

OPINION 6
CONGRESS' OBC
PARANOIA IS AGE-OLD

WORLD 9
UKRAINE MARKS GRIM BUCHA
ANNIV, CALLS FOR JUSTICE

MONEY 10
RETAIL INFLATION FOR INDUSTRIAL
WORKERS FLAT AT 6.16% IN FEB

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



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



DELHI TO FACE
LUCKNOW IN
IPL 2023 TODAY
12 SPORT

Ram Navami clashes go on unabated

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

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

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

communal clashes over Ram Navami procession.

A minor child also sustained gunshot injuries. Four other persons also sustained injuries. They were admitted in Sadar hospital and they are said to be out of danger. The violence was triggered during the Ram Navami Shobha Yatra started from Labour Welfare Centre on Friday evening. When it reached Kanta area, some persons pelted stones from the rooftops, and this led to stampede-like situation and

then, clashes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Guj HC quashes Kejriwal's plea for Modi degree info

Imposes ₹25,000 cost on Delhi CM

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

First US ex-Prez to face criminal charge, Trump cries political conspiracy

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump has been indicted by a Manhattan grand jury on charges related to paying off a porn star during his 2016 presidential campaign, making him the first former US president to face a criminal charge and upending his bid to retake the White House in 2024.

The grand jury on Thursday voted to indict 76-year-old Trump, a Republican, for his role in paying money to porn star Stormy Daniels in an attempt to buy her silence over an alleged affair. He will be arraigned on Tuesday.

The indictment remains under seal and it is not clear what crimes and how many criminal counts Trump has been charged with. CNN reported that the former president has been charged with



Former President Donald Trump speaks with reporters while in flight on his plane after a campaign rally at Waco Regional Airport, in Waco, Texas on Saturday

AP

more than 30 counts.

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

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

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

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

India on road to \$2 trillion exports in 2030

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"We have to meet our exports targets going forward,"



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

PTI

said the minister, adding that "we will need to work a bit harder" on goods exports.

Detailed report on P10

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

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Of the 11 people affected by the fire, two are receiving treatment and three were discharged after first aid. The deceased include four men, a woman and a toddler.

Eyewitnesses said four bodies were found on the stairs and the toddler was found inside the room on the first floor.

The residents had gone to sleep after Sehri, which is consumed before day-break



during Ramzan and the fire broke out after that, police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northeast), Joy Tirkey, said they received information about the incident at around 9 AM. "After reaching the spot we found that nine people had been taken to the Jag Praveesh Chandra Hospital," the DCP said.

Delhi Fire Service chief Atul Garg said they received a call and three fire tenders were rushed to the site to douse the fire. "Though the

fire was small, the occupants died due to inhalation of smoke," he added.

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

Akbar Ali, the owner of the house, said four of the deceased had come to stay on rent there this week.

CAPSULE

'FISCAL DEFICIT TOUCHES 82.8% OF YEAR-TARGET'

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

P10

'PEOPLE IN PAK BELIEVE PARTITION WAS MISTAKE'

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

FOUR KILLED IN GAS CYLINDER BLAST IN UP

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

While the interest rates for popular PPF and savings deposits have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, there has been an increase between 0.1 per cent and 0.7 per cent in other saving schemes, a finance ministry statement said. The highest increase was in the interest rate of the National Savings Certificate, which will now attract 7.5 per cent for the April 1-June 30, 2023 period.

Detailed report on P10

IPL begins with glittering ceremony

FIANS ■ AHMEDABAD

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

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

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



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

PTI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Several Akharas refuse to take out Ramnavami processions to protest Govt curbs

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The festivities associated with Ramnavami processions turned sour in the steel city as majority of the Ramnavami Akhara organisers refused from taking out the processions in protest against the administration restrictions imposed on the processions.

Instead of taking out the processions, the Akhara committees staged dharnas at strategic locations like Sakchi roundabout and Jugsalai Chowk Bazaar, demanding the administration to call off the restrictions.

The head of a prominent Akhara at Kashidih in Sakchi has even given a call for the Jamshedpur bandh tomorrow.

The district administration had announced a ban on the



use of trailers and also the normal use of DJs during the Ramnavami processions triggering protests by several Akhara organisers.

The protest intensified after the police on Thursday seized a trailer which was being decorated by one of the

Akhara committees at the Aam Bagan ground in Sakchi. As soon as the trailer was seized, the Akhara organisers had started pressurising the administration to release the vehicle. But as the request did not yield any result, Abhay Singh, president of central

Akhara Samiti on Thursday appealed to the remaining Akhara organisers not to take out the processions.

Despite the call for a boycott appeal, several Akhara organisers took out the processions and immersed the religious jhanda in the

Kharkai and Subarnarekha. Large numbers of people, including women and children had assembled along the main roads in Sakchi, Bistupur, Sonari and other localities to have a glimpse of the traditional processions, but were disappointed in absence of the processions.

Devotees in large numbers participated in the celebrations with members of a few Akhara committees displaying daredevil acts throughout the route.

Subarnarekha ghat (Sakchi), Kapali Ghat (Sonari), Domuhani ghat (Sonari), Sati Ghat (Kadma), Bhuiyandih ghat (Sitaramdera), Bodhanwala ghat (Bistupur) and Baroda ghat (Bagbera) were earmarked for immersion.

Drone cameras were used for aerial surveillance near

the composite control room (CCR), near Sakchi police station and near Sakchi roundabout, Mango roundabout and Subarnarekha river ghat.

All the licensed akhara committees had their own videographers to record their immersion procession while the administration from its own end deployed videographers at Sakchi CCR, Kadma, Sonari and near Mango police station.

East Singhbhum civil surgeon team deployed medical team with ambulances, first aid kits at 19 locations primarily on routes taken for immersion procession, namely Gandhi Maidan roundabout and Mango roundabout (in Mango), Kapali Ghat, Domuhani, Ram Mandir, Bharat Sevashram Sangh (all in Sonari), Ram Mandir (in Bistupur).

BSL's Ingot mold foundry excels

PNS : BOKARO

The Ingot Mold Foundry under Engineering Shops of BSL has created a new record by producing the best ever 73 slag pots during the financial year 2022-2023. Prior to this, Team Ingot Mold Foundry had created a record by producing 56 slag pots in the financial year 2007-2008. Team Ingot Mold Foundry Notably under the guidance and led by Executive Director (Works) BK Tiwari and Chief General Manager (Shops) JV Shekhar including General Manager (Forge Shop) P.P. Singh, Manager (IMF) Shubhlendu Kumar and Manager (ICSF & PS) Khemnath Mahto have achieved this pinnacle of excellence. ED Works Tiwari has congratulated Team Ingot Mold Foundry team on this achievement.



Dr Dharmender Kumar takes over charge as I/C Principal MMCH

M F AHMAD : DALTONGANJ

Dr Dharmender Kumar is the principal in charge of the Medinirai medical college in Daltonganj. He took over charge from Dr R D Nagesh who retired today.

The medical college office will send his taking over as principal in charge to the state health department for approval and financial powers of his.

Dr Dharmender Kumar said this medical college has acute deficiency of faculties for which he will be working hard to have them from the state government.

Dr Dharmender Kumar is the fourth principal in the four years history of this medical college starting in 2019. R D Nagesh was given a warm farewell on his retirement. In his parting speech which he read out from his cell phone said he has cleared an interview for a job on



Dr Dharmender Kumar takes over charge as incharge principal of medical college in Daltonganj. PNS

contract here and within months of his retirement he would prefer to be here in the department of surgery if the state health department posts him on contract here. Dr Dharmender Kumar is known to be a tough task master but challenges in this medical college are equally enormously too many. The first challenge is to see that pending or non-starting construction like auditorium etc gets taken off. There is no teacher in the forensic medicine and toxicology department which is a very vital deficiency. Sources said it all depends on the state government as first the state health department is to approve this local arrangement under which Dharmender Kumar is the stop gap principal then vesting him with financial powers and finally a free hand to run this medical college which has 390 plus MBBS students in all.

RANCHI BUSINESSMAN DIES UNDER MYSTERIOUS CONDITION

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR:

Under mysterious conditions, a 27-year-old businessman from Ranchi who was staying at Hotel Devdoot along Kalimati Road in Sakchi was found dead on Friday. Ashwini Jaiswal, the businessman, had checked in the hotel along with his wife 11 days ago.

The businessman was not keeping up well and on the request of wife, the hotel management soon arranged an ambulance and rushed Ashwini to Tata Main Hospital where the doctors on emergency duty declared him dead.

The deceased was into real estate and would live near Devi Mandir along the Hazaribagh Road in Lalpur. Both Ashwini and his wife had come in a BMW car and were staying at the hotel since March 19.

The young woman who claimed herself to be Ashwini's wife said that her parents' house is at Sainagar in Bada Gamharia in Seraikela-Kharsawan district and that she was married to Ashwini just two months ago.

OC, Sakchi police station, Sanjay Kumar Singh confirmed about the mysterious death of a young businessman from Ranchi.

"It is too early to know what led to sudden death. As we are busy in the law and order duty pertaining to the Ramnavami festival. We will start an investigation into the circumstances under which the businessman died," said the OC. Singh said the family members of the deceased have been informed.

OLIC meeting held at SAIL, RSP



PNS : BOKARO

The Official Language Implementation Committee (OLIC) of SAIL, Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) was held at DIC's Conference Hall 'Manthan' on 30th March 2023. Atanu Bhowmick, DIC, RSP and Chairman of OLIC, presided over the meeting. S R Suryawanshi, ED (Works), P K

Satapathy, ED (P&A), P K Sahoo, ED (Projects), Dr. B K Hota, ED (M&HS), P K Rath, CGM In-charge (Mines), A K Behuria, CGM in-charge (F&A), several Chief General Managers and Heads of Department attended the meeting. Notably speaking on the occasion the DIC emphasised upon the need of usage of Hindi in all possible rele-

vant documents in compliance with the guidelines of the Rajbhasha Directives. He also stressed on every department having a Hindi Officer to ensure the implementation of Rajbhasha in the departmental works. Mr. Bhowmick also advised to have a senior level committee for greater effectiveness and vibrancy of the Rajbhasha activities.

Participating in the interactions the Executive Directors and other Senior Officers shared ideas and suggestions on improving the use of Rajbhasha and also including the language in official communications both online and offline.

At the outset Archana Satpathy, DGM (PR) & COC and Incharge (Rajbhasha) delivered the welcome address. Lolati Toppo, Rajbhasha Adhikari presented the status report of the minutes. The meeting was coordinated by the employees of Rajbhasha section.

Art Workshop to observe Autism Week

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

To observe Autism Week, CII YI conducted a special Art Workshop at Gyanoday Noble Academy, Telco. The school has a total of 55 children with various disabilities ranging from autism, Down syndrome, hearing impairment, visible disability, physical disability etc. They participated in sand art. In various batches they had a wonderful time interacting, assisting and getting to know each other better. The children were enthusiastic and very artistic. Tanvi Shah helped in conducting the workshop so smoothly. Chair and co-chair of Vertical Rushabh Mehta and Prantik Kumar were present on the occasion.



Farewell to retired employees from BSL

PNS : BOKARO

On March 31, a farewell function was organized in the main auditorium of the Human Resource Development Center for the personnel retiring from Bokaro Steel Plant in the month of March. Chittaranjan Mohapatra, Executive Director (Projects) was the chief guest on the occasion. During the programme, CGM (MM) Harsh Nigam and General Manager (Personnel) Soni Singh and other officials of the Personnel Department were also present. Dr. Nanda Priyadarshini, Senior Manager (Personnel-Services) welcomed the visitors at the beginning of the function and then she gave information related to the final settlement and Maitri Bhawan to the retiring personnel and presented the bio-data of each retiring personnel. Chief guest Chittaranjan Mahapatra congratulated the retiring personnel for their dedicated service and wished them a happy life. The guests presented service certificates and gifts to the retiring personnel. A total of 9 executives and 56 non-exec-



utives are retiring from BSL in the month of March. The programme was coordinated by Dr. Nanda Priyadarshini. Executive Director KK Thakur was given farewell in a separate function organized for Executive Director level officers in the conference room of the Director-in-charge. On this occasion, Director-in-charge BSL, Amarendra Prakash and Chief General Managers of various departments including the Executive Director of BSL were present. Important achievements related to the service period of Thakur were remembered during the function. DIC Prakash presented him a memento. Everyone wished the retiring Mr Thakur good luck for his future life.

Low awareness, Internet issue likely to be a hurdle in admissions under NEP System

SHAILESH SHARMA : HAZARIBAG

In the long marathon meeting with the Governor, all vice chancellor of the universities of the State have decided to introduce (National Education) NEP Policy 2022 in all Universities of the State at graduation level. The base of admission will be online examination UET (University Entrance Test) marks, not the marks secured by the students in the main examination. Under the National Education Policy it has been decided that for the four years graduation course, the students have to pass to get the good marks in the online examination in 12th standard.

The 12th class examination by CBSE has been completed but the Jharkhand Education Board just completed the examination. The results of both the boards have not been published.

The last date of filling the

form for online entrance examination is 31st March with the fees of 100 rupees. The students who will pass from CBSE, they know how to fill the form, but of such students who will pass from Jharkhand board, they are maximum from the remote areas. In such a situation the rural area students are totally dependent upon the cyber cafés. The students said that they are facing dual problems. First is how to fill the form and second is the Internet. As per the norms of the National Education Policy the college and schools have to conduct the awareness camp to inform the students how to fill the form and what will be the patron of the question papers. No college or +2 schools had conducted such a programme in their colleges. The same condition is with the Vinoba Bhawe University Hazaribag. The colleges who are running the +2 classes in their institutions have not adopted the awareness camp.

Shilpa Shetty to visit Jamshedpur on April 2

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Kalyan Jewellers, one of India's leading jewellery brands, today announced that it will be launching its 2nd showroom in the state of Jharkhand, making a foray into the state's largest market - Jamshedpur. The showroom is scheduled to be inaugurated on 2nd April 2023 by Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty.

Kalyan Jewellers' new showroom located in S.B Shop Area, Jamshedpur, is part of the company's strategy to expand its retail footprint and operations in the region, providing customers with easier access to the brand. The showroom will feature an extensive range of designs from Kalyan Jewellers' jewellery collections, presented in a world-class ambience.

Additionally, the Kalyan Special Gold Board Rate, which is the lowest in the market and standardized across all company showrooms, will apply, ensuring a seamless and service-backed shopping experi-



ence.

In celebration of the showroom launch, Kalyan Jewellers is offering a unique promotion of 0% making charges on half the purchase value for customers shopping for a minimum of Rs. 1 lakh. These offers are valid for a limited period only.

Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director of Kalyan Jewellers, said, "As we complete 5 years in the state of Jharkhand, we are delighted to announce our foray into the city of Jamshedpur. The state of Jharkhand holds a special place in our hearts as this is where the company celebrated and marked the milestone of 100 showrooms, back in 2018.

The new investments in this region reflect upon the brand's commitment to strengthen its presence in the state. Considering Jamshedpur is one of the largest markets in the state of Jharkhand, we believe it has tremendous untapped potential and will help us boost the overall growth momentum, on the back of our strong foundations laid in the region."



After promotion in the rank of ASI, Jharkhand Region Police Men's Association President Rajesh Kumar Pandey, Vice President Karn Kumar Singh will be in charge of the President of the body and will discharge all duties of the President. The decision was taken in the meeting of the central committee here on Friday. PNS

Commercial Tax Dept collects Rs 21k Cr against target Rs 18.5 k cr: Oraon

MRITUANJAY KUMAR : RANCHI

The Commercial Tax Department has set a record for the State by recovering more than Rs 21000 crore. On the last day of the current financial year 2022-23 and so far the Commercial Tax Department has recovered more than Rs 2500 crore against its fixed target of Rs 18,500 crore. The Commercial Tax Department has achieved about 114 per cent against the set target.

Addressing a press meet at his residence on Friday, the State's Finance Minister, Dr Rameshwar Oraon said, "You are aware that after the

implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) system, compensation was to be paid by the Central Government to the State Governments only for 5 years, which ended in the first quarter of the current financial year itself. That is, from July 1, 2022, the payment of compensation to the State Governments has been stopped by the Central Government, yet this achievement has been achieved by the Commercial Tax Department."

Oraon said that It is worth mentioning that after separating the amount of compensation of the Central Government in the last finan-



Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon during a press conference at his residence in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

cial year, compared to Rs 15,741 crores received in the financial year 2020-21, in the current financial year it has been Rs 18,941 crores, which is about Rs 3200 crores more. Compared to the revenue collection received by the Commercial Tax Department in the previous year 2021-22 was 18 per cent on account of SGST, 22 per cent in VAT item, 43 per cent in electricity duty and more than 4 per cent has been recovered under the head of profession tax. The Minister further said that some new steps were taken by the Commercial Tax Department to meet the shortfall in compensation, as a result of which there was a

huge increase in revenue collection. "Intelligence and Revenue Analysis Unit (IRAU) has been formed by the department at the headquarter and divisional level, by which the work of inspection and others has been done by analysing the data. Apart from this, special task units have been formed in 05 big circles, whose work is to monitor the returns and others of big taxpayers. Along with this, about Rs 563 crore revenue has been recovered from the reversal of intelligible IGST in the current financial year," he added.

"The online tax assessment process of VAT has been started by the Commercial

Tax Department, in which there is little need for businessmen to come to the office. Tax settlement scheme has been brought at the end of this financial year to recover dues under old taxation and reduce pending cases in various courts and so far about 04 crores have been received and it is expected that about 500 crore will be recovered in the next financial year. Commercial Tax Department Principal Secretary, Aradhana Patnaik, Commercial Tax Commissioner, Santosh Kumar Vats and all the officials of the department have contributed very important behind this unexpected revenue recovery," he added.

'Poverty will not be a deterrent for students of Jharkhand'

CM's instructs to facilitate Bokaro student for higher education and cover his family under the ambit of various state-run schemes



PNS : RANCHI

Under the instructions of the Chief Minister Hemant Soren consistent efforts are being made to achieve inclusivity in education. In this regard recently, the Chief Minister has given orders to extend full support to Ankit Kumar, a resident of Badki Punnu, Gomia, Bokaro to facilitate his post-matric higher education. Besides this, steps are also

being taken to cover his family members under the umbrella of various state-run schemes. The Chief Minister has taken cognizance from the Deputy Commissioner, Bokaro regarding this issue. Pertinent steps have been taken to extend all welfare related benefits to Ankit so that no stone is left unturned in the route of his education.

The CM received information that Ankit Kumar, a resi-

dent of Bokaro, has secured around 96 per cent marks in the matriculation examination of 2022. Due to the poor financial condition of the family, he was unable to pursue his further studies. Ankit's father is physically weak and his mother, who works as a labourer, had her arms and legs injured in an accident, due to which the whole family is facing a severe financial crisis. After taking cognizance

about the issue the CM gave his instructions to the Deputy Commissioner, Bokaro to extend all possible government aid and also to ensure his family is covered with benefits of various government-run schemes. The Chief Minister said that the government has come up with many schemes at every level so that poverty does not become a hindrance in the pursuit of education for anyone.

DTO office registers record revenue collection of 111.28%

PNS : RANCHI

District Transport Office, Ranchi has registered a major achievement in the financial year 2022-23. In this financial year, more than 100 per cent annual revenue has been collected by the District Transport Office. District Transport Office, Ranchi has collected 111.28 per cent revenue in the financial year 2022-23. Against the annual target of Rs 30163.23 lakh set by the Transport Department, a revenue of Rs 33567.00 lakh has been collected, which is more than the fixed target. In the last financial year 2021-22, the annual target set by the Transport Department was Rs 27500 lakh. In the current financial year 2022-23, where the percentage of revenue collection was higher as compared to the previous financial year 2021-22, the annual target was also increased from Rs 27500 lakh to Rs 30163.23 lakh. Even today, on the last day of the financial year, under the leadership of District Transport Officer, Ranchi Praveen Kumar Prakash, vehicles operating without tax failure, overload, without pollution proof, without permits and other valid documents related to vehicles in Ring Road, Daldali, Kanke area And an investigation campaign was launched against those driving two wheelers without helmets. During the checking the documents of about 154 vehicles were checked. A total fine of Rs 2 lakh 55 thousand was collected from 32 vehicles while one vehicle was seized and kept at Pandra TOP for security.



RMC passes Rs 2801 Cr budget for financial year 2023-24

PNS : RANCHI

Ranchi Municipal Council (RMC), on Friday, passed a budget of Rs 2801 crore for the financial year 2023-24 in the meeting.

RMC Mayor, Asha Lakda informed that a target of Rs 284.53 crore has been set for income from various sources. Rs 108.23 crore from tax, 106.56 crore from rent, fee and utility tax from corporation property, Rs 3.06 crore from sale and rent, Rs 50.75 crore from revenue grant and contribution, interest from bank and investment Rs 4.63 crore, Government assistance for registration fee or its compensation, Rs 6.06 crore and the target of receipts from other heads has been kept at Rs 4.63 crore.

Under various schemes for urban development, a total of Rs 1662.72 crore has been received from the Central and State Government and a target has been set to spend Rs 1660.21 crore against it in the financial year 2023-24. Under the National Urban Livelihood Mission, for the development of the urban poor and to make them self-reliant, under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme,



RMC Mayor Asha Lakra, Dy Mayor Sanjeev Vijayvargia, Rajya Sabha MP Mahua Maji alongwith officials during RMC Board Meeting, in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

individual loans, group loans, skill development, training programs and building community structures to organize the urban poor. A provision of Rs 92.61 crore has been made in the budget for this scheme in the financial year 2023-24. Also, to increase the income of the corporation, the objective is to get Rs 200 crore through BOND. In the financial year 2022-23, a budget of Rs 2757 crore was passed.

For the development of the urban poor, 25 per cent of the estimated income of RMC

from its own sources that is Rs 57.29 crore is to be spent. An integrated plan will be prepared for the localities in which development work will be done with this amount. RMC will try to install LED lamps on electric poles in those colonies. Drains, roads, education system, water supply, community building and public toilets should be constructed. Apart from this, a provision of Rs 74.11 crore has been made in the budget for drain construction, Rs 149.67 crore for road con-

struction and Rs 110 crore for schemes to be taken up from the 15th Finance Commission. Rs 110 crore is likely to be received from the 15th Finance Commission. With this amount, various schemes will be taken up for solid waste management and urban water supply for high levels of air quality. Along with this, a provision of Rs 2.59 crore has been made in the budget for the purchase of fogging machines.

RMC has estimated an

income of Rs 284.53 crore from its sources in the financial year 2023-24. Rs 2 crore have been proposed for the City Development Plan. Efforts will be made to make improvements by preparing an action plan and adopting other innovative ideas. Efforts are being made to meet the shortage of personnel by getting service through outsourcing, so that revenue can be ensured along with service and RMC can develop into a self-supporting institution.

Maoists loot detonators kept at warehouse in W Singhbhum

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a shocking incident, CPI Maoists looted detonators kept in a warehouse of a company located in Saranda forest area of West Singhbhum district.

According to information, the ultras raided the warehouse of DK Ghosh Company located in the area last night and looted the detonators. The warehouse is located in Parambaljodi village area. The detonators were kept for supply. A company named DK Ghosh is engaged in supplying explosives to private iron ore mines in the area. SP Ashutosh Shekhar confirmed the incident and informed that the quantity of detonators looted is yet to be ascertained. Sources informed the ultras were not able to succeed in looting the large gunpowder stored there.

The security of the place where explosives are kept in Parambaljodi village area was under the responsibility of the private security guard of the same village. The Naxalites had already come to know about this. After this, they attacked with full planning and looted detonators etc. According to sources, the police have sounded alert for all the police stations and CRPF camps in West Singhbhum district. On March 30, due to Ram Navami, all the police were busy and there was rain and storm in the night. Taking advantage of which the Naxalites carried out this incident. The agencies of the mines where the explosives are kept have also been alerted. A company named DK Ghosh is already engaged in supplying explosives to private iron ore mines. They hold a licence. They also have a petrol pump in Barajamda. The company operates vehicles with explosives. Even about a decade and a half ago, Naxalites had looted a vehicle filled with 12 tonnes of gunpowder near Check Naka of the Forest Department located in Chandipos, Odisha and fled to the Saranda forest. Police said that the security has been beefed up in the area and they were keeping strict vigil on movement of the Naxalites. "There has been a substantial increase in Maoist activities in this. We are not much concerned about small acts of violence because these activities can be controlled by us, but the bigger attacks are worrisome," said a security official. Sources informed that the police have decided to ensure strict vigil and deploy additional security forces in the fringe areas. "Security has been beefed up in the area and they were keeping strict vigil on movement of the Naxalites. The plan is to keep a tab on the camps being operated by ultras," said another official.



RANCHI DC CHAIRS DMFT BOARD MEETING

PNS : RANCHI

Deputy Commissioner Ranchi cum Chairman District Mineral Foundation Trust Ranchi, Rahul Kumar Sinha chaired an important meeting of the Governing Council of District Mineral Foundation Trust here on Saturday. The DC gave instructions to include schemes of education, health, environment, skill development and women and child development in the priority sector in the year 2023-24. He instructed the concerned officer to include the scheme of road culvert irrigation in other priority areas under the DMFT scheme.

Sinha and the committee decided that development and welfare schemes should be implemented in the mining-affected areas of Ranchi district with the amount of royalty. He gave necessary directions to the concerned officer on the proposal to nominate two mining lessees of Ranchi district under DMFT.

The DC asked what works has been done in the education project in these 4-5 years. Necessary directions were given to the concerned officer for making its list. He asked whatever school buildings are built under the DMFT project. He instructed to pay attention to the basic services, so that clusters are made in the elec-



Deputy Commissioner Ranchi-cum Chairman, District Mineral Foundation Trust Ranchi, Rahul Kumar Sinha during DMFT Governing Council meeting, in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

tions. There should be no problem for the security personnel and concerned officials to stay there.

The DC gave beautification proposals of most of the schools to the concerned authorities. He instructed the concerned officer to do it better. Sinha instructed the concerned officer to prepare a proposal for setting up kitchen gardens in Anganwadi centers of Ranchi district. Along with this, necessary guidelines were given for construction/renovation of Anganwadi centers in the form of model Anganwadi centers, so that all the equipment are available in Anganwadi centres.

Sinha gave instructions to the concerned authorities to reduce pollution in Khalari colliery and its surrounding

area of Ranchi district. There is a Dak Bungalow at McCluskieganj which was renovated in the financial year 2017-18. By starting the use of that newly constructed building as a livelihood for all, necessary guidelines were given to the concerned authorities to start it, so that the said newly constructed building can be developed as a skill development and employment oriented training centre for local youths and women.

Sinha listened to MLA, Kanke Assembly Constituency and MLA, Mandar Assembly Constituency, MLA, Khijri Assembly Constituency and MP representatives, MLA representatives who came. After discussing the need for any development related work told by him, necessary guidelines were given to the concerned

officers to prepare an action plan on it.

Deputy Development Commissioner cum Member Secretary, DMFT Ranchi, Dinesh Kumar Yadav and District Planning Officer, Ranchi, Vinay Kumar and MLA, Kanke Assembly, Samri Lal, MLA, Khijri Assembly, Rajesh Kachhap, MLA, Mandar Vidhan Sabha, Representative Abhijit Kumar, MP, (Rajya Sabha) Representative of Aditya Prasad Kaushal Kumar, Assistant Project Officer, Samgra Shiksha, Amar Nath Chowdhary and District Mining Officer, Ranchi, Sanjeev Kumar and DMFT PMU Team, Abhishek Anand, Anil Kumar Singh, Salma Soren, Shrikant, Arvind Srivastava attended the meeting.

IN BRIEFS

International seminar at Shashwat B Ed College

Under the aegis of Shashwat Institute of Teachers Education, Ranchi, a three-day international seminar on National Education Policy 2020 and the role of teachers in nation building is being organized from 1-3 April 2023. Experts from country and abroad will participate (online and off line) and people will benefit from their views. Among the scholars who will be present in the inaugural session at 10.30 am on Saturday are Dr. Ajit Kumar Sinha, Vice Chancellor, Ranchi University, Dr. Tapan Kumar Shandilya, Vice Chancellor Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Dr. SP Agarwal, Vice Chancellor, Sainath University, Ranchi Dr. Triveni Nath Sahu Vice Chancellor Jharkhand State Open University, Ranchi, Dr. SP Yadav Vice Chancellor, YVN, Ranchi, Sanjay Seth MP, Ranchi Dr. RK Sharma, Ranchi, Dr. Ram Singhasan Singh, Gaya Dr. Kumari Manisha etc are the prominent guests on the occasion. Everyone is invited and everyone is welcome in this seminar. This information was given by Organizing Secretary Dr. Jang Bahadur Pandey.

DPS Ranchi conducts Aptitude Test



Delhi Public School Ranchi conducted Aptitude Test Phase 02 (session 2023 - 24) on 31st March 2023 for the candidates who are aspiring to take admission in Class XI in the school. Large number of applicants from Pan India reached the examination center along with their Admit Cards. Earlier, the applicants had got all the information regarding examination pattern, time duration of the test and syllabus for all the streams (Science, Commerce and Humanities) from the school's official website. Apart from this, the school also organised an interactive session for the parents of applicants in Vivekananda Auditorium. The session was graced by Principal Dr Ram Singh.

‘Chinese moves along LAC provocative’

PIONEER NEWS
SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW
DELHI/WASHINGTON

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

Making this observation, Kurt Campbell, the Deputy Assistant to the US President and Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific told a Washington based think-tank late Thursday there his country is destined to work more closely with New Delhi.

The think tank-Centre for a new American Security (CNAS)-in its report said Indian officials believe China is trying to contain India by forcing it to divert more resources into defending simultaneously both its western border with Pakistan and eastern flank with China and by weakening its willingness and ability to challenge Chinese ambitions to dominate the region.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indian-Americans slam violence against mission by Khalistani supporters

PIONEER NEWS
SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW
DELHI/WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Now, not only Ministries, but Mins to come under CAG’s ambit also

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW
DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

deprived of Public Distribution System (PDS) rations due to a slew of “errors”, including Aadhaar mismatch, bank account mismatch and fingerprint recognition failure. “Similar problems are being faced by workers in MGNREGS. The effect of such rules is to discourage workers from approaching the MGNREGS system for work,” it said.

Raising the issue of “delay” in wages for workers, the editorial claimed it went beyond the 15 days leeway that is allowed. According to the government’s own data, Rs 3,630 crore worth of wages were paid after more than 15 days delay in the current year while Rs 1,010 crore was pending as unpaid wages, said the editorial blaming Modi Government.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

21 held, 300 booked in Mumbai clash

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

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

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

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

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

Man hurt in Ram Navami attack dies

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

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

Ajit Pawar says citizens must work to ensure peace

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

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

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

Manipur to set up temporary shelter for Myanmar refugees

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

403 immovable properties of Kalptaru Buildtech group attached

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

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

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

PNS

Ministry forms panel to monitor dal prices

New Delhi: To reduce the prices of urad, moong and arhar dal, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs has asked pulses importers to declare their stockpiles. The ministry has also formed a committee to monitor dal prices.

In a meeting with Retailers Association of India (RAI) and major organised retailers, the consumer affairs secretary Rohit Kumar Singh told them to calibrate the retail margins in such a way that the composition of pulses consumption basket of households is not disturbed by price rise. The average retail price of tur dal has increased by 11.12 per cent to

Rs 115 per kilogramme in the country in the last one year as per the data maintained by the consumer affairs ministry.

Since February till now, the price of Arhar pulses has increased by about Rs 1200 per quintal. In February, arhar was widely available at Rs 8,550 to Rs 9,000 per quintal, but since then the price has increased to Rs 10,500. Prices are under pressure as the country's tur production is estimated to be lower at 36.66 million tonnes in the 2022-23 crop year (July-June), as against 42.20 million tonnes in the previous year as per the agriculture ministry's second estimate. **PNS**

TN masks up as Covid cases rise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

Sources said that if the Covid surge continues, other States may join the suit and make the mask mandatory. In fact, since the beginning of March, there is a continuous

rise in the corona cases. In the meantime, the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued revised recommendations for prioritising the use of COVID-19 vaccines to reflect the impact of Omicron and high population-level immunity due to infection and vaccination.

According to the Ministry data, 3,095 new Covid cases were registered in India on Thursday (30 March). This figure is the highest in the last six months.

Now the number of active cases in the country has reached 15,208. "The country has seen a rise in the number of new Covid cases in the last few days amid a spurt in the data of H3N2 Influenza cases.

More than 3000 cases have been reported for the second consecutive day. Earlier on Wednesday (March 29), 3,016 new Covid-19 cases were registered. Also, currently the recovery rate is 98.78 percent," said an official from the Ministry.

With 3,852 cases, Kerala tops the list of infections in the country, followed by 3016 active cases in Maharashtra, then 2247 in Gujarat, 1037 in Karnataka, 932 in Delhi.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the government has been testing sewage to pre-empt a possible return of the virus. All the cases are also being sent for genome sequencing to timely identify new variants if any, he said.



President Droupadi Murmu with Oscar 2023 winning documentary short film 'The Elephant Whisperers' producer Guniet Monga and director Kartiki Gonsalves, in New Delhi, on Friday

PTI

Transgenders open salon in Kalyan with USAID help

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The US Consulate in Mumbai and US Agency for International Development (USAID) on Friday launched a new salon named 'TransFormation,' which is owned and operated by members of the transgender community, at Kalyan in neighbouring Thane district.

Inaugurated by U.S. Consul General Mike Hankey and USAID Deputy Mission Director for India Karen Klimowski on the occasion of International Transgender Day of Visibility, the TransFormation Salon will offer services for all in an inclusive and stigma-free environment. "The U.S. Government is proud to support TransFormation, where anyone - regardless of how they identify - can access salon services in a safe and inclusive environment for all guests.

We recognize and celebrate the important contributions of transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming



people and take pride in supporting improved health outcomes through innovative models that mobilize communities to take charge of their financial and physical health," U.S. Consul General Mike Hankey said.

Neeta Kene, Chairperson, Kinnar Asmita, a community-based organization, which set up TransFormation and will operate the new saloon, said: "This initiative is a strong message to the society that Transgender Persons with the right kind of skill and support can effectively mainstream themselves. For us this is not

only an initiative on livelihoods, it is on dignity, self-worth, and progress. We are thrilled to start this initiative and we need the support of the mainstream to make it a roaring success both socially and financially."

The International Transgender Day of Visibility is an annual celebration and recognition of the contributions of transgender people around the world. On this day and every day, the U.S. Government honours transgender people who are fighting for freedom, equality, dignity, and respect.

HC: Transgender becoming girl after surgery can get relief in domestic violence case

Mumbai: A transgender person who chooses to be a woman by undergoing gender reassignment surgery can seek relief under Domestic Violence Act, the Bombay High Court has ruled upholding a lower court order directing a man to pay maintenance to his estranged wife, who was initially a transgender person. A single bench of Justice Amit Borkar in order of March 16, a copy of which was available on Friday, said word "woman" is no more limited to binary of women and men and also includes transgender persons who have changed their sex in tune with how they identify themselves. Justice Borkar noted that section 2(f) of DV Act that defines a domestic relationship is gen-

der neutral and hence includes persons irrespective of their sexual preferences. There is no manner of doubt that a transgender person or either a male or female who has undergone a sex change operation is entitled to the gender of their choice, the order said.

"The object and purpose of provisions of Domestic Violence Act is to provide more effective protection of rights of women who are victims of violence of any kind that occurs within family," it said. The bench further noted that the need to pass such legislation was because existing law was inadequate to address a woman who was subjected to cruelty by her husband and their family. **PTI**

Guj: 8 AAP workers held for putting up anti-Modi posters

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Eight workers of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have been arrested for allegedly putting up posters saying "Modi Hatao Desh Bachao" in different parts of Ahmedabad city in Gujarat, police said on Friday. The Gujarat unit of AAP condemned the arrests saying the action has proved their point that "democracy is in danger".

In a release, the city crime branch said eight persons have been arrested on the charge of damaging public property by putting up posters with the text "Modi Hatao Desh Bachao" in areas like Isanpur, Maninagar, Vatva, Narol and Vadaj.

The posters were put up by the AAP workers on Thursday, it said. The arrests were made on Thursday night after the registration of first information reports (FIRs) in different police stations earlier in the day,



said the release. Police have identified the AAP workers as Natwar Thakor, Jatin Patel, Kuldeep Bhatt, Bipin Sharma, Ajay Chauhan, Arvind Chauhan, Jivan Maheshwari and Paresh Tulsiani.

AAP's Gujarat vice president Sagar Rabari said though the party posted such posters in many other states on Thursday, only Gujarat police booked their workers. "Ahmedabad is the only city where people are deprived of their Constitutional rights

because police can arrest you anytime and book you as per their whims and fancies. This police action proves that our apprehension that democracy is in danger is not misplaced and we were not wrong in carrying out that poster drive," said Rabari. In last year's Gujarat Assembly elections, AAP won five seats and secured 13 per cent of popular vote, in a performance that belied its high-decibel campaign in the state. BJP registered a record 156 wins in the house of 182 seats.

www.dailypioneer.com
facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/
PAPER WITH PASSION

Proof of the pudding...

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

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

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

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



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

Words matter, better choose them carefully

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

Words are a mysterious manoeuvre of communication in an individual's life. They are the most powerful drug used by humans so if they can inspire and connect at the same time they can divide, demoralise and incite hate. Words are invasive and their impact on different people varies because it depends on their understanding and conception. As they are used in every aspect of life, their power is immense and powerful as a result. A single phrase, an uplifting word or even a single act of kindness can change an individual's life forever towards the betterment. Words are what an individual uses to express themselves, thoughts and feelings. One must never underestimate words' power. A person's choice of language can affect not only how another person feels but also how they perceive events around them. Childhood bullying, verbal abuse in domestic relationships, and even word choice by medical



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

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

may lead to stress, anxiety and anger followed by a disconnect in the relationship. A word is not just a combination of letters or sounds but a functional unit that helps thoughts take shape. It's the words that have the power and power to help, heal, hurt, harm or humiliate anyone. Since it is not in anyone's control what others say or do to a loved one, learning how to respond in loving ways can always prove fruitful. Remember, no one can create a better reality while complaining or crying over current problems. It is imperative to choose words carefully with empathy and intention. Words should build bridges, and opportunities and not barriers, spread love and affection and not hate and war. Always be mindful of the conversation going on in your mind, for it can destroy or uplift you. It is imperative to become aware of words because words and feelings, when directed outwardly, can rebound and cause havoc in one's own life. (The author is an educator)



SAKSHI SETHI

Congress' OBC paranoia is age-old

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

Late Rajiv Gandhi was the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha in 1990 when the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh took the historic decision to implement the Mandal Commission Report to give effect to reservation to other backward classes (OBCs) to the extent of 27 per cent. Six years before Rajiv Gandhi had led Congress to win 404 seats with over 49 per cent vote share. The Mandal Commission Report was a turnaround for Indian politics, as Rajiv Gandhi stood in the Lok Sabha to oppose its implementation. The Bharatiya Janata Party leaders Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani welcomed the decision of the VP Singh government, stating that the time had come to recognise the legitimate demands of the OBCs in the country.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Also, there had been a number of precedents in

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMERICA'S BACKING FOR RAHUL

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

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

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

COMMUNAL TENSION ON RAM NAVAMI

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

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

Cause of great concern



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

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

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

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

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

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

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

HATE SPEECH — A VICIOUS CIRCLE

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

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

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

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Coimbatore

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE HYBRID
WORKPLACE PUZZLE

Post pandemic, ‘hybrid’ will define the employer-employee relationship



ARNAB GHOSH

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Reforming the capital gains tax a smart move



UTTAM GUPTA

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



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

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

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

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

“

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

(The writer is a policy analyst)

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

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

IMPACT ON INVESTORS

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

We need to look at things from

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fill top vacancies at 3 important institutions for PwDs

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



ARCHANA JYOTI

(The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

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

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

next month i.e., April.

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

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

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

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

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

additional secretary in the Ministry.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

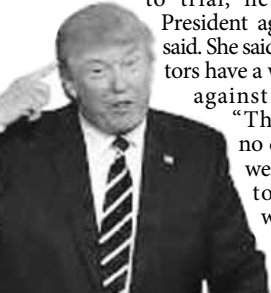
Donald Trump’s indictment evokes mixed reactions

AP ■ NEW YORK

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

New Yorkers and tourists strolled by the building, some stopping only briefly to take pictures of the multi-story glass tower, which is ensconced among the world’s most luxurious brands on 5th Avenue, and that bears Trump’s name. “As far as Trump being indicted is concerned, sure they’ll handcuff him, they’ll take a mug shot and then he will be good to go. This has made Trump’s base stronger,” New York activist Susan-Anne Miller told PTI outside the Trump Tower. “By the time the case goes to trial, he will be President again,” she said. She said prosecutors have a weak case against Trump.

“There was no case, they were trying to find a way to work it around



so that they could hold him. This is a political witch hunt and in the end, he will be proven innocent,” she said. Miller said there will be no riots from Trump supporters in the aftermath of the indictment. An elderly couple said it was “about time” that Trump was indicted. “We are very excited. We hope he is indicted. We don’t want him to become President again. (The indictment and charges) are a long time coming, he is a crook,” they said.

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

“The Democratic Party and their allies have been wanting to get Trump indicted on something, whatever it was, for the better part of about eight years now,” he said. “This is the most ridiculous one that they could have thrown out there,” he said, referring to charges related to the hush money payments to Daniels. “May be they want to knock him off the ballot through legal means by moving forward with this. This is just the next step of this country becoming a banana republic,” he said.

Benjamin Adams, a New Yorker, said the Trump indictment was going to divide the American people even more. “I think the country has a lot more pressing issues at the moment than to worry about this,” he said. His friend listed China, Russia, the US dollar and a weak economy as more pressing issues the country is facing and needed attention. Another New Yorker termed the indictment as “spectacular” and said: “it is a long time coming.” “He is finally going to face consequences. His base is going to get riled up about anything anyway,” he said. Al Mason, Indian-American Trump supporter, real estate businessman and co-chair of the Trump Victory Indian-American Finance Committee, told PTI that the charges against Trump are “100 per cent political.” “Trump will emerge even stronger after this witch hunt. Never underestimate him.

Conservative media figures leap to US ex-Prez defence

New York (AP): Conservative media figures leaped to Donald Trump’s defense with apocalyptic language on Thursday, claiming the former president was being unfairly persecuted by a Manhattan grand jury’s indictment and predicting his 2024 bid for the White House would get a boost from his perceived martyrdom. “This is totally unacceptable and a disgrace to this country,” said Fox News Channel host Jesse Watters.

“This is repulsive,” said Fox’s Sean Hannity, three days after he interviewed Trump on his show. “This is a disgusting political hit job the likes of which we have never seen in this country anymore.” “It’s insane,” said Newsmax’s Eric Bolling. The actual charges in the grand jury indictment against Trump have not been

made public. The Manhattan district attorney’s office has investigated payments made during the 2016 presidential election to silence claims of an extramarital affair. For conservative-oriented media, Thursday’s fury represented a rapid turnaround. Trump had recently complained of being looked over by Fox, by far the most popular media outlet for conservatives, and had not appeared there for an interview in months before Hannity spoke to him earlier this week.

“This is a horrible night for the republic, but politically it’s a great night for Donald Trump,” commentator Pete Hegseth said, predicting that mug shots of the former president would be proudly displayed in college dorm rooms and on T-shirts.

‘India, Japan join hands with Lanka to bolster regional connectivity in Indo-Pacific region’

PTI ■ LANKA

India and Japan have jointly agreed to cooperate with Sri Lanka to bolster regional connectivity in the strategic Indo-Pacific, a media report said on Friday, amid China’s aggressive military manoeuvring in the resource-rich region. The US, India and several other world powers have been talking about the need to ensure a free, open and thriving Indo-Pacific. China is engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas.

Beijing has also made substantial progress in militarising its man-made islands over the past few years.

Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay said India and Japan share wide-ranging interests in a peaceful, progressive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, the Daily Mirror Lanka newspaper reported. He made these remarks at an event here in the presence of the Japanese envoy Mizukoshi Hideaki, it said. Asserting that Sri Lanka is an important member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IROA) countries, Baglay said there is a great deal of opportunity for India, Japan and Sri Lanka to work together



for the prosperity of people here and the benefit of all sides, the report said. “This should be in accordance with the priorities of Sri Lanka,” he said

“Sri Lanka is at the happy confluence of three important pillars of India’s foreign policy,” Baglay was quoted as saying in the report. Japanese Ambassador Hideaki said that during Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s recent visit to India, the two countries exchanged views on cooperation with Sri Lanka and agreed to work closely. “I believe that connectivity is the best area to showcase how two countries can bring tangible benefits to the entire region including Sri Lanka. To this end, perspectives and insights from countries in the region are critical, and this report precisely addresses that,” he was quoted as saying in the report. Sri Lanka is a key part of

China’s Belt and Road Initiative, a long-term plan to fund and build infrastructure linking China to the rest of the world. But China’s unproductive projects in Sri Lanka, including the Hambantota port, which Beijing took over on a 99-year lease in 2017 as a debt swap, have come under sharp criticism. Earlier this month, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a USD 3 billion bailout programme to help Sri Lanka overcome its economic crisis and catalyse financial support from other development partners, a move welcomed by Colombo as a “historic milestone” in the critical period. Last week, Sri Lanka received USD 330 million as the first tranche of the IMF bailout programme, which will pave the way for the debt-ridden country to achieve better “fiscal discipline” and “improved governance,” according to President Wickremesinghe. Sri Lanka was hit by an unprecedented financial crisis in 2022, the worst since its independence from Britain in 1948, due to a severe paucity of foreign exchange reserves, sparking political turmoil in the country that led to the ouster of the all-powerful Rajapaksa family.

Trump not alone in US presidential pantheon of controversies, scandals

New York (PTI): Donald Trump will go down in history as the first US President to be indicted on criminal charges but he is far from alone in the pantheon of presidential predecessors whose tenures have been marred by scandals and controversies.

A grand jury in Manhattan on Thursday afternoon voted to indict the real estate tycoon, former reality TV host and America’s Commander-in-Chief in connection with hush money payments to adult film star

Stormy Daniels, making Trump the first former US President to face criminal charges. But Trump, the 45th US president, does not stand alone among current or former US Presidents when it comes to controversy plaguing the White House occupants.

Bill Clinton was the 42nd president of the United States and sat in the Oval Office from 1993 to 2001. In December 1998, Clinton was impeached by the US House of Representatives on charges

Nepal PM Prachanda expands Cabinet

Kathmandu (PTI): Nepal’s Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ on Friday expanded his Cabinet for the seventh time in three months, inducting ministers from five new parties, including the Nepali Congress.

The newly-appointed ministers took an oath of office and secrecy from President Ramchandra Paudel at Sheela Niwas, the President’s Office. A total of four leaders of the Nepali Congress have been appointed ministers in the first phase owing to internal disputes in the party, the Kathmandu Post newspaper reported. Despite the seventh reshuffling, the Cabinet is yet to get into full shape.

Prachanda is still looking after the foreign ministry, ministries of law, justice and parliamentary affairs; forest and environment; health and population and the ministry of youth and sports, the report said. Nepal’s 10-party ruling alliance on Thursday failed to reach a consensus on the power-sharing deal, causing yet another delay in the expansion of the Cabinet. Top leaders held meetings at the Prime Minister’s official residence here at Baluwatar to reach an agreement on the distribution of ministries among



various political parties. Power sharing and the distribution of ministerial portfolios were the major bottlenecks among the members of the ruling alliance as the demand for Cabinet posts was exceeding the number of ministries available, officials said. Before the expansion, Prachanda was overburdened with about 16 ministerial portfolios, including the ministries of Home, Finance, Foreign, Industry and Commerce, Science and Technology, and Agriculture. There were only six Cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister and one minister of state in the Prachanda-led government before Friday’s expansion, as ministers from CPN-UML, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, and Rashtriya Swatantra Party had resigned from the posts following the break up of the seven-party coalition.

‘14 dead in gold mine collapse’

Khartoum (AP): At least 14 workers are dead after a gold mine collapsed in northern Sudan, mining authorities said Friday. The fatal collapse happened after one of the hillsides that surround the Jebel Al-Ahmar gold mine - situated near the Egyptian border - gave way Thursday afternoon, the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company said in a short statement. Some twenty other minors were injured in the collapse and transferred to a nearby hospital, it said.

According to a report published Thursday by Sudan’s state-run news agency SUNA, a search operation was launched to find those trapped beneath the rubble. Witnesses cited by SUNA said the workers were searching inside mining wells for gold using heavy machinery which caused the collapse. A security source cited by the state agency said workers were thought to be trapped beneath the mine’s groundwater.

After being fired, Israel’s defence min caught in limbo

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Five days ago, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s decision to fire his defence minister set off a wave of spontaneous mass protests and a general strike that threatened to paralyse the country, forcing the Israeli leader to suspend his divisive plan to overhaul the judicial system. But Netanyahu never even sent Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant a formal termination letter, a spokesperson for Netanyahu said. As of Friday, Gallant — whose criticism of Netanyahu’s planned judicial changes led to his dismissal — was still on the job. Gallant’s aides said it was business-as-usual at the Defence Ministry. As local media this week crackled with reports of Netanyahu considering whether to replace Gallant with stalwarts of his right-wing Likud party, Gallant remained in limbo — and even so, the public face of

his ministry. He greeted the Azerbaijani foreign minister, toured two military bases and attended Tuesday’s security cabinet meeting this week.

On Thursday, Gallant attended a celebration ahead of the Jewish Passover holiday with the director of the Shin Bet security service, his office said, releasing a photo of him smiling beside Director Ronen Bar. “We have a duty to calm the spirits in Israeli society and maintain an inclusive and unifying discourse,” Gallant said at the holiday toast. The questions swirling around the fate of Israel’s crucial Defence Ministry — which maintains Israel’s 55-year-old military occupation of the West Bank and contends with threats from Iran, Lebanon’s Hezbollah militant group and the Gaza Strip’s militant Hamas rulers — reflects the tensions tearing at Netanyahu’s tight-wing coalition after one of the most dramatic weeks for Israel in decades.

Iranian adviser killed in Israeli airstrike in Syria

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

The airstrikes came after similar attacks early Thursday. SANA said Syrian air defences confronted “hostile targets,” adding that the strike caused material damage. SANA said some of the Israeli missiles were shot down by air defences. Iran’s state television reported Friday that Milad Heidari, an Iranian military adviser, was killed during what it called a “criminal strike” by Israel early Friday morning in Syria. Without giving Heidari’s rank, the report called him a “guard of Islam.” The outlet said he was a member of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and warned Israel will receive an answer for the crime.

6 found dead near Quebec border: Police

Montreal: The Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service said late on Thursday it was investigating the discovery of six bodies in a marshy area of Quebec near Canada’s border with New York state. Police said they were awaiting the results of post-mortem and toxicology tests to determine the cause of death. They said they were still trying to identify the dead and their status in Canada. It wasn’t immediately known if they were migrants trying to cross the border. “The first body was located around 5:00 PM in a marsh area in Tsi Snaihne, Akwesasne, Quebec,” police said in a statement on social media. “There is no threat to the public at this time.” Last month, the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service and the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Police reported a recent increase in illegal entries through their lands and waterways. The statement said some migrants required hospitalisation. And in January the force noted people involved in human smuggling had attempted to utilize shorelines along the St. Lawrence River in the area.

Indian-Americans meet US justice dept officials over embassy attack

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Eminent Indian-Americans, including members of the Sikh community from Silicon Valley, recently met with the officials of the US Department of Justice and condemned the recent violence against the Indian diplomatic mission and diplomats in San Francisco.

During the meeting that took place on Wednesday, the Indian-Americans told the DoJ officials that they felt unsafe going to the San Francisco Consulate and felt disturbed while the Sikh community members said such unlawful activities, which do not reflect the voice of the majority, bring a bad name to the community. They also talked about personal safety and the lack of action by the San Francisco Police. The meeting came after a group of Khalistan supporters this month attacked and damaged the Indian Consulate in San Francisco.

Raising pro-Khalistan slogans, the protesters broke open the makeshift security barriers

raised by the city police and installed two so-called Khalistani flags inside the Consulate premises. Two consulate personnel soon removed these flags. Later, the Khalistani supporters also held a protest in front of the Indian Embassy in Washington and tried to incite violence and even threatened the country’s envoy, but timely intervention by law enforcement agencies prevented them from vandalising the property. During the meeting, senior officials from the DoJ addressed and interacted with Indian-Americans and Sikhs at two separate round tables hosted by eminent community leader Ajay Bhutoria during which they discussed issues of safety and security of the Indian consulate, hate crimes, and community tensions.

The meeting aimed to promote understanding, build stronger relationships, and ensure safety and security for everyone. Sikh community leaders told DoJ that they do not believe in violence.

“We must try to create an environment where everyone

feels safe to express their opinions and concerns without fear of violence,” Bhutoria said as he underscored the safety and security of the Indian Consulate in San Francisco which provides a critical service to the community. It is essential that those seeking services can access them without facing protestors and feel safe, Bhutoria said.

The discussion spread over two days and two different sessions highlighted the importance of respecting and valuing diverse perspectives within the community and ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the dialogue. DoJ representatives Harpreet Mokha and Vincent Player were present at the event to listen to the community’s concerns and offer support.

The roundtable aimed to build stronger relationships between diverse Indian community groups and the broader US community while ensuring the safety and security of the Indian consulate and its staff and the premise.

US Senate confirms Verma for top State Dept position

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

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

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



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

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

Inflation increasing poverty in Argentina

Buenos Aires (Argentina): One of the world’s highest inflation rates is making it more difficult to make ends meet in Argentina, where at the end of last year nearly four of every 10 people were poor, official figures revealed Thursday. Poverty increased to 39.2 per cent of the population in the second half of 2022, a three percentage point increase from the first six months of the year, said Argentina’s national statistics agency, INDEC. Among children under age 15, the poverty rate increased more than three percentage points to 54.2 per cent.

In a poor neighbourhood in Argentina’s capital, those who run a soup kitchen don’t need the statistics to tell them what they have been seeing amid an economy wracked by inflation that reached 94.8 per cent last year. “There’s more poverty than before,” said Graciela Gamarra, who runs the soup kitchen in the Fraga district that hands out more than 800 portions of food every weekday afternoon.

“After the pandemic, everything got worse,” she said. “Most have precarious jobs, they don’t have fixed employment to say that they’re sure about how much they’ll make each month.” Rosa Guerrero, 76, was one of the people who went to the soup kitchen with her plastic container to get food on a recent afternoon.

“If it weren’t for the soup kitchen, what would become of me?” Guerrero said, noting that more people from outside the neighbourhood had been arriving recently to ask for food.

Mexican experts say mummy exhibit may pose health risks

AP ■ MEXICO

Mexican government experts said Thursday they are concerned that a travelling display of mummies from the 1800s may pose a health risk to the public. The preserved corpses were unintentionally mummified when they were buried in crypts in dry, mineral-rich soil in the state of Guanajuato. Some still have hair, leathery skin and their original clothing.

But the National Institute of Anthropology and History said in a statement that one of the mummies also appears to have fungal growths.

The federal institute distanced itself from a state government decision to display a half dozen of the mummies in glass cases at a tourism fair



in Mexico City. It was unclear whether the cases were air-tight, and the institute said it had not been consulted about the display.

“It is even more worrisome that they are still being exhibited without the safeguards for the public against biohazards,” said the institute.

“From some of the published photos, at least one of the corpses on display, which

was inspected by the institute in November 2021, shows signs of a proliferation of possible fungus colonies,” the institute wrote.

“This should all be carefully studied to see if these are signs of a risk for the cultural legacy, as well as for those who handle them and come to see them.”

The mummies are usually on display in the Guanajuato state capital. But they have travelled before, and some were exhibited in the United States in 2009. They were naturally preserved, some say because of the climate, mineral-rich environment, other because of the sealed crypts, though no one knows for sure. They were dug up starting in the 1860s, because their families could no longer pay burial fees, and put on display.

Indiana boy shoots baby with handgun

Lafayette (US): A 16-month-old boy was fatally shot by his 5-year-old sibling after the older child found a handgun in a northwestern Indiana apartment, police said. The circumstances of Tuesday’s fatal shooting of Isiah Johnson remained under investigation Thursday by the Lafayette Police Department, which does not plan to release additional information during the ongoing investigation, said Capt. Brian Phillips.

Police said previously that the shooting occurred when one adult and two children were inside the apartment in Lafayette, about 96 kilometers north of Indianapolis. Phillips said Thursday that the 5-year-old sibling who shot Isiah gained access to a handgun in the apartment. He declined to provide additional information about the sibling and said police were still investigating who owns that weapon.

An autopsy performed Wednesday determined that Isiah died from a single gunshot wound, but his manner of death is pending completion of the police investigation and toxicology reports, said Tippecanoe County Coroner Carrie Costello, the Journal and Courier reported.

Once police complete their shooting investigation, Phillips said those findings will be forwarded to the Tippecanoe County Prosecutor’s Office for review and to determine if charges might be filed.

India on track to achieve \$2-trn exports by 2030, says Goyal



Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal with Ministers of State Anupriya Patel and Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal releases 'Foreign Trade Policy 2023', in New Delhi on Friday

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

The minister said he has asked the Department of Commerce to undertake a "massive focused concentrated" outreach globally in the next 4-5 months sectorally as well as country-wise through Indian missions abroad with special focus on trade, technology, tourism and investment.

India's total exports growth decelerated to 13.4 per cent in 2022-23 annually from 36 per cent expansion in the previous financial year as global demand was affected following outbreak

of Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 and other geopolitical reasons.

"We will achieve exports of \$1 trillion each in goods and services by 2030," Goyal said.

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

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

FTP 2023 to facilitate greater trade, boost manufacturing: FIEO president Sakthivel



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The new foreign trade policy will facilitate greater trade, boost manufacturing and help in making the rupee a global currency, the president of apex exporters' body FIEO A Sakthivel on Friday said.

The Foreign Trade Policy 2023 was unveiled by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday. It will come into effect from April 1, 2023. Terming the FTP as a dynamic without an end date, the FIEO President said it maintains policy continuity with a window for the trade and industry to ensure a responsive and nimble approach.

Sakthivel said that India has been continuously touching record-high exports, as the country's FTP has contributed immensely to this illustrious export performance.

He said that the focus of the FTP 2023 has been mainly on four pillars, including moving on from incentives to remissions, and export promotion through collaborations.

"The policy has rightly emphasised key elements, including ease of doing business with a reduction in transaction cost and e-initiatives," he said.

Online approvals with a physical interface, reduction in user charges for MSMEs under advance authorisation and EPCG, e-certificate of origin, and paperless filing of export obligation discharge applications will not only reduce the transaction time and cost but will also help exporters in the timely discharge of the export contract, he added.

He requested the government that a 3-6 months transition period may be provided, whenever a major change is notified in the Foreign Trade policy so that the existing contract can be executed factoring in the prevailing benefits.

Unlike the practice of a five-year foreign trade policy, the FTP 2023 is without an end date and will be updated as per the requirement.

Crif Microlend report: MFI loans grow 20% in Q3



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The gross micro loans portfolio grew 20 per cent to ₹3.16 lakh crore in the quarter ended December 2022 as compared to the year-ago period, a report said on Friday.

The gross loan portfolio growth came at 5.5 per cent when compared to the September quarter, according to the report by credit information company Crif Microlend.

Delinquencies of advances overdue for over 90 days by value declined 1.7 per cent while as a percentage of overall advances, it was at 2 per cent at the end of December 2022 as against 2.7 per cent in the year-ago period.

The coronavirus pandemic had impacted the microfinance sector as field agents were unable to visit borrowers to extend loans and also ensure timely repayments.

The report said that non-bank finance companies continue to dominate the market with a 35.7 per cent share, followed by banks at 33.5 per cent and small finance banks at 16.9 per cent.



Govt raises interest rates on most small saving schemes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The highest increase was in the interest rate of the National Savings Certificate (NSC), which will now attract 7.5 per cent, up from 7 per cent, for the April 1 to June 30, 2023 period.

The new rate for the girl child savings scheme Sukanya Samriddhi has been increased to 8 per cent from 7.6 per cent.

The interest rate on the senior citizen savings scheme and Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP) is 8.2 per cent (up from 8 per cent

and 7.6 per cent (up from 7.2 per cent), respectively. KVP will now mature in 115 months as against 120 months earlier.

Interest rates were increased in the last quarter as well.

Interest rates for small savings schemes are notified on a quarterly basis.

With the revision, a one-year term deposit with post offices would earn 6.8 per cent (up from 6.6 per cent), for two years — 6.9 per cent (up from 6.8 per cent), three years — 7 per cent (up from 6.9 per cent) and five years — 7.5 per cent (7 per cent).

The interest rate on Public Provident Fund (PPF) has been retained at 7.1 per cent and that of the savings deposit at 4 per cent. Monthly Income Scheme has been increased by 30 basis points to 7.4 per cent.

The Reserve Bank since May has raised the benchmark lending rate by 2.5 per cent to 6.5 per cent, prompting banks to raise interest rates on deposits as well.



Retail inflation for industrial workers remains flat at 6.16% in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation for industrial workers remained flat at 6.16 per cent in February compared to that of January this year.

"Year-on-year inflation for the month stood at 6.16 per cent compared to 6.16 per cent for the previous month (January, 2023) also and 5.04 per cent during the corresponding month (February 2022) a year before," a labour bureau statement said.

It stated that food inflation stood at 6.13 per cent against 5.69 per cent of the previous month and 5.09 per cent during the corresponding month a year ago.

The Labour Bureau, an attached office of the Ministry of Labour & Employment, has been compiling Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) every month on the basis of retail prices collected from 317 markets spread over 88 industrially important centres in the country.

The index is compiled for 88 centres and all-India and is released on the last working day of succeeding month.

The all-India CPI-IW for February 2023 decreased by 0.1 point and stood at 132.7 points. It was 132.8 points in January 2023.

On 1-month percentage change, it decreased by 0.08 per cent with respect to previous month.

A decrease of 0.08 per cent was recorded between corresponding months a year ago too.

The maximum downward pressure in current index came from food & beverages group contributing 0.1 percentage point to the total change.

At item level, cabbage, cauliflower, brinjal, carrot, onion, potato, peas, french-bean, drum stick, kundru, grapes, sunflower oil, soyabean oil, mustard oil, poultry/chicken, eggs-hen and fish fresh etc. Are responsible for the fall in index.

However, this decrease was checked by rice, wheat, wheat atta, buffalo milk, cow milk, pure ghee, garlic, gourd, lady's finger, parwal, cumin seed/jira, apple, banana, mango, country liquor, foreign liquor and medicine allopathic, etc. Putting upward pressure on the index.

Forex kitty rises \$5.98 billion to \$578.78 billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI

In a second consecutive weekly increase, India's forex reserves rose \$ 5.977 billion to \$578.78 billion in the week ended March 24, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the kitty had risen by \$12.8 billion to \$572.8 billion.

It can be noted that in October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of \$645 billion. The reserves have been declining as the central bank deploys the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments.

For the week ended March 24, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by \$4.38 billion to \$509.728 billion, according to the Weekly Statistical Supplement released by the RBI.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Markets end last trading day of FY23 in style; Sensex Nifty rally nearly 2 pc on firm global trends

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended the last day of 2022-23 fiscal with nearly 2 per cent jump on Friday in line with firm trends in the global markets and heavy buying in index major Reliance Industries.

Fresh foreign fund inflows also added to the positive momentum in the equity market. The 30-share BSE Sensex zoomed 1,031.43 points or 1.78 per cent to finish at 58,991.52. During the day, it jumped 1,108.38 points or 1.91 per cent to 59,068.47.

The broader NSE Nifty climbed 279.05 points or 1.63 per cent to end at 17,359.75.

"Markets saw a perfect ending to FY23 as charged bulls went berserk on Dalal Street thus propelling both the benchmark indices to close above the psychological mark. The rally was long overdue as fading worries over the recent turmoil in the US and European banking industry prompted investors to latch upon the beaten down stocks.

"Also, falling US bond yields and the return of FILs into the local markets in recent sessions have bolstered the market sentiment," said Amol Athawale, Deputy Vice President - Technical Analyst, Kotak Securities Ltd.

Among the Sensex firms, Reliance Industries emerged as the biggest gainer as it jumped over 4 per cent. Nestle,



Infosys, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, Tech Mahindra and Axis Bank were the other major winners. Sun Pharma, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and Titan were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Japan, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the green. European markets were trading with gains during the afternoon trade. The US markets ended in positive territory on Thursday.

"As the financial year drew to a close, the market witnessed an upward trend marked by bullish moves in the banking and IT sectors driven by robust global cues. Notably, an increased interest from foreign institutional investors due to the moderation in Indian stock valuations also aided," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Indian equity markets were closed on Thursday on account of 'Ram Navami'.

Investors' wealth erode by ₹5.86 L crore in FY23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Dalal Street investors became poorer by Rs 5.86 lakh crore in 2022-23 fiscal as the equity market faced a tough time in view of plenty of negative triggers such as high inflation, geopolitical conflicts and higher interest rates.

The domestic stock market encountered many headwinds this fiscal such as high inflation, the Russia-Ukraine war, higher interest rates, foreign fund outflows and the recent global banking turmoil.

"In FY23 we have seen events of decadal high inflation, aggressive monetary policy stance by global central banks w.r.T interest rate hikes, banking crisis in US and Europe, and continuing Russia-Ukraine war," said Srikanth Subramanian, CEO of wealth management company Kotak Cherry.

Amid the sluggish trend in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies fell by ₹5,86,605.38 crore to ₹2,58,19,896.00 crore in the entire 2022-23 fiscal.

The main issue facing equity market in FY23 was inflation, which resulted in the increase in interest rates around the world and lowered investor sentiment, said Parth Nyati, Founder of online stock trading app Tradingo.

IN-BRIEF

NTPC POWER GENERATION HIGHEST AT 400 BU

New Delhi: NTPC Ltd, India's largest integrated power generator, has registered the highest-ever power generation of 400 BU in FY23, a growth of 10.80 per cent via-a-vis previous year. NTPC continues to demonstrate an upward trend in coal production from its captive mines with a coal production of 23.2 Million Metric Tonnes with a robust growth of over 65 per cent vis-à-vis the previous corresponding year. NTPC has taken several steps to augment the coal production to the coal mines. NTPC has set an ambitious goal of reaching half its installed capacity through RE by 2032, to serve the nation and support its decarbonisation goals. During the financial year, FY 23, the company registered a growth of 24.24% in a non-fossil portfolio.

POWER GRID WINS 3 SPVS FOR TRANSMISSION

Gurugram: Power Grid Corporation of India Limited has acquired three Project Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) for various Transmission System Projects after competing with various private sector players and emerging as successful bidder in the Tariff Based Competitive Bidding process (TBCB) conducted by PFC Consulting Limited as per the Guidelines notified by Government of India. These Project SPVs are Bhadla Sikar Transmission Limited, Dhamrajgarh Transmission Limited and Raipur Pool Dhamtari Transmission Limited.

SKILL BUILDING INITIATIVE GENERATES JOBS

New Delhi: Bal Raksha Bharat (globally known as Save the Children), with support from Avaya India recognised 380 youth and adolescents who found placements after going through vocation skills training under a joint programme. 150 of these young adults who will form the alumni group, were felicitated at a 'Youth Conclave 2023', held in New Delhi, to celebrate their success through their journey 'from a trainee to a working employee'.

DEPT OF POST LAUNCHES SUB-POST OFFICE IN VIT

Vijayawada/Amaravati/ Guntur: The Department of Posts has launched the Sub Post Office in the VIT-AP University. Aditya Kumar Naik, IPOS, Director- Postal Services, Andhra Pradesh Circle has inaugurated the new sub-post office with the postal code 522241. Operations of the post office have started with immediate effect in the campus.

Output of eight key infra sectors record almost flat growth at 6% in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Production of eight infrastructure sectors recorded an almost flat growth rate of 6 per cent in February as against 5.9 per cent in the same month last year, according to official data released on Friday. The output of core sectors had increased by 8.9 per cent in January 2023.

Barring crude oil, all the segments posted an increase in production. Crude oil output contracted by 4.9 per cent in February. The growth rate of eight infrastructure sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity — stood at 7.8 per cent in April-February this fiscal as against 11.1 per cent during the same period last fiscal.

Sebi extends compliance period for three years for big corporations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Friday extended the compliance requirement to three years for 'large corporates' to raise at least 25 per cent of their incremental borrowings through debt securities to a contiguous block from two years at present.

This comes after the board of Sebi approved a proposal in this regard on Wednesday.

Currently, the rules mandate large corporates to mobilise a minimum of 25 per cent of their incremental borrowings in a financial year through the issuance of debt securities which has to be met over a contiguous block of two years.



Coal India crosses FY23 production target of 700 MT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) on Friday said it has crossed the annual coal production target of 700 million tonne (MT) in 2022-23. As of Thursday, March 30, the company produced 700.4 MT of coal, up 13 per cent over 619.8 MT on the same date a year ago, the miner said in a statement.

"CIL has breached its challenging production target of 700 MT one day ahead of FY23 closure. CIL is likely to end FY23 with 703.6 MT output going by the current rate of production. It produced 622.6 MTs in the previous fiscal year," it added.

The stiff target of 700 MTs was a challenging task but all our subsidiaries went the extra mile to chip in their best, the statement noted.

The production increased by 81 MT year-on-year in FY23. It outstrips, by nearly two-fold,

the previous high of 44.5 MT hike reported in 2015-16.

Odisha-based CIL subsidiary Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) production rose by 25 MT year-ion-year to 192.8 MT in FY23. It accounted for 27.5 per cent of CIL's total production.

South Eastern Coalfields Ltd's production increased by 24.3 MT to 166 MT as of March 30 from 142.5 MT last year.

CIL's overburden removal (OBR) rose to a new record of 1,651.7 M.Cu.M (million cubic metres) as of March 30. The previous high was 1,362 M.Cu.M.

"Growth in OBR is an encouraging indicator and bodes well for CIL in ramping up the production in the first quarter of FY24, especially when faced with a challenging target of 780 MT. Exposing the coal seam for future readiness, OBR facilitates faster coal extraction," the statement said.

NTPC logs highest ever power generation of 400 bn unit in FY23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned NTPC on Friday said it has registered the highest-ever power generation of 400 billion units — a 10.8 per cent year-on-year growth in 2022-23.

"NTPC Ltd has registered the highest-ever power generation of 400 BU in FY23, a growth of 10.80 per cent via-a-vis previous year," a statement said. NTPC continues to demonstrate an upward trend in coal production from its captive mines.

od stood at ₹14.53 lakh crore.

The fiscal deficit in the comparable period of 2021-22 was 82.7 per cent of that year's Revised Estimate (RE) in the Budget.

For the full year 2022-23, the government expects the deficit at ₹17.55 lakh crore or 6.4 per cent of the GDP.

CGA data showed that the net tax collection in the first 11 months of this fiscal was at

₹17,32,193 crore or 83 per cent of the RE for 2022-23. In the comparable period last fiscal, the collection stood at 83.9 per cent of the RE for 2021-22.

Total expenditure incurred by the government was ₹34.93 lakh crore (83.4 per cent of RE 2022-23), out of which ₹29,03,363 crore was on Revenue Account and ₹ 5,90,227 crore was on Capital Account.

Rupee rises by 17 paise to 82.17 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 17 paise to 82.17 against the US dollar on Friday as foreign capital inflows and a rally in domestic stocks bolstered investor sentiment.

Besides, easing global crude oil prices and rising appetite for riskier assets also supported the domestic unit, forex traders said.

However, a strong dollar against major rivals overseas ahead of US inflation data capped the rupee's gain, they added. At the interbank foreign

exchange market, the domestic unit opened strong at 82.12 and touched an intra-day high of 82.09 and a low of 82.26 against the greenback.

The local unit quoted at 82.17 at 1530 hrs, registering a gain of 17 paise over its previous close of 82.34.

The forex market was closed on Thursday for Ram Navami.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, gained 0.25 per cent to 102.08 ahead of the release of the US inflation data later in the day.

MEDVEDEV, ALCARAZ REACH MIAMI SEMIS

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Russian, who after the



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

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

'MISTAKES AMPLIFIED'

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

ley, putting it out and ending his resistance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

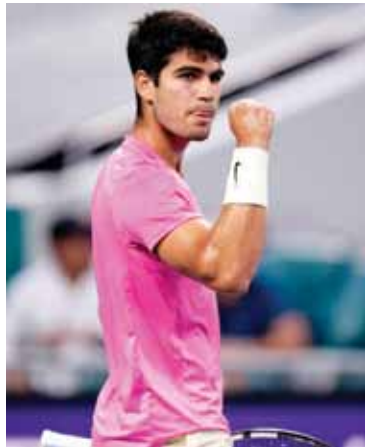
seed beat Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo 6-3, 6-2.

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

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

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

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



AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

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

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

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

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

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

winners off of a lot of shots, shots that people normally aren't hurting me off of. "I just felt he was more offensive and pressed me a lot more," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

AP ■ MUNICH

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

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

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

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

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

The Dortmund coach prai-

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rybakina beats Pegula to reach Miami final

AP ■ MIAMI

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

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

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

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

Pegula had been 4-2 up in the

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

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

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

"It's really difficult because of



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chelsea stun Lyon in Champions League shoot-out

AP ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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



2021 final.

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

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

Eight-times champions Lyon

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

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

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

Mjelde then kept her cool to fire in from the spot as her effort levelled the tie and sent it to a shoot-out. Earlier, a 1-1 draw at home was good enough for Wolfsburg to go through.

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

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

Renard named coach of France women's football team

AP ■ PARIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alonso fastest in wet Australian 2nd practice, Verstappen third

AP ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

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



NO HOPE OF CHALLENGING RED BULLS IN AUSTRALIA: HAMILTON

AP ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and adrift but ahead of Verstappen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GAIKWAD TAKES CSK TO 178/7

Ruturaj scores 92 runs from 50 balls to help Chennai post a fighting total against GT



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Opener Ruturaj Gaikwad was all class in his 92 off 50 balls as Chennai Super Kings posted a challenging 178 for seven against defending champions Gujarat Titans in the IPL opener here on Friday.

Gaikwad regaled the near capacity crowd here with his sublime strokeplay. It was a display of effortless hitting from Gaikwad, who relied on his lofted drives over extra cover and crisp pull shots to collect as many as eight sixes.

Apart from Gaikwad, the only other batter who put the Titans under pressure was Moeen Ali who came up with a 17-ball 23. Ali's flat six off Mohammad Shami on a free-hit ball was the highlight of his cameo.

Gaikwad pulled IPL debutant Joshua Little on his very first ball to set the tone of his innings. That over went for 15 runs and with Shami conceding 17 runs in the following over, CSK got the momentum they were looking for.

Titans' trump card Rashid Khan was introduced in the powerplay and as he often does, he got the wicket that his team was looking for

by getting the dangerous looking Ali caught behind.

Rashid's second over saw him getting rid of England Test captain Ben Stokes, who too was caught by wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha, leaving CSK at 70 for three.

However, the fall of wickets did not make Gaikwad change his game as he kept getting the boundaries. He welcomed Alzarri Joseph into the attack by smashing him for three sixes in the eighth over.

Titans did well to stem the flow of runs in the middle overs and got the wicket of Ambati Rayudu.

Shivam Dube struggled to find the big hits and that put pressure on Gaikwad who was caught in the deep in the 17th over and missed out on a deserving hundred.

Skipper M S Dhoni came out to bat at number eight but still managed to make an impact as he pulled Little for a six before flicking him for a four in the final over, sending the crowd into a frenzy.

Kane Williamson injured his knee while fielding at the boundary and limped off the field.



Hazlewood likely to miss first 7 games of RCB

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Set to miss at least first leg of the IPL due to an Achilles (heel) problem, Royal Challengers' Bangalore's Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood would reach India by April 14 but would take another week to be match-fit.

While Hazlewood will miss at least seven IPL games, his Australian teammate Glenn Maxwell is doubtful for RCB's opening match against Mumbai Indians on April 2 in Bengaluru as he is yet to fully regain strength post leg fracture.

"Everything is ticking along according to plan, so I'll be heading over on the 14th (of April) depending on how the next two weeks go," Hazlewood was quoted as saying by The Age.

"I probably won't be quite ready to go right then, but (after) another week in India to touch things up skills wise I should be ready to go hopefully."

Hazlewood, who had to opt out of Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India, is hoping to get ready for the Ashes via the IPL. "You don't need a lot of workload for T20. It's more just ticking off those boxes of getting up to speed and pushing back in the run-up. I'm probably only going to need to do one or two sessions at full pace and then I'm probably good to play."

"T20 is a lot different to Test and even one-day cricket. You only need 20 balls at full pace and that's pretty close to a game, which is a good thing," he said.

The 32-year-old pacer, however, is still awaiting a medical clearance from Cricket Australia before departing for India.

"It's a niggly one, the Achilles tendon. It's a slow process but it thrives on a bit of work, and I'd have to be bowling to prepare for the Ashes, so it may as well be in a game of cricket," Hazlewood said.

Injury-hit KKR, PBKS look to make positive start

PTI ■ MOHALI

Plagued by injuries and unavailability of a few foreign players, both Punjab Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders would still look to put their best foot forward as they lock horns in their opening IPL encounter here on Saturday.

These are the two franchises, which over the years have flattered to deceive. Inconsistency in team selections seemed to have also affected the them badly. While PBKS finished sixth, two-time champions KKR ended a rung below in the seventh spot in the 10-team competition last year.

Both teams will be led by new skipper this season. While veteran Shikhar Dhawan will be at the helm of Punjab, domestic star Nitish Rana has replaced injured Shreyas Iyer as KKR captain.

On paper, though, PBKS looks a tad more stronger than KKR. But Englishman Jonny Bairstow's absence will certainly leave a big void in Punjab's team composition.

Bairstow has been ruled out of the entire IPL as he continues to recover from a leg injury he had sustained while playing golf last September.

In Bairstow's place, PBKS has roped in BBL's player-of-the-tournament this season, Matthew Short who is expected to open the batting along side Dhawan.

Other key PBKS players, who will miss Saturday's game are hard-hitting all-rounder Liam Livingstone, who is yet to get clearance from the ECB, fol-



These are the two franchises, which over the years have flattered to deceive. Inconsistency in team selections seemed to have also affected the them badly

lowing a knee injury, and South African Kagiso Rabada who is on national duty.

PBKS squad is stacked with all-rounders, the most lethal among them being \$2 million plus buy Sam Curran, who is more than handy with the bat and is a very fine death bowler. Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza

is another utility all-rounder PBKS could bank upon.

But they would depend on Dhawan and Short to provide consistency at the top. On the bowling front, PBKS would miss Rabada on Saturday and in his absence the onus would be on Arshdeep Singh, old guard Rishi Dhawan, Curran and leg-spinner Rahul Chahar to do the job.

For two-time champions KKR, new coach Chandrakant Pandit will be the key man as it is now an open secret that he along with Mumbai stalwart Abhishek Nayar are going to take all decisions from the dug-out and Rana's only job would be to implement them.

KKR too have been hurt by injuries with regular skipper and batting mainstay Shreyas being almost ruled out of the tournament with a back prob-

lem. The two Bangladeshis Shakib Al Hasan and Litton Das are also going to miss the opening game due to national commitments.

KKR's strength too lies in the team's all-rounders with the likes of Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, David Weise, Vernkatesh Iyer and Shakib Al Hasan in their rank.

Even though both Tim Southee and Lockie Ferguson have joined the KKR squad, the latter is a doubtful starter on Saturday having injured his right hamstring last week.

KKR's weakness lies in an unsettled top-order and it remains to be seen who will anchor the innings.

In Wiesie, Rinku Singh and Afghan Rahmanullah Gurbaz, KKR have some terrific hard-hitters who can pull off a win on their given day.

India have firepower in pace department to trouble Oz in the WTC Final: Taylor



PTI ■ DUBAI

Former New Zealand skipper Ross Taylor has backed the Indian pace unit to cause trouble for Australian batters in the World Test Championship final scheduled at the Oval in London from June 7-11.

Taylor feels Indian fast bowlers have the wherewithal to create problems for Australia even though Jasprit Bumrah will be sidelined. "Any time you play in England, conditions and the weather play a big part," Taylor was told ICC website.

"Any time you think of Australia and India, and also you're playing in a neutral ground, the seamers play a big part. The Australian seamers are renowned for bowling with the Dukes ball and have a lot of experience."

But Taylor didn't rule out India's chances. "I wouldn't rule out this Indian side. They have had a lot of success over there in the years gone past, they have a few of these seamers," he added.

While spin played a key role in the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India,

Taylor expects pacers of both the teams to rule the roost in the WTC Final at The Oval.

Taylor is confident that even without Bumrah, India have enough options in the pace department to make an impact in English conditions. "Very tough to replace someone like Bumrah. He has been fantastic in all three formats and is the leader of their bowling attack," he said.

"But I think there's still enough depth in this Indian line-up to trouble the Australian side. (Mohammed) Shami and co are fantastic in these conditions."

"When you consider the India attack, (Mohammed) Siraj and Co. are also very good with the Dukes ball."

"I think there are still a lot of (India) seamers that are fantastic and enjoy bowling with the Dukes ball. Umesh Yadav also bowls 140-plus. They will relish the opportunity to bowl with the Dukes ball and in English conditions," Taylor added.

DC look to corner under-pressure Rahul's LSG

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Mitchell Marsh's brute power with the willow will be Delhi Capitals' lethal weapon as they brace up for life without Rishabh Pant while starting their Indian Premier League campaign against Lucknow Super Giants, here on Saturday.

LSG, who will be playing at home for the first time, is an equally beleaguered outfit if not more, with skipper KL Rahul going through the toughest phase of his career and has been on a downward spiral for quite some time now.

By the look of it, neither DC nor LSG look like outfits that give you the



vibe of a champion side like Chennai Super Kings, Mumbai Indians or for that matter Gujarat Titans.

However in the shortest format, equations could change at the drop of hat as the margin that separates a master-stroke from a harakiri is as thin as a thread.

So when DC begin its journey on Saturday evening at the Ekana Stadium, it will be an Australian, who will hold the key to the kind of start that the franchise expects.

And that Australian isn't stocky New South Wales man David Warner, who is leading the side but the giant from Western Australia, who has provided some sort of a trailer during the

ODI series against India with 12 sixes in three games -- 11 of which came in the first two encounters.

It seems that Marsh has got a hang of Indian tracks and that can only augur well for DC.

Marsh, who hasn't bowled his medium pacers for some time, will be a vital cog in Powerplay overs if Warner and his flamboyant opening partner Prithvi Shaw, fail to get going.

DC head coach Ricky Ponting expects a lot from Shaw and on his day, he can butcher any attack. Shaw also likes to work with pace of deliveries and Mark Wood in the opposition ranks, with a speed in excess of 150 clicks, gives him that opportunity.

NZ beat SL by 6 wickets, win ODI series 2-0

AP ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand capitalized on another failure by Sri Lanka's batters and avoided one of its own to win the third ODI by six wickets in Hamilton on Friday and to take the three-match series 2-0.

After being bowled out for only 76 in the first match -- which New Zealand won by 198 runs -- Sri Lanka was dismissed for 157 in 41.3 overs as it batted first after winning the toss in Game 3.

New Zealand also was in trouble early when it lost two wickets in the second over of its innings and was 6-2, then 21-3. But Will Young, who had been out of form with only 30 runs from his last four ODI innings, ground his way back to form with an unbeaten 86, which guided New Zealand to



victory with 17.1 overs remaining.

Young and Henry Nicholas (44) shared an unbeaten partnership of exactly 100 runs for the fifth wicket.

Vaughan cleared of racism on 'balance of probabilities'

AP ■ LONDON

Former England cricket captain Michael Vaughan was on Friday cleared "on the balance of probabilities" of using racist language before a match for county club Yorkshire in 2009.

He was alleged to have used the term "you lot" when referring to a group of four players of South Asian ethnicity, including Pakistan-born Azeem Rafiq.

A Cricket Discipline Commission (CDC) report said it was "not satisfied on the balance of probabilities" that Vaughan spoke the words he was alleged to have used.

But it added that its findings "do not in any way under-

mine the wider assertions" made by Rafiq, who told lawmakers in November 2021 that English cricket was "institutionally racist".

In its concluding remarks the CDC report said: "This is not a case which necessitated a conclusion from the panel that anyone has lied or acted out of malice."

"Far from it, the panel had to consider whether the case as presented to it by the ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board), in light of all the evidence, was sufficiently accurate and reliable, on the balance of probabilities, to rule out mistake. It was not."

Vaughan, who appeared in person at a CDC hearing earlier this month to answer the charges brought by the ECB,

thanked the panel for "their careful attention in very difficult circumstances".

"It has been both difficult and upsetting to hear about the painful experiences which Azeem has described over the past three years," the 48-year-old said in a statement on social media.

"The outcome of these CDC proceedings must not be allowed to detract from the core message that there can be no place for racism in the game of cricket, or in society generally."

Yorkshire accepted in September 2021 that Rafiq, now 32, had been the victim of racial harassment and bullying during his time at the club.



स्टील अथॉरिटी ऑफ इण्डिया लिमिटेड
STEEL AUTHORITY OF INDIA LIMITED
बोकारो इस्पात संयंत्र
BOKARO STEEL PLANT

Important Notice for Procurement of services through GeM

For kind Attention to all Vendors/Bidders of SAIL-Bokaro Steel Plant.

Presently, publication & bid submission of service contracts tenders of SAIL/Bokaro Steel Plant is being done through SAP-SRM platform. As per the direction of Government of India, procurement of services is to be done through GeM Portal. Consequently SAIL/Bokaro Steel Plant will commence floating service contract tenders through GeM Portal in the near future. This is to inform you that that for participation in tenders through GeM portal, registration of vendor on GeM Portal in respective service category/Sub-category is mandatory.

It is therefore required that you visit the GeM Portal and register in the appropriate service category or sub-category that applies to you as it will make you enable to take part in the SAIL/BSL service contract tenders floated on the GeM portal.

SAIL/ Bokaro Steel Plant

Registered Office : Ispat Bhawan, Lodi Road, New Delhi-110003

There's a little bit of SAIL in everybody's life

LOST & FOUND

This is to inform that page no. -8 of the registered sale deed no. : 8154 dated-08/07/2008 in favour of my Client Mr Amar Daruka of property bearing address - Old Plot No.- 657, New Plot No.- 768, Old khata no.- 7, New Khata No.-57, Thana No.- 220, P.S.- Govindpur, Mouza-Ghoramurga, Dist.-Dhanbad, Jharkhand - got lost. If found Please contact on ADV. P.N. Tiwari, Mob.- 7301993687.