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‘Supari’ given to sully my image, says PM

PNS ■ BHOPAL

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

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

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

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

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

“Some people are sitting inside the country to support



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

— PM NARENDRA MODI

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

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

Amid their conspiracies, every countryman has to pay

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stay ready to deal with new threats, PM urges military

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

Detailed report on Page 5

Defence export soars by ten-fold in last six years

Make-in-India paying dividends, asserts PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Georgia 1st US state to pass resolution against Hinduphobia

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

Indian-American diaspora communities in Georgia.

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

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

Continued on Page 5



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

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

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

PNS ■ PATNA/HOWRAH

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

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

Meanwhile Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday asserted communal tensions during Ram Navami festivities at Sasaram and Bihar

Sharif towns were triggered by some people indulging in “gadbad” (mischief) and rejected the BJP’s charge of poor law and order situation in the State.

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

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

In Patna, while interacting

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

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

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

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

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

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CAPSULE

INDIA LOGS 2,994 COVID-19 CASES

New Delhi: India on Saturday recorded 2,994 new Covid-19 infections, while the number of active cases increased to 16,354, according to Union Health Ministry data. With the fresh infections, India’s Covid-19 tally stands at 4.47 crore (44,718,781). The death toll climbed to 5,30,876, with nine deaths.

MODERATE INTENSITY QUAKE HITS NEPAL

Kathmandu: A moderate intensity earthquake was recorded with its epicentre at Suri in the Dolakha district of Nepal on Saturday morning. The earthquake of 5.2 magnitude was recorded at 11.27 am in Dolakha, 180 km east of Kathmandu, according to the National Seismological Centre here.

‘JUVENILITY PLEA CAN BE RAISED AFTER 22 YEARS’

Lucknow: In an important judgment, the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has held that a person can raise a plea of juvenility even after passage of 22 years during trial.

Freed from jail, Sidhu raps Centre, Punjab Govt

PNS ■ PATIALA

Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu walked free on Saturday after spending nearly 10 months in Patiala Central Jail in a 1988 road rage death case. Soon after walking out of the jail, Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu slammed the Centre, alleging that democracy is in chains and institutions have turned slaves.

Sidhu described Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann as “akhbari mukhmantri” and criticised his Government over law and order and debt issues.

The 59-year-old’s supporters had assembled since morning outside the prison to accord him a grand welcome upon his release and they could be heard chanting “Navjot Sidhu zindabad”.

Several Congress leaders, including Amritsar MP Gurjit Aujla, were waiting for the return of Sidhu.

After cold comfort, mercury to shoot above normal in summer

IMD prediction

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After unseasonal rainfall, several parts of India are to witness hotter-than-usual weather from April, May and June, raising the risk of more strain on the power sector as people turn to air conditioners to cool themselves.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday predicted that most of India, barring parts of north-west and peninsular region, is expected to experience above-normal maximum temperatures in April, May and June.

“A significantly higher number of heatwave days are predicted over most parts of Central India, East India and Northwest India during the hot weather season during April, May and June.

“Above normal heatwave days are likely over many parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, East Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Gangetic



West Bengal, north Chhattisgarh, western part of Maharashtra, Gujarat and some parts of West Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana during April,” IMD director General Mrutyunjay Mahapatra said in a virtual Press conference.

A heatwave is declared if the maximum temperature of a station reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius in the plains, at least 37 degrees Celsius in coastal areas and at least 30

degrees Celsius in hilly regions, and the departure from normal is at least 4.5 degrees Celsius.

As some States received unseasonal rain in March, damaging wheat, mustard and onion crops, it has raised the risk of an increase in prices.

While farmers pray for sunshine for the drenched crop to dry, they remain wary of extreme heat waves that could further erode yields.

Rainfall across the country

was 26 per cent above normal in March, Mahapatra said.

The Power Ministry predicts that peak electricity demand will climb to a new record in April as people crank up their air conditioners, fans and refrigeration units.

According to the IMD, the probability forecast for the minimum temperatures indicates that during the hot weather season (AMJ), normal to above normal minimum temperatures are very likely over most parts of the country with the exception of some areas in northeast and northwest India, as well as some isolated pockets in Peninsular India where below normal minimum temperatures are likely.

India logged its hottest February in 2023 since record-keeping began in 1901, according to the IMD.

However, above-normal rainfall (37.6 mm against a normal of 29.9 mm) due to seven western disturbances, including five strong ones, kept temperatures in check in March.

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Protecting farmers’ interest priority of govt, says CM

Rules for wheat procurement may be relaxed

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid fears of adverse impact of bad weather on the quality of wheat, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asked officials to prepare a proposal for relaxing rules for purchase of such crops and ordered the Relief Commission to pay compensation to farmers without any delay.

“Due to untimely rains and hailstorms in many areas of the state in March, farmers and agricultural produce have been

adversely affected. In the last 24 hours also, there is information of hailstorms in nine districts of the state. In this hour of crisis, the state government stands with the farmers,” the chief minister said in a high-level meeting held on Saturday, in which he reviewed the situation arising out of recent untimely rains and hailstorms in various areas of the state. While observing a presentation of the Revenue department, the chief minister said that protecting the interests of the annadata farmers was the priority of the government.

“There should be no delay in providing the compensation amount to the farmers as per the rules by the relief commissioner’s office after assessing

the crops damaged by untimely rains and hailstorms,” he said.

The chief minister instructed officials that timely information be made available to the farmers about the weather forecast. “Information about the warnings of meteorologists should be made available to farmers in remote villages through TV, newspapers and local administration. This forecast should be for 24-48 hours so that the farmers may take protective actions,” he said.

“If any resident of the state dies tragically due to natural calamity, or if someone is injured due to human-wildlife conflict, the victim’s family should be contacted immediately and provided financial assistance from the Disaster

Relief Fund at the relief commissioner’s level,” he said.

The chief minister said that due to natural reasons like rain, strong winds and hailstorms, the wheat could be damaged and the quality of the crop being produced was also likely to be adversely affected. He said such crops should also be procured at the minimum support price and for this, a proposal should be prepared to relax the rules as per the requirement.

“There could be a shortage of straw this year due to the possible loss to wheat crop. In such a situation, arrangements for cattle fodder should be made in time by the Animal Husbandry department,” the chief minister said.

18 booked in scholarship scam busted by ED

Lucknow (PNS): Ten private educational institutes were accused of being part of a Rs 100-crore post-matriculation scholarship scam. A case was registered against 18 accused whose role was found in a probe conducted by the Enforcement Directorate. The probe was conducted in February after irregularities surfaced.

Inspector, Hazratganj, Akhilesh Mishra said the institutes, with the connivance of their staff and imaginary persons and bank agents, opened bank accounts and withheld the debit cards to usurp the scholarship money.

“The accused entities usurped post-matriculation scholarship worth Rs 100 crore, given to economically weaker beneficiaries by the Central and state governments since 2015. The institutes used fake documents, credentials and addresses to open bank accounts in the name of staff members and managers. It further surfaced that they used the same email ID for opening bank accounts in the name of different students. They used fake paper trails in the scam, thus tricking the officials into issuing the funds for scholarship,” Mishra alleged.

Police said it surfaced in the probe that some of the beneficiaries were minors while others were elderly. It was alleged that the accused opened the bank accounts with the help of FINO bank agents. The institutes were provided user IDs and passwords and they later siphoned off the money on the pretext that it was withdrawn by the beneficiaries.

It surfaced that a total of 3,000 fake bank accounts were opened and 1,200 SIM cards were obtained with the help of fake documents. A spokesman said a case under sections 406/420/467/468/471 of IPC was registered against 18 accused at the Hazratganj Kotwali. He said the case was lodged on the complaint of SSI Daya Shanker Dwivedi, who was asked to conduct a probe into the case.



Congress workers of SC/ST, OBC and minority wing protesting outside the party headquarters in Lucknow on Saturday in support of beleaguered former MP Rahul Gandhi

Pioneer

Doc stresses on need to cut down on stress, junk food

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The need of the hour is to focus on preventive medicine to check the rise of lifestyle diseases. Diabetes and heart diseases have increased at an alarming rate in the country and need to be prevented, according to Dr Sandeep Sahu from Sanjay Gandhi Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences.

The factors responsible for the rise in these diseases are increased stress, junk food adulteration in food, he pointed out. “If people can keep the blood pressure and blood glucose levels in check by bringing about necessary lifestyle changes, they can remain healthy. People seem to be spending a lot of money on unhealthy food and it is giving rise to diseases. The cases have risen to such an extent that people are not ready to take it seriously. Even if a person is having the symptoms, they do not want to get tested because they are afraid that the test may blow the lid off this particular health issue,” he pointed out.

“e-commerce has also added to the lifestyle disorders. The availability of junk food online at any given time has only added to the problem,” he said, adding that as a preventive measure, people should get their blood pressure and blood glucose levels measured every six months.

“Earlier, heart attacks would occur at the age of 60 years or above but now even people in their 30s are having cardiac failure because of high stress levels. Nearly all the hormones in our body are catabolic and when a person is in stress, destructive hormones are secreted in large amounts, show their result on the end organs. It gives rise to blood pressure and blood glucose levels. The combination of the two results in the constriction of the arteries, leading to heart attack. Every fourth person in India has diabetes while every second person aged 40 years or above has irregular blood pressure. Five out of ten people have increased cholesterol,” he said.

Dr Sahu said that ideally, a person should get up in the morning without any stress so that destructive hormones are secreted less, and blood glucose and blood pressure remain normal. “The total health means physical, mental and spiritual. After getting up in the morning, one would work slowly and in a relaxed manner. Adequate sleep and taking the required amount of calories can prevent the lifestyle diseases,” he said.

“All those who have a history of either diabetes or blood pressure should get themselves checked after 30 years of age because physical activity is very less amongst the upper, upper middle class and higher class. They should check their BP and blood glucose levels with validated electronic devices available in the market,” he said. He added that screening should be carried out every six months and if a problem is detected, one should go for necessary lifestyle changes.

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A man and his friend were attacked by his rivals over a property dispute in Krishna Nagar on Friday. The victim had lodged a complaint against the alleged attackers in the past too, but no action was taken, and it emboldened the accused.

As per reports, Mukesh Sonkar of New Sardari Kheda in the area has a dispute with Nanha and his neighbour over a house. On Friday, Mukesh, along with his friend Pramod of Golaganj in Wazirganj police area, went to the house in New Sardari Kheda where they were attacked by Nanha, his family members, including his wife and sons (Rakesh and Bauwa), and their neighbour besides 18-20 unidentified accused.

“Armed with sharp-edged weapons, they attacked both of us following a verbal spat. Rakesh snatched my mobile phone which I was using to film their act. After being hit on the head, I fell unconscious.

Man deprived of gold chain, rings by comen

Lucknow (PNS): Two persons masquerading as policemen in civvies duped a man of his ornaments worth several lakh in PGI police station area on Saturday. Ashok Kumar Pandey of Rae Bareilly, along with his brother, was in Lucknow to visit a mall on Shaheed Path on Saturday.

When they reached Shanidev temple crossing, Ashok got down from the car while his brother left for Sitapur. Ashok was looking for an autorickshaw to go to the mall when two bike-borne men asked him why he was overlooking their calls. They told him that they were from policemen conducting a checking drive in view of drug ped-

dling cases. They asked Ashok to put off his gold chain and five gold rings as the ornaments could be looted by miscreants on the prowl.

“I put off the ornaments and kept them inside the bag. They said they would keep the ornaments in a sachet signed by them so as to save them hassles in more such drives,” Ashok stated in his complaint. He said he doubted their credentials and tried to confront them, but they took the ornaments, put the same in a sachet and kept it in the bag. “When I opened the sachet, I found it filled with stones. The miscreants sped off towards Alambagh,” he said. A case was registered in this connection.

However, before that, they also pelted us with stones and bricks to shoo us away,” Pramod alleged. He added that the

attackers also opened fire on them. “Mukesh was attacked by the above-named accused on March 25 as well. He had

lodged a complaint but no action was taken by police,” Pramod said.

In another case, a woman alleged that her neighbour attacked her daughter and sister’s son in Gomti Nagar on Thursday. A case was registered in this regard on Saturday. The complainant, a resident of Badi Jugauli, said her daughter and nephew were standing at the gate of their house when their neighbour’s son Prashant attacked them. “We rushed to their rescue but he stormed the house and mouthed choicest of expletives. He later fell into a drain outside the house while trying to flee the scene. He has been threatening to kill us ever since,” she alleged. She further alleged that Prashant was staring at her daughter and when her nephew confronted him, he attacked them. “On the day of Holi, Prashant had barged into our house and abused my daughter. He was under the influence of alcohol. We had complained to his parents after which the issue subsided,” she alleged.

CITYBRIEFS

CEREMONIAL PARADE

A ceremonial parade was held at the Officers Training College, Army Medical Corps Centre and College, on the conclusion of Medical Officers Basic Course-241 on Saturday. The 9-week course imparts intensive combat medical support training to young armed forces medical and dental officers in order to empower them for effectively performing their duties and transforms young professionals to medical and dental officers. The course comprised 118 officers, including 44 lady officers with tri-services representation. The parade was marked by military precision and customary elegance. The ceremonial parade was reviewed by Lt Gen V Sabid Syed, Commandant, AMC Centre & College, OIC Records, & Col Commandant, AMC. Shubham Saini was adjudged the best all-round officer and awarded the Commandant’s Rolling Trophy. Omkar Agarwal was awarded Major Laishram Jyotin Singh, Ashok Chakra Memorial Trophy for being the best officer in field events.

DIVINE EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The ‘Divine Education Conference’ of City Montessori School, Jopling Road campus, was held at school’s Gomti Nagar auditorium on Saturday. CMS founder Jagdish Gandhi inaugurated the programme and awarded prizes to the meritorious students who had performed brilliantly in the annual examinations as well as in other competitive examinations and extra-curricular activities. The students presented devotional songs and also gave dance performances.



GRAVITAS 2.0 FROM APRIL 12-13

Students of department of business administration, Lucknow University, are excited to host Gravitas 2.0 on April 12 and 13. The event, with a focus on management, provides a variety of activities. A senior faculty member said that the students would participate in a variety of events that would help them develop their leadership skills, teamwork, and creativity. From quizzes and case studies to discussions, debates and cultural events, Gravitas 2.0 has it all. The winners will be given away prizes.

GHONGHA BASANT SAMMELAN

Ghongha Basant Sammelan was organised at Ravindrakalyan on the occasion of April Fool’s Day on Saturday. Rang Bharti has been organising this programme for the past 62 years. Several poets, including Vikas Baukhal from Ramnagar, Danda Banarsi, Jamuna Prasad Upadhyaya from Ayodhya, Dharam Raj Upadhyaya from Lucknow, Pramod Pankaj from Barabanki, Sameer from Fatehpur and Amit Omar from Kanpur, had the audience in splits. ‘Bedhab Banarsi Rang Bharti Samman’ was given away to Danda Banarsi and Popular Meeruthi and ‘Ramai Kaka Rangbharti Samman’ to Vikas Baukhal.

ANNUAL FUNCTION

The 29th annual function and prize distribution ceremony was organised at Lok Bharti Inter College in Geetapalli on Friday. The students displayed their excellence in both scholastic and non-scholastic fields. The winners were awarded as their parents cheered. The chief guests on the occasion was Sudhir Kumar Mishra ‘Bablu Mishra’ (corporator) and Amit Kumar Chawla.



Carry Modi’s welfare schemes to last mile: Jitendra Singh

Amroha (PTI) Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Saturday urged representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institution to take Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s welfare schemes to the last mile. Presiding over a meeting of PRI representatives from Amroha district in Uttar Pradesh, he said they can be the most important messengers of Prime Minister Modi’s people-centric initiatives and programmes as they are directly in touch with the grassroot people.

“Panchayats are continuously being empowered under Modi,” said Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel. The minister said the PRI representatives being elected representatives, know who are the most needy among the lowest strata of the society and can ensure that the benefits reach them

without any vote bank consideration. He said Modi symbolises grassroot level democracy which is liberated from any dynasty politics as he himself has risen from the grassroots.

The minister said the prime minister’s faith in PRIs and grassroot level democracy is evident from the fact that after 70 years, it was due to his intervention that Jammu and Kashmir district development council (DDC) elections were held for the first time.

Singh emphasised the need for time-bound completion of development programmes and underlined the need for adoption of newer technologies and innovations for faster completion of projects without compromising with any quality, a statement issued by the Personnel Ministry said.

He said when Modi took

over in May, 2014, almost half of the country’s population was deprived of facilities like toilets, housing, vaccination, electricity connection and bank accounts. Singh said with ‘Sabka Prayas’, the Centre has been able to bring many schemes closer to 100 percent saturation during the last eight years.

There is a new resolve to make India a frontline state in the world in the next 25 years of Amrit Kaal, the statement said. He told the PRIs to always keep in mind Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s call for maximising the reach and utilisation of government schemes in rural India so that no one is left out. Singh said the Modi government has reiterated on many occasions that there would be no shortage of funds for any of the central schemes.

Congress leader booked over remarks on PM

Sambhal (PTI): The Uttar Pradesh Police on Saturday booked Congress state general secretary Sachin Chaudhary over his alleged objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The case under relevant sections of the law was registered at Sambhal Kotwali based on a complaint filed by the BJP’s youth wing leader Akshit Agarwal, Additional Superintendent of Police Shrish Chandra said.

Agarwal, the BJYM district unit office in-charge, told reporters that the Congress leader made the remarks against the prime minister during a press conference here on Friday. At the press meet, Chaudhary targeted Prime Minister Modi over the Adani issue. He said a video clip of the Congress leader’s “indecent and objectionable” remarks has gone viral on social media.

‘Maharajganj excavations a pointer to Kushan Empire’

Lucknow (PNS): The state archaeology department’s recent excavations at Banarsiha Kala village in the Maharajganj district are a likely pointer to the Kushan Empire which could be existing here 2,000 years ago. State archaeology director Renu Dwivedi said further excavations to be carried out in October and November later this year could shed light on whether it was Lord Buddha’s maternal grandparents’ area.

“Nothing can be said as of now and we wound up the excavations on March 24 for the first phase. The work was started in the second week of February. We have unearthed some antiquities and brick walls possibly belonging to the Kushan period,” she said, adding the excavations were carried out because the Archaeological Survey of

India had done trial trenching there a couple of years back.

“There is a ‘stupa’ clearly visible, and we have the remains of a palace. It could possibly be the place of Lord Buddha’s maternal grandparents. Although Kapilvastu in Nepal is considered his birthplace and Nepal has also declared it, we are also exploring this area,” she said.

Dwivedi said they had procured money from the state government to carry out the excavations and nearly Rs 9-10 lakh were spent in the exercise. “The items unearthed in the area possibly belong to the first century AD and are approximately 2,000 years old. They have been kept at the archaeological office in Chhattar Manzil. The excavations have been discontinued because summer months are not good for this exercise,” Dwivedi added.

Holy Week for Christians begins today

Lucknow (PNS): The Holy Week for the Christian community is beginning with Palm Sunday on April 2. Father Morris from a local church said the Holy Week, which commemorates the Passion of Christ, would begin on Palm Sunday (April 2). It will include Maundy Thursday on April 6 and Good Friday on April 7. The Holy Week will culminate in celebrations on Easter (April 9).

“Palm Sunday commemorates the triumphal entrance of Jesus Christ into the city of Jerusalem as the King of the Jews. Palm branches were placed in his path before his arrest on Maundy Thursday and his crucifixion on Good Friday. Maundy Thursday is the day when Christ celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples, four days after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Only hours after the Last Supper, Judas would betray Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, setting the stage for his crucifixion on Good Friday. On that evening, Jesus sat down with the disciples to eat his final meal before going to the cross. As they dined together, he told the 12 disciples that one of them would soon betray him,” Morris explained. He said it was on that evening that Jesus also washed the feet of his disciples and demonstrated the important lesson of servitude through living a life of humility. “Jesus said that real leadership is the ability to serve your people and he demonstrated it with his disciples very effectively,” Morris pointed out.

“Good Friday is the day when Jesus Christ was hanged on the cross for the sins of all human beings. Hanging on the cross, Jesus uttered the Seven Words from the cross which are the seven most important statements spoken by him on earth. The crux of these statements is the ability to forgive and live a life of humility and patience,” he added.

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Yogi promises education to every child

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Promising good education to every child of the state, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that it was the responsibility of the government to ensure that not a single child was deprived of schooling because a fully literate population would be a big asset for the state.

Launching the month-long School Chalo Abhiyan, the chief minister said that parents must be prepared to send their children to school as the state could achieve 100 per cent literacy only when every child went to school.

He stressed on the need for advancing the School Chalo campaign in the coming years as a fully literate population would be a big asset for the state. On this occasion, the chief minister provided free textbooks to the children of classes one to eight and distributed report cards to the students who had passed the examination. He also released 'School Readiness and Teacher Guide' and launched Rani Laxmibai Self-Defense Training Programme as part of Mission Shakti.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said, "The soul of the country resides in Uttar Pradesh as this region has been the focal point of education and health since ancient times. Kashi and Prayagraj have attracted people to higher education for a long time. Naimisharanya of Sitapur has been the land of scripting the Vedic knowledge of India."

The chief minister went on to say that Uttar Pradesh has long been the centre of India's knowledge, science and spirituality. "The actions taken by the state government over the past six years are now showing results in every field. On July 1, 2017, we launched the School Chalo Abhiyan in Kukrail. This



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath giving away text book to a schoolgirl during the launch of 'School Chalo Abhiyan' at Lok Bhawan in Lucknow on Saturday

programme has been a complete success," he said.

Yogi continued, "When Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed his position in 2014, he observed that there was a high rate of school dropouts, particularly among girls and those who had completed the fifth and eighth grades. That's why a slogan was given at that time, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao. Through this programme, we have tried to ensure that no child is deprived of schooling. For this, a large-scale programme was run with the help of our teachers, public representatives, and Education department personnel."

"In July 2017, there were 1.34 crore enrolled students; as

of today, there are 1.92 crore students. This increased number shows that this programme has progressed successfully within the state," he added.

Pointing out the condition of schools before 2017, Yogi said that the schools lacked basic amenities and the students had no uniforms and shoes. "Our government made the decision to provide two uniforms, bags, books, shoes, and socks to each school going child. Under Operation Kayakalp, public representatives, Education department officials, administrative officers, police officers and alumni adopted one school each. I am happy to report that as part of Operation Kayakalp, we covered

1.36 lakh schools out of a total of 1.56 lakh schools, providing them with basic amenities as well as smart classes and other facilities," he said.

He said that work was underway to provide the remaining 20,000 schools with basic amenities as well as smart classes and other facilities.

Chief Minister Yogi added that the curriculum had undergone significant change as well. The Basic Education Council is adopting the syllabus of NCERT. Along with the presence of teachers, the presence of officials of the Education department is being registered through the Manav Sampada portal. "You can estimate the changes in the education sector

by the fact that we have appointed 1.60 lakh teachers in basic and secondary education alone. This demonstrates that there were not many teachers," Yogi said.

The chief minister noted: "With the beginning of the School Chalo Abhiyan, it becomes our responsibility to see to it that every teacher and every headmaster holds a meeting with all the dignitaries of the ward or gram panchayat in which the school is located, and seeks their cooperation. They must meet parents. Door-to-door screening of each house should be done."

The chief minister directed the district magistrates to appoint a nodal officer who, along with the basic Shiksha adhikari (BSA), will ensure that the money is transferred to the parents' accounts through DBT (direct benefit transfer) after this program in every development block and every gram panchayat.

"The government has decided that every gram panchayat will have a playground. This will be on the land surrounding the school. Also, make arrangements for an open gym. Children should not go to roads to play. As long as the school runs, the children will use it and the rest of the gram panchayat will also use it. In this way, a big campaign can shape up in the state, which will not only create a good learning environment but also keep children physically and mentally healthy," the chief minister remarked. Yogi emphasised that the next one month was very important for basic education. "Only government schools run by the Basic Education Council should not be included in this. It should be our endeavor that schools run by government-aided private management are also linked with government schools," the chief minister said.

CM for including cleanliness programme in schools

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Assuring good health to the school going children, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that a cleanliness programme should be incorporated in schools so that teachers could educate children about the virtues of good health.

"The teachers must pay attention to cleanliness and availability of pure drinking water. Cleanliness programme in schools has to be carried forward," Yogi said while launching the School Chalo campaign here on Saturday.

On communicable diseases, Chief Minister Yogi said that Uttar Pradesh was a state of nine climatic zones and different diseases occurred in different areas. "Encephalitis kills thousands of kids each year in Kushinagar, Gorakhpur, the Terai of Nepal and Saharanpur. Varanasi and the surrounding areas used to be affected by kala-azar, Bareilly and its surrounding areas by malaria, Lucknow,

"The teachers must pay attention to cleanliness and availability of pure drinking water. Cleanliness programme in schools has to be carried forward"

Kanpur Nagar and Mathura by dengue and Jhansi and Bundelkhand region by chikungunya virus," he pointed out.

Regarding the simultaneous launch of the Communicable Disease Control Programme and the School Chalo Abhiyan, Chief Minister Yogi said that it was because children fall prey to these diseases. "Preventive steps should be taken in schools where the children should be taught how to protect themselves from these diseases," he said and added that the more information one gave to children

about cleanliness, the more success one gets in controlling communicable diseases. "In two years, we have to free every patient from TB (tuberculosis). Big programmes are going on for this. Every teacher in the village should try to help TB patients; the government will assist them," Yogi added.

The Communicable Disease Control Programme was launched on April 1, 2018, exactly five years ago. Organisations like Unicef, WHO contributed along with the departments of the state to take these programs to the masses. "Today Uttar Pradesh has set a model for the country for communicable disease control," the chief minister said.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also flagged off vector control vehicles at Lok Bhavan on Saturday. Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak was also present with the chief minister as the vector control vehicles left for their destinations in different districts.

Sharda programme to find, re-admit school dropouts

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To ensure that dropout students return to schools, the Yogi Adityanath government on Saturday started the School Har Din Aayen (Sharda) programme to find and re-admit dropout students. In the Right to Free and Compulsory Education to Children Act, 2009, there is a provision that children in the age group of 6-14 years who are out of school should be identified and enrolled in age-appropriate classes and special training should be arranged for them. "In order to effectively implement this provision, instructions have been given from time to time to run the 'Sharda' programme under the direction of the district magistrate," Director General School Education Vijay Kiran Anand said here.

In his order he said that there was a provision for re-admission of all out-of-school children under the 'Sharda' programme. He said children who were "out of school" could be divided into two categories -- children who have never been enrolled in school and children who were earlier enrolled in a school but for some reason they left the school without completing their education i.e. dropped out. The instructions state that school principals, teachers, shiksha mitras, instructors, and each BTC trainee



will conduct a household survey to identify out-of-school children and enroll them in classes that are appropriate for their age.

This campaign will be conducted in two phases in the academic session 2023-24. In the first phase, children will be identified and enrolled in age-appropriate classes from April 1, 2023 to May 15, 2023, while in the second phase, identification and enrollment of children of families affected by brick kiln mines and seasonal migration in age-appropriate classes will be done from July 1, 2023, to July 31, 2023. Besides, identification of out-of-school children with special needs will also be done simultaneously, which would be followed by their enrollment in the age-appropriate classes.

Migration certificates will be made available to the migrating children so that the child can be enrolled in

the school nearest to the place of migration. According to the instructions, the first assessment (baseline assessment) of all out-of-school children enrolled for special training in classes 2 to 8 will take place through the Sharda app after 15 days of identification. The second assessment will be done in October, the third assessment in January and the fourth assessment in March.

Based on the results of the assessment, a teaching plan will be prepared by the nodal teacher for the education of the nominated out-of-school children. Regular attendance of these children will be monitored regularly by the designated nodal teacher and headmaster for special training. To bring them into the mainstream, these children will be linked to social security schemes. Arrangements will be made to provide special training to out-of-school children enrolled in age-appropriate classes in schools on the basis of Sharda curriculum. For this, the nodal teachers have been trained at the block level.

Monitoring of 20 schools will be done every month by special educators and information regarding identification and attendance of out-of-school children will be uploaded through the Sharda app.

HC seeks govt reply on state funding of religious education

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court has directed the Central and state governments to file their respective affidavits explaining how religious education by madrasas can be funded from the state exchequer. The Allahabad High Court in September 2021 had asked a similar question from the state government whether the policy to provide financial aid to religious institutions was consistent with the secular scheme of the Constitution. It also asked whether state-aided madrasas also admit girl students.

"Whether this could be in violation of Articles 14, 25, 26, 29 and 30 of the Constitution of India," a single judge bench of Justice Dinesh Kumar Singh asked the both governments to explain in its order issued on March 30. The High Court issued this direction while hearing a petition by a madrasa school teacher, Azaj Ahmad, in a madrasa located in Samdariya Islamia, Shudnipur, district Jaunpur, pertaining to his salary dispute.

Dealing with the issue at hand, the court noted that the madrasa concerned, besides normal curriculum, was also imparting religious education. Therefore, the court sought the affidavits of the Central government through the secre-

tary, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India and from the state government through principal secretary, Department of Minority Welfare and Waqf, Government of Uttar Pradesh, answering the aforesaid questions within six weeks from the date of the order.

The court ordered, "If the petitioner has been teaching in Madrasa Samdariya Islamia, Shudnipur, district Jaunpur, and the said madrasa has received funds from the government(s), the petitioner should be paid salary as per his appointment letter dated 6-4-2016."

The UP government provides budgetary support of Rs 230 crore to 561 madrasas recognised by the UP Madrasa Board. In the current fiscal 2023-24, a provision of Rs 230 crore has been made in the budget for this. A graduate teacher in state funded recognised madrasa is given a salary of Rs 6,090 per month while the post-graduate teachers teaching Hindi, English, mathematics and science are paid Rs 12,000 per month. The madrasas are also given an annual grant of Rs 1 lakh for setting up and maintaining a computer laboratory. A provision of Rs 6.81 crore has been made in 2023-24 budget for construction of hostel and school building.

5 IAS officers transferred

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government, on Saturday, shifted five IAS officers. Durga Shakti Nagpal, Special Secretary (Health) has been posted as the district magistrate of Banda. Krishna Kumar, Special Secretary (Agriculture) has been posted as member (judicial) of the Board of Revenue.

Divya Prakash Giri, Special Secretary (Food and Civil Supplies) has been posted as staff officer to the chief secretary. Samukta Samaddar, who was waiting for posting, has been posted as Commissioner, National Capital Region and Anand Kumar, Special Secretary (Cultural Affairs) has been posted as member (judicial) Board of Revenue.

Cong garners support for Rahul in Amethi

Amethi (PTI): Congress provincial president Ajay Rai on Saturday said people of Amethi are Rahul Gandhi's strength, asking them to stand by the former MP just as they have always supported the Gandhi family in the past.

Alleging that the sitting BJP MP Smriti Irani lied to the people to get votes in the Lok Sabha elections, Rai said she had promised to provide sugar at Rs 13 rupees per kg, but today the price of sugar is not hidden from anyone.

On the other hand, the Gandhi family never lied like this for votes, Rai said, stressing that Amethi is in the heart and mind of Rahul Gandhi and he can never forget it.

"People of Amethi are the strength of Rahul Gandhi, the way the people of Amethi have supported the Gandhi family, in the same way we would like

them to once again stand with Rahul Gandhi," Rai said while talking to media persons here.

Amethi remained the stronghold of the Gandhi family till 2019 when BJP's Smriti Irani defeated Rahul Gandhi, who held the seat for the longest period, from 2004 to 2019. The Uttar Pradesh constituency has also been represented by his mother, father and uncle in the past. Alleging that Rahul Gandhi is being continuously harassed, he said, "Rahul Gandhi had given a speech in Karnataka and BJP changed the state and filed a case in Gujarat."


"These people took the case to another state and filed a case," he said referring to the defamation case leading to the disqualification of Gandhi following conviction and two-year jail term. Rai said the Modi government is so worried that it is doing everything in haste.



"His membership was terminated the very next day after he was sentenced to 2 years and was asked to vacate the house after giving 40 hours. BJP is only working on how to weaken Rahul and Congress."

Referring to the Hindenburg report on Adani, Rai said neither the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) nor the prime minister are saying anything on the matter, rather it is being said that the "attack on Adani is an attack on India."

"Today the BJP government is trying to suppress the voice of democracy, they are going to any level to suppress their opponents and constitutional institutions are being misused, we have seen all this," he said. "We are celebrating Amrit Mahotsav the Amrit Kaal of democracy but democracy is being strangled. Besides, the questions raised by the opposition are not being answered and those raising them are being disqualified," he said, adding that this is very unfortunate. "Ours is a democratic country and our forefathers have made great sacrifices for its freedom. We have fought a long battle, if there is any danger to democracy, we are not going to sit silently, it is being opposed in the whole country, opposition parties are also opposing this incident," Rai added.

 BANK OF MAHARASHTRA		Zonal Office-Opposite LDA Office, Vipin Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010, E-Mail- legal_luc@mahabank.co.in Head Office: Lokmangal, 1501, Shivajinagar, Pune-5		
[Rule-8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property)				
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the Bank of Maharashtra under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under Sub-section (2) of Section 13 read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued under said Act. The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, Notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession symbolic of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with the Rule 8 of the said rules				
Sl. No.	Name & Address of Borrower & Guarantors	Amount due to bank as per notice	The Details of the properties mortgaged of the bank and taken possession by the bank	Demand Notice Date Possession Date
FARRUKHABAD BRANCH				
1.	M/S Shree Nav Durga Saree Centre Prop. Pawan Kumar Sharma S/o Sh. Bal Krishan Sharma H. No. 3/63, Senapati Street, Kaimganj Farrukhabad-209625 UP (Borrower) Sh. Sushil kumar S/o Sh. Suresh Chandra H. No. 3/50, Mohalla Rakabganj Khurd Tehsil Sadar Farrukhabad-209625 (Guarantor)	Rs. 1026268.55/- + Unapplied respective Interest p.a. w.e.f. 27.11.2022 + penal interest and other charges/expenses	Equitable Mortgage of all those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at Mohalla Astval taral (kharbandi Andar Shahar) Pargana Pahara Tehsil Sadar Dist Farrukhabad Area: 140.32 sq mts. Survey No 3/24-C Area known as Hathu Mintu Khan Bounded by: East: Plot of Abdul Ahmed North: Govt Rd 20 ft West: 5 ft wide street South: House of Akram	28.11.2022
				28.03.2023
2.	Mr. Pinku Sakya W/o Sh. Ram Swaroop Vill Salempur Post Bartal, Nawabganj Farrukhabad-209601 UP (Borrower) Smt. Rajni W/o Sh. Pinku Sakya Vill Salempur Post Bartal, Nawabganj Farrukhabad -209601 (Guarantor)	Rs. 938926.01/- + Unapplied respective Interest p.a. w.e.f. 27.11.2022 + penal interest and other charges/expenses	Equitable Mortgage of all those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at Village & Post Nawabganj, Ganipur, Pargana Shamsabad West, Tehsil Kalyanganj Tehsil Sadar Dist Farrukhabad Area: 61.34 sq mts. Bounded by: East: Gali 12 ft North: Khet of Sh Sharafat Ali West: House of Rajendra South: House of Banke Lal	28.11.2022
				28.03.2023
3.	M/s Khawaja Gareeb Nawaj Zari Art Prop. Sh. Chand babu S/o Sh. Mausam Ali H. No. 170, Gherhamu Khan Tehsil Sadar Farrukhabad-209625 (Borrower) Smt. Nasreen W/o Sh. Mausam Ali H.No. 170, Gherhamu Khan Tehsil Sadar Farrukhabad-209625 (Guarantor)	Rs. 771676.70 + Unapplied respective Interest p.a. w.e.f. 27.11.2022 + penal interest and other charges/expenses	Equitable Mortgage of all those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at H. No. 5/568, Mohalla Gheer Shamu Khan Pargana pahara, Tehsil Sadar Dist Farrukhabad Area: 44.22 sq mts. Bounded by: East: Street North: House of Rafeeq Mohammad Khan West: Plot of Praveen South: Rasta	28.11.2022
				28.03.2023
4.	M/s Jai Maa Durga & Aata Udhog Prop. Suman Gupta W/o Sh. Vinay Kumar Gupta H. No. 1/398 Granganj Fatehgarh Farrukhabad-209601 U.P (Borrower) Sh. Vinay Kumar Gupta S/o Sh. Ram Saran Gupta H. No. 1/398 Granganj Fatehgarh Farrukhabad-209601 (Guarantor)	Rs. 1184052.32 + Unapplied respective Interest p.a. w.e.f. 27.11.2022 + penal interest and other charges/expenses	Equitable Mortgage of all those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at Mohalla Granganj Police Line Katchahry Road near dist jail Chouraha Paragan Pahara Tehsil Sadar Survey No 1/39C Dist Farrukhabad Area: 16.41 sq mts Bounded by: East: Plot of Dvesh Chand North: Plot of Sh Satish Chand West: Rasta 10ft South: Nala Badahu Govt Road	28.11.2022
				28.03.2023
5.	Mrs Geeta Pandey W/o Pradeep Kumar H. No. 4/47, Moh Hathu Mintu Khan Pargana pahara Tehsil Sadar Farukhabad-209625	Rs. 326340/- + Unapplied respective Interest p.a. w.e.f. 28.11.2022 + penal interest and other charges/expenses	Equitable Mortgage of all those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at Vill Tausar, Ta Amritpur Dist. Farrukhabad Survey No 1621, Known as Hathu Mintu Khan. Area: 64.65 sq mts. Bounded by: East: Houase of Asha Devi West: House of Roop Kumar. North: Rasta South: House of pratpal	28.11.2022
				28.03.2023
BAHRAICH BRANCH				
6.	M/S Munna Traders Prop. Mr Ali Ahamad R/o Ghantaghar Chowk, Churi Wali Gali, Chowk bazar, Bahraich- 271801 ALSO AT: Mohalla H. No. 607, Qazipura (North) Bahraich-271801 (Borrower) Mrs. Tabassum Siddiqui W/o Mr. Ali Ahamad R/o Ghanta ghar Chowk, Churi Wali Gali, Chowk bazar, Bahraich-271801 (Guarantors)	Rs. 678914/- + Unapplied respective Interest rate p.a.w.e.f. 30.11.2022 + penal interest and other charges/expenses	Mortgage of Property situated at Plot Gata No. 277, Area 190 sqft- Vill Ameenpur Nagaur, Pargana Bahraich, Dist Bahraich-271801 Owner: Mrs. Tabassum Siddiqui w/o Sh. Ali Ahamad. Bounded by North: 12 ft kachha Road East: Khet Liyakat Ali West: Khet Sabbir South: Khet Mahendra Kumar	30.11.2022
				27.03.2023
7.	M/S Abdul salam Aara Machine, Prop. Mohd Abdul Salam S/o Abdul Khalik, R/O Premises no 343, New No 392, Moh. GudraTehsil & District: Bahraich 271801 (UP) (Borrower) Mrs.Husn Bano Alias Hoor Bano w/o Abdul Salam R/o Premises no 343, New No 392, Moh. Gudra Tehsil & District: Bahraich 271801 (Guarantors)	Rs. 1032341/- + Unapplied respective Interest rate p.a. w.e.f. 15.11.2022 + penal interest and other charges/expenses	Equitable Mortgage of Property situated at H. No 343 (Old) & New 392, Mohalla-Gudri, Near Masjid Sare Khan, Bahraich-271801 Owner: Mrs. Mrs.Husn Bano Alias Hoor Bano w/o Abdul Salam) Area 81.65 sq Mts Bounded by North: House of Abdul Khalik East: Rasta 14 ft 6 inch wide CC after that Mazar Sharif West: House of Nizamuddin South: House of Shareef Khan	16.11.2022
				27.03.2023
Lakhimpur Branch				
8.	M/S Munesh Gur & Rab Udyog, Prop. Mr. Muneesh Mishra S/o Mr. Ram Pramod Mishra, R/O Village Pakariya Kishunpur, Tehsil Mitauli Lakhimpur Kheri-262727 (Borrower) Mr. Ram Pramod Mishra S/o Sh. Sunderlak R/O Village Pakariya Kishunpur, Tehsil Mitauli Lakhimpur Kheri -262727 (Guarantors)	Rs. 1042527.90 plus interest thereon @ contractual rate plus other charges w.e.f. 11.12.2022	EquitableMortgage of Owner Mr. Muneesh Mishra S/o Mr. Ram Pramod Mishra) All those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at Village rasoolpur, Pargana Paila Tehsil Mitauli, Lakhimpur Kheri-262727 Area: 15000 sqfts. Bounded as: - North:- Nala, South:- Nemaonga Bhadura Road, East:- Land Anoop Kumar, West:- Land of Prakash	12.12.2022
				27.03.2023
Amethi Branch				
9.	M/s Singh Traders Prop. Mr. Sangam Singh S/o Sh. Subhash Singh R/O Misrauli Bazar, Antu Road Amethi-227405 Also at: Post Kasara, Tarapur, Amethi 227405 (Borrower) Sh. Subhash Singh S/O Sh. Ramkaran Singh R/O Post Kasara, Tarapur, Amethi 227405 (Guarantors)	Rs. 1398692.91 plus interest thereon @ contractual rate plus other charges w.e.f. 29.11.2022	Equitable Mortgage of (Owner- Mr. Sangam Singh S/o Sh. Subhash Singh) All those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at Plot No.89/90, village chachha, Tehsil Amethi Area: 475.0 sqmts. Bounded as:- North: Plot No 84, South: Plot No 89, East: Plot No 91/92, West:- Plot No 86	30.11.2022
				27.03.2023
Maharajganj Branch				
10.	Mrs. Punam Kumari W/o Sh. Sandip Kumar, R/O Bismil Nagar, Ward No. 22 Nagar palika Parishad Maharajganj- 273303 (Borrower) Smt. Saraswati Devi W/o Sh. Subhash Prasad Bismil Nagar, Ward No. 22 Nagar palika Parishad Maharajganj- 273303 (Guarantors)	Rs. 1026183 plus interest thereon @ contractual rate plus other charges w.e.f. 01.12.2022	Equitable Mortgage of Owner- Smt. Saraswati Devi W/o Sh. Subhash Prasad All those pieces and parcel of property with construction & fixture there being & lying at bismil Nagar, Ward No 22, b Nagar palika Parishad, Maharajganj Arazi No 1327 Area : 81.78 sqmts. Bounded as: - North: House Sri Vishwanath South:- Land Sri Vijay Kumar, East:- Kacha Rasta less than 4 mtr. West:- House Sri Lata Nayak	12.12.2022
				27.03.2023
The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charge of Bank Of Maharashtra for an amount here in above mentioned. The details of the properties mortgaged to the Bank and taken possession by the Bank are as above. 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.				
Date:02.04.2023		Place: Lucknow		Authorized Officer, Bank of Maharashtra

Fire breaks out in Nehru Complex

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A massive fire broke out at the dense area of Chowk in Prayagraj on Saturday morning. According to the information, 210 shops have come under the grip of fire. Of these, 30 shops have been completely gutted. As soon as the information about the accident was received, 20 vehicles of police and fire brigade reached the spot. Crews brought the fire under control after several hours.

Within a short-while, smoke engulfed all over the area. The complex has shops selling clothes and plastic items. Fire broke out due to short circuit. Nearby shops were also closed. Actually, the place where the fire started is the densest area of the city. There are more than 10,000 shops in this area.

Clock Tower and Chowk area is the densest and congested area of the city. People from all over the district come here to buy everything including clothes. Every day a crowd of lakhs of people gather here. Shopkeeper Mohd Rauf told the police that the transformer is right next to the Nehru Complex. There was a short circuit in the transformer at



Massive fire broke out in Nehru Complex located at densely populated area of Chowk in Prayagraj

around 8.30 am. After which, due to sudden winds, the fire engulfed many shops in a moment. Flames and smoke started rising from these shops.

Shopkeeper Raja said that three years ago, a huge fire broke out in Nehru Complex. In which 200 shops were burnt. Today again the fire destroyed

it again. He said that so far 30 shops have been burnt to ashes. Shopkeepers; leader Lalu Mittal has expressed displeasure over DM, SP not reaching the spot on time.

Seeing the rising flames, shopkeepers started taking out goods from their shops. They took more clothes kept in thier shop to a safe place. It was fortunate that the fire started in the morning. If it happened somewhere in the afternoon, there would have been a lot of trouble, he added.

CFO RK Pandey said that at 8.30 in the morning, the fire was reported in Nehru complex. 20 fire brigade vehicles and more than 100 personnel brought the fire under control with the help of JCB and hydraulic machines.

He said that there are 210 shops in Nehru Complex which is built on the ground floor and three floors. About 30 shops were affected due to the readiness of the fire service. The shops are full of inflammable material plastic shoe slippers, cosmetics, clothes storage. Goods were evacuated from the rest of the shops. Prima facie the cause of the fire was said to be short circuit. However, no loss of life was reported in this massive fire, added Pandey.

Pachauri flags off fogging fleet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The BJP Member of Parliament, Satyadev Pachauri, while flagging off the fogging fleet from Kanshiram Hospital on Saturday said the Uttar Pradesh Government has geared up to ensure they not only bring down the number of cases of communicable diseases but drastically reduce the number of deaths. He said environmental factors influence the spread of communicable diseases and water, sanitation, food and air quality were vital elements in the transmission of communicable diseases and in the spread of diseases prone to cause epidemics.

Addressing the gathering the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Alok Ranjan said there were certain factors which gave rise to communicable diseases and they were infectious agent, reservoir, portal of exit, mode of transmission, portal of entry,

and susceptible host. He said the UP Government has worked out a strategy to stop germs from spreading by interrupting this chain at its link. He said the drive which was being launched in this month was aimed at making people aware of the importance of cleanliness, sanitisation, and fogging.

He said the State government has also issued directives to the health authorities to set up special centres, ICU beds, deploy trained medical personnel and doctors and manpower and equipment has also been pumped in the diagnostic centres. He said urbanisation brings with it the problems of housing, sanitation, pollution, drinking water, and health care facilities. He said even the rural areas were now not untouched by urbanisation and with the increasing population densities and urban poverty encouraged the spread of viruses, especially under poor sanitary conditions the people

were more susceptible to pulmonary and gastrointestinal infections.

Dr Ranjan said climate can affect disease transmission in a variety of ways and the distribution and population size of disease vectors can be heavily affected by local climate. He said flooding after heavy rains can result in sewage overflow and widespread water contamination. He said since the outbreak of COVID-19 there had been constant emergence of similar viruses of different strains causing health problems across the country.

He said occasionally, an outbreak or cluster of disease was seen in a population for which the cause was unclear and these outbreaks may be due to a new or modified pathogen, a natural toxin, an initially undetected release of a chemical, or over-exposure to ionizing radiation from an unknown source. He advised people to immunise against

infectious diseases wash and dry hands regularly and above all stay at home if one were sick. He advised people to mandatorily cover coughs and sneezes as well.

He said infectious agents were plentiful, mutate rapidly, and can become resistant to drugs if not destroyed completely. He said low vaccination rates, poor nutrition, age (young and elderly), and immunosuppression all contribute to infectious risk. He said once it has been established that an emergency condition existed, there must be a prompt and thorough response for communicable disease control.

He said the UP government has set up overall goals like rapid assessment, prevention, surveillance, outbreak control, and disease management. A large number of medical officials and para medical team were present at the time of flagging off of the fleet.

Two killed, 2 others injured as mobile tower falls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Two persons were killed and two others were seriously injured when, during the thunder storm followed by rains, a mobile tower fell on them near Galla Mandi Samadhi Pulia in Vidhnu police station area late Friday evening. The incident took place when they were passing that way. One of them was killed on the spot, while another succumbed to his injury at the hospital. The condition of two others was also stated to be critical at the hospital. A native of Chandi Sisolar village, Hamirpur, mason Horilal alias Mastana (60) was presently living in a hut near Sagarपुर Road in Galla Mandi. Late Friday evening, during strong thunder storm and rains, when he was passing through the mobile tower, it suddenly fell on him and killed on the spot. Besides, Ramgopal Yadav (35) of Kharakpur; Kalloo Balmiki (40) of Lakhpat Vihar and Kalloo Prajapati of Kurara Jhalokhar, Hamirpur, standing there were seriously injured after being crushed

under the tower. Police admitted the injured to the LLR (Hallet) Hospital where Ramgopal was also pronounced dead. The condition of Kalloo Balmiki and Kalloo Prajapati was stated to be critical. SHO Satish Chandra Rathaur said after admitting the injured to the hospital, kin of the deceased had been informed. On the basis of complaint, further action would be taken up in the matter, he said.

BODY OF PAN SHOPOWNER RECOVERED: The charred body of the pan shopowner Gyan Chandra Sahu, missing in the Bansmandi readymade cloth market fire incident, was recovered after 30 hours on Saturday morning. After recovery of the body, panic prevailed among his family members. A native of Bhatipur village, Khadesar Shambhuwa in Vidhnu police station area, Gyan Chandra Sahu was running his pan shop in front of the readymade cloth market AR Tower in Bansmandi for the past 20 years. His family comprised

wife Deepa and two children. Elder son Ajay Kumar said after closing the shop, father Gyan Chandra Sahu used to sleep on the rooftop of the AR Tower. Due to rains late Thursday night, he had staired down from the rooftop and thereafter went missing. It was apprehended that Gyan Chandra Sahu was burnt alive in the fire which broke out in the readymade cloth market around 2 am. On Friday morning, amid the devastating fire, when family members found him missing, they had started tracing him. On Saturday morning, after control of the fire to some extent, fire fighting jawans entered the premises and recovered charred body of Gyan Chandra Sahu from the third floor.

On hearing about the recovery of his body, panic prevailed among the family members who kept on sitting in front of the AR Tower since Friday morning. It was the first casualty reported in the Bansmandi Fire incident.

ADARSH WINS GOLD MEDAL: Adarsh Malhotra

won the gold medal in 100 mtrs race of saking by completing it in 45 seconds in the Roller Skating & Cycling National Championship organised by the Special Olympic Bharat in Gurugram from March 29 to 31. He is student of Prerna Special School, Cantonment Board, Kanpur. At the same time, Sanjit Upadhyaya of Ummid Asha Kiran Air Force School, Kanpur, won the silver medal in 10 km cycling race. They represented the city under the leadership of coach Satyendra Singh Yadav on behalf of the Uttar Pradesh East Zone Special Olympic Association. CEO Cantonment Board Anuj Goel, nominated vice president Lakhanlal Omar, Area Director of UP Special Olympic Bharat, East Zone Manoj Singh, Principal (Prerna Special School) Dr Shikha Agarwal, senior physiotherapist Subrato Bhadra, Alka Mishra, Principal (Ummid Asha Kiran Air Force School) Richa Tripathi and coach Krishna Sharma congratulated the players for winning medals for their institutions.

CORE ends fiscal year on high note

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Central Organisation For Railway Electrification with its Head Quarters at Prayagraj ended the financial year 2022-23 on a high note with an unbeatable record of highest ever electrification of 4767 RKM. Government of India has set a target to electrify the entire BG route by December 2023, taking into consideration inherent advantages of electric traction. CORE under the guidance of its General Manager, Pramod Kumar scaled new heights by electrifying 4767 RKM in financial year 2022-23 surpassing its previous record of 4283 RKM in financial year 2021-22. To achieve this national mission, CORE is playing a pivotal role and working as a dedicated team, towards making the nation self-reliant by developing a safe, energy efficient, eco-friendly and economical rail transport system through its nine project units.

Other Public Sector Organisations and Zonal Railways are also involved in Railway electrification. However, CORE has done the lion's share of commissioning which is approximately 74 per cent of overall electrification works carried out in the financial year 2022-23.

Secundrabad unit of CORE contributed 1050 RKM which is the highest ever electrification in the history of any project unit. This was followed by



GM CORE addressing officials at Headquarters.

Bangalore unit which commissioned 713 RKM followed by Ahmedabad unit with 669 RKM. Jaipur contributed 670 RKM, New Jalpaigudi commissioned 580 RKM, Ambala commissioned 453 RKM, Chennai did 406 RKM, Lucknow contributed 194 RKM and Kolkata commissioned 31 RKM during the financial year 2022-23.

Apart from electrification of sections under the jurisdiction of various railways and in various States, CORE has been relentlessly targeting the commissioning of Traction Substations for strengthening the power supply system and ensuring smooth and safe train operations. In the financial year 2022-23, a total of 61 Traction Substations (TSS) have been commissioned by CORE which a significant jump of 80 per cent compared to last financial year. Project units Secundrabad tops the list with 12 TSS. In other pro-

ject units Bangalore commissioned 6 TSS, Ahmedabad commissioned four TSS, Jaipur commissioned 10 TSS, Ambala commissioned six TSS, Chennai commissioned five TSS, Lucknow commissioned six TSS, New Jalpaigudi commissioned one TSS and Kolkata commissioned 11 TSS. In the month of March alone, a total of 21 Traction Sub-Stations were commissioned in different railways which is a record for TSS commissioning on a monthly basis. Earlier, 11 Sub-Stations were commissioned in the month of January 2023. This shows the importance CORE has attached to commissioning of Sub-Stations for smooth train operations.

Similarly, in this financial year a total of 50 Tower Wagon Sheds have been commissioned which is a quantum jump of 212 per cent compared to the last financial year. Tower Wagon sheds are an indispensable part of traction main-

tenance works and CORE is taking all out efforts to commission the balance tower wagon sheds at the earliest.

In the financial year 2022-23, CORE has electrified many important sections, which will not only increase the sectional capacity and operational speed but also provide impetus to the socio-economic development of the adjoining regions. An important electrified route from Prayagraj to Bhopal has been achieved with the electrification of Ishanagar -Udaipura section (75 RKM) apart from North Central Railway becoming 100 per cent electrified. With the electrification of the Sikar-Churu section (87 RKM), entire Shekhawati region, which is a major business and tourism hub, is now directly connected to Delhi on electric traction.

With the electrification of Shohratgarh -Pachpherwa -Subhagpur section (118 RKM) the entire alternative stretch from Gonda via Balrampur -Anand Nagar to Gorakhpur has been fully electrified. At the same time entire State of Uttar Pradesh as well as NER have been fully electrified.

With the electrification of Pangri- Latur Road section (129 RKM), the entire stretch from Pune to Secunderabad via Kurduwadi, Latur Road and Vikarabad has been fully electrified. This will provide an alternative route to Pune-Wadi-Secunderabad section along with Central Railway being fully electrified.

Umesh Pal had keen interest in politics

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Umesh Pal, who was the main witness in the MLA Raju Pal murder case, had a keen interest in politics. His ambition was to become a big leader. He first joined BSP, then SP and later BJP for ticket in assembly elections, though he did not get ticket from any party. However, in the Panchayat elections in 2008, he contested the election of District Panchayat member from Kaudihari ward, in which he was victorious. After this, his intention was to become an MLA and he started contacting big leaders.

If sources are to be believed, 52 witnesses were

presented on behalf of Mafia Atiq in the Umesh Pal kidnapping case. Several witnesses told in their testimony before the court that there was no enmity between Umesh Pal and Atiq Ahmed. Both lived and helped each other. When Umesh Pal was contesting the election of District Panchayat member in the District Panchayat elections, many of Atiq's henchmen were roaming day and night from village to village and working hard to vote in favour of Umesh Pal. The people of Atiq left no stone unturned to make Umesh Pal win the election. Its effect also showed and Umesh Pal won the election.

Umesh Pal had tried hard

to get ticket from SP from Phaphamau assembly in 2022 assembly elections. He had joined SP and was spreading propaganda in the area. Many of his posters along with Akhilesh Yadav were also going viral on social media. Along with this, he used to post photos of participating in SP's programmes on Facebook and other social media accounts. SP had given ticket to Ansar Ahmed from Phaphamau at the last moment in ticket distribution for assembly elections. After this he had taken the membership of BJP.

Umesh Pal was shot dead on February 24 at around 5 pm near his Sulemsarai residence. He was returning home with

his two government gunman after appearing in the district court in his own kidnapping case when he was riddled with bullets as soon as he got down from the car. Umesh Pal had created a page on Facebook in the name of Umesh Pal 254 Phaphamau Vidhan Sabha. He had joined BJP after parting ways with SP. After this, he used to share his photos with BJP leaders on social media. He used to actively participate in BJP programmes. All the photos with Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya, Siddharth Nath Singh, Union Minister SP Singh Baghel can be seen on his page. Also, he used to share photos and videos of participating in BJP programmes.

Millet is magical foodgrains

KANPUR (PNS): The Dean, Arts Faculty, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Prof CL Maurya while addressing the closing function of the special camp of National Service Scheme said Millets were magical foodgrains which were highly beneficial for the human health. He said the government has decided to emphasise on the promotion of the consumption of millets and for this special awareness campaigns were being held everywhere.

He said the first and the

foremost beneficial feature of Millets is that it drastically reduces the blood sugar level and this in this say it keeps the glucose level under control. He said with diabetes becoming a global epidemic it was felt that millet use in human consumption will naturally control the fluctuating glucose levels. He said the onus rested on the parents and teachers to apprise the children and students the importance of millets in their daily diet. He said it was high time that the people make their children aware of the

harmful effects of junk food and the benefits of millets.

Addressing the students Dr Archana Singh said Millet was rich in dietary fibre, both soluble and insoluble. She said the insoluble fibre in millet was known as a "prebiotic," which meant it supported good bacteria in ones digestive system. She said this type of fibre was also important for adding roughage to stools, which helped keep one regular and reduced risk of colon cancer. She said the varsity had decided to promote use of millets in

the day to day diet by taking the help of the Home Science department. She said families can use millets for breakfast by preparing Millet Upma, Dosas, pancakes, Ragi Idlis, Millet Vermicelli. She said similarly for lunch they can prepare Millet chapatis, Millet Khichdi, Millet salads, Millet Pongal and also use it for preparing snacks like Ragi and Rajgeera Laddus, chikkis etc. Dr RK Pathak also addressed the students and the vote of thanks was delivered by Dr Rashmi Singh.

34 wheat procurement centres opened

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 34 procurement centres have been opened in the district to procure wheat. The wheat procurement will remain in effect till April 15.

The Additional District Magistrate (Food & Supply) Jawahar Lal Sriavstava made a review on Friday at Rifle Club here regarding the preparations for wheat procurement and issued directives to the in-charges of procurement centres. The district food marketing officer Sunil Bharati and AR-Cooperative Ajit Kumar Singh were also present in the review meeting.

Bharati informed that as many as 34 procurement centres have been opened in the district to procure the wheat including 12 centres of Food department, 19 centres of PCF, 2 centres of PCU and one centre of FCI and added that the wheat procurement would remain in effect till April 15.

The wheat procurement centres will remain open from 9 am to 6 pm and the wheat will be procured from the farmers at the MSP of Rs 2125

per quintal, he informed and added that the government has so far not set a target regarding the wheat procurement for the rabi marketing year of 2023-2024. The procurement of wheat will be ensured on MSP till the farmers reach the centre for the procurement, he informed, adding that the wheat would be procured as per the fixed standard for the government at centre.

The special attention should be paid on the cleanliness in the standard while procuring the wheat, Bharati directed the in-charges of centres and added that the arrangement of all the requisite equipment and other requirements should be made at centres. The procurement centers will remain open on each day barring on Sunday and public holidays, he informed and directed the in-charges to make arrangements to save wheat from rain and other natural calamities. The farmers are required to get registration on the portal of Food department -www.fcs.ip.gov.in for the wheat procurement and the wheat will be procured by elec-

tronic point of purchase machine through biometric certification, he informed.

DIRECTIVE: The District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam has directed the concerned officer to get the children enrolled in the schools by preparing a list of slum localities and brick-kilns.

The pace to saturate the schools under the Kayakalp Yojana should be speeded up, he added while chairing the meeting of district level task force under the district committee on education held on Friday at the auditorium in the Collectorate here.

To prepare the list of slum localities and brick-kilns and get the children enrolled in the schools and ensure the attendance of the children at least 60 per cent in the classes, the DM directed and added that the officers should make efforts for the purpose at a vast level. The DM directed BEO to make a review as school-wise and launch a drive for a week to enhance the attendance of the children in the schools.

The DM reviewed the saturation of 19 parameters in

schools under the Operation including Kayakalp uploading on Prerana Portal, DBT model, School Chalo Abhiyan, Mission Prenana Phase-II, implementation of Nipun Bharat, etc and directed the officers to ensure the saturation of all the schools by speeding the work on all points.

There should not remain any work incomplete in the next meeting and the responsibility would be fixed of the responsible officers if the progress is found unsatisfactory and the action should be ascertained, the DM cautioned.

The ramp and rallying should be constructed in all the Parishadiya schools under Kayakalp Yojana and also ensure the cent per cent availability of toilets separate for boys and girls, the DM directed, adding that the tiling work should also be completed in all the schools against the target. The work under Kayakalp Yojana should be done on the priority basis, he directed and added that the mid-day meal should be cooked as per menu and special attention should be paid on the quality.

PM reviews op readiness of Armed Forces

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday asked the three Services to stay ready to deal with these new and emerging threats, emphasising that all steps are being taken to equip the Armed Forces with necessary weapons and technologies. He made these assertions during the Combined Commanders' Conference in Bhopal which began on March 30. He also reviewed the security situation and operational readiness of the Armed Forces during the valedictory session of Combined Commanders' Conference. He was also updated about the steps underway for the creation of Theatre Commands in an effort to fight the modern day war with perfect synergy between the three Services namely army, navy and air force, sources said.

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

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



nation building and providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) assistance to friendly countries.

During the final day of the session, various topics including aspects of digitisation; cyber security; challenges of social media; Aatmanirbharta; absorption of Agniveers and jointness were discussed.

In a significant development from the past, the scope of the conference was expanded this year, wherein, a few multi-layered and interactive sessions were conducted with participation of soldiers from every command of the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force, including the Tri-Services Andaman and Nicobar Command.

Now India, Malaysia can trade in ₹



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trade between India and Malaysia can now be settled in Indian Rupee (INR) in addition to the current modes of settlement in other currencies. This follows the decision by the Reserve Bank of India in July 2022 to allow settlement of international trade in Indian Rupee (INR), the ministry of external affairs(MEA) said here on Saturday.

This initiative by the RBI is aimed at facilitating the growth of global trade and to support the interests of the global trading community in Indian Rupee (INR).

India International Bank of Malaysia (IIBM), based in Kuala Lumpur, has operationalised this mechanism by opening a Special Rupee Vostro Account through its Corresponding Bank in India i.e. Union Bank of India, MEA said.

Raut gets death threat from Bishnoi, 1 held

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Less than 24 hours after Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and MP Sanjay Raut received a threat message on his WhatsApp on alleged behalf of mafia leader Lawrence Bishnoi that he would be shot dead in New Delhi, the Maharashtra police on Saturday detained one person for questioning in Pune for questioning.

Identifying the person detained as one Rahul Talekar who works at a hotel in Pune, the police said that he had been handed over to the Mumbai police for further investigations. Raut had received a whatsapp message late on Friday evening warning that he would be shot dead with an AK-47 in New Delhi along the lines of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala who was eliminated last year.

Raut got a threat in a WhatsApp message on Friday evening warning that he would be shot dead with an AK-47 in New Delhi, with reference to the killing of the Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala last year. The threat received by Raut reward thus: "Anti-Hindu, I will kill you. Meet me in Delhi, will finish you off with an AK47. Like Moosewala. Treat this as a message from Lawrence Bishnoi," with a reference to Salman Khan. Immediately after he received



the threatening message, Raut had complained to the Mumbai Police Commissioner about it. Raut's MLA-brother Sunil Raut lodged a formal complaint with the Kanjurmarg police on Saturday morning.

Based on the technical evidence gathered by the Mumbai police that the person who had sent the whatsapp message to Raut was in Pune, the crime branch sleuths of the Pune detained Talekar, a resident of Wadgaon Sheri, from a hotel at Kharadi Chandannagar in Pune.

While it is not known immediately as to the motive behind Talekar handing a death threat to Raut, the detained person has told the police that he had sent a threat message to the Sena (UBT) MP under the influence of alcohol. He reportedly told the police that he had telephoned Raut many times, but the latter had not taken his call. Preliminary investigations have revealed that Talekar had no political affiliation nor were there any criminal antecedents. Soon

afterwards, Raut complained to Mumbai Police Commissioner, and a probe was initiated, leading to the detention of the suspect in Pune. The Mumbai police are questioning him on his links with the Bishnoi gang and also the recent email threats issued to Bollywood actor Salman Khan.

Reacting to the latest death threat, Raut – whose security was beefed up immediately after he received the whatsapp threat message – said: "I have been targetted in a similar manner in the past as well. But, I will not be cowed down by such threats".

"My security as well as the security covers of several Maha Vikas Aghadi leaders' security have been withdrawn and deployed for the gaddars' (traitors)... What has the government done about this?" Raut asked. Alluding to similar threats issued to prominent NCP leader of Thane Jitendra Awhad, Raut accused the state government of ignoring such threats faced by opposition leaders.

Leaders of Opposition in the State Assembly Ajit Pawar and his counterpart from Upper House Ambadas Danve, NCP MP Supriya Sule and Congress leaders expressed serious concerns over threats and urged government to take matter seriously.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk will visit India for three days starting Monday at the invitation of President Droupadi Murmu. He will be accompanied by Lyonpo Dr. Tandi Dorji, Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, and senior officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

The visit is in keeping with the long standing tradition of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries, the ministry of external affairs said here on Saturday. During the visit, King of Bhutan will meet with the President and the Prime Minister.

The External Affairs Minister and senior officials will call on the King of Bhutan. India and Bhutan enjoy unique ties of friendship and cooperation, which are characterized by understanding and mutual trust.

The visit would provide an opportunity to both sides to review entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and to further advance the close bilateral partnership, including economic and development cooperation.

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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Amid the family feud over Hassan Assembly seat in poll-bound Karnataka, former chief minister H D Kumaraswamy on Saturday said he will not entertain any 'rebellion.' He also said the second list of candidates will be released on Monday including for the Hassan seat.

The Hassan seat has become a big headache for Janata Dal (Secular), which is witnessing a rebellion within the first family of the party. The party which was among the first to release its list of can-

didates has not been able to finalise a name for Hassan constituency yet.

The reason being that the former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's daughter-in-law and H D Revanna's wife Bhavani Revanna is adamant about contesting the election from Hassan, which is a JD(S) stronghold.

It is now learnt that the Bhavani has warned that she would contest the election as an independent candidate if she is denied a ticket. Her two sons – Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna and MLC Suraj Revanna too have backed their mother. "I will not entertain any rebel-

lion. I have already said this several times that we will respond to the sentiments of the party workers. Even if there is pressure it will not work because the final decision will be left to the wishes of the workers," Kumaraswamy told reporters.

According to sources in the JD(S), Kumaraswamy is keen on fielding H S Prakash's son H P Swaroop. H S Prakash was a four-time MLA from this constituency who lost the 2018 Assembly election to BJP's Preetham Gowda. Six months after losing the Assembly election, Prakash passed away.

The JD(S) second-in-command wanted to field Swaroop keeping in view the large support base and sympathy he enjoys among voters, the sources said.

They added that 89-year old Deve Gowda, who is not keeping well, called the leaders from Hassan to discuss the issue at his Bengaluru residence. With the Hassan conundrum growing to enormous proportions, senior party leaders reached Bengaluru on Saturday to find a way out. "Some of our leaders have arrived here with regard to Hassan constituency and they too made an appeal.

FROM PAGE 1

DEFENCE EXPORT SEES 10-FOLD JUMP IN LAST 6 YRS

India has earmarked 75 per cent of this year's defence capital procurement budget for locally made weapons and systems, a move aimed at unlocking new opportunities for achieving self-reliance targets and ramping up the country's defence exports.

Moreover, the Government has banned import of more than 200 items in an effort to give a fillip to the Indian industry. Around Rs one lakh crore has been set aside for domestic procurement this year, compared to Rs 84,598 crore, Rs 70,221 crore and Rs 51,000 crore in the three previous years.

GEORGIA 1ST US STATE TO PASS RESOLUTION AGAINST HINDUPHOBIA

A move in this regard was spearheaded by the Atlanta chapter of the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), which organised the first-ever Hindu Advocacy Day held on March 22 at the Georgia State Capitol. It was attended by around 25 lawmakers — both Republicans and Democrats — who joined the Hindu community to understand its concerns, pledge to create ways to protect the community against discrimination and facilitate the inclusion of Hindu voices in important decision-making processes in the state. "It was a true honour to work with Rep McDonald and Rep Jones as well as other lawmakers who guided us through the whole process of getting this County Resolution passed," said Rajeev Menon, CoHNA vice president.

"We also heard that all the lawmakers had been working really long hours given the amount of legislative items on the agenda, but still decided to join us at the Advocacy Day to show how much they value the Hindu community," he said.

CoHNA general secretary Shobha Swamy said, "The issues faced by Hindu Americans in Georgia and the rest of the country via false, Hinduphobic narratives are negatively impacting a community that has been hardworking, law-abiding and enriching the fabric of America."

"We urged for their help in combating such bigotry which advances hatred and creates the idea that Hindus and people of Indian-origin need special laws and

monitoring due to allegations around some inherent propensity to discriminate," she said.

ABOVE-NORMAL TEMP, MORE HEATWAVE FROM APRIL TO JUNE PREDICTED BY IMD

However, above normal rainfall (37.6 mm against a normal of 29.9 mm) due to seven western disturbances, including five strong ones, kept temperatures in check in March.

March 2022 was the warmest ever and the third driest in 121 years. The year also saw the country's third warmest April, 11th warmest August and eighth warmest September since 1901.

Last month, the Centre For Policy Research (CPR) said a review of 37 heat action plans in India shows most of them do not explicitly carry out vulnerability assessments, leaving the authorities with little data on where to direct their scarce resources. Heat action plans (HAPs) are the primary policy response to economically damaging and life-threatening heatwaves. They prescribe a number of activities, disaster responses and post-heatwave response measures to reduce the impact of heatwaves. The IMD said India is expected to see normal rainfall in April. It said above-normal heatwave days are predicted in most parts of Central, East and Northwest India during this period.

"During the 2023 hot weather season (April to June), most parts of the country are expected to experience above-normal maximum temperatures, except for south peninsular India and some parts of north-west India where normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely," the IMD said.

The IMD further predicted that most parts of the country are likely to experience normal to below normal monthly minimum temperatures during April, except for some areas in Northwest, Central and East India where above normal minimum temperatures are expected.

Normal to above-normal minimum temperatures are very likely over most parts of the country, barring some areas in northeast and northwest India and isolated pockets of the peninsular region, it said.

Normal to above normal precipitation is expected over most parts of Northwest,

Central and peninsular region, while below normal rain is predicted in east and Northeast India, it said.

The rainfall during April 2023 averaged over the country as a whole is most likely to be normal (88- 112 per cent of LPA). Normal to above normal rainfall is expected over most parts of the Northwest, Central and Peninsular India whereas below normal rainfall is likely over East and Northeast India and some areas over the west coast of India.

Currently, La Nina conditions, cooling of the waters in the Pacific Ocean near South America that favours the Indian monsoon, have weakened, according to the IMD. "Forecast indicates ENSO neutral conditions are likely from April to June. A transition to El Niño is favoured by July-September, with chances of El Niño increasing through the fall," Mahapatra said. El Niño, the warming of the waters in the Pacific Ocean near South America, is associated with weakening of monsoon winds and less rainfall in India.

Neutral Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) conditions are present over the Indian Ocean and the latest MMCFs forecast indicates that the neutral IOD conditions are likely to continue during the hot weather season.

EDGY CALM DAY AFTER RAM NAVAMI CLASHES; SHAH ON BIHAR VISIT

In Sasaram, district administration ordered imposition of Section 144 on Friday afternoon after re-eruption of clashes, which first broke out the previous evening.

Shah has cancelled his tour of Sasaram on Sunday where prohibitory orders are already in place. Interacting with journalists, state BJP chief Samrat Choudhary, said Shah, who will be reaching Patna on Saturday evening, will address party workers in Nawada Lok Sabha constituency on Sunday as per schedule, even as he squarely blamed the Kumar Government in Bihar for the cancellation of the function at Sasaram, organised to celebrate the birth anniversary of Emperor Asoka.

When asked about the cancellation of Shah's visit to Sasaram, Kumar said, "I have no idea about this. I don't know why he was coming and I don't understand why he decided not to come. As far as the law and order situation in the State is concerned, it's perfectly alright".

Trader cheats SBI of ₹95 cr, arrested

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Kaushik Kumar Nath, a Kolkata based businessman in a money laundering case linked to defrauding the public sector lender State Bank of India (SBI) to the tune of Rs 95 crore. The ED said Nath availed various credit facilities from the State Bank of India by submitting forged and fabricated documents. The funds received in the guise of credit facilities were withdrawn in cash and used for purposes other than for which it was sanctioned.

The SBI has been cheated and defrauded to the tune of Rs 95 crore, it said. The ED has initiated the investigation under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on the basis of four different FIRs/charge sheets regis-

tered/filed by CBI, Kolkata. During investigation by ED, another case registered by the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police also came to the notice of the agency. "Kaushik Kumar Nath is frequently changing his identity and defrauding the banks. Recently, he had shifted his base to Mumbai and engaged in such type of criminal activities there," the ED said in a statement.

ED has identified several immovable properties acquired by the accused from the 'Proceeds of Crime'. Out of the said properties, four properties worth Rs 3.68 crore are already attached by the ED.

Nath was produced before the Special Court, Kolkata on Friday. The Court has granted him to ED custody for 10 days till April 10. Further investigation in the case is in progress, it added.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOCHI

The Cochin Shipyard Limited has signed a contract for building six Next Generation Missile Vessels (NGMV) for the Indian Navy at a cost of Rs 9,805 crore with the delivery of ships set to begin from 2027.

The state-run shipyard said the contract marks its entry into advanced weapon intense platforms. "The primary role of the ships would be to provide offensive capability against enemy warship, merchantmen and land targets," Cochin Shipyard said in a release. It said the delivery of ships is scheduled to commence from



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

be a potent instrument of sea denial for enemy ships especially at choke points," the release said. The shipyard said these ships would be employed for local naval defence operations and seaward defence of offshore development area.

Cochin Shipyard Limited CMD Madhu S Nair said the shipyard was keen to take up the construction of NGMVs after successfully delivering the country's first indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant.

In addition to the above, the state-run entity is also building eight Anti Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Crafts for the Navy and these vessels are under various stages of construction at the yard.

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

Kolkata: China has issued visas to over 18,000 Indians in the last three months, a Chinese diplomat said. Interacting with a group of journalists in Kolkata, Minister Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in India, Chen Jianjun, said he was looking forward to more Chinese being given visas by India.

"The number of visa applications for China has been on the rise. Since January, we have given visas to 18,560 Indians," he said.

"Since August, 9,409 student visas have been issued to Indian students," he said. However, Jianjun said, the number of visa applications is yet to reach the pre-pandemic levels. **PNS**

6 German Shepherds to take on wildlife thugs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Six German Shepherds, ranging between six and nine months old, and their 12 handlers have joined the forest departments of Karnataka (4), Bihar (1), and Madhya Pradesh (1), to take on the wildlife criminals and protect flora and fauna in their respective states.

This takes the total number of wildlife sniffer dogs trained under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's programme in India to 94, said Ravi Singh, Secretary General and CEO WWF-India.

The canines had received seven-month-long training at basic training Centre, Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force



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

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

Dr Merwyn Fernandes, Coordinator of TRAFFIC's India Office, said, "Illegal wildlife trade is a serious threat to the conservation of species in the wild. Wildlife law enforcement practices are crit-

ical in containing this threat, and the use of wildlife sniffer dogs for wildlife crime prevention and detection is crucial." "We hope at least four to five wildlife sniffer dogs are deployed in each state and at trans-border areas, working with law enforcement agencies to protect our wildlife."

Dr Dipankar Ghose, Director & HoD, Wildlife & Habitats Division, WWF-India, and Interim In-Charge, TRAFFIC's India office added, "Detecting smuggled wildlife is an ongoing challenge for law enforcement agencies. TRAFFIC and WWF-India support initiatives that bring in new tools and technology for wildlife crime detection and prevention."

Indictment scrubs ‘Teflon Don’ of invincibility

AP ■ NEW YORK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Former president raises over \$ 4m in 24 hours

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

statement said.

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

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

The White House has refused to comment on the indictment of the former president. “I have no comment on that,” President Joe Biden told reporters on Friday.

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

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

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

Indians among eight found dead near Canada-US border

PTI ■ TORONTO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

US museum to return 15 smuggled sculptures to India

PTI ■ NEW YORK

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pak inflation woes not yet over

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ COLOMBO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Israeli cops shoot man in Jerusalem

AP ■ JERUSALEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pope leaves hospital, to preside over Easter mass

AP ■ ROME

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



ing my strength and tweaking techniques.

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

the 54kg class, an Olympic category.

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

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

"I never thought I'd come

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

boys, much to the dislike of her mother.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maini bags maiden F2 podium at Melbourne

AP ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Haaland misses Man City match vs Liverpool due to injury

AP ■ MANCHESTER

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

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

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



Pep Guardiola said ahead of the game.

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

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

titions.

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

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

NBA, players reach deal for new labour agreement



AP ■ NEW YORK

The NBA will have labor peace for years to come.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

AP ■ MARSEILLES (FRANCE)

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

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

Verstappen takes pole position at F1 Australian Grand Prix

AP ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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



enduring a horrible day in Melbourne.

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

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

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



ITF Mysuru Open: Mukund -Vishnu pair bags doubles title

PTI ■ MYSURU

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Results (Singles, semifinals)

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

Doubles, Final:

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

Gender equality coming to Formula One racing team soon?

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Taking a break in the paddock after watching Max Verstappen set a lap record in practice at the Australian Grand Prix, Melbourne teenager Kaitlyn Bourne was loving her day at the track.

The 17-year-old Bourne, who was wearing a clear plastic poncho over a Red Bull sweater on a wintry day at Albert Park, is a massive fan of Australian Formula One driver Daniel Ricciardo, who is sitting out this season.

But Bourne, who comes from a motorsport-loving family and watches every Grand Prix race, hopes that one day she will have the chance to support a female F1 driver.

"It is still a very male dominated sport, so it would be good to bring in more females. I think it could happen," she said.

There has not been a woman driver in a Formula 1 race for more than 40 years. But with estimates suggesting that 40% of current Formula 1 fans are female, the motorsport industry is making a concerted effort to ensure that changes.

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

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

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

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

Sinner stuns top-ranked Alcaraz in Miami Open semifinals

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA),

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

TRUMP INDICTMENT & INVESTIGATION

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

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

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

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

WHAT’S THIS CASE ABOUT?

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

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

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

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

WHAT ARE THE CHARGES?

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

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

WHAT HAS TRUMP’S LAWYER SAID?

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

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

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

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Law enforcement officials have been making



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

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

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

WHAT’S THIS GRAND JURY AND WHO TESTIFIED?

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

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

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

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

McDougal’s story until after the election.

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

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

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

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS FOR TRUMP?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT ABOUT OTHER TRUMP INVESTIGATIONS?

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

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

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



Trump at the end of primrose path

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

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

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

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

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

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

“These are not things that Donald Trump ever thought in

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

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

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

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

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

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



derail his candidacy.

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

More than 25 per cent of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERSPECTIVE

Demystifying philosophical layers of temples

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

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

peaceful conditions prevail.

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

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

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



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

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

to the Salagrama stones that arrived in Ayodhya from Nepal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The vibrant temple culture of India has withstood the ravages of time chiefly because of the empowering philosophical and cosmological concepts that subliminally enrich devotee’s experience within a shrine. These need to be acknowledged to foster a society that is rooted to its traditions even as it embraces cosmopolitan ambitions



ANIRUDH NAVEEN

