said.

Convicted ex-MLA surrenders before court

Ayodhya (PTI): Former BJP MLA from the Gosaiganj constituency of Ayodhya – Indra Pratap Tiwari – who has been convicted in a fake marksheet case, surrendered before the MP-MLA court here on Friday. Tiwari was currently out on bail.

The surrender has come after the Allahabad High Court dismissed his appeal on March 17 against a trial court order that led to his conviction.

Talking to PTI, Dinesh Tiwari, Council for the MLA, said, “Indra Pratap Tiwari surrendered on Friday in the court of Special Judge MP-MLA Additional District Judge Ashok Dubey. The court took the former MLA in custody and sent him to jail.”

Dismissing Tiwari’s appeal, the Lucknow bench of the court, earlier this month, noted that the former legislator should be taken into custody forthwith to serve out the sentence awarded to him by a sessions court in Ayodhya.

FAKE MARKSHEET CASE

In its order, the court took note of the fact that Tiwari had a criminal history of 35 cases. Besides the former MLA, the two other appellants were Kripa Nidhan Tiwari and Phool Chand Yadav. “From the evidence led by the prosecution, the offences under sections 420 (cheating), 468 (forgery) and 471 (using as genuine a forged docu-

ment) of the IPC are fully made out and proved against the appellants and the trial court rightly convicted and sentenced the appellants for the aforesaid offences,” the HC order read. In separate appeals, the three had challenged the 2021 judgment of a special MP-MLA court in Ayodhya, sentencing Tiwari to five years in jail. The appellants were put on trial for the offences committed while getting themselves admitted to Saket Mahavidyalaya in Ayodhya on the basis of fake marksheets. A complaint was filed by the then principal of the college, Yaduvansh Ram Tripathi, on February 14, 1992, and February 16, 1992, with the SSP, Faizabad. Subsequently, a chargesheet was filed in the case.

CITYBRIEFS



Students performing at the Divine Education Conference of CMS, Rajendra Nagar Campus II, on Friday

DIVINE EDUCATION CONFERENCES

City Montessori School, Aliganj Campus II, felicitated its meritorious students with awards at the ‘Divine Education Conference’ organised at the Gotti Nagar auditorium on Friday. CMS founder Jagdish Gandhi awarded prizes to the meritorious students. Meanwhile, CMS, Rajendra Nagar Campus II, also organised its ‘Divine Education Conference’ on Friday. The children showcased their talents through music and dance as they presented meaningful talks on values, global thinking, serving the entire humanity and excellence in everything.

ENCROACHMENT

After receiving complaints of illegal occupation on Yamuna lake in Aishbagh, Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Roshan Jacob reached the spot and got the encroachment removed. She gave instructions to the officials concerned that an FIR should be filed against encroachers and they be sent to jail. Whatever barren land is there on record should be vacated, he said. The encroachment

was removed with the help of Lucknow Development Authority, Municipal Corporation, district administration and police.

VISIT

President and chief financial officer of The Coca-Cola Company John Murphy and president for India and Southwest Asia Sanket Ray visited Integral University and interacted with students and faculty members. They asked the students to aspire for bigger goals. They also visited the Chancellor’s gallery and had a glimpse of the journey of Integral University. Murphy kicked off a friendly soccer match between national and international teams of students.

SPECIAL ROBOT

Under the guidance of Anuj Kumar Sharma at AKTU’s Center for Advanced Studies, students have developed a special kind of robot. It will work on the instructions of fingers of both hands, and the disabled will also be facilitated by it. AKTU spokesperson Pawan Kumar Tripathi said they are constantly doing

experiments in the field of technology. Controlling multiple robots using hand gestures is being made at AKTU’s Centre for Advanced Studies. At present, the research paper of this technique is about to be published. PhD scholar Abhishek Kaushal, MTech student Anand Yadav and Suraj Chaurasia and BTech student Krishna Gupta have worked on this technique under the supervision of Dr Anuj Kumar Sharma.

WORKSHOP

A workshop on basics about animal experimentation in experimental pharmacology was organised by the Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Lucknow University on Friday under the guidance of Vice-Chancellor Prof AK Rai. Principal scientist, CSIR-CDRI, Dhananjay Hansda was the eminent speaker who provided detailed and significant information about the use of laboratory animals in experimental pharmacology and biomedical research. The workshop was attended by BPharm

and DPharm students along with faculty coordinator Akanksha Mishra and others.

CAMP

A special camp organised by Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, National Service Scheme Unit, from March 24 ended on Friday. Yoga, asanas, plantation, street plays, road safety, anti-drug surveys and other programmes were held at the camp. The chief guest at the valedictory function was Dr Vivekananda Nayak. BBAU Vice-Chancellor Sanjay Singh congratulated all the volunteers and members of the organising committee.

FOUNDER’S DAY

BBD Educational Group celebrated Dr Akhilesh Das Gupta’s 62nd birth anniversary on Friday as Founder’s Day. Group’s chairperson Alka Das Gupta, president Viraj Sagar Das, and vice-president Devanshi Das paid floral tributes to the portrait of Dr Akhilesh Das Gupta. A video clip based on the history of BBDU was screened.



On the occasion of Ram Navami, a bhandara was organised at Vibhuti Khand market in Gotti Nagar on Thursday. Awanish Awasthi, Chief Advisor of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, inaugurated the bhandara. Litterateur Hari Om Sharma ‘Hari’ welcomed the devotees.

Hippo polishes off 80-kg feed a day

Lucknow (PNS): When it comes to diet, the hippopotamus at Lucknow zoo is at the pole position while giraffe is the distant second. The hippo gobbles up 80-kg feed in a day while the giraffe’s diet is 32-kg feed per day. The hippo eats wheat bran, potatoes, carrots, small amounts of jaggery & black salt, and green feed while the giraffe gets 16 kg seeds & fruits, and 16 kg vegetables per day. Zoo’s deputy director Utkarsh Shukla said they take proper care of the daily diet of both carnivores and herbivores, with daily monitoring of minerals and supplements to be given to the animals.

Seasonal fruits such as watermelons, cucumbers, snake gourd, melons, carrots, etc are dominating as of now and it will change in the rainy season and then in winters. “The deer savour 25-30 types of plant varieties in the wild but we cannot provide them the same here at the zoo. We give them wheat bran or chana besides their daily dose of greens,” he pointed out. The carnivores are given buffalo meat and, sometimes, chicken with calcium, minerals and vitamin supplements.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
PARADIP PORT-754142, Odisha (India)
ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT
(Estate Wing)
AD/EST/GENL-01/2021/1010 Dt.28.03.2023
E-Tender Notice
An e-Tender notice invites bids for the work "Providing field/office assistance for Estate Works for a period of 2 (Two) years" is available in the website from 29.3.2023 to 19.04.2023. Interested bidders may log on the website:- <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.
Sd/-
PPA/PR/239/2022-23 Sr.Asst.Estate Manager
29/3/23 Paradip Port Authority

NOTICE
It is hereby informed that Arazi No. 2085/1, 2085/5 and 2085/5, renumbered as Arazi No. 2072 admeasuring 0.02091 Hec. was purchased by Mrs. Preeti Saxena wife of Mr. Mukesh Chandra Saxena resident of 292, Bairi AbkarpurKachar, Kanpur Nagar, vide Sale Deed dated 18.10.2011, duly registered at Serial No. 5637/2011, which Sale Deed is lost and that the said property is unencumbered.
If any bank, financial institution, etc. has any charge, claim pertaining to the aforesaid Arazi or may be in possession of the original title documents thereof or any other person having any right, title, interest, receivable in the said property, kindly inform the signatory below within15 days, failing which the signatory below will purchase the said property and any claims thereafter, shall be deemed and considered null and void against this publication."
(Manish Kumar Keshan) S/o Radhey Shyam Keshan (Smt. Seema Keshan) W/o Shri Rishi Keshan (Rishi Keshan) S/o Radhey Shyam Keshan (Smt. Mukta Keshan) W/o Shri Manish Kumar Keshan R/o 128/2, H-2 Block Kidwai Nagar, Kanpur Nagar.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
PARADIP-754142, ODISHA (INDIA)
(An autonomous body under Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Govt. of India)
No. AD/RSC-22/196/2015(Pt.-V)/718 Dated, the 28th March, 2023
Advertisement
Applications are invited from Indian Nationals for engagement of 01 (one) Sr. Manager (**Business Development & Trade Promotion**) on contractual basis in Paradip Port Authority.
For further details, visit our website <https://www.paradip-port.gov.in/Carrer.aspx> .
PPA/PR/238/2022-23
Dt. 29/03/2023
Sd/- **Dy. Secretary,**
Paradip Port Authority

CM: UP to be torchbearer of Industrial Revolution 4.0

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Investment proposals worth Rs 35 lakh crore received in the Global Investors' Summit prove that Uttar Pradesh would emerge as the 'torchbearer' of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Friday.

While addressing an award ceremony as well as toolkit distribution ceremony under Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana at Lok Bhawan here, the chief minister said, "The focal point of UP's industrial development are the 96 lakh MSME (micro, small and medium enterprise) clusters. The time has come to open designing and packaging institutes in the state to take MSME products to a new level."

He went on to say that along with this, there was a need to link banks with the Vishwakarma Shram Yojana so that the artisans could get financial help to expand their businesses. For this, meetings of artisans associated with Vishwakarma Shram Yojana should be organised with bankers in every district of the state, he added. Yogi said that along with honoring traditional handicraftsmen and artisans of the state through Vishwakarma Shram Samman, toolkits were being made available across the state.

"Today, ODOPI (One District One Product scheme) is not only promoting the products of every district of the state but by adding them with new design and technology, it is also providing a global market for them. ODOPI has become the backbone of the MSME sector of UP. It has emerged as the foundation of self-reliant India in the whole country," the chief minister asserted.

He reiterated that ODOPI had brought respect to the handicraft artisans of UP at the global level. "This is the reason that UP has emerged as the hub of exports today. Before 2017,

'Lack of fund not to hinder treatment'

Lucknow (PNS): Assuring people that lack of money would not be a hindrance to medical treatment, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that people with serious illnesses should be treated in the best medical facilities.

When a woman sought financial assistance from the chief minister during the Janata Darshan programme so that she could receive treatment at Apollo Hospital, he responded, "Aap bina chinta treatment kariye, paisa hum denge (Do not worry, we will provide the money)."

In front of Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Auditorium of the Gorakhnath temple complex, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed the grievances of over 250 people.

The chief minister listened to each person individually and assured all of them that there was no need to panic or become upset because every situation would be handled effectively.

As he handed over the applications to the police and administrative officers, the chief minister gave them instructions to pay attention to the public's problems and find a satisfactory solution.

Numerous people had come to the Janata Darshan to seek financial support for the treatment of serious illnesses. The chief minister was informed by a woman that she was receiving treatment at Apollo Hospital. The woman was asked by the chief minister if she had an Ayushman card. When she said no, the chief minister responded by saying, "You will be treated well and there is no need to worry. We'll



provide the money." He directed the officials present on the spot to send the estimate of the treatment to the government soon after completing the process.

When a woman informed the chief minister about her housing problem, Yogi Adityanath assured her that her wish to have her own home would soon come true.

Yogi also blessed children who came with some women and gave them chocolates while motivating them to study.

Yojana. So that our artisans and our labourers can start their business, there should be such a system that they get financial help from the banks. We have to work for their uplift by opening export promotion centres in every district," he added.

On this occasion, 12 people were awarded Sant Kabir State Handloom Award, 34 firms were given State Export Award, 20 people were given MSME award, 75,000 artisans were trained under Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana, toolkits were distributed and certificates were distributed. Toolkits were distributed by the chief minister to five people associated with the Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana.

that today the government had honoured 51 weavers with the Sant Kabir State Handloom Award. "These weavers are our strength. In UP, 2.5 to 3 lakh families are associated only with the work of weaving. The government is soon going to announce freight units for weavers' looms. We have to increase our strength so that we can connect with good design and good technology. The government is with you at every step," he said.

The chief minister said that today toolkits were being provided to 75,000 artisans associated with Vishwakarma Shram Samman in the entire state. "Now, we must connect banks with the artisans associated with Vishwakarma Shram

CM to launch 'School Chalo Abhiyan' today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ensuring 100 per cent enrolment in primary and upper primary schools, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will kick-start the 'School Chalo Abhiyan' on Saturday from the aspirational district Shravasti.

"The state government has worked assiduously over the past four years to re-enroll the children who dropped out of school. The government has been successful in enrolling a large number of children in schools under the campaign," Director General School Education Vijay Kiran Anand said here on Friday.

He said the ACER 2022 survey found that 3.5 per cent kids in the 7-16 age group were still not enrolled in schools. As part of the campaign, the Yogi government will make an effort to re-enroll these kids in school during this session.

Anand said, "Uttar Pradesh has been at the forefront of enrolling the maximum number of students in government schools. Efforts are being made to bring back the remaining children as well. We have identified four lakh children. A lot of work has been done on home visits and tracking of boys and girls working in domestic industries."

Under the 'School Chalo Abhiyan', events will be organised in selected model schools in aspirational blocks. During this, the minister in-charge and a public representative will be present.

Under this campaign, teachers will visit the homes of children who have dropped out of school. Home visits, especially of girls, will be done and they will be encouraged to return to school.

Their parents will also be made aware of the Rs 1,200 they will receive via direct benefit transfer (DBT), which they can use to purchase school uniforms, shoes, socks, and stationery for the kids.

In addition, schools and students with a very low attendance rate will also be targeted during the campaign.

Mahana: Significant change in perception about UP assembly

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



UP Vidhan Sabha Speaker Satish Mahana has said that the perception about the state assembly has undergone significant change in the recent past.

"Earlier, the members of the state assembly were known more by their caste identity and criminal background. Now the members are known by their abilities and professional competence," Satish Mahana said on Friday while addressing a press conference on completion of one year in office.

"Sustained messaging to the educated people to come forward and join politics is necessary to clear the mess in electoral politics created during the last over three decades," the speaker said.

He said the perception about the state assembly had changed following the positive message emanating from the assembly with meaningful debate and participation of more members of the House.

Expressing concern over the attempts in the last over three decades to undermine the dignity of the institution of legislature, the speaker said, "During the last 3-4 decades concerted attempts were made to weaken the state assembly but the situation has radically changed and UP assembly is now the most prominent state assembly of the country."

"During the last one year several innovative measures were taken. Earlier the role of the UP assembly was insignificant in the annual conference of the presiding officers of the state assemblies. Now UP assembly figures prominently

in the conference of the presiding officers," Mahana said.

On the innovative measures taken by the state assembly during the last one year, the speaker said, "In September last year, during the five-day session, one day was reserved for women members. One member pointed out why the whole day for women and I said not one day in a five-day session, only one day in the last 75 years."

He said the new rules of business for the conduct of the proceedings of the UP assembly were likely to come into force from the next session of the state assembly. He said the rules drafted in 1958 were being revised to accommodate the rapid technological changes that had taken place in the last 65 years.

"Earlier, the MLA had to personally file the question to the question section of the UP assembly secretariat. Now this can be done online 24x7, round the year," Mahana said, and added, "Many other changes have been incorporated in the rules as the proceedings of the assembly have been digitised and made paperless."

Mahana said due to digiti-

sation of the proceedings of the assembly, more seats had been added. He said earlier there were only 397 seats in the assembly which had increased to 401 in the House with the strength of 403. He said additional seats had to be provided as 14 ministers were members of the legislative council, the upper house of the UP legislature. He said during the last one year four sessions of the assembly were held and proceedings had to be adjourned only for 36 minutes.

Mahana said the legislative assembly would take suggestions from the IIM faculty on better management in the House in view of the changing technology. He said many other schemes were also on the anvil including a 'Best Legislator Award' which would be given on the basis of conduct, activity and participation of the assembly members.

"The role of management has increased in the changing era of technology therefore experts from Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) will be called in 'Legislative' (legislature) to take suggestions for better management," Mahana said.

2.69 crore smart prepaid meters installed so far

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government headed by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has installed smart prepaid meters on the premises of a total of 2.69 crore consumers so far under the Government of India's Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme.

The Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) notification was issued by the Government of India in 2021 to provide quality and uninterrupted power supply to the consumers of the state through an efficient and strong distribution system. The government seeks to bring down distribution losses from 12 per cent to 15 per cent by 2024-25 through the scheme.

Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL) Chairman M Devraj informed that a total of Rs 18,885.48 crore had been approved by the Government of India for the installation of smart meters, of which 15 per cent of the sanctioned amount, i.e. Rs 2,832.82 crore, was provided as a grant and the remaining amount, i.e., Rs 16,052.66 crore, would be funded by the state government and the power distribution corporation.

He said that Rs 16,498.61 crore had been sanctioned by the Government of India for strengthening the power system and reducing distribution losses, of which 60 per cent (Rs

9,899.17 crore) would be provided as grant by the Government of India and the remaining 40 per cent (Rs 6,599.44 crore) by the state government and the power distribution corporation.

For loss reductions, 2.71 lakh km of armored cabling has been used for providing connections, construction of 15,000 km of LT line with armoured cable, replacement of 1.18 lakh km of open wire LT line with AB cable, extension of 35,000 km 11 KV lines, and 16,000 km 11 KV feeder separation works have been carried out.

According to Devraj, proposals worth Rs 18,916.20 crore have been sent to the Government of India for modernisation of the electricity distribution system and the approval is expected in the next financial year.

Of this proposed amount, 60 per cent (Rs 11,349 crore) will be funded by the Government of India and the remaining 40 per cent (Rs 7,566.4 crore) will be funded by the state government and the distribution corporation.

The proposed main works of modernisation include the construction of 593 new sub-stations of 33/11 KV, capacity enhancement of 1,511 sub-stations of 33/11 KV, construction of about 10,000 km of new 33 KV lines, installation of 76,000 distribution transformers, construction of about 22,000 km 11 KV line, construction of about 15,000 km LT line, capacity enhancement work of one lakh distribution transformers and 14 SCADA/DMS in urban areas.

Incentives of entrepreneurs to be processed online

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

All the incentives of the entrepreneurs investing in the state will be processed online as 'Nivesh Sarathi', the UP government's single-window clearance system, will enable the entrepreneurs investing in the state to receive the incentives online.

The 'Online Incentive Management System' will start functioning after entrepreneurs apply for incentives on the Nivesh Sarathi portal.

In case of any errors or issues during the process, the investors will also be able to review the application within 15 days and then the online incentives will be given to the investors as soon as the process

of verification of the application is completed.

The Yogi Adityanath government has issued necessary guidelines for the effective implementation of the online incentive management system developed under the Nivesh Mitra portal for incentives and concessions given in various investment promotion policies.

Apart from this, it has been directed to make the online incentive management system universally accessible, technology-enabled and multidimensional without human intervention and to implement it completely.

As soon as the application form for obtaining departmental incentive and concession is

submitted through the online incentive management system, the officers concerned of the nodal department will see the application in their log-in account. The officers concerned of all the nodal departments will be able to send the received applications to other departments for opinion.

After checking the application form, if any shortcoming is found at any point, the entrepreneur will be sent it for review after informing about those shortfalls. The entrepreneur will have to respond to the review within 15 days. If the entrepreneur does not provide the information sought in the review within 15 days, then the officer of the nodal department will be free to take further

action on the application.

After verification, the nodal department can select those applications which need to be included in the agenda note. The nodal department can send the applications to the competent authorised committee by uploading the agenda note. After the approval of the authorised committee, the department concerned will be able to upload the copy of digitally signed LOC or signed Letter of Comfort (LOC) given against the application of the entrepreneur. Its update will also be visible to the entrepreneur on the dashboard located in his login ID.

The entrepreneur will also get the facility to download the LOC. Not only this, the department will recommend disbursement of departmental incentives and concessions. If any report is required from any CA or any district level officer in relation to any application, then that too will be contacted through the portal itself.

As per the guidelines, all related incentives and concessions will be selected, approved and distributed through this system. Therefore, it will be mandatory for the beneficiary investors to register through Nivesh Sarathi to take benefits of the scheme and from April 15, 2023, all the work will be done only under the online Incentives Management System. No offline application will be accepted after April 15, 2023.

Samajwadi Party gearing up to retain Suar assembly seat

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party is gearing up to retain the Suar assembly seat in Rampur district.

The Election Commission of India has announced the bypoll there as the seat was vacated following the disqualification of SP MLA Abdullah Azam after his conviction in a 15-year-old case in February this year.

Abdullah is the son of senior SP leader Mohammad Azam Khan. Polling at Suar will be held on May 10.

SP state president Naresh Uttam on Friday met the chief electoral officer of UP and submitted a memorandum demanding the transfer of

Moradabad Divisional Commissioner AK Singh. He said free and fair election in Suar was not possible unless the commissioner was shifted.

Rampur district falls under Moradabad division and AK Singh was earlier District Magistrate of Rampur.

Bypolls to two UP assembly seats — Suar and Chhanbey — will be held on May 10 while counting of votes will be taken up on May 13.

Mirzapur's Chhanbey seat is going for bypoll after it fell vacant due to the death of Apna Dal (Sonelal) MLA Rahul Kol.

The bypolls will not impact the Yogi Adityanath government much in

terms of numbers as it enjoys a comfortable majority in the 403-member UP assembly.

However, the Suar seat assumes significance for both Bharatiya Janata Party and the family of SP leader Mohammad Azam Khan. The BJP is looking forward to making a clean sweep in the Azam Khan bastion by winning the Suar seat too after recently defeating Azam Khan's protégée from Rampur assembly seat, the stronghold of Azam Khan.

Bypoll to Rampur assembly seat was held in December 2022 as Azam Khan was disqualified as the Rampur Sadar MLA in October 2022 after being sentenced to three years in jail

in a 2019 hate speech case. The BJP succeeded in demolishing the four-decade-old hold of Azam Khan on the Rampur Sadar assembly seat where its candidate Aakash Saxena won.

The Azam Khan family, which is struggling with difficulties both on the political and the court fronts, now faces the challenge of saving its last bastion, the Suar assembly constituency.

Both father and son have been barred from contesting elections for six years. It is also a huge jolt for Azam Khan as it is for the first time in the last over four decades that the veteran SP leader's family does not have a single MLA or MP. Azam Khan or one

Pramod Tewari targets PM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Veteran Congress leader and parliamentarian Pramod Tiwari, on Friday, accused Bharatiya Janata Party of strangling democracy by trying to save the illegal operations of Gautam Adani.

Tiwari, who is deputy leader of the Congress in the Upper House of Parliament, made this allegation at a press conference here on Friday afternoon.

He claimed that the government had been asked to clarify whether Adani's shell companies had Rs 20,000 crore or 3 billion dollars pumped in them through illegal sources?

Mysterious packet thrown outside Azam's house

Lucknow (PNS): The Rampur police have launched a probe into an incident in which a packet containing some clothes and other objects was thrown outside the house of senior Samajwadi Party leader Mohammad Azam Khan.

The incident took place late on Thursday evening and was captured on CCTV installed in the area.

In the CCTV footage, an unidentified man is seen throwing the packet outside the house of Azam Khan.

According to the police, the packet contained some articles of clothing and has been confiscated by police.

"We got information late at night that a packet was thrown at Azam Khan's residence. In the packet, there are some clothes, a cap. We have taken possession of the packet. According to the CCTV footage, the incident took place at 6:17 pm.

A man is seen in the video, however he has not been identified yet. The man crosses the road and throws the packet and moves on," said Sansar Singh, Additional Superintendent of Police in Rampur.

The police said that an investigation was underway to ascertain the reason for the incident and that action would also be taken against the police guard on duty.

"We will investigate who this man is and why he threw the packet. There was a police guard at the house. If there is police negligence action will be taken against it also," the ASP said.

Meanwhile Azam Khan's wife has lodged a police complaint against an unidentified man alleging that he threw a small bundle inside the main gate of her house containing a few random articles, including clothes, and expressed fear that it may be associated with 'black magic.'

According to the complaint filed by Tazeen Fatma, a former parliamentarian, the man throwing the packet is seen in the CCTV footage but they could not recognise him. Fatma wrote a letter to Rampur's superintendent of police reporting the incident and expressed her fear that it could be a part of some big conspiracy.

In her letter, Fatma also wondered how could such a breach take place when the house is guarded 24-hour under Y-category security.

Azam Khan has been a Member of Parliament from Rampur parliamentary constituency and MLA from Rampur assembly constituency 10 times. His assembly membership ended after a local court sentenced him in a hate speech case. He also has several criminal cases registered against him and was released from jail after getting bail last year.



Department for Special Operations

1st Floor, Pranay Towers, Near Vidhan Sabha, 38, Darbari Lai Sharma Marg, Lucknow-226001

POSSSESSION NOTICE APPENDIX IV [RULE 8(1)]

Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of the HDFC Bank Ltd. under the Secularization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, issued demand notice dated 03.01.2023 calling upon the borrower(s) 1. MR. PRANAY KUMAR MISHRA S/O MR. ARVIND KUMAR MISHRA (BORROWER) 2. MR. ARVIND KUMAR MISHRA S/O MR. RAM NARAYAN MISHRA (CO-BORROWER) to pay the amount mentioned in the notice Rs. 9,28,287/- (Rupees Nine Lakh Twenty Eight Thousand Two Hundred And Eighty Seven Only) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13 (4) of the said Act on the read with rule 8 & 9 of the said Rules, on this 27-MARCH-2023. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to charge of HDFC Bank Ltd. for an amount of notice Rs. 9,28,287/- (Rupees Nine Lakh Twenty Eight Thousand Two Hundred And Eighty Seven Only) and interest thereon together with expenses and charges etc. less amount paid, if any.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

H. N. 614/307, Property No.18, Minjumla Khasara No.366, Admeasuring 1650 Sq. Ft Situated At Rahim Nagar Dedouli, Ward- Faizullaganj, pargana Lucknow-220222, Uttar Pradesh, Which In The Name Of Mr. Arvind Kumar Mishra. Bounded As Under- East : 20' Wide Road, West : Property No.29 & 30, North : Property No.19, South : Property No.17.

Place: Lucknow

DATE :- 27-MARCH-2023

AUTHORISED OFFICER,

HDFC BANK LTD.

O-2012



By E-Mail/e-Despatch

E-Mail ID :- arcsc@ruralworks.org

Ph.No-06792-261247/261244

Gangpur, Baripada

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER

RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BARIPADA

"e" Procurement Notice for Bridge Work

Identification No.- Online Tender- Bridge N.C.B. No. 275 for 2022-23.

Letter No. 1965 / Date. 28.03.2023 _//

1.

Name of the work

-: Bridge works under Biju Setu Yojana in the District of Mayurbhanj

2.

Total No. of work

-: 02 Nos. (Two)

3.

Estimated Cost

-: Rs.591.39 lakhs to Rs.602.55 lakhs (approximately).

4.

Eligible Class of Contractor

-: As per annexure.

5.

Period of Completion

-: As per annexure.

6.

Other details

-:

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender On-line for bidding	Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification.	Date & Time of Opening of Tender in O.C.C.E.R.W. Circle, Baripada
		From To		Technical Bid Financial Bid
1	2	34	5	7
Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Baripada	Bridge On-line N.C.B. No. 275	Dt.03.04.2023 at 11.00 A.M. up to 5.00 P.M.	Dt.17.04.2023 up to 5.00 P.M.	Dt.18.04.2023 at 11.00 A.M. Will be intimated later

• Further details can be seen from the website: www.tendersorissa.gov.in.

• Any Corrigendum / Addendum will be displayed in the above e tender website only.

OIPR-25130/11/0029/2223

Chief Construction Engineer, R.W. Circle, Baripada.

500 shops gutted in fire

PTI ■ KANPUR

At least 500 shops were gutted in a massive fire that broke out in a multi-storey commercial building and quickly spread to adjacent towers in Bansmandi area here early on Friday, a senior official said. Prime facie the fire broke out due to a short circuit following a massive dust storm. The blaze started at 2 am in AR Tower also known as Afaq Rasool Tower and spread to Maqsood, Humraz complex and Nafees towers charring about 500 shops located in these four towers, the official said, adding strong winds fanned the flames. According to the senior official, goods and cash worth about ₹100 crore were gutted



Firefighters douse a fire which broke out in AR Tower next to Hamraj market in Kanpur on Friday.

in the fire. Joint Commissioner of Police (law and order) Anand Prakash Tiwari told PTI that several fire tenders were rushed to the spot to douse the fire which is yet to be doused.

Fire fighters have been battling for hours to douse the blaze, JCP added. An SOS call has been made to all neighbouring districts, including Kanpur Dehat, Unnao, Lucknow and Kannauj, to dispatch fire tenders to assist in the operation, he said, adding firemen have successfully prevented the fire from further spreading. The shops in all the four towers have been gutted and goods worth crores completely destroyed, the JCP said. “The building didn’t adhere to fire safety norms,” another official said.

‘Bhoomi puja’ of Green Park B ground performed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Magistrate Visakh G Iyer while performing the ‘bhoomi puja’ of Green Park B ground assured the cricket enthusiasts that in month’s time this pitch will be available for them. He said the cricket enthusiasts’ training and practice was being hindered on account absence of B ground especially meant for budding cricket enthusiasts. He said all facilities for the smooth conduct of cricket be it day or night will be available in the B pitch. He said summer camps witnessed massive rush of cricket enthusiasts and this B pitch will facilitate training and practice session in two sessions. He said the pitch preparation was hoped to be



ready in a month’s time so that children who arrive for training and practice to Green Park were provided facility of practising on the B pitch without any hindrance. He said Green Park was an international

cricket stadium and famous far and wide and keeping in mind that the budding cricket enthusiasts can be groomed in two shifts. He said as per the feedback there was a great pressure on the Green Park Sports

Club and this was now because of increased awareness among parents that apart from academics talent in field of sports was equally important and thus catch them young will be the ideal principle of Green Park Sports Centre. He appealed to cricket enthusiasts who had assembled on the occasion to avail themselves of the facility. ADM (City) Atul Kumar, Deputy Director (Sports) Mudrika Pathak and curator Shiv Kumar were present.

MEETING: RTO Rajesh Singh on Friday informed that under the chairmanship of Divisional Commissioner a meeting will be held on April 19 at the camp office of the Commissioner. He said its objective was to review new registration of common carriers.

Smriti to visit Poshan Mela tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Grand Poshan Mela (nutrition fairs) will be organised at three places in the district from Saturday from 9 am to 8 pm and on the second day on April 2, Union Minister Smriti Irani will attend the Poshan Mela as the chief guest. In the fairs comprehensive information will be given about the ways to save newborn babies and pregnant women from malnutrition. Along with the information about health and nutrition, an exhibition related to different types of nutrition will also be organised in the fairs apart from creating awareness among the lactating mothers and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana. These fairs will be organised at Kashi Krishak Inter College (Harhua), Yugal Bihari Inter College (Rameshwar) and Jagatpur Inter College (Jagatpur).

Meanwhile, according to the Health department a special communicable disease con-

trol campaign will start in the district from Saturday. This month-long campaign will run in two phases. In the first phase along with organising programmes of awareness and prevention, such places will be identified where mosquitoes can be found. The second phase will start from April 17 till April 30 in the form of ‘Dastak Abhiyan’. In this, trained health workers will go door-to-door and give information about prevention and treatment of communicable diseases. During this information about possible tuberculosis (TB) patients will also be obtained. District Magistrate S Rajalingam held an inter-departmental meeting recently to review the preparations for the campaign and gave necessary instructions. Apart from the Health department, the officers of Urban Development, Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Animal Husbandry, Child Development and Nutrition, Education,

Divyangjan Empowerment, Agriculture, Irrigation and Horticulture departments were also present in the meeting held at Rifle Club. The DM asked the officers of Health and other departments to work for the control of communicable diseases by creating mutual harmony. He said that whatever responsibilities have been given to the departments in the context of the campaign, they should be followed with full responsibility. CMO Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said that for effective control of communicable diseases like dengue, malaria, chikungunya, kala-azar, filariasis, TB, flu, viral etc, a ‘Special Communicable Disease Control Campaign’ is going to start from April 1. “The preparations have been completed. In the first phase the health team will assess the vector density in the identified and high-risk areas on the basis of region-wise data of patients. Efforts will be made to effectively curb this with the cooperation and departments concerned in

areas with high mosquito density,” he said, adding that the Dastak Abhiyan, the second phase of the campaign, will start from April 17 and in this, ASHA and Anganwadi workers will visit homes and inform people about the danger and prevention of communicable diseases. ACMO (Vector borne) Dr SS Kanojia said through this campaign the message of education and behavioural change related to communicable diseases, meningitis will be conveyed to every household. District Malaria Officer Sharad Chand Pandey said 118 hot spots have been made in the district related to communicable diseases. Of these, 63 are in rural areas and 55 in urban areas. A special action plan will be prepared for these places and a campaign will be launched. He said along with 15 basic health workers, seven supervisors and 11 malaria inspectors, 2,294 ASHA workers will be deployed in urban areas and 567 in rural areas. ACMOs, DCMOs and other medical officers of urban and rural areas were present.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Hard work and dedication were the bedrock of every great achievement. This was stated by BJP MLA Neelima Katiyar while chairing the annual award ceremony ‘Our Shining Stars’ organised at Delhi Public School, Servodaya Nagar on Friday thus bringing the academic session 2022-2023 to a fruitful end.

Headmistress Pratibha Shukla expressed gratitude to the august gathering for their gracious presence. She addressed the gathering by highlighting the vision of the school and role of parents and teachers in the students’ learning process. She read out the school report and emphasised on the fact that the school endeavoured to provide love, affection and encouragement to the child. Through the school’s report she briefed about achievements of the students in academic and various cultural activities throughout



BJP MLA Nilima Katiyar being welcomed at DPS Servodaya Nagar

the year. She said awarding a student for hard work boosted

the level of confidence among them. The school was decorated with eye-catching thematic decor comprising a banner, trophies, graduation hats and much more. The ceremony was graced by Pro-Vice Chairperson Bandana Misra, Founder Alok Misra, member of the managing committee Devavrata Misra, Director Rachna Mohotra and Headmistress Pratibha Shukla. The event began amidst great pomp and grandeur with the lighting of the lamp by chief guests Neelima Katiyar and Arun Pathak, member of Legislative Council, Uttar Pradesh. The programme ended with the school anthem sung by students. ‘Award for Application’ was presented to students achieving the highest percentage in class. The all-rounders were awarded the ‘All Round Good Performance Award’ for their commendable academic result as well as their excellent performance in all aspects of school.

Eight BLW employees retire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In the month of March this year, a total of eight employees of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW), including national level volleyball player Sitaram, retired. The tenure of Sitaram was very promising as he won many medals in national and inter-railway competitions. In the farewell ceremony held at BLW’s Hall of Fame here on Friday, Principal Chief Personnel Officer Renu Sharma bid farewell to all the retired employees by presenting them medals and folders.

She suggested to the retired employees to use their accumulated money in a proper way. Due to the hard work and cooperation of the employees of the Accounts and Personnel departments, lump sum payment was made to the retired employees. Dr Amit Gupta, Divisional Medical Officer, BLW Central Hospital, wished good health to all the retired



A farewell function being held in BLW, Varanasi on Friday.

employees and highlighted the health related medical points. The representatives of the bank in their address urged the retired employees to invest their accumulated money properly. The function was

conducted by Senior Personnel Officer/Headquarters Raj Kumar Gupta. Deputy Chief Personnel Officer/Headquarters Shyam Babu, Senior Personnel Officer RK Chaudhary, Assistant

Personnel Officer (APO) Piyush Meenj, members of the Staff Council Shrikant Yadav, Sanjay Kumar, Manish Kumar Singh and Naveen Sinha and representatives of Bank of Baroda were also present.

DC emphasises on discipline

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The three-day regional Rovers-Rangers meet concluded at Kulbhaskar Ashram PG College here on Friday. Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant was the chief guest at the concluding event. On the other hand, the girl students presented beautiful dances to welcome guests, where everyone applauded by clapping. Route march, handicraft, painting, weaving, camping, pioneering, quiz and tableaux were shown by the participants came from various colleges of the state. Cleanliness and other interesting tableaux were presented in front of the guest which was appreciated a lot. Encouraging the Rovers and Rangers Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant said that discipline, creativity and positivity are necessary along with teamwork to be successful in life. He stressed on the need for youth full of energy to work in the right direction so that our society can move forward fast. He motivated the participants to stay away from social media and utilise the time in their creative work. The participants were advised not to get disheartened in life. Dr Sudha said that the participants will use the skills learned from here for personal life and social service. The principal and programme coordinator of the college, Prof Gitanjali Maurya reminiscing about the honour she had received earlier

from the Divisional Commissioner. She welcomed all the guests and participants. The overall champion trophy of all the competitions was awarded jointly to the Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal Vishwavidyalaya, Jaunpur and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. The Ghazipur PG College got the first position in Rovers at state level and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi got first position in Rangers. The prizes were distributed by the Department of Physical Education of the college. Prof Pawan Kumar Pachauri’s physical education and yoga book was also released by the divisional commissioner. The programme was conducted by Prof Sheetla Prasad Verma while the vote of thanks was proposed by Prof Shiv Prasad Vishwakarma. Rakesh Khare, vice-president of Kulbhaskar Ashram Management Committee, former Dean of Rajju Bhaiya University Prof Ravi Prasad Srivastava and Dean Prof AK Rai along with all the office-bearers of Bharat Scouts and Guides and their team members were present.

AWARDED: On the occasion of International Women’s Day, non-gazetted women railway employees working on various posts in the headquarters, divisions and workshops

of North Central Railway were awarded for their outstanding contribution in various fields during a prize distribution ceremony organised by North Central Railway Women’s Welfare Organisation, Headquarters here on Friday. The programme was organised at Railway Officer’s Club, Subedarganj. Under it a total of 20 non-gazetted women employees were selected for their excellent work. On this occasion

and Essay Competition-2022 were organized by the organization. The competition was organised in three groups. The selected children of these competitions were awarded first, second, third and consolation prizes to the children of each group by Ruby Rani Singh, president of the organisation. Certificates and cash prizes were also given to the children on the occasion. During the programme secretary of the organisation Nupur Aggarwal,



Women railway employees awarded for their outstanding contribution in various fields.

all these 20 outstanding railway women employees were honoured with certificates and personal gifts by Ruby Rani Singh, president of the organisation. In the same sequence, prize distribution programme was also organised for the children selected in the Drawing and Painting

Meena Mathur, Shanta Beura, Anuradha Kesharwani, Madhuri Singh, Richa Verma, Alka Agarwal, Vijetha Srivastava, Dr Ritu Agarwal, Neelam Kumar, Shruti Sachan, Sangeeta Aggarwal, Sushma Tiwari, Sushma Saxena and Suman Vajpayee were present.

‘Swachh Bharat Mission helped educate people’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Noted scientist and NSS Incharge of Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Dr Archana Singh while addressing the ‘Rural Cleanliness Campaign’ of NSS unit of the varsity said the objective was to ensure there was awareness in marginalised ruralities to improve levels of cleanliness in rural areas through solid and liquid waste management activities and making gram panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitised. She said the varsity has under the guidance of the chief minister adopted rural areas and with the help of students the mission was gradually progressing. She said this was in fact an effort for improvement in general quality of life in the rural areas and to motivate communities and Panchayat Raj institutions to adopt sustainable sanitation practices and facilities through awareness creation and health education. She said it also focused on encouraging cost



CSAUAT girls taking part in the poster making contest as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan launched under NSS on Friday.

effective and appropriate technologies for ecologically safe and sustainable sanitation.

Addressing the students Dr Sanjeev Sachan, the key person behind the drive said Swachh Bharat Mission helped to educate the people in both

rural and urban areas when it came to keeping the surroundings clean by not littering everywhere and using dustbins. He said this mission helped the urban dwellers to remember fundamental duties and rights together and that cleanliness

was not limited to government departments and was a duty of every responsible citizen of this country.

He said on account of the unhealthy conditions in the rural areas child mortality rate was still uncontrollable and said this was an alarming reality of the nation which was taken care of with proper implementation of hygiene amenities and cleanliness measures in rural areas along with proper education to parents and guardians of these children who were at high risk before.

He said starting from clean streets and roads to developing infrastructure and achieving milestones like making India open defecation free this movement was truly historic and there was no doubt that the importance of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan will be cherished for generations to come and looked back as a huge success for India. He then felicitated the students who took part in the poster campaign. He was accompanied by Dr Khalil Khan, Prof CL Maurya and several others.

Stress on emancipation of women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Sakhi Kendra general secretary Neelam SChaturvedi while addressing the one day ‘Think Tank Workshop’ at Merchants Chamber of Commerce on Friday said the objective of Sakhi Kendra was to prepare a robust team of right proctors and leaders who can boost the morale of women, especially from the weaker sections of the society. She said ironically the condition of urban women of this section was equal to what one can witness in rural women. Sakhi Kendra had decided to work out a strategy to ensure that it was effectively implemented so that there can be meaningful emancipation of both rural and urban women. She said in India caste and

class biases in exclude many women communities and obstruct their efficient participation in economic and social development and among the marginalised communities the most susceptible were women folk who faced severe forms of discriminations that denied them to access the progress and development. She said it directly or indirectly affected them in the field of occupation, livelihood and education. A brutal environment was set up where women folk were prevented from participating in social life which in turn led to their further isolation.

She said women education referred to every type of education that aimed at their all-round development, including general education in schools and colleges, pro-

fessional and technical education, health education etc. Chaturvedi said education was a strong medium for creating consciousness about their rights and empowerment. She said education ensured socio-cultural and economic development of women in society. She said nation will progress remarkably if there were educated mothers.

She said women education will change the social fabric of society by bringing about socio-economic development, prosperity, improved life and health, dignity and honor etc. She said importance of women education had been highlighted in the directive principles of our Constitution and various commissions and committees also recommended measures for women’s uplift.

Teachers builders of youth power: Kovind



Former President Ram Nath Kovind addressing a seminar at IUCTE in Varanasi on Friday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Underlining the role of youth in nation building, former president of India Ram Nath Kovind said that teachers are the builders of youth power and teachers should be at the centre of fundamental reforms in the education system. Speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural function of the two-day national seminar entitled 'Emerging Challenges in Higher Education Before Academia' at the Inter University Centre for Teacher Education (IUCTE), Banaras Hindu University (BHU) here on Friday, he emphasised on learning, teaching and living in the present moment and said that it is the job of a teacher to think and meditate.

"Every person should be ready to learn while remaining egoless," said the ex-president and highlighted the importance of education in mother tongue and its use. Kovind

emphasised that teachers at all levels must be re-established as the most respected and essential members of our society, as they actually shape our next generation of citizens. There are a total of more than 100 participants in the national seminar. Moreover, there will be talks by 15 subject experts in different sessions of the seminar. The purpose of this seminar is to identify the current and future challenges of higher education before academia. There is a need to brainstorm on what should be the meaningful discussion and future action plan for solution for those challenges.

Presiding over the inaugural session, IUCTE Governing Board Chairman and former Director of National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) Prof Jagmohan Singh Rajput stressed on the biggest challenge before academia is to look within in the light of

expectations from it. "That requires a thorough study of the history, heritage, culture and the tradition of knowledge creation and generation," he said, exhorting the educationists to work hard to restore their credibility and to bring the credibility of higher education institutions to an advanced level once again. While giving the welcome address, IUCTE Director Prof Prem Narayan Singh apprised the participants about the need and outline of the national seminar. He introduced the guests and participants about the responsibilities of IUCTE in the light of the National Education Policy (NEP). The stage was moderated by Dr Rachna Vishwakarma and the vote of thanks was proposed by Harishchandra, senior administrative officer of the centre. The seminar is being coordinated and co-coordinated by Dr Deepti Gupta and Dr Kushagri Singh respectively.

IIT Madras faculty to teach govt school students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The faculty of IIT Madras will now teach government school children in this parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. An agreement has been signed between IIT Madras and the Office of Basic Education regarding 'Project Vidya Shakti', in which the teachers of IIT Madras will teach online in the government smart schools of Varanasi. Online classes will start in 100 schools of the district as a pilot project. Under this project, children will be taught Maths, Science and English subjects. While rejuvenating the government schools, the Yogi government first got the buildings of the schools renovated and then made the schools smart. Now smart classes have been made in most of the schools. Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) Arvind Pathak said that a contract has been signed with IIT Madras in which IIT teachers will teach students of class VI to VIII students of government schools in the district. All classes will run online after school hours. BSA said online classes will start soon in 100 schools as a pilot project in Varanasi. He said that 70 selected schools have already been made smart while the same process is going on in 30 schools.

Three meet tragic end

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Three persons died on the spot in a heart-wrenching accident on the Phaphamau bridge here on Friday morning when two trucks collided head on and one jumped the railing and landed on the sandy bank of the Ganga river. The deceased include the driver and cleaner of a parcel van which fell by the side of the river and one motorcycle rider who got crushed under the wheels of a truck. The other sand-laden truck had also uprooted the railing but got stuck there. Wreckless driving is said to be the reason for this harrowing accident which took place on the Chandra Shekhar Azad Bridge, popularly known as Phaphamau bridge around 5 am. The driver of the sand-laden truck fled from the spot. Those who lost their lives in this accident include Himanshu Sahu and Ashu Sahu, driver and cleaner of the parcel van besides a security guard of MNNIT, Bajrang Bahadur Singh of Nawabganj, who was going to join duty in the morning on his bike. The driver and cleaner of the parcel



van were brothers from Lucknow. Their bodies got compressed in the cabin of the parcel van which fell from the bridge on the sandy ground. The bodies were pulled out with the help of cutters. The sand-laden truck was going towards Phaphamau while the parcel van was coming from the opposite side. Unfortunately the bike riding security guard came under the wheels of the truck, while his motorcycle was thrown away. An unprecedented traffic jam followed this accident because the truck could be removed from the bridge with the help of cranes after hours. A good number of population of Prayagraj reside in the trans-Ganga areas of Phaphamau and commute on a regular basis to attend court, offices, schools and other establishments. The office goers started reaching there as usual around 9 am unaware of the accident and the resultant traffic jam. Long queues were seen on both the sides of the bridge and those who tried to take another route found it difficult to take their vehicles out of the jam. Later the police started diverting people on other routes. Traffic flow could be normalised in the afternoon hours.

Hindalco committed to well-being of employees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Hindalco holds an important place in the production of quality aluminum not only in the country but in the whole world and the top leadership along with the employees here have played an important role in making Hindalco reach this milestone. The present Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Hindalco N Nagesh's able leadership and the able guidance of Jasbir Singh, HR Head, Hindalco Renukoot cluster is continuously expanding human amenities for its employees and their families. It is due to Nagesh and Jasbir Singh that today children are playing in the parks that were neglected for years in Hindalco Colony.

More than 25 open gyms have also been set up by the health-conscious Hindalco administration where children to elders can take care of their health. Quality repair and construction of roads have been done in the colony. Now the entire city is visible at night with high mass lights near the Renukoot police post along with the plant. To promote sports where basketball courts, badminton, volleyball, table tennis court etc have been constructed in Club Hindalco. Many new modern equipment has been installed in the gym



located in Club Vindhyachal and Hindalco Colony. A new gym has also been started in the Young Managers Hostel. The Hindalco Cricket Stadium has been given a new look where the newly built pavilion and floodlights are giving it even more grandeur.

Along with this, a lawn tennis court has also been constructed in Plant-2

Colony. While the Hindalco auditorium has been made more attractive, the parking area has been permanently transformed into a grand multi-facility hall. Due to the construction of the newly constructed Aditya Kalyan Bhawan for marriages and other auspicious functions, everyone is getting a lot of facility. The project of construction of an additional

room in the H, L and I type quarters of the company is going on in full swing along with expansion work of kitchen and rooms in the Young Managers Hostel has also been done. People are very happy because of the construction of the Hanuman temple in Plant-2 Colony. A fully equipped lunch room has been constructed in every plant. To promote green energy, a large amount of clean energy is being produced by installing solar panels on a large scale. Shuttle bus service has been started for the safe movement of employees in the plant, while many new buses have been brought in for the safe travel of children going to and from school. Apart from providing the facility of CT scan machine in Hindalco Hospital, radiologists have also been appointed and many modern machines have also been installed in the eye and pediatrics departments. New ambulances with modern facilities have also been procured and a modern health centre has also been started in Plant-2 Colony. Along with the above-mentioned facilities, there are many more such development work due to which the popularity of Nagesh and Jasbir Singh is increasing day by day among the employees as well as the local people and development works being done by them are being discussed all around.

DDU hospital, Shivpur UCHC made Covid dedicated health centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With the increase in the number of Covid infected patients in the district once again, the Health department has become alert for its prevention and effective control of positive cases. The Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay (DDU) Government Hospital located at Pandeypur and Shivpur Urban Community Health Centre (UCHC) have been made Covid dedicated health centres. This information was given by Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary.

The CMO said as per the instructions received from the government, 10 beds each have been reserved for Covid patients in DDU Hospital and Shivpur UCHC. The bed capacity for Covid patients is 55 in DDU and 30 in Shivpur UCHC now. "If necessary, the number of beds in these centres will be increased apart from ensuring the availability of facilities of investigation, sufficient quantity of medicines and

other health services. Along with this, instructions have also been given to reserve 10 beds each in the remaining government hospitals, five beds each in all CHCs and two beds each in primary health centres (PHCs) for Covid patients in the district," Dr Chaudhary said. He directed all medical superintendents and incharges to check any possible Covid and influenza flu-like patients and ensure arrangements for their treatment. He said that the patients should be advised to remain in home isolation for 14 days. According to him, two new Covid positive patients were found in the district on Thursday and with this the number of positive cases found this month has increased to 15. "Presently, there are 10 active patients in the district. All these patients have been kept in home isolation. Covid testing facilities are available in DDU Hospital, SSPG Divisional Hospital Kabirchaura, LBS Hospital Rannagar, SVM Hospital Bhelupur and SSH BHU," he said. District

Surveillance Officer and ACMO Dr SS Kanojia said in case of symptoms like difficulty in breathing, fast breathing or shortness of breath, fever or cough are repeated after getting cured the patents should immediately go to the nearest hospitals/ health centres and get themselves examined and treated according to the doctor's advice. He advised the people that to prevent infection, they should avoid going to crowded places; wear masks, protect themselves from contact with infected patients, cover nose and mouth with handkerchief or tissue while coughing and sneezing, consume liquid and digestible substances, avoid touching the eyes and nose again and again, in case of fever should take medical advice, keep distance from people and do not shake hands or hug when greeting, avoid spitting in public places and share food and drinking water with others, do not consume medicine without medical advice nor use bath soaps and towels of others.

CRS inspects Indara-Dohrighat section

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), North East (NE) Region, Mohammad Latief Khan inspected Indara-Dohrighat (34.8 km) rail section of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) on Friday after the completion of gauge conversion work along with the construction of electrified broad gauge. In order to expand the basic infrastructure for upgradation of passenger facilities and ease of operation by the railway administration, this important safety inspection was carried out by the CRS, along with Chief Administrative Officer (Construction) SC Srivastava, Divisional Railway Manager (Varanasi) Ramashray Pandey and other senior officers. After reaching Indara by his inspection special train, the CRS started his inspection of a new broad gauge on Indara-Dohrighat rail section and after reaching Kopaganj station, he inspected the railway gate and tested the safety knowledge of the gateman. Later after inspection of Ghosi station he reached two

major bridges and inspected the safety of foundation, approach, girder, span and fittings. Then he reached Dohrighat station where he inspected points, track circuits and signals as per the standards of electrified broad gauge section. Notably, ₹213.35 crore was approved for gauge conversion of



Indara-Dohrighat (34.8 km) meter gauge rail section in which the work of the gauge conversion project was to be completed with electrification. This project has been completed within the stipulated time period with complete quality. With the opening of rail traffic on this section, the traffic from Indara Junction, Kopaganj,

Ghosi and Amila to Dohrighat has become easier. Earlier, continuing his safety inspection on completed double-cum-electrified routes of Varanasi Division, the CRS conducted a safety inspection on Indara-Kiriharapur (14.6 km) rail section of Aunrihar-Bhatni rail route a day ago. After the inspec-

tion the CRS also did speed trial with his special train touching a maximum speed of 120 km per hour successfully. For the entire Bhatni-Aunrihar rail section (117 kms), ₹1,177 crore has been approved for the double line as well as electrification apart from other passenger facilities and construction of 12 major and 108 minor bridges. During his inspection, the CRS first reached Kiriharapur station by road and made a thorough inspection of the railway station. He checked various aspects related to safety, including VDU control panel, integrated power supply room, relay room etc. Later, in the course of his inspection, Khan while inspecting the Kiriharapur-Indara block section by motor trolley reached a level crossing gate and checked the safety equipment apart from testing safety knowledge of gateman Vakil Kumar. Then he reached Indara railway station and inspected the doubled rail section, yard plan, platform clearance, foot over bridge, power substation, station working rule, traction line, isolation feeder etc as per the standard norms. Later he did his speed trial on this route. He was accompanied by CAO (Construction) SC Srivastava, DRM (Varanasi) Ramashray Pandey, Chief Project Manager of Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) VK Shukla, ADRM (Infra) Rahul Srivastava and many other senior officers of Varanasi Division of NER and RVNL.

Atiq kept in high-security barrack of Sabarmati jail

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Mafia don-turned- politician Atiq Ahmad's entire profile has changed after he was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Umesh Pal kidnapping case. Atiq, kept in the high-security barrack of Sabarmati jail in Ahmedabad, will now be known as prisoner number 17052. He will get an honorarium of ₹25 per day as an unskilled worker. Atiq Ahmed will now get 500 grams of 'roti' instead of 380 grams. He will get pulses and rice more than before. Skilled artisans get ₹40 per day but Atiq Ahmad is an unskilled artisan so he will get only ₹25 honorarium per day. Atiq's diet chart will also be changed now.

On Thursday new documents regarding the mafia were also prepared in Sabarmati jail. His name was entered in the register of convicted prisoners. He will now be known as prisoner number 17052. The household clothes kept in Atiq's barrack will not be allowed to be worn now. Leaving his personal towel, handkerchief under garments etc the rest of the clothes received from the jail have been given to him to wear. Atiq Ahmad will now be woken up at 4 am for work. Being an unskilled worker, he will be made to do gardening, carpentry, cleaning, animal husbandry etc. In such a situation, the name of the mafia has now also been registered in the register of working prisoners. His government account has also been opened in the jail. His earned money will be deposited in this account. Atiq can send this money to his family. After checking the names of the old people whose names have been removed from the mafia Atiq gang and investigating the relations with the mafia, the police will include them again. Among them the names of Ashraf's brothers-in-law are prominent. Apart from this the names of Atiq's wife Shaista Parveen and his two sons, Asad and Ali, will also be included in gang IS227. The name of Abid Pradhan, a very close shooter of Atiq Ahmad, was also removed from the old gang list. The police can again include their names after investigating these cases.

BJP to celebrate Social Justice Week from Apr 6

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With the announcement of provisional list of reserved seats and starting of the process for the elections of civic bodies in the state, the regional unit of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has intensified its activities and its newly-appointed regional president (Kashi) Dilip Singh Patel has directed the party workers to complete the work of booth empowerment before April 6 as the BJP is going to organise a week-long programme from its foundation day. The decision in this direction was taken in a meeting of state office-bearers and regional presidents at the party's state headquarters in Lucknow recently, informed Patel while addressing a meeting of district presidents, district in-charges and regional working committee members at party's regional office at Rohania here on Thursday.

He said that the BJP will celebrate the 'Social Justice Week' from April 6 to 14 and the party will celebrate its foundation day on the first day. "Apart from the party's district offices of the region, the BJP flags will also be hoisted on the houses of all office-bearers from the booth to the national level," he said, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address party workers on the occasion of foundation day of the party (April 6). He said that in order to help the party workers listen to

the PM, arrangements for LED screen should be made at all booths, Shakti Kendras and regional level, which will be monitored by office-bearers of regional and district levels. Patel said the party has decided to on April 11 the birth anniversary of famous social reformer Jyotiba Phule will be celebrated at the booth level where after garlanding the pictures, contribution made by Jyotiba Phule to the society will be remembered apart from highlighting the work done by the government for the uplift of the backward castes. Besides, he said the party will celebrate the birth anniversary of Baba Saheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on April 14 as 'Social Harmony Day'. On the occasion cleanliness campaign will be conducted around the statues of Dr Ambedkar apart from garlanding the same and recalling Babasaheb's contribution to the country. He said the party's booth empowerment campaign is going on by working on the lines of 'My booth is the strongest'. "Keeping this in mind, the process of formation of booth committees should be ensured 100 per cent before April 6 and the responsibility of panna pramukhs should also be fixed at all booths where the work of formation of committee of 11 members has not been done," he instructed the party workers, adding that the data of the booth committees and panna pra-

mukhs is uploaded on the Saral app within a fixed period of time.

Regional general secretary Sushil Tripathi, while discussing the upcoming action plan for the municipal elections, said the party will highlight the achievements of central and state governments under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath which would become the basis of BJP's victory. Another regional general secretary Santosh Patel said as the 100th episode of Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' is going to be held in April so the party has decided to help the people listen to the PM at 100 per cent booths. Regional vice president and MLA Ramesh Jaiswal said public welfare schemes of the central and state government should be taken to the needy. Regional general secretary Ashok Chaurasia conducted the meeting while the vote of thanks was proposed by regional vice-president and MLC Nirmala Paswan. The meeting was also attended by state secretary Meena Choubey, district chief Hansraj Vishwakarma, city president Vidyasagar Rai, Nagendra Raghuvanshi, Amarnath Yadav, Ashok Tiwari, Rajesh Rajbhar, Ashish Singh Baghel, Dr Sudama Patel, Pradeep Agrahari, regional spokesman Navratan Rath, Sriprakash Shukla, Santosh Solapurkar, Uday Pratap Singh Pappu and Nandji Pandey.

Prize distribution ceremony held



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A prize distribution ceremony was organised at Samneghat Branch of Sunbeam Academy when annual results were announced here on Friday.

The ceremony began with the lighting of the lamp in front of the idol of Lord Ganesh, followed by a dance performance by the students. A function was organised for the students from Nursery to UKG, in which they were awarded gowns, merit certificates and portfolios. First, second and third prizes were awarded to the best performing students of class I to XI in the examination.

The highlight of the function was the luminary award. This award was given to the students who stood first in their class for three consecutive years and their attendance

was above 95 per cent. This award was given to Samridhi Bhardwaj of class V and Ayush Singh of class VIII and both of them were given ties and star-studded blazers along with the awards. The school examination results were 100 per cent like the previous years. Secretary Jagdeep Madhok, Director Poonam Madhok and Deputy Director Dr GP Mishra congratulated the students. Principal Dr KK Panda said like every year, this year also the result was the best. The passing percentage of the students was also the best. There was a tough competition among students who came first, second and third, he added. CEO Rohan Madhok also looked satisfied with the result and expressed hope that the students will continue to repeat the best performance in future also. Administrator Dr Nishant Singh and others were also present.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Proof of the pudding...

Foreign Trade Policy 2023 has good intentions but these need to translate into action for \$2-trillion exports

The new Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) is in sync with the basic thrust of the economic policy regime: doing away with incentives and moving towards a system in which is friendlier to exporters in terms of costs and procedural rigours. The key approach to the policy, according to the Government, is based on four pillars: incentive to remission; export promotion through collaboration involving exporters, states, districts and Indian missions; ease of doing business, reduction in transaction cost and e-initiatives; and emerging areas ase-commerce developing districts as export hubs and streamlining SCOMET policy. SCOMET is the acronym of special chemicals, organisms, materials, equipment and technologies. Announcing the policy, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said, "We will achieve \$2 trillion in exports by 2030, but it shouldn't be that merchandise exports are outperformed by services exports." The Government's focus is correct, for merchandise exports are laggards. In the first 11 months of 2022-23, they stood at \$405.94 billion, which was 7.55 per cent more than \$377.43 billion in the corresponding period 2021-22. In contrast, services exports went up from \$227.58 billion in April 2021-February 2022 to \$296.94 billion in April 2022-February 2023, which was a rise of 24.56 per cent. This is not surprising because India's weakness in manufacturing is no secret; economic reforms began

more than three decades ago, but they still have to percolate to the lowest levels. This explains the greater focus on states, districts, ease of doing business, reduction in transaction cost and e-initiatives in FTP.

FTP 2023 is based on continuity of time-tested schemes facilitating exports, an official press release said, adding that it is a document which is nimble and responsive to the requirements of trade. The release highlights the nimbleness and responsiveness by pointing out that changes were done subsequent to the initial release of FTP 2015-20. That may be true, but the point is that this did not help merchandise exports much, as the latest figures suggest. Services exports have been doing well, but that is primarily because the businesspersons in this sector don't have to interact much with the government officials. For instance, an IT firm is not bothered by the boiler inspector. An important feature of FTP 2023 is that it is open-ended. As Director General of Foreign Trade Santosh Kumar Sarangi told the media, it will be updated "as and when required." Another feature is a one-time amnesty scheme for exporters to close the old pending authorisations and start afresh. He also said, "The approach of the new policy is to move from an incentive-based regime to a remission of taxes regime." Just as the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the efficacy of a policy is in its implementation. The target of exports worth \$2 trillion can be achieved if the good intentions of FTP 2023 get translated into action.

PICTALK



A tiger cools itself in a pond on a hot day, at Maharajbagh Zoo in Nagpur

PTI

Words matter, better choose them carefully

It is imperative to choose words with empathy. They should build bridges, not create barriers

Words are a mysterious manoeuvre of communication in an individual's life. They are the most powerful drug used by humans so if they can inspire and connect at the same time they can divide, demoralise and incite hate.

Words are invasive and their impact on different people varies because it depends on their understanding and conception. As they are used in every aspect of life, their power is immense and powerful as a result. A single phrase, an uplifting word or even a single act of kindness can change an individual's life forever towards the betterment.

Words are what an individual uses to express themselves, thoughts and feelings. One must never underestimate words' power. A person's choice of language can affect not only how another person feels but also how they perceive events around them. Childhood bullying, verbal abuse in domestic relationships, and even word choice by medical



professionals can lead to emotional challenges. Several researchers have found that the choice of words can cause specific areas of the brain to activate and affect a person's subjective experience of pain. Pain-related words create stronger responses in many areas of the brain, including the anterior cingulate cortex and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. Words when used as bullets, with a feeling of superiority and condemnation will never restore a relationship to love. As seeds of support and sincerity, they can rebuild a relationship in a positive and life-affirming way. Words impact different people differently because it depends on their understanding and conception of them. They are

by far the most powerful force available to humanity. Children or learners can be instilled with confidence by the words, tone, or even the tone of encouragement they receive from their parents, teachers, or coaches. This even helps promote cognitive development. Also, giving a compliment to a co-worker or a colleague positively impacts their emotional state resulting in creating a ripple effect of positivity. When people use powerful words and phrases such as "please and thank you"; "how may I help you?"; acknowledging and appreciating work, they inspire the individual, thus making their work environment more enjoyable. Such words even help in motivating and encouraging and building mutually respectful relationships with team members, clients and customers. On the other hand, negative words along with sarcasm at times, can tear down, intimidate and discourage an individual especially young learners resulting in the release of dozens of stress-producing hormones which ultimately interrupt brain functioning. For adults, it

may lead to stress, anxiety and anger followed by a disconnect in the relationship.

A word is not just a combination of letters or sounds but a functional unit that helps thoughts take shape. It's the words that have the power and power to help, heal, hurt, harm or humiliate anyone. Since it is not in anyone's control what others say or do to a loved one, learning how to respond in loving ways can always prove fruitful.

Remember, no one can create a better reality while complaining or crying over current problems. It is imperative to choose words carefully with empathy and intention. Words should build bridges, and opportunities and not barriers, spread love and affection and not hate and war. Always be mindful of the conversation going on in your mind, for it can destroy or uplift you. It is imperative to become aware of words because words and feelings, when directed outwardly, can rebound and cause havoc in one's own life.

(The author is an educator)



SAKSHI SETHI

THE AUTHOR IS AN EDUCATOR

Congress' OBC paranoia is age-old

Party leader Rahul Gandhi's stand against the other backward classes will cost the Congress dear, just as it had during Rajiv Gandhi's time



TARUN CHUGH

Late Rajiv Gandhi was the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha in 1990 when the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh took the historic decision to implement the Mandal Commission Report to give effect to reservation to other backward classes (OBCs) to the extent of 27 per cent. Six years before Rajiv Gandhi had led Congress to win 404 seats with over 49 per cent vote share.

The Mandal Commission Report was a turnaround for Indian politics, as Rajiv Gandhi stood in the Lok Sabha to oppose its implementation. The Bharatiya Janata Party leaders Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani welcomed the decision of the VP Singh government, stating that the time had come to recognise the legitimate demands of the OBCs in the country.

The stand of Rajiv Gandhi was almost unilateral as records of those times show that the OBC leaders within the Congress were appalled at the decision of their leaders. The Congress leaders were shocked that Rajiv Gandhi was disconnected from the masses. He was not ready for the march of social justice.

Within a few years, Congress was reduced to a party with the best tally of about 200 Lok Sabha seats even when the party came to power in alliance with other political parties. From the strength of 404 Lok Sabha seats, Congress' fortunes were cut by half in the Lok Sabha, solely for its anti-OBC mindset. The space vacated by Congress was occupied by the regional parties. They mushroomed all across the country. The political parties espousing the cause of the OBCs came up in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. They ate into the vote base of Congress. Even after three decades, Congress has mostly lost its vote base in states where the OBC identity-based regional parties cropped up.

The BJP was clear from its beginning that the OBC deserved social justice and the party's leadership was steadfast in their support. The BJP's sup-



port for the OBC was also manifested in a strong leadership of the party from the backward castes. They were at the forefront of the party workers in several states. They also took the leadership of the party and even became chief ministers.

The journey of Congress and the BJP is in sharp contrast. Congress went into a steep political fall since the 1990s. The BJP rapidly rose in its political stock since the 1990s. The Congress base shrank. The BJP vote base expanded. Congress kept hitting lower and lower in its Lok Sabha tally. The BJP tally in the Lok Sabha kept rising.

In the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, Congress won 197 seats. The BJP had won 85 Lok Sabha seats in the same election. Three decades later, the BJP won 303 Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Congress for the second time in a row could not win enough seats to gain the status of the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. The people of the country punished Congress for its anti-OBC bias in the last three decades.

THE BJP WAS CLEAR FROM THE BEGINNING THAT THE OBCS DESERVED SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP WAS STEADFAST IN ITS SUPPORT TO THEM

Rahul Gandhi repeated the same mistake that his father had committed in the Lok Sabha in 1990. There is not a single independent voice in the country that didn't admonish him for his 2019 election speech in Kolar, Karnataka in which he asked "why all thieves have Modi surname". This was an outrageous statement by a person who was president of Congress. He had been a member of the Lok Sabha multiple times. He is also 52 years old. He couldn't have made the scandalous and outrageous statement to question the integrity of the OBC community.

Worse is the fact that there is no remorse on the part of Rahul Gandhi. He has occasions to express remorse and apologise in the Surat Court. But he chose not to apologise. It's beyond understanding that a number of lawyers who hold senior positions in Congress would not have gauged the consequences of Rahul Gandhi not apologising for his defamatory statement.

Also, there had been a number of precedents in

which senior political leaders escaped judicial fury by apologising in the court. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had also levelled baseless allegations to defame the late Arun Jaitley and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari. Both forgave him after he apologised for his mistakes. But here Rahul Gandhi doesn't want to own up to his mistake. In place, he has chosen to enact political stunts in the name of his conviction by the court in a criminal defamation case and the subsequent automatic disqualification from membership of the Lok Sabha, which was in accordance with the Supreme Court ruling of 2013. Rajiv Gandhi's anti-OBC stand had cut Congress' strength by half. Rahul Gandhi's stand against the OBC will also bring similar wrath, and the Opposition party given its current strength may find among the regional parties sitting in one corner of the Lok Sabha with a handful of members after the 2024 general elections.

(Author is the national general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMERICA'S BACKING FOR RAHUL

Sir — All is not well for the Indian government as the United States of America and Germany are backing and supporting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and noting his disqualification of membership from the parliament and receiving congratulations from all the opposition parties and its leaders and Congress supporters across the country.

Since it is a great embarrassment for the Indian government to intervene in foreign countries in the internal matter of India which has been rejected but the growing support or backing of foreign countries to Rahul Gandhi is a cause for concern which may spoil the friendship and relationship with US and Germany and many other countries in future. It is high time the tense situation in the country must be defused at the earliest to avoid many more foreign countries interfering in the internal matter of India to make it an international issue.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

COMMUNAL TENSION ON RAM NAVAMI

Sir — At a time when the world is admiring us watching different festivals being celebrated all over the country democratically, Ram Navami brought us shame and communal violence in the name of festivity. Ram Navami was celebrated across the country with grand processions and special pujas, but the festivities were marred in Madhya Pradesh where 14 devotees died after falling into a well at a temple, and in Maharashtra where a clash left 12 injured.

In the nation's Capital, Delhi, a large number of people defied a police order and took out a procession in Jahangirpuri, which witnessed riots last year during the Hanuman Jayanti celebrations. Meanwhile, stones were pelted at a march in Gujarat's Vadodra too. The celebrations remained largely incident-free in the rest of the country with people coming out on the streets with religious fervour and enthusiasm and law-enforcement agencies on the watch.

Cause of great concern



As cases of the Covid-19 virus are rising again, it is yet another reminder that the world must not lose its guard against the pandemic, India logged 3,016 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours, over 40% rise in daily tally. A concern over a fresh spike in infections in the country, Though Number speaks: No cause for alarm on Corona outbreak as of now as nationwide we have administered around 220.65 crore doses of Covid vaccine.

Though we have fully upgraded our health care system, with adequate ICU facility and

Oxygen supply to meet any eventuality, India must take concrete steps for its prevention as in the view of the ground realities reflecting poverty, social backwardness, Lockdowns are not the answer as it affects more poor people with the closure of business establishments and the sufferers are especially daily-wage earners, and cannot be treated as the only solution. We have seen the plight of people during the Corona-19 second wave which will prove a counter-productive and will further wreck the economy.

Patients with slight symptoms of shortness of breath, and lowering of Oxygen should immediately report to their family doctor. Other notable steps are, fully adhering to Corona-19 protocols, like wearing masks in crowded places, keeping a safe distance, and if cases increase we can go for pre-screening with testing increase testing and citizens to adhere to strictly to the covid --19 protocols. Also virus knows no geographical boundaries, hence we must keep with an international traveller coming from those countries with cases of Corona-19

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

Lord Ram will be an inspiration for humanity in every era. Maryada Purushottam' Lord Ram's birth anniversary brought a feud and fight in the streets and made a mockery of the celebrations. Thus, far we did make an impact as a country of different castes, creed and religions brought out the fighting past and a bleak future during the festivities of this nature. Again, as the festivals collide in this country, so do people go haywire and collide in disruptive ways.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

HATE SPEECH — A VICIOUS CIRCLE

Sir — Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the Supreme Court that hate speeches were being made by several people against the members of the Hindu community and the court could not be selective in its approach in seeking a response

from the states on the action taken against such statements. He asked the court why it had not taken suo motu cognizance of such cases and held state governments to account even when those speeches were in the public domain.

The hate speeches were a vicious circle and said they are being made by fringe elements. Every action has an equal reaction. We are following the constitution and orders in every case are bricks in the structure of rule of law. We are hearing the contempt petition because states are not taking action in time. This is because the state has become impotent, and powerless, and does not act in time.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Coimbatore

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE HYBRID
WORKPLACE PUZZLE

Post pandemic, 'hybrid' will define the employer-employee relationship



ARNAB GHOSH

Post-pandemic commercial real estate professionals are grappling with the word "hybrid." The agile workspace is dead. A hybrid workplace is the new holy grail of office design. How we interpret this new word will define the employer and employee relationship now. The perfect solution will take some time to arrive. Meanwhile, we can only attempt to solve this hybrid jigsaw with our eyes and ears open wide.

Designing a hybrid workplace involves creating a flexible work environment that allows employees to work remotely and on-site. As a design brief, it is a challenge and thus needs a structured approach.

The first step is to assess the needs of your workforce, including their work styles, preferences, and job requirements. One-to-one interviews with senior leaders, online surveys, and real-time occupancy data from existing workplaces will help establish the baseline.



The second step is to evaluate your technology infrastructure. A hybrid workplace relies heavily on technology, including communication tools, collaboration software, and video conferencing systems. After evaluation, we need to do a gap analysis and ensure the proposed new technology infrastructure is robust enough to support remote and on-site work.

Once the above is done, the designer is ready to start with his design thinking process. A few approaches which might work for the designer while designing a hybrid office space are as follows:

1. Redesign your physical office space to create a more flexible work environment that supports remote and on-site work. This may include the conscious selection of flexible work furniture, which can be rearranged for different work environments, dismountable partition systems, formal and informal meeting spaces, and quiet spaces.
2. Today, it is essential to understand that the purpose of the office has changed dramatically—accordingly, the spaces it used to contain need also to evolve. The ambience of an office today is designed to provide a positive and inclusive environment for all employees. The use of wallpapers, curated artwork, designer work furniture, and decorative light fixtures today help designers to achieve that desired reality. The new trend of serviced offices is forcing the new office design to be strongly influenced by hospitality design principles.
3. While we do all the above, let us remember the imminent climate change disruption expected soon. Energy efficiency and wellness thus need to be default goalposts for designers today—no compromise on those aspects.
4. Finally, please continuously evaluate your hybrid workspace's effectiveness and adjust as needed. Gather feedback from employees and make changes based on their input.

By following the above steps, you can physically create a hybrid workplace that is flexible, productive, and supportive of your employees' needs. However, in addition to the physical execution, certain managerial aspects need to be part of this change management.

A key aspect of a hybrid workplace is to not have dedicated workstations for employees. This can be a major change to adjust employees. Please establish clear policies around remote work, including work hours, communication, and productivity expectations. Organizations must be cognizant of today's new reality and establish their design briefs accordingly. Design and project professionals should look at the workspace through all lenses before recommending solutions to their clients.

(The writer is Managing Director, Corporate Fitouts, Colliers India)

Reforming the capital gains tax a smart move



UTTAM GUPTA

It is perfectly justified if the rich class is made to pay more which, in turn, helps the Government provide services to the poor



In the Finance Bill, 2023 passed by the Lok Sabha on March 24, 2023, an amendment relates to a change in the tax treatment of capital gains from non-equity or debt mutual funds (DMF). This has led to consternation in the investor fraternity including high net-worth individuals (HNIs), corporate, and so on who argue this will undermine efforts to deepen the bond market which is crucial for financing the long-term development needs of the economy.

They also say such a change should have been introduced in the Union Budget. This would allow for thorough discussion in Parliament, instead of an official amendment. Now that it is part of the Finance Act, any discussion on the procedure adopted is merely academic. Before discussing the amendment that will take effect from April 1, 2023, let us look at the existing position. DMF is a scheme that invests in fixed income instruments, such as corporate and government bonds, corporate debt securities, and money market instruments etc. that offer capital appreciation. Debt funds are also called income or bond funds.

Currently, any capital gain on redemption of units in a debt fund held for three years or longer is treated as long-term capital gain (LTCG) and is taxed at a flat 20 percent with the benefit of indexation (it adjusts the cost of a person's investment to account for inflation, effectively reducing her capital gains and in turn, her tax liability). Any capital gain on redemption of units held by investors before three years is treated as short-term capital gain (STCG) and is taxed at an individual's income tax (albeit personal) slab rate.

The amendment does away with this distinction in the case of 'Specified mutual funds' (SMFs) which essentially refer to mutual funds where not more than 35 percent of their total proceeds are invested in equity shares of domestic companies. As a result, gains arising from SMFs irrespective of the period for which the units



WE NEED TO LOOK AT THINGS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT WHICH IS EXPECTED TO MAKE LAWS WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF INCLUSIVE GROWTH THAT ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY

(The writer is a policy analyst)

are held by investors are deemed STCGs and hence, liable to tax at the rate applicable to the slab in which their total income falls.

Given the way SMFs are defined, the new tax treatment will also apply to exchange-traded funds (ETFs), international funds, gold/silver funds, outbound mutual funds and even equity funds etc. wherein the gains will be taxed at the personal income tax (PIT) slab rate. The amendment will be applied prospectively from April 1, 2023. This implies that all MF units already in possession of the investors as well as those acquired before this date will continue to be covered by the old dispensation.

IMPACT ON INVESTORS

Consider a high-income earner earning Rs 2 crore per annum. The applicable effective tax rate in her case is 39 per cent. Assume she has invested Rs 100 in DMF units which yield a return of 10 percent per annum. Further, assume that inflation is 5 percent. With these basics, under the old regime i.e., 20 per cent LTCG tax with indexation benefit, her gain at the end of three years would be Rs 17.4 (value of investment Rs 133.1 minus inflation adjusted cost Rs 115.7). Tax @20 per cent on Rs 17.4 comes to Rs 3.5. Under the new regime i.e., tax rate in the relevant slab (39 per cent in this example) and no benefit of indexation, capital gain at the end of three years will be Rs 33.1 (value of investment Rs 133.1 minus cost Rs 100). Tax @39 per cent on Rs 33.1 will be Rs 12.9 which is almost 4 times the tax under the previous regime. It is this steep increase in the tax burden that is hurting the high-income earners.

We need to look at things from

the perspective of the government which is expected to make laws with the objective of inclusive growth that address the concerns of all sections of society and not just pander to the interests of a particular class. If the rich class is made to pay more resulting in more revenue for the government. This in turn, helps it cater to the majority of the poor, this is perfectly justified.

Even so, the existing taxation regime was arbitrary, inequitable and customized to grant undue benefit to HNIs/corporate etc. Income earned by a person has no colour. Irrespective of the source from where earnings are made be it salary, profit from business, investment in shares, bonds or mutual funds and so on, these add to her income. Therefore, the tax treatment must be uniform. It can't vary depending on the source.

Yet, the regime gave preferential treatment to income generated from DMF investment by taxing capital gains from these at 20 percent against the applicable slab rate of 39 percent. It was discriminatory even compared to investment in other avenues. For instance, interest income from investment in fixed deposits (FDs) in banks or bonds issued by governments or companies is taxed at an individual's income tax slab rate. These earnings don't also benefit from indexation.

While HNIs should have no grudges about paying more tax, those earning less, especially the middle class, will not stand to lose in the new dispensation. Under the proposed PIT regime as per the 2023-24 Budget, a person with annual income up to Rs 700,000 pays 'nil' tax. For those earning Rs 700,001-Rs 900,000, the tax rate is

10 percent and for those earning Rs 900,001-Rs 1,200,000, it is 15 per cent. For all investing in DMFs, the switch to taxing capital gains at the applicable slab rate will be beneficial. Under the earlier regime, these were taxed at a higher rate of 20 percent.

The Finance Bill, 2023 also addressed another anomaly. This one relates to a fancy instrument called market-linked debentures (MLDs). Unlike a normal debenture on which a fixed return is paid, MLD holders get a return linked to stock price movement, say the Nifty 50 Index. Earlier capital gains from listed MLDs were taxable at 10 per cent if held for more than a year. They were also taxable at a slab rate if held for up to 1 year. Now, these will be taxed at the slab rate even when owned for more than one year.

To conclude, the 2023-24 budget has ended DMF preferential treatment by taxing all capital gains — irrespective of the holding period — at the slab rate and withdrawing the indexation benefit. It has created a level playing field by aligning their tax treatment with other avenues such as FDs and bonds etc. It would be naive to believe that this would lower the shine of such instruments (read: debt MFs) as investment in these units is liquid; it can be withdrawn at any time unlike FDs where premature withdrawal attracts a penal interest rate. Besides, the former offer investors the possibility of setting off capital gains in some units by short-term capital losses in others thereby reducing tax liability. Any fear that the amendment would impact funding the long-term development needs of the economy is without any basis.

Fill top vacancies at 3 important institutions for PwDs

The Government must ensure that three institutions funded by it for the welfare of the disabled population function properly and deliver in right earnest

In a welcome move which though, comes much after dilly dalling for years, the Government has now promised to fill by April-end the top-level vacancies at the three statutory institutions — Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities (CCPD), National Trust (NT) and Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) — of the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The Secretary of the Persons with Disability Department, Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in a recent submission before a Parliamentary Panel said that the process is on to fill the posts. He submitted that the candidates were being shortlisted and interviews will be held in the first week of the



ARCHANA JYOTI

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next month i.e., April.

He also expressed confidence that by the end of April month they will send three proposals to the DoPT. After that the final accreditation will come from the ACC (Appointment Committee of the Cabinet), the Secretary submitted before the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment when asked about the vacancy position in the offices of the three statutory bodies. Headed by Lok Sabha MP Rama Devi, the panel submitted its report last week in Parliament.

However, disability rights activists are not impressed. In fact, they have dismissed these promises as just lip service. They argue that advertisements for appointments have been published from time to

time over the past years, but the posts were never filled up.

To corroborate their points, in this regard, they have drawn attention to a reply to a query in Parliament in 2021 when Union Social Welfare and Empowerment Minister of State, Pratima Bhoumik, while admitting that the post of Chairperson, RCI, has been lying vacant since September 15, 2015, the steps were being taken to fill the post.

However, it is needless to say that this has not happened till date. Presently, Secretary Rajesh Aggarwal is the officiating head of the RCI and NT. This speaks volumes of how serious the Government is for the welfare of the sector. The CCPD is headed by bureaucrat Upma Srivastava, an

additional secretary in the Ministry.

In the absence of appointments of a candidate through a transparent process, new policies, existing programmes and funds remain half-heartedly implemented. Focus of the NT, RCI and CCPD has lost in between, leaving the sector to fend on its own, laments activist Alok Bhawan from Manovikas Charitable Society.

This apathy also leads one to doubt government's intention if it is really keen for transparent appointments for the sensitive posts or wants to put its cronies who toe the government's line. The delay in appointment is also strengthening the doubts that the government is just doing lip service but not keen in

actually taking steps to empower, handhold the sector which has big potential if given the chance. As per the latest report, India has 3 crore people with a wide range of disabilities.

The Council formed under the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 is mandated to regulate and monitor the training of rehabilitation professionals while the activities of the National Trust include training, awareness and capacity building programmes and shelter, caregiving and empowerment to the people with intellectual disability. Similarly, CCPD has been conceived with an aim to ensure legal rights of the sector enshrined in the Persons with Disability Rights Act.

Bhuvan maintains that it's high time that the government adopts a right-based approach instead of the Charity Model. Charity model of disability views the person with disabilities as the problem and dependent on the sympathy of others to provide assistance in a charity or welfare. This model treats the disabled as dependent upon society. Thus, leaving them hapless and helpless, dependent on the benevolence and charity of the so-called 'abled' in the society.

In contrast, the Rights-based model of disability regards disability as a normal aspect and that the disabled are equally entitled to rights as others, ensuring that criteria for support programmes are prioritized by people

themselves respecting their autonomy and freedom of choice. The disability rights model focuses on equality and non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, accessibility, breaking down barriers, equal participation and inclusion and private and public freedom, says Dr Dilip Kumar Upadhyay, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Madhav University, Rajasthan.

By ensuring that the three important institutions seriously deliver what they are meant to, the Government will be implementing what has been enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. That is 'all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity'.

‘Chinese moves along LAC provocative’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Amidst tension continuing at the Line of Actual Control(LAC)in Ladakh and China ramping up its military infrastructure on its side there, the US has said some of the steps being taken by Beijing along the India-China border have been “provocative.”

Making this observation, Kurt Campbell, the Deputy Assistant to the US President and Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific told a Washington based think-tank late Thursday there his country is destined to work more closely with New Delhi. The think tank-Centre for a new American Security(CNAS)-in its report said Indian officials believe China is trying to contain India by forcing it to divert more resources into defending simultaneously both its western border with Pakistan and eastern flank with China and by weakening its willingness and ability to challenge Chinese ambitions to dominate the region.

Campbell also said India is not an ally of the United States and will never be so. “But it does not mean that we will not be close partners and share many things. That’s how we need to understand the role that India will play as a great nation on the global stage.

“We want to encourage that and support that and deepen this relationship, which is



already very strong, probably the strongest people-to-people relationship of any country that the United States has on the global stage,” he said.

The think tank report said the India-China border intrusions and clashes have become more frequent and threaten to lead to all-out conflict.

The increased prospect of India-China border hostility has implications for the United States and its Indo-Pacific strategy between the two Asian giants, it said.

Campbell told the think-tank, “Some of the steps that China has taken along this vast 5,000-mile border had been provocative and deeply concerning to Indian partners and friends.”

The think tank’s report, authored by Lisa Curtis and Derek Grossman, has made several recommendations to help deter and respond to further Chinese aggression along the border with India.

Prominent among them include the United States should elevate Indian territorial disputes with China on par

with Beijing’s assertiveness against other US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific and ensure this is reflected in all national security-related documents and speeches.

It also recommended that the US offer India the sophisticated military technology it requires to defend its borders and initiate the coproduction and co-development of military equipment and assist India in strengthening its maritime and naval capacity.

The think tank also urged the US to conduct joint intelligence reviews with India to align assessments of Chinese plans and intentions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and enhance coordination with Indian officials on contingency planning in the event of a future India-China conflict.

It asked the US to criticise Beijing’s ‘efforts at land-grabbing’ in multilateral forums, including the UN, Shangri-La Dialogue, G20, and East Asia Summit and be prepared to extend full support to India in the event of another border crisis or conflict.

Indian-Americans slam violence against mission by Khalistani supporters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Taking note of the violent incidents by alleged Khalistan supporters in the last few days in the US, eminent Indian-Americans, including members of the Sikh community from Silicon Valley have condemned the actions against the Indian diplomatic mission and diplomats in San Francisco. The group conveyed these feelings in a meeting with the officials of the Department of Justice of US.

Meanwhile, a senior US State Department official said his country takes the safety and security of diplomats and diplomatic missions in the country quite seriously.

“We take the safety and security of the diplomatic missions that we host in the United States and the diplomats that work in them quite seriously,” Vedant Patel, the Deputy Spokesperson of the State Department told reporters at a press conference here late Thursday.

As regards Indian Americans taking exception to the incidents, some of them



met with the officials of the US Department of Justice(DOJ) on Wednesday and condemned the recent violence against the Indian diplomatic mission and diplomats in San Francisco.

During the meeting, the Indian-Americans told the DoJ officials that they felt unsafe going to the San Francisco Consulate and felt disturbed while the Sikh community members said such unlawful activities, which do not reflect the voice of the majority, bring a bad name to the community. They also talked about personal safety and the lack of action by the San Francisco Police.

The meeting came after a group of Khalistan supporters this month attacked and damaged the Indian Consulate in San Francisco.

Parliamentary committee asks DoPT to look into IAS officers’ property returns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Noting that a large number of IAS officers have not filed annual immovable property returns, a Parliamentary committee has asked the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) to form a panel to look into it and also put in place a mechanism to check the veracity of asset details filed by bureaucrats. As many as 1,393 Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers did not file their asset details in the 2011 to 2022 period, according to a recent report of the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice.

“Keeping the wider ramifications of corruption in public administration in mind, the Committee recommends the central government to constitute a committee to examine the issue of non-submission of annual immovable property returns by public servants in detail,” said the report tabled in Parliament recently.

The Committee said that DoPT should put a mechanism in place to check the veracity of the property return statement filed by public servants. It said India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) which mandates the state parties to establish and promote effective practices aimed at prevention of corruption. The Committee said DoPT is the nodal department for anti-corruption, including matters concerning UNCAC.



The panel also took up the matter of posting of an All India Service (AIS)-Indian Foreign Service (IFS) couple at the same station and suggested framing of appropriate guidelines. It appreciated the Department of Personnel and Training for formulating guidelines for posting husband and wife, who are in government service, at the same station.

“However, the Committee feels there is a lacuna in the policy which needs to be addressed. It is observed that DoPT’s guidelines do not provide any relief to spouses where one of the spouses belongs to an All India Service and the other spouse belongs to the Indian Foreign Service,” said the report tabled in Parliament recently. The three All India Services are IAS, Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service.

“The IFS does not have positions earmarked in the state governments except for postings in Regional Passport Offices and branch secretariats. Moreover, these positions are restricted to certain pay levels. Secondly, the AIS officer can opt for deputation but the rules require him/her to go back to the cadre for ‘cooling off’ period or in case of other exigencies,” the report said.

NIA seizes ₹8L as proceeds of terror from Babbar Khalsa



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has seized Rs 7.80 lakh in cash and a vehicle as “proceeds of terrorism” in a case related to the recovery of arms and explosives, smuggled from Pakistan by the proscribed Babbar Khalsa International, in Haryana last year.

The cash and the Innova vehicle were seized on Thursday as proceeds of terrorism under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the NIA said in a statement.

On May 5, 2022, police intercepted the vehicle at Bastara Toll Plaza in Haryana and recovered three improvised explosive devices (IEDs), one pistol with two magazines, 31 rounds of ammunition, and Rs 1.30 lakh in cash which had been concealed in a specially designed cavity. Four terror operatives -- Gurpreet Singh alias ‘Gopi’, Amandeep Singh alias ‘Deepa’, Parminder Singh alias ‘Pinder’ and Bhopinder Singh -- who were on their way to Adilabad in Telangana were arrested, the agency said.

The NIA investigations have revealed that multiple consignments of arms, explosives and drugs had been sent from Pakistan by designated terrorist Harwinder Singh Sandhu alias Rinda, a ‘designated terrorist’ under UAPA, through drones to pre-decided locations near the India-Pakistan border.

India, Philippines resolve to strengthen bilateral ties during fourth Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meeting



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and the Philippines on Friday resolved to further strengthen their Defence ties during the fourth Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meeting here between officials of the two countries.

Giving details, officials said the Indian delegation was led by Joint Secretary, Ministry of Defence Amitabh Prasad, while the Philippines delegation was headed by Assistant Secretary for Strategic Assessments and International Affairs, Department of National Defence Pablo M Lorenzo.

During the meeting, both sides reviewed the ongoing bilateral defence cooperation and discussed effective and practical initiatives to further expand the engagements. The

co-chairs reaffirmed their commitment to implement 2006 agreement concerning defence cooperation, based on mutual trust and understanding, common interest and shared values of democracy and rule of law.

Both sides agreed to initiate measures to enhance cooperation in Defence Industry and Technology domain and look forward to greater synergy in effectively deepening bilateral cooperative engagements across the spectrum.

They discussed cooperation in multilateral forums and noted complementarities in their approaches to the Indo-Pacific region and decided to hold regular consultations on issues of mutual interest. The interest and enthusiasm towards strengthening the bilateral relations across sectors were appreciated.

Centre trying to strangle MGNREGS through budget cuts, says CPI(M)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CPIM) has alleged that Modi Government is trying to ‘strangle’ the rural job guarantee scheme as well as other welfare programmes by periodically cutting budget allocations. The latest editorial of the Left party’s organ People’s Democracy also criticised the introduction this year of the compulsory marking of attendance by workers under the scheme through mobile-based application ‘National Mobile Monitoring Service (NMMS)’.

“This has led to chaos at worksites across the country. With patchy internet connectivity, workers are reported to be spending hours just to get their attendance recorded. It is a life and death issue for them because failure to mark their attendance would mean loss of wages for the day,” said the editorial.

“Imposition of this kind of hi-tech measures is a well known ploy of this government, ostensibly to tackle fraud. It has been imposed earlier in PDS distribution, in marking attendance of government school teachers, etc - all with similar chaotic and tragic consequences for the people,” it said. Hitting out at the BJP



Government at the Centre, it said ever since the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014, it has been ‘trying to somehow strangle the rural job guarantee scheme (MGNREGS)’.

“Driven by its commitment to the discredited neoliberal dogma that public expenditure should be cut down in order to allow the private sector to have its way and guide the economy more ‘efficiently’ and ‘productively’, the government has not only periodically cut budget allocations to various welfare schemes, including MGNREGS, but it has also taken other devious measures to squeeze the schemes,” the editorial said.

The editorial also said that apart from internet connectivity issues, thousands are

Now, not only Ministries, Mins too will come under CAG’s ambit

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In a major paradigm shift in the audit methodology by the country’s audit watchdog CAG, not only the Ministries but Ministers, too, will come under the ambit of ‘audit’ of their concerned departments, which so far remained confined only to the bureaucracy or the executive system.

Sources in the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) said that for years the accounting and audit details used to be an examination of accounts between CAG and officers of the concerned department but from now onwards, after the change in policy, CAG will give an opportunity to the political executives as well to have their say, if any, to avoid any confusion at a later stage.

“CAG outreach is now being extended to include political executives to highlight audit concerns. The intention is to build a shared understanding of the most pressing concerns in governance and find possible solutions,” the Comptroller and Auditor General, GC Murmu, had said earlier.

Sources said that while the all departments be it Centre or State/UTs have to undergo audit from the CAG, now it will be also the responsibility of the auditor as well the concerned minister or political executive to share/divulge the required accounting information.



“The political executive how so ever high will have to cooperate according to the new charter of this constitutional body. This we are doing for more effective and greater transparency in the system at all level and channels,” explained a senior CAG official. Under this now a range of Council of Ministers will also be audited for the responsibilities they owe.

In the recent times the CAG has also been working overtime to scan all kind of tenders, media reports of major projects based on which the audit watchdog prepare itself to move ahead to check the details and the probabilities of the projects at the costing evaluated.

The CAG also announced for full operationalisation of the One IAAD One System (OIOS) workflow system in the audit offices effective from April 1, 2023. Presiding over an event on Friday, Murmu declared that “from tomorrow (Saturday) onwards, all new audit work in our institution will take place only through OIOS and physical paper-based workflow must

cease. From tomorrow onwards, the digitisation process would be irreversible”. OIOS is an enterprise wide end-to-end IT application. OIOS is web-enabled solution with support for multiple languages with offline functionality and a mobile app. The OIOS roll out process involved work relating to master data, audit design, audit execution, legacy data migration, knowledge management system, quality assurance, quality control, audit products, communication and follow-up.

“The institution of the CAG has always been one of the first Government organizations to adopt new technology in its working model. Be it digitizing the accounting and entitlement process, adopting IT enabled audit, using data analytics in facilitating audit, work flow automations, OIOS is a step in that direction which strengthens our Audit officers to continue to provide independent and credible assurance on public resources and be a global leader in public sector auditing,” Murmu said.

Def Min inks pact with UDPL to upgrade naval aircraft yards at Goa, Kochi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to modernize the Naval aircraft yards (NAYs) at Goa and Kochi, the Defence Ministry on Friday signed a contract with Ultra Dimensions Pvt. Ltd. (UDPL), Vishakhapatnam. The deal is approximately Rs 470 crore. The NAYs undertake servicing and repairs of Naval Aircraft, Aero Engines, Rotables and Test Equipment.

Induction of latest state-of-

the-art aircraft into Indian Navy inventory requires modernisation of existing maintenance and repair facilities at Naval Aircraft Yards to bridge the technological and capability gap to meet the present and future aviation maintenance challenges.

The modernisation includes repair facilities with state of art automated machineries and composite repair bays. This project will generate an employment of more than 1.8 lakh man-days

over a period of three years. The modernisation will augment operational readiness of naval aviation platforms and reduce dependence on external agencies and foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) for repairs. This project will be a proud flag bearer of ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’.

In addition, the defence ministry has inked a contract with Mecon Ltd, Ranchi as Project Monitoring Consultant, at a cost of Rs 24 crore.

‘40,000 water bodies developed under Mission Amrit Sarovar in 11 mths’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Conceived last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s pet mission ‘Amrit Sarovar’ is moving full steam with a battery of people from various walks of life such as freedom fighters, senior members of panchayats, family members of martyrs and Padma awardees engaged in developing 50,000 water bodies across the country by August 15 this year, of which 80 per cent have already come up till date.

“In the last 11 months, around 40,000 water bodies have been developed under the Mission Amrit Sarovar across the country. The Mission aims at developing and rejuvenating 75 water bodies in each district of the country as part of the “Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav”.

“On every 15th August, National Flag hoisting will be organised on every Amrit Sarovar site,” said an official from the Union Ministry of Rural Development, a nodal ministry overseeing the project.

Talking about the people’s participation, he said that “so far at least 1,784 freedom fighters, 18,173 eldest mem-

bers of panchayats, 448 family members of freedom fighters, 684 family members of martyrs and 56 Padma awardees have already participated to develop 40,000 water bodies.

Taking people’s participation as an important component under the scheme, 54,088 user groups were formed for developing the water bodies which will be known as Amrit Sarovars. These user groups are involved in feasibility assessment, execution and its utilization, he explained.

As of now 66 percent of user groups are engaged in agriculture, 21 percent in fisheries, six percent are involved in water chestnut and lotus cultivation and seven percent of the groups are involved in animal husbandry.

The Mission is boosting rural livelihood as the completed water bodies have been identified for activities like irrigation, fisheries, cultivation of water chestnut and animal husbandry. It also aims at qualitative implementation and development of water bodies as a hub of local community activities and convergence with different ministries for the job, he said.



Vice-Chief-of-Naval-Staff Vice-Admiral SN Ghormade with other Armed Forces personnel during a ceremony to accord him a Guard of Honour on his superannuation, in New Delhi on Friday.

(PTI)

21 held, 300 booked in Mumbai clash

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Police have registered a first information report (FIR) against nearly 300 people and arrested 21 so far in connection with a clash between two groups during a Ram Navami procession in Mumbai's Malvani area, an official said on Friday.

The incident occurred on Thursday night at Malvani in suburban Malad (West) when the procession was going on and some people objected to high volume DJ and loud music accompanying it.

Those involved in the clash are being identified with the help of drone and CCTV footage of the area at the time and action is being being according to their role, he said.

While nearly 300 persons have been booked, police have arrested 21 persons so far and more arrests are likely, the official said, adding that probe in the case underway. In the FIR, police have pressed charges under Indian Penal Code sections 353 (assault or use of criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of his duty), 324 (voluntarily



Charred remains of a vehicle after a clash between two groups near a Ram temple in Aurangabad, on Thursday.

PTI

causing hurt by dangerous weapons or means), 332 (whoever voluntarily causes hurt to any person being a public servant in the discharge of his duty as such a public servant), 145 (joining or continuing in unlawful assembly) and 143 (unlawful assembly). Earlier,

police had apprehended more than 20 persons on the charge of rioting and said the process to place them under arrest was on. During the clash between the two groups on Thursday night, stones were hurled, which triggered panic in the area. Additional police

force was called in and the police personnel used force to disperse the crowd, the official said. Senior police officials and some local political leaders rushed to the spot and appealed for peace, he said. After the incident, supporters of a right-wing organisation gathered

outside the Malvani police station and demanded action against those who allegedly pelted stones. A large number of police personnel were deployed in the area and the situation was brought under control, he added.

Man hurt in Ram Navami attack dies

Aurangabad: Hours after he suffered injuries in a mob attack on police personnel following a clash near a Ram temple in Maharashtra's Aurangabad city, a 51-year-old man died during treatment at a hospital, an official said on Friday.

The deceased was identified as Shaikh Muniruddin, he said. The victim died during treatment at a private city-based hospital on Thursday night, hours after the violence, a senior police official said. The police, however, did not specify the reason behind his death.

Ajit Pawar says citizens must work to ensure peace

Pune: Leader of Opposition in Maharashtra Assembly Ajit Pawar on Friday said political parties, civil society and citizens must work towards ensuring peace in Aurangabad, where a person died after two groups clashed recently.

At least 12 people, including 10 policemen, were injured after a mob of around 500 people hurled stones and petrol-filled bottles when cops tried to control situation following a clash between two groups near the Ram temple in Kiradpura locality of Aurangabad.

"An unfortunate incident has occurred in Sambhajinagar. There is a need to make efforts to ensure that a peaceful environment prevails. Though I am the Leader of Opposition, I will not make any statement which will deteriorate the atmosphere. The police are doing their work but everyone, should work towards prevailing peace there," he said. **PTI**

Manipur to set up temporary shelter for Myanmar refugees

Imphal: The Manipur Government has asked district authorities of Chandel district to set up a shelter camp at Gamphazol village for people fleeing strife-torn Myanmar.

Tribal Affairs and Hill Development Minister Letpao Haokip, who visited Gamphazol village on Thursday and interacted with more than 100 immigrants from Myanmar, told the officials "to set up a temporary shelter camp and construct a barbed fencing around the camp".

Haokip was recently appointed as the head of the newly created Cabinet Sub-Committee under the instruction of Chief Minister N Biren Singh. Law Minister Thounaojam Basanta Singh and Water Resources and Relief and Disaster Management Minister Awangbow Newmai are also members of the sub-committee. Haokip later told the media, "construction of a temporary shelter camp has been initiated

where the immigrants will be provided with food, medicines and other requirements."

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner of Chandel district, Mayanglabam Rajkumar told PTI that "we are in the process of carrying out a verification of the immigrants. We expect somewhere around 400-600 immigrants from Myanmar seeking shelter in Chandel district but we cannot give the exact number as official works are in process."

During the visit, the Law Minister also told gathering comprising state officials, villagers and immigrants, "the idea of all of us coming together is that immigrants should have a safe place and should return back..."

Not one single person will be allowed to stay back...We will also make an announcement to village authorities that legal actions will be initiated against them if they harbour illegal immigrants.

Maha Cong demands probe into source of ₹20K cr funding to Adani

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had during the last nine years "worked only for his friends and helped them by putting public money in their pockets", the Maharashtra Congress on Friday said that "Modi should show courage" to order an inquiry into the source of Rs 20,000 crore allegedly invested in the Adani group through shell companies.

On a day when the Congress staged protests at different places across the state to demand an inquiry into the source of Rs 20,000 crore allegedly invested in the Adani group through shell companies, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee President Nana Patole alleged that "thieves" like Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi, Vijay Mallya



defrauded people's money and fled abroad. "For calling Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi thieves, Rahul Gandhi was sentenced by a Surat court for defamation and the very next day the BJP government disqualified him from the Lok Sabha."

All this has been decided by the BJP. Rahul Gandhi was sued for raising his voice against the Modi government, exposing the Modi-Adani corrupt alliance," Patole said. Apart from Patole, State Congress

leaders Balasaheb Thorat, Ashok Chavan, Prithviraj Chavan addressed simultaneous news conferences at Ahmednagar, Parbhani and Pune respectively to demand probe into the money invested in the Advani group of companies through shell companies and to slam the dictatorial regime of the Narendra Modi government.

"The situation in the country is alarming and the question whether there is democracy or not in the country is posed in front of us. Action has been taken against Rahul Gandhi due to political vendetta."

He was not allowed to speak in the Parliament, dissenting voices are suppressed in our democracy. Differences of opinion happen in a democracy, this is a sign of a healthy democracy, but BJP does not allow that to happen, it is

going towards the end of democracy," Leader Balasaheb Thorat said. Talking to media persons in Pune, former Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan said: "It is the basic duty of the opposition party is to ask questions to the government, as the Congress leaders were barred from that duty in Parliament, we are trying to provide information with the help of the media."

The Hindenburg report has alleged that Gautam Adani is a big scam, and it is also alleged that Adani expanded the group by giving false information and bringing pressure from the government."

"Rahul Gandhi raised this question in Parliament. What is relationship between Gautam Adani and Modi? Rahul Gandhi also asked who gave Rs 20,000 crores in Adani group through benami companies."

Call for prayer sirens by 3 faiths gives Kerala civic body headache

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Municipal Council of Changanassery in Kottayam district of Kerala is faced with a hitherto unheard problem as two major communities in the local body have approached the authorities with a bizarre plea.

The genesis of the issue was an office order dated March 23 issued by the secretary of the municipal council ordering the sounding of the local body's siren every evening at 6.30 till April 21 to coincide with the Ramadan fasting period of the Muslim community.

The decision of the municipal secretary was in response to the demand made by MHM Haneefa, secretary of the Muslim Jama Ath of Changanassery.

Amused over the municipal council's decision to sound the siren to mark the end of fasting time of the Muslim communi-

ty, Ganesh Kumar, an ardent devotee of the local Hindu Temple, who is also a Hindu Front activist, approached the local body with a plea to sound the siren to mark the beginning and end of the daily poojas held in the temple at 4.45 in the morning and at 6.45 in the evening.

Not to be left behind, the Christian community under the auspices of Christian Association and Alliance for Social Action (CASA), an umbrella organization representing all sects of the Church.

The CASA's request is that the municipal siren be sounded to inform the faithful about the daily Holy Mass being held at the age-old St Mary's Cathedral in the town at 5.30 AM, 7.00 AM, and at 5.00 PM with the three special Masses held on Sundays. If the council accedes to the demands made by these communities, Changanassery

Municipality would become a town with maximum number of daily sirens catering to the requirements of the three major religions in the State.

While the municipal council opted to ignore the demands made by CASA and the Hindu Front, two petitions were moved in the Kerala High Court demanding the quashing of the municipal secretary's order to sound the siren to alert the Muslims about the conclusion of the fasting hours.

The petitions contend that fasting during Ramadan was purely an Islamic ritual and that the Municipality, an instrumentality of the State within the ambit of Article 12 of the Constitution could not be used for conducting a religious ceremony or ritual at the expense of exchequer. Though petition was scheduled for hearing on Friday, the Court could not take it up because of other pressing issues.

403 immovable properties of Kalptaru Buildtech group attached

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached 403 immovable properties worth ₹83,96,58,834 of real estate major Kalptaru Buildtech Corporation Ltd, its group entities and Directors under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The ED initiated a probe on the basis of various FIRs registered by UP Police and other State police for cheating and fraud with investors in various schemes floated by Kalptaru Buildtech and its other group companies.

Investigation revealed that Jai Krishna Singh Rana, CMD of Kalptaru Group started collecting deposits from the public fraudulently in Kalptaru Agro (I) Limited by giving them assurance for registration of plots after specified time.

PNS

FROM PAGE 1

GUJ HC QUASHES KEJRIWAL'S PLEA FOR MODI DEGREE INFO

In May 2016, the then Vice Chancellor of the Gujarat University, MN Patel, had announced that Modi completed his MA in Political Science in 1983 with 62.3 per cent as an external student.

During the past hearings, the Gujarat University vehemently objected to the CIC's order saying "irresponsible childish curiosity" of someone cannot become public interest under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

During the last hearing held in February, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the university, claimed there was nothing to hide in the first place because information about PM's degrees is "already in public domain" and the university had also placed information on its website on a particular date in the past.

However, Kejriwal's advocate Percy Kavina had claimed the information was not available in public domain and defended his client's demand saying "no one is above the law".

Citing exceptions granted under the RTI Act for not complying with the order of the CIC, Mehta had also argued that the RTI Act is being used for settling scores and to make "childish jabs" against opponents.

Citing some past judgements of the Supreme Court and by other high courts about the exemptions granted under section 8 of the RTI Act, Mehta also said that one cannot seek someone's personal information just because one is curious about it. Mehta had further argued that as per section 8 of the RTI Act, a university can refuse to divulge information regarding its students to a third person because of the "fiduciary relationship", a relationship of trust between a trustee and a beneficiary.

According to Mehta, one cannot seek private information not related to a person's public activity.

"Just because the public is interested in it, it cannot become public interest. Courts' interpretation has established that educational qualification is personal information, whether it is of a politician or any other person," argued the Solicitor General in the last hearing in February.

TRUMP INDICTED FOR HUSH MONEY TO PORN STAR, TO BE ARRAIGNED ON TUE

Trump, the 45th US President from 2017 to 2021, is expected to fly from his home in Florida to New York on Monday and be arraigned in court 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.

Trump has denied all wrongdoing in connection with the payments made ahead of the elec-

tion.

In a statement responding to news of his indictment, the former president called it "Political persecution and election interference at the highest level in history," and accused Democrats of "weaponising our justice system to punish a political opponent, who just so happens to be a President of the United States."

"The Democrats have lied, cheated and stolen in their obsession with trying to 'Get Trump,' but now they've done the unthinkable — indicting a completely innocent person in an act of blatant Election Interference," Trump said.

He lashed out at Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney, calling the prosecutor a "disgrace," and accused him of "doing Joe Biden's dirty work." "This is third-world prosecutorial misconduct. It is the opportunistic targeting of a political opponent in a campaign year," Trump's son Eric tweeted.

President Biden, a Democrat, repeatedly declined to comment on the indictment of former President Donald Trump as he departed the White House on Friday morning, CNN reported.

Trump attorneys Susan Necheles and Joseph Tacopina issued a statement, saying that the former president "did not commit any crime" and vowed to "vigorously fight this political prosecution in court."

The case stems from a payment made just days before Trump was elected president in 2016. His former attorney Michael Cohen arranged a wire transfer of USD 130,000 to Daniels in exchange for her silence about an alleged affair. Daniels has said she had a sexual encounter with Trump at a Lake Tahoe hotel in 2006 — the year after he married his current wife Melania.

Cohen has said in court that he made the USD 130,000 settlement "in coordination with and at the direction of" the former president. Cohen was jailed from 2018-20 on multiple charges. Following the indictment, Daniels thanked her supporters. "I have so many messages coming in that I can't respond...Also don't want to spill my champagne," she tweeted.

"Thank you to everyone for your support and love! I have so many messages coming in that I can't respond...Also don't want to spill my champagne. Teamstormy merch/autograph orders are pouring in, too! Thank you for that as well but allow a few extra days for shipment," the 44-year-old adult actress said.

Daniels' attorney Clark Brewster tweeted: "The indictment of Donald Trump is no cause for joy. The hard work and conscientiousness of the grand jurors must be respected. Now let truth and justice prevail. No one is above the law."

Former Vice President Mike Pence who served under Trump said that while "no one is above the law, including former presidents," that he cannot "speak to the merit of this case at all." "I really do believe that this decision today is a

great disservice to the country and the idea that for the first time in American history a former president would be indicted on a campaign finance issue to me, it just smacks of political prosecution, and I think the overwhelming majority of the American people will see it that way," Pence told CNN.

Trump was caught off guard by the grand jury's decision to indict him, according to a person who spoke directly with him.

While the former president was bracing for an indictment last week, he began to believe news reports that a potential indictment was weeks or more away. "Is this a shock today? Hell yes," the person said, speaking on condition of anonymity as Trump's team calculated its response.

In light of Trump being indicted by a New York grand jury, US Marshals, Secret Service and New York Police Department are talking about how the former president will appear for his arraignment, according to a senior New York Police Department source.

Out of an abundance of caution, all personnel at NYPD headquarters and support units will be in uniform on Friday, according to an internal memo from the department.

The indictment comes as Trump faces legal hurdles in other potential criminal cases. Trump is currently the front-runner among all declared and potential contenders for the 2024 Republican White House nomination.

But there is nothing in US law that prevents a candidate who is found guilty of a crime from campaigning for and serving as, president - even from prison.

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

INDIA ON ROAD TO \$2 TRILLION EXPORTS IN 2030

missions abroad with special focus on trade, technology, tourism and investment.

India's total exports growth decelerated to 13.4 per cent in 2022-23 annually from 36 per cent expansion in the previous financial year as global demand was affected following outbreak of Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 and other geopolitical reasons. "We will achieve exports of \$1 trillion each in goods and services by 2030," Goyal said.

The Foreign Trade Policy 2023 outlines a host of measures and incentives to boost exports from India.

"We always had the capacity to do more, but I feel it needed Prime Minister Narendra Modi to pump up our energies and enthusiasm and see the change witnessed thereafter," Goyal said. The WTO's global trade has forecast growth in world trade to slow down to 1 per cent in 2023 due to global uncertainties.

Kid among 6 die of suffocation as mosquito coil falls on bed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Six people, including a woman and a child died due to suffocation while two others were injured after a fire broke out in a house at Mazar Wala Road, Machhi Market, Shastri Park, police said on Friday. A Delhi Police team rushed to the spot and found that the injured had been taken to Jag Pravesh Chandra Hospital.

According to the police, a preliminary probe revealed that a burning mosquito coil fell on a mattress in the house during the night. The toxic fumes caused the victims to lose consciousness and later they died due to suffocation.

Of the 11 people affected by the fire, two are receiving treatment and three were discharged after first aid. The deceased include four men, a woman and a toddler. Eyewitnesses said four bodies were found on the stairs and the toddler was found inside the room on the first floor.

The residents had gone to sleep after Sehri, which is consumed before day-break during Ramzan and the fire broke out after that, police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northeast), Joy Tirkey, said they received information about the incident at around 9 AM.

"After reaching the spot we found that nine people had been taken to the Jag Pravesh Chandra Hospital," the DCP said. elhi Fire Service chief Atul Garg said they received a call and three fire tenders were rushed to the site to douse the fire. "Though the fire was small, the occupants died due to inhalation of smoke," he added.

The deceased have been identified as Hamza, Pashirul, Zahiuddin, Dinesh, his wife Nisha and Fazlu Choudhary. Zahirul and Soni are being treated for burn injuries at hospital, while Mat-ur-Rehman, Taju Das and Ajmat Ali have been discharged, police said.

Akbar Ali, the owner of the house, said four of the deceased had come to stay on rent there this week. "They were from Bihar and used to run rickshaws. My brother Asgar gave them room on rent," Ali, who works as an attendant at an e-rickshaw parking, said. A fifth person was also a tenant. The toddler who died was Ali's nephew.

"My brother Ajmat and his daughter Soni suffered injuries while his son Hamza has died," Ali said. He said his family came out of the house from the other gate. Ali said his brother's wife Sumaila woke him up when the fire broke out.

"I was sleeping in my room when Sumaila knocked on my

door and informed me that a fire had broken out in her room. Immediately, I tried to douse the blaze which had spread to a bed. The first floor of the house was completely filled with smoke from the fire that started on the ground floor," he said. "I saved Ajmat's kids Aram, Farhaan and Mahira, but could not find Hamza in the smoke," Ali said.

He said there were 20-25 people in the building when the fire broke out. Nazreen, the mother of Hamza, said the deceased was the youngest of her five children. "After Sehri we went to sleep around 5 AM. In the fire, I lost my youngest child Hamza, while my husband Ajmat Ali and Soni, who were on roza, received burn injuries," Nazreen said.

She said there were shanties in the area earlier and another fire incident had occurred there seven years ago. "Only the household articles were lost in that fire," she said. Hasim, a relative of Akbar Ali, said he pulled out five people from inside the house. "I live on the ground floor of the house and went upstairs along with another person after covering our faces with wet clothes. There was a lot of smoke. The bodies of four people were lying on the stairs on the first floor, while Hamza was found inside his room," Hasim said.

TN masks up as Covid cases rise

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As Covid virus continues its Northward journey with more than 3,000 cases reported second day in a row on Friday morning, the Tamil Nadu has become a first State to make wearing of face masks mandatory at all government hospitals across the State from Saturday i.e. April 1. Delhi Government has already advised its citizens to wear the masks whenever in the public areas. Sources said that if the Covid surge continues, other States may

join the suit and make the mask mandatory. In fact, since the beginning of March, there is a continuous rise in the corona cases. In the meantime, the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued revised recommendations for prioritising the use of COVID-19 vaccines to reflect the impact of Omicron and high population-level immunity due to infection and vaccination.

According to the Ministry data, 3,095 new Covid cases were registered in India on Thursday (30

March). This figure is the highest in the last six months.

Now the number of active cases in the country has reached 15,208. "The country has seen a rise in the number of new Covid cases in the last few days amid a spurt in the data of H3N2 Influenza cases. More than 3000 cases have been reported for the second consecutive day. Earlier on Wednesday (March 29), 3,016 new Covid-19 cases were registered. Also, currently the recovery rate is 98.78 percent," said an official from the Ministry.

Ukraine marks grim Bucha anniv, calls for justice

AP ■ BUCHA (UKRAINE)

Ukrainians marked the anniversary Friday of the liberation of Bucha with calls for remembrance and justice after a brutal Russian occupation.

"We will not let it be forgotten," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said at a formal ceremony in Bucha, vowing to punish those who committed outrages there. "Human dignity will not let it be forgotten. On the streets of Bucha, the world has seen Russian evil. Evil unmasked."

The town near Kyiv has come to stand as a symbol of atrocities committed by Moscow's military since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022. Ukrainian troops who retook the town found hundreds of bodies, on the streets, in yards and homes, in a mass grave. Some showed signs of torture.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, fighting continued Friday: Russia used its long-range arsenal to bombard anew several areas, killing at least two civilians and damaging homes.

And the Kremlin-allied president of neighboring Belarus raised the stakes when he said Russian strategic nuclear weapons might be deployed in his country, along with part of Moscow's tactical nuclear arsenal. Moscow said earlier this week that it planned to place in Belarus tactical nuclear weapons, which are comparatively short-range and low-yield. Strategic nuclear weapons such as missile-borne warheads would bring a greater threat.

At the official commemoration in Bucha, Zelenskyy was joined by the president of Moldova and the prime ministers of Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The Kremlin's forces occupied Bucha weeks after they invaded Ukraine and stayed for about a month. When Ukrainian troops retook the town, they encountered horrific scenes. Over weeks and months, hundreds of bodies were uncovered, including children. Russian soldiers on intercepted phone conversations called it "zachistka" — cleansing, according to an investigation by The Associated Press and the PBS series "Frontline." Such organized cruelty, which Russian troops employed in past conflicts as well, notably in Chechnya, was later repeated in Russia-occupied territories across Ukraine. Zelenskyy handed out medals to soldiers, police officers, doctors, teachers and emergency workers in Bucha, as well as to the families of two soldiers killed during the defense of the Kyiv region. "Ukrainian people, you have stopped the biggest anti-human force of our times," he said. "You have stopped the force which has no respect and wants to destroy everything that gives meaning to human



Members of the Ukrainian State Emergency Service clear the rubble at the building which was destroyed as a result of Russian strike in Zaporizhzhia district, Ukraine on Friday.

Lukashenko: Russia might put strategic nukes in Belarus

Tallinn (AP): Russian strategic nuclear weapons might be deployed in Belarus along with part of Russia's tactical nuclear arsenal, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said Friday. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced last week that his country intended to deploy tactical, comparatively short-range and small-yield nuclear weapons in Belarus.

The strategic nuclear weapons such as missile-borne warheads that Lukashenko mentioned during his state-of-the-nation address would pose an even greater threat, if Moscow moves them to the territory of its neighbour and ally.

Belarus was a staging ground for amassing Russian troops before the invasion of Ukraine a little over 13 months ago. Lukashenko, the only person to have served as president since the country's independence from the Soviet Union, delivered his annual address amid escalating tensions over the conflict in Ukraine.

More than 1,400 civilian deaths, including 37 children, were documented in the Bucha district by Ukrainian authorities, Zelenskyy said. More than 175 people were found in mass graves and alleged torture chambers, he said. Ukraine and other countries, including the U.S., have demanded that Russia answer for war crimes. Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin alleged



Both he and Putin have alleged that Western powers want to ruin Russia and Belarus.

"Putin and I will decide and introduce here, if necessary, strategic weapons, and they must understand this, the scoundrels abroad, who today are trying to blow us up from inside and outside," the Belarusian leader said.

"We will stop at nothing to protect our countries, our state and their peoples."

Friday that many of the dead civilians were tortured. Almost 100 Russian soldiers are suspected of war crimes, he said on his Telegram channel, and indictments have been issued for 35 of them.

Two Russian servicemen have already been sentenced by a Ukrainian court to 12 years in prison for illegally depriving civilians of liberty, and for looting.

'Kremlin warning a shift in rhetoric'

PTI ■ LONDON

Dmitry Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman, warned Russians that they must prepare for a "forever war". "Things will get much harder," Peskov told a gathering of the country's political elite. "This will take a very, very long time." It's a far cry from Vladimir Putin's "special military operation". This was supposed to sweep into Kyiv in a matter of days, weeks at the most. Once there, Russia would be able to free Ukrainians from the "gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis" who were preventing Ukraine from assuming its natural role as a part of the motherland. A war which was going to take days or weeks could now take many years. And far from rescuing Ukraine from fascists, the conflict is now a bitter struggle for Russia's continued existence. As Putin told work-

ers at an aviation factory recently: "For us, this is not a geopolitical task, but a task of the survival of Russian statehood, creating conditions for the future development of the country and our children."

But then Kremlin narratives have been notably flexible and self-serving over the years. This was brilliantly highlighted in the recent BBC documentary Putin versus the West, which took a close look at shifts in Russian political rhetoric over the past decade. This is the period we might accurately refer to as "Putin II". In 2012, Putin resumed the presidency after getting around the constitutional ban on serving three consecutive terms by making his prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev, president for one and then resuming the top job. Since then he has ramped up the historical nationalism somewhat. But even as far back as 2008,

in a meeting with then US president, George W. Bush, Putin was questioning Ukrainian sovereignty: "You have to understand, George, Ukraine is not even a country." Shortly after his troops entered Crimea, leading to its annexation in March 2014, he doubled down on this theme, insisting that it was the Bolsheviks ("may god judge them") who gave much of south-east Russia to Kyiv. In the same speech he said Nikita Khrushchev, a former leader of the USSR, may have added Crimea to Ukraine to atone for the famine of the 1930s — but that this was something "for historians to figure out".

This message of Ukraine as a historical aberration has been a common and fairly unwavering element of Putin's discourse since 2012.

In 2016, the Rand Corporation, a US thinktank, developed a model for Russian

propaganda it called the "fire-hose of falsehood". The Kremlin uses all the machinery of state (including a tame media) to embellish and perpetuate its lies with the purpose of confusing the widest possible audience. There have been several constant mantras emerging from the Kremlin over the war and in its build-up. One is that Ukraine's pro-Russian former president Viktor Yanukovich had been ousted in a coup, meaning that all subsequent Ukrainian governments have been illegitimate.

The Kremlin logic trail then continues that, as a result, Ukraine is not a democracy. Of course, the fact that after the invasion began, the Zelensky government cracked down on pro-Russian agents and banned pro-Russia political parties is taken as further proof of Kyiv's lack of commitment to democracy.

Joe Biden asks Russia to release detained US journalist

Washington: President Joe Biden on Friday urged Russia to release Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich after the country's security service arrested him on espionage charges — allegations that the newspaper denies.

"Let him go," Biden told reporters at the White House on Friday morning when asked about his message to Russia on the arrest of Gershkovich. Russia's Federal Security Service has accused Gershkovich, a U.S. citizen, of trying to obtain classified information.

It is the first time an American journalist has been detained on accusations of spying since the Cold War.

The Journal has said it "vehemently denies" the charges.

The Biden administration said Thursday that it was working to secure consular access to Gershkovich. **AP**

Donald Trump's indictment evokes mixed reactions

AP ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump's indictment ignited mixed responses from New Yorkers, with some hailing the development as "spectacular" while others slamming it as a "political witch hunt" from which the ex-president will emerge stronger. A grand jury in Manhattan on Thursday afternoon voted to indict 76-year-old Trump over hush money payments made to adult film star Stormy Daniels in 2016, making him the first former US president to face criminal charges. About 6.5 kilometers from the Lower Manhattan courthouses where the grand jury decided to indict Trump, the scene outside the Trump Tower in the upscale Fifth Avenue in Manhattan was sombre and quiet. It was inside this popular Manhattan building in June 2015 when Trump descended the "golden escalators" into a crowd of supporters and media persons to announce his presidential run. On a chilly Thursday evening, barring a couple of New York Police Department (NYPD) patrol vehicles, barricades lining the sidewalk and some reporters and camera persons, the scene outside Trump Tower was uneventful.

New Yorkers and tourists strolled by the building, some stopping only briefly to take pictures of the multi-story glass tower, which is ensconced among the world's most luxurious brands on 5th Avenue, and that bears Trump's name. "As far as Trump being indicted is con-

cerned, sure they'll handcuff him, they'll take a mug shot and then he will be good to go. This has made Trump's base stronger," New York activist Susan-Anne Miller told PTI outside the Trump Tower. "By the time the case goes to trial, he will be President again," she said. She said prosecutors have a weak case against Trump. "There was no case, they were trying to find a way to work it around so that they could hold him. This is a political witch hunt and in the end, he will be proven innocent," she said. Miller said there will be no riots from Trump supporters in the aftermath of the indictment. An elderly couple said it was "about time" that Trump was indicted. "We are very excited. We hope he is indicted. We don't want him to become President again. (The indictment and charges) are a long time coming, he is a crook," they said.

Charles Earlston, a lawyer and veteran, said he had hoped to see more crowds of protestors and supporters outside the Trump Tower after the indictment news. The indictment is "symbolic" of where the country is at right now, he said.

"The Democratic Party and their allies have been wanting to get Trump indicted on something, whatever it was, for the better part of about eight years now," he said. "This is the most ridiculous one that they could have thrown out there," he said, referring to charges related to the hush money payments to Daniels.

Japan FM to visit China amid friction over detained citizen

AP ■ TOKYO

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said Friday he will visit China this weekend for talks with his counterpart Qin Gang, becoming Japan's first top diplomat to do so in more than three years amid growing frictions between the two countries, including a recent flap over the detention of a Japanese national in Beijing. Hayashi hopes to "engage in a candid and in-depth exchange of views toward establishing a constructive and stable relationship" at his planned talks with Qin and other officials during his April 1-2 visit, he told a news conference.

He is expected to demand the release of the detained Japanese national, discuss security concerns in the region and ask China to act "responsibly" on global issues including Russia's war on Ukraine.



Hayashi noted an agreement between the leaders of the two countries to build constructive and stable relations but said "Japan-China relations are facing many challenges and concerns, although there are various possibilities (for cooperation)." Despite close economic and business ties between the two Asian powers, Tokyo and Beijing have been increasingly at odds in recent years as Japan considers China's growing influence in the region as a threat to its national security and the

economy. "I believe it is important to build a constructive and stable relationship while we insist on our position on some issues, seek (China's) responsible actions and continue our dialogue," Hayashi added. His predecessor Toshimitsu Motegi's December 2019 visit to China was the last such trip made by a top Japanese diplomat, just prior to China's near-total closure of its borders amid strict pandemic control measures.

Commenting on Hayashi's visit, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said it was in the "common interests of the two sides and the region to maintain the sound and stable development of China-Japan relations." Mao said Qin and other Chinese leaders she didn't name would "have an in-depth exchange on bilateral relations and regional and international issues of mutual concern."

China, Japan set up military hotline

Beijing (PTI): China and Japan on Friday set up a military hotline to strengthen their capability of managing and controlling maritime and air incidents arising due to their aggressive patrolling of the disputed waters in the East China Sea.

The hotline mechanism was announced ahead of the visit by Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi to Beijing this weekend for talks with his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang on improving bilateral relations amid Beijing's vocal criticism against Japan's active role in the US' Indo-Pacific strategy.

China is also sharply critical of the Quad alliance comprising the US, India, Japan and Australia saying that it is aimed at containing its rise.

This will be the first visit by the Japanese Foreign Minister to China since 2019 when Hayashi's predecessor

Toshimitsu Motegi went to Beijing after which China shut down its borders to combat COVID-19. China reopened the country for international travel early this year. Announcing the hotline, the Chinese Defence Ministry said as agreed upon by the defence departments of China and Japan, the two sides have recently completed the construction of a direct telephone line for the sea and air liaison mechanism and will maintain communication on the arrangement for the launch. The establishment of the direct telephone line will effectively enrich the communication channels between the defence departments of China and Japan, strengthen the capabilities of the two sides to manage and control maritime and air crises, and help further maintain regional peace and stability, the ministry said.

Israeli strikes kill Iranian adviser

Beirut (AP): Israeli airstrikes hit the suburbs of Syria's capital city early Friday for the second day in a row, killing an Iranian adviser, the state media of Syria and Iran reported. Loud explosions were heard over Damascus shortly after midnight Thursday, according to residents in the capital and the state news agency SANA.

The airstrikes came after similar attacks early Thursday. SANA said Syrian air defences confronted "hostile targets," adding that the strike caused material damage. SANA said some of the Israeli missiles were shot down by air defences. Iran's state television reported Friday that Milad Heidari, an Iranian military adviser, was killed during what it called a "criminal strike" by Israel early Friday morning in Syria. Without giving Heidari's rank, the report called him a "guard of Islam."

US Senate confirms Verma for top State Dept position

Washington (PTI): The US Senate has confirmed Indian-American lawyer, diplomat and executive Richard Verma as the Deputy Secretary of State, Management and Resources, a position which is normally seen as the CEO of the powerful State Department in the US government. Verma, 54, was confirmed by a vote of 67-26 on Thursday.

He served as the US ambassador to India from January 16, 2015, to January 20, 2017, and is currently the chief legal officer and the head of global public policy at Mastercard. During the previous Obama administration, Verma served as the Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs.

Earlier in his career, he was National Security Advisor to United States Senator Harry Reid and was Democratic Whip, Minority Leader and then Majority Leader of the United States Senate. Verma has served as Vice Chairman of The Asia



Group, Partner and Senior Counsellor at Steptoe and Johnson LLP, and Senior Counsellor at the Albright Stonebridge Group.

He is a veteran of the United States Air Force, where he served as a Judge Advocate. Verma, who was born in 1968 to an Indian immigrant, grew up in Pennsylvania. He attended a private college on a US Air Force scholarship.

'China rolls over \$2bn as loan to Pakistan'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Cash-strapped Pakistan has received a rollover loan of USD 2 billion that matured last week from its "all-weather ally" China, finance minister Ishaq Dar said on Friday, a move that will help Islamabad secure the much-required bailout from the IMF.

The rollover is one of the key requirements for Pakistan meeting its external financing needed for it to ink the staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"I am happy to confirm that this has been rolled over on March 23," Dar told parliament, adding that all formalities were completed. Pakistan, currently in the throes of a major economic crisis, is grappling with high external debt and dwindling foreign exchange reserves. Pakistan is scrambling to increase its forex reserves which are estimated to be at USD 4.8 billion after China refinanced USD 500 million a fortnight ago. Pakistan has been negotiating with the IMF for the release of a USD 1.1 billion bailout package since February but has so far met with little success due to the stringent conditions imposed by the Washington-based lender.

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 rollover comes days after Pakistan decided to skip the Democracy Summit in Washington so that it does not potentially upset its "all-weather ally" China.

'Some steps taken by Beijing along India-China border provocative'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Some of the steps being taken by Beijing along the India-China border has been "provocative," a top White House official has said while reaffirming that the United States is "destined" to work more closely with India. Kurt Campbell, the Deputy Assistant to the US President and Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific, told a Washington-based think-tank on Thursday that India is not an ally of the United States and will never be so.

"But it does not mean that we will not be close partners and share many things."

That's how we need to understand the role that India will play as a great nation on the global stage. "We want to encourage that and support that and deepen this relationship, which is already very strong, probably the strongest people-

to-people relationship of any country that the United States has on the global stage," he said. Campbell said that the India-US relationship "is the most important bilateral relationship for the United States in the 21st century."

"I believe we are destined to work more closely together. I believe that our people-to-people ties are strong, animate in a relationship that is becoming deeper, richer and more strategically important," he said. The think tank — Centre for a New American Security (CNAS) — in a report said that the India-China border intrusions and clashes have become more frequent and threaten to lead to all-out conflict.

The increased prospect of India-China border hostility has implications for the United States and its Indo-Pacific strategy between the two Asian giants, it said.

Stampede at food distribution centre kills 11 in Karachi

Karachi (PTI): At least 11 people, including women and children, were killed and several others injured in a deadly stampede at a Ramzan food distribution centre in Pakistan's port city of Karachi on Friday, officials said. The stampede took place after some people unknowingly stepped on a live wire where food was being distributed, leading to the tragedy. Soon, people started pushing each other, due to which some even fell into a nearby drain, police said.

At least 11 people, including women and children, died in the stampede and several others were injured. "Initially two persons were electrocuted after stepping on the live wire and that led to panic and stampede," SSP Ameerullah told PTI. "Two children and two women fell in a drain when its wall collapsed due to the rush of the people," he said.

At least 11 other people, including women, have died while trying to get free flour from government distribution outlets in Pakistan's Punjab province in recent days.

Indians among 6 migrants found dead in Canada

PTI ■ TORONTO

Members of an Indian family were among six people who drowned in the St Lawrence River while attempting to cross into the US from Canada illegally, authorities said on Friday.

Six bodies were recovered by police Thursday afternoon in a marshy area of Quebec near an overturned boat during an aerial search with the Canadian Coast Guard., according to Canadian news outlets CBC and CTV. A search of the area is ongoing to find the missing infant.

"The six individuals are believed to be from two families, one of Romanian descent and the other believed to be citizens of India," Lee-Ann O'Brien, deputy chief of Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service, told reporters in a

news conference on Friday.

"Police believe one infant from the Romanian family has not been located and we'll continue searching," she added.

"All are believed to have been attempting illegal entry into the US from Canada."

Police said one of the bodies found was that of a child under three. The child was found with a Canadian passport and was a member of a Romanian family. The bodies, which haven't been officially identified, were found in Tsi Snaihue (Snye) in Akwesasne, a Mohawk territory that straddles Quebec, Ontario and New York state. They were discovered after the search for another missing person that also started Thursday. In January 2022, the bodies of four Indians, including a baby, were found frozen in Manitoba near the Canada-US border.

Opposition pressures Rishi Sunak over wife's biz interest

London (PTI): The UK's Opposition parties are piling on the pressure on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak over a recent Budget policy that could benefit his wife, Akshata Murty, through her business interest in a childcare firm. Murty, the daughter of Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy, is listed as a shareholder in Koru Kids Ltd which is likely to benefit from a new pilot scheme announced in the Spring Budget earlier this month to incentivise people to become childminders. While 10 Downing Street has stated that Sunak had followed the UK's ministerial code on the matter, the Opposition has called for further explanations. "There are serious questions for Rishi Sunak to answer over any potential conflict of interest, and any extra income his family could receive from his own government's policy," said Liberal Democrat chief whip Wendy Chamberlain, who has called on the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests Sir Laurie Magnus to investigate.

MEDVEDEV, ALCARAZ REACH MIAMI SEMIS

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

World number one Carlos Alcaraz and in-form Russian Daniil Medvedev booked their places in the Miami Open semi-finals with convincing victories over American opponents at Hard Rock Stadium on Thursday.

Alcaraz crushed ninth-seed Taylor Fritz 6-4, 6-2, while Medvedev ended qualifier Christopher Eubanks' impressive run with a 6-3, 7-5 victory in their quarter-final.

Alcaraz needed just 78 minutes to dismiss Fritz with the Spaniard yet again dominating with his big serve and attacking the American from the outset.

The powerful Alcaraz set the tone by breaking Fritz's first service game and he did the same again at the start of the second set, winning the game to love.

The 19-year-old broke again to go 5-2 up and wrapped up the win without losing a point in the final game. He will be up against Italian tenth-seed Jannik Sinner next as he seeks to complete the 'Sunshine Double' following his triumph over Medvedev at Indian Wells.

The 26-year-old Eubanks was playing in his first ATP Masters 1000 quarter-final after upsetting Frenchmen Adrian Mannarino and Gregoire Barrere and Croatia's 17th-ranked Borna Coric.

The 6-foot-7 (2.01m), big-serving Eubanks showed no signs of nerves, holding his first two serves, but he was unable to take advantage of five break-points in a thrilling fourth game.

A half hour rain-break appeared to disrupt Eubanks' momentum, however, and he was broken on his first service game after the resumption of play, going long and allowing Medvedev to take a 4-3 lead.

The Russian, who after the



break noticeably stepped further into the second serve, broke again to take the first set, but Eubanks was not about to roll over against the world number five.

In the sixth game of the second set, Medvedev won a great rally at the net to go 4-2 up but Eubanks again showed his character to break back and keep his hopes alive.

'MISTAKES AMPLIFIED'

Eubanks saved two match points as Medvedev looked to break him and avoid a deciding set, but then on the third match point he messed up a straightforward vol-

ley, putting it out and ending his resistance.

The American, who will move from 119th to 85th in the ATP rankings, said Medvedev had shown the ruthlessness that exists at the top level of the game.

"The mistakes are going to be amplified at this level. Little things, missed opportunities, that maybe in some tournaments I've played in the past or (against) some opponents don't seem like such a big deal," he said.

Medvedev has now won 22 of his past 23 matches, capturing titles in Rotterdam, Doha and

Dubai during that run and reaching the final in Indian Wells, where he lost to world number one Carlos Alcaraz.

"I have never had such a good start to the season. A lot of matches won, tournaments won. I am really happy," Medvedev said.

"I was disappointed at Indian Wells when my streak ended but the only thing you can do is begin a new streak and I am happy I was able to bring my form into Miami."

Medvedev, in the semi-finals in Miami for the first time, will face fellow-Russian Karen Khachanov for a place in the final after the 14th

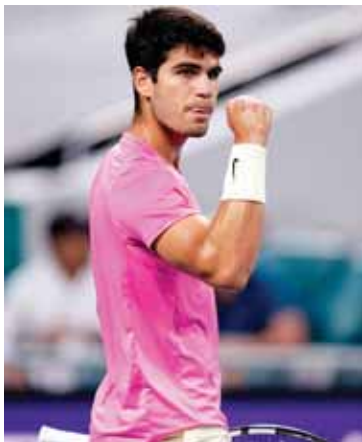
seed beat Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo 6-3, 6-2.

Khachanov needed just 75 minutes to take care of business against Cerundolo despite a determined start from the Argentine.

Cerundolo broke the Russian to go 3-2 up but then lost his next two service games and was never able to recover. Khachanov now faces a familiar foe in Medvedev.

"We know each other from young age. We've been playing against each other since we were kids... we're good friends outside, but we're rivals on the court," he said.

Facing Alcaraz tougher than any of the 'Big Three': Fritz



AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

American Taylor Fritz had his first taste of facing world number one Carlos Alcaraz in a Miami Open quarter-final loss on Thursday and said it had been a tougher experience than facing any of the sport's former 'Big Three'.

Asked how his maiden appearance against the Spaniard compared to his first matches against the now retired Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal or Novak Djokovic, Fritz did not disguise his opinion.

"Oh, I definitely felt like I had more breathing room against those guys than in this match," he said.

"I think that it's different game styles. Novak will have these long rallies, but he'll kind of slowly get you out of position and overwhelm you. I still feel like I can hang in these rallies for a long time and get more chances to attack," he said.

"I think that I'd go back to the first couple games of the match. He just hit

winners off of a lot of shots, shots that people normally aren't hurting me off of.

"I just felt he was more offensive and pressed me a lot more," he said.

Fritz believes that Alcaraz is ahead of where multiple Grand Slam winners Federer, Nadal and Djokovic were in their late teens.

"It's not even what I saw today. It's what I have seen for a while now. I said it a year ago when I watched him play, for how young he is, he just has all the tools," he said.

"He can come to the net, he can dropshot you, he can lob you, he's incredibly fast, he has all the power, his forehand is good, his backhand is good," he said.

"It's very rare to see someone so young so developed in their game and not really have anything that they need to work on so much," he said.

"He has tons of different ways to play, and he can incorporate tons of different game plans to play different players because he has so many tools to win a match."

"I think that's something that I wouldn't say any of those people had at such a young age. There is always I guess things that people need to improve on," he said.

Alcaraz started his rapid rise in the past year by winning Miami before his first Grand Slam win at the US Open.

The Spaniard is now looking to complete the 'Sunshine Double' following his win at Indian Wells earlier this month.

Fritz certainly expects to see plenty more victories for the 19-year-old who he says is already the complete package and conceded he simply couldn't cope with the start of the match.



Tuchel hire 'changed our preparation' for Munich clash: Terzic

AP ■ MUNICH

Borussia Dortmund manager Edin Terzic said Thomas Tuchel's appointment as Bayern Munich manager forced his side to change their preparation for Saturday's 'Der Klassiker' clash.

Dortmund travel to Munich one point clear of Bayern at the top of the Bundesliga table.

Speaking at the pre-match press conference on Friday, Terzic said the firing of Julian Nagelsmann in favour of the former Dortmund mentor "obviously changed our preparation a little bit" for the top-of-the-table clash. "We don't know how much Thomas Tuchel will continue on with what Julian Nagelsmann did in the last few weeks, or whether he brings in completely new ideas."

"But what hasn't changed is that they still have a top manager on the bench and a top team on the field."

Terzic admitted his side had watched "the first six games of Thomas Tuchel at Chelsea" to get an idea of "what could happen in this situation or that".

The Dortmund coach praised

Tuchel's ability to "bring Chelsea together in just a few months and be rewarded by winning the Champions League at the end of the season".

"He's one of the best managers in Europe and one of the most successful," Terzic spoke publicly for the first time on Nagelsmann's sacking, saying "I find it to be a real pity what happened with Julian Nagelsmann, who's an absolute top coach."

"But we know how quick things can go in football."

Dortmund have not won in Munich in the league since 2014 but Terzic said "we're a different side" this year.

Terzic said on Friday several players would return from injury for the clash, including goalkeeper Gregor Kobel, midfielder Julian Brandt and forwards Youssoufa Moukoko and Karim Adeyemi.

Terzic confirmed that there were "question marks" over English teenager Jamie Bynoe-Gittens and Germany defender Nico Schlotterbeck for the game, while USA forward Gio Reyna and Belgium defender Thomas Meunier have been ruled out.

Rybakina beats Pegula to reach Miami final

AP ■ MIAMI

Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina reached the final of the Miami Open by beating American world number three Jessica Pegula 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 at Hard Rock Stadium on Thursday.

Kazakhstan's Rybakina is on course to claim the 'Sunshine Double' after winning in Indian Wells earlier this month.

The 23-year-old, ranked seventh in the world, will face the winner of Friday's semi-final between Petra Kvitova and Romanian Sorana Cirstea.

In a rain-disrupted match, neither player was able to settled into their serve with 11 breaks in total throughout the two sets.

Pegula had been 4-2 up in the

second set but after she was broken again, the contest turned decisively in Rybakina's direction when the American, on her serve, found the net on a return to go 5-4 down to the Moscow-born Rybakina.

Rybakina then held her serve with ease to secure back-to-back WTA 1000 finals and she said the unwelcome prospect of a third set had pushed her to take a more positive approach.

"I think that I started being a bit more aggressive because I knew that if it's going to go to the third set, it's going to be much more difficult, so I maybe risked a bit more in the end of the second set," she said, noting how tough it has been to go all the way in back-to-back tournaments.

"It's really difficult because of



different conditions and these two weeks by the matches, you will see that it's been much more difficult for me here than in Indian Wells, but for the sunshine double, I am going to give it my best and hopefully I can make it," she added.

Pegula was left to regret not being able to hold after making breaks.

"I think she was playing better as in those moments, she was returning really well. I guess I could have served a little better, but sometimes I was hitting pretty good serves and she was still ripping returns," she said.

"But that's her game, she's pressuring you on your serve as well to come up with something big and I just wasn't able to really do that I guess," she said.

Two-times Wimbledon champion Kvitova reached the Miami semi-finals for the first time after fighting to a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 win over Ekaterina Alexandrova on Thursday.

The Czech grabbed the first set, in the match which was postponed due to rain on Wednesday, after breaking Alexandrova on her second service game but the Russian fought back well.

Kvitova, ranked 12th in the world, held off four break-points at 2-2 and but was finally broken at 4-2 and Alexandrova held on to her serve to force a third set.

It was tight throughout until the 33-year-old Kvitova made the decisive break to go 5-3 up and then served out for the match, yelling out her delight and relief.

Chelsea stun Lyon in Champions League shoot-out

AP ■ LONDON

Ann-Katrin Berger made two saves in a penalty shoot-out as Chelsea knocked holders Lyon out of the Women's Champions League on Thursday to set up a semi-final with Barcelona.

An already dramatic two-legged tie had finished all-square at 2-2, but only after Chelsea substitute Maren Mjelde scored a penalty in the eighth minute of added-on time at the end of extra-time to send the match to spot-kicks.

Germany goalkeeper Berger then denied Wendie Renard before ending the match when she got a strong hand to Lindsey Horan's strike low to the bottom left corner.

The Blues' 4-3 shoot-out success sparked joyous scenes at Stamford Bridge, with Chelsea — yet to win the Women's Champions League — now facing a Barcelona side that beat them 4-0 in the



2021 final.

Earlier two-time Champions League winners Wolfsburg secured a last-four place against Arsenal, one of Chelsea's London rivals, with a 2-1 aggregate win over Paris Saint-Germain.

It is the first time since the 2017/18 season that two English teams have qualified for the semi-finals.

Eight-times champions Lyon

appeared to have done enough when Sara Dabritz's goal deep into extra-time put the French side 2-0 up on the night and 2-1 ahead on aggregate.

But in the third minute of added-on time at the end of extra time, Lyon's Vicki Becho clipped Lauren James inside the box.

Following a lengthy VAR check, and with Lyon players surrounding the referee, a penalty was awarded.

Mjelde then kept her cool to fire in from the spot as her effort levelled the tie and sent it to a shoot-out.

Earlier, a 1-1 draw at home was good enough for Wolfsburg to go through.

The German club took an early lead through star striker Alexandra Popp but that was soon cancelled out by a Kadidiatou Diani equaliser.

Wolfsburg manager Tommy Stroot enjoyed his side's "extremely special" victory, saying "we made it, we're proud of it — and now Arsenal waits for us."

Renard named coach of France women's football team

AP ■ PARIS

Hervé Renard was on Thursday appointed as the new coach of the France women's football team after the sacking of Corinne Diacre, the French football federation announced.

The 54-year-old Renard resigned as coach of Saudi Arabia earlier in the week after leading them to a memorable group stage win over Argentina at last year's World Cup in Qatar.

His departure was confirmed following Tuesday's 2-1 friendly defeat by Bolivia. Renard has signed a contract with France through to the 2024 Olympics in his first job coaching a women's team.

Renard, a two-time Africa Cup of Nations winner with Zambia and Ivory Coast, takes over less than

four months before the Women's World Cup begins in Australia and New Zealand.

Diacre was removed from her role at the start of March after her position was weakened following a revolt by leading players.

She was under contract until 2024 but came under serious pressure after captain Wendie Renard announced she would no longer play for the team, with fellow stars Kadidiatou Diani and Marie-Antoinette Katoto following suit.

France have four friendlies before starting their World Cup campaign against Jamaica in Sydney on July 23.

Renard's first game at the helm will be on April 7 against Colombia with another match four days later against Olympic champions Canada.

Alonso fastest in wet Australian 2nd practice, Verstappen third

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso topped the timesheets ahead of Ferrari ace Charles Leclerc in a rain-hit second practice at the Australian Grand Prix on Friday, but world champion Max Verstappen went fastest for the day.

The Spanish veteran followed up his podium finishes at the first two races of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia with another eye-opening run.

He powered around the bumpy Albert Park circuit under darkening clouds before rain fell in a best time of one minute 18.887 seconds among his 13 laps, bettering his fourth place in the first one-hour session.

"The afternoon was obviously impacted by the rain, so there is still some work to do tomorrow," said Alonso.

"We need to learn more about the tyres and the long-run pace of the car because there was not much time for that today. So far though the car seems to behave well."

Leclerc, who won in Australia last year, came an encouraging second after Ferrari's early season reliability and pace issues, nearly half a sec-



NO HOPE OF CHALLENGING RED BULLS IN AUSTRALIA: HAMILTON

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton admitted on Friday that Mercedes had little hope of keeping pace with the Red Bulls in Australia, and matching his fifth place in Saudi Arabia was a more realistic target.

The Briton came a surprise second in the opening practice at Albert Park behind Red Bull's Max Verstappen, before slumping to 13th in a rain-affected second session.

He blamed changes made to the car between the two hour-long runs for the gaping difference.

The car "felt a little bit better this morning, we made some changes, they didn't work, so we'll revise those tonight," he said.

"Then it rained obviously so it wasn't the best of sessions. You don't really learn a huge amount when it's between (conditions), so just keep the car safe."

He learned enough to know that come race-day on Sunday, Mercedes will again be playing catch-up to Verstappen and his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez.

Hamilton said another fifth-placed finish would be a good result for him in Australia.

"We won't be competing against the Red Bulls," he said. "It will just be about trying to see if we can get up as high as possible. I think we've got pace to be around fifth, same as the last race."

Russell, who was fourth in the second practice, was more optimistic, saying it "wasn't too bad a day".

ond adrift but ahead of Verstappen.

The Red Bull pilot, the early championship leader, clocked a 1:18.790 in the first practice when he had an out-of-character spin, which was better than Alonso's second session best.

But the Dutchman had no decent opportunity to improve on it on a wet track, saying it was slippery and he had low grip.

Red Bull are attempting to score a third consecutive 1-2 finish for the first time in the team's history in Melbourne after their dominance in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Verstappen's teammate and Jeddah winner Sergio Perez came seventh.

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton was a surprise second in the opening practice but could only manage a disappointing 13th in FP2.

His teammate George Russell was fourth ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, with Alpine's Esteban Ocon sixth.

McLaren's Lando Norris, Haas driver Nico Hulkenberg and Pierre Gasly in the other Alpine rounded out the top 10.

Williams' Logan Sargeant, who had an electrical problem during the first practice, failed to complete a lap.

