

OPINION 6
WHAT BREWED AT
DAVOS?**WORLD 8**
OMAN OPENS AIRSPACE
TO ISRAEL**MONEY 10**
INVESTORS BECOME
POORER BY ₹7.48L CRORE

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADALate City Vol.33 Issue 54
*Air Surcharge Extra If ApplicableLEIPZIG, MAN
CITY PLAY 1-1
DRAW IN CL
11 SPORT

Deplaned, held for Modi slur, SC comes to Khera's rescue

Congress leader released on interim bail by SC till Feb 28

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI/RAIPUR

Congress media department head Pawan Khera was arrested by the Assam Police on Thursday by deplaning him from a Raipur-bound flight from the tarmac of the Delhi airport only to be released on interim bail by the Supreme Court till February 28.

He was arrested for his alleged remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a press conference in Mumbai this week for which multiple FIRs were lodged against Khera, including one by the Assam Police.

Khera, along with several party leaders, were on his way to Raipur for the Congress plenary session when he was arrested by police who deplaned him and took him away. "He was detained by the Delhi Police on a request by the Assam Police. We were just extending support to them. The arrest has been made by



Congress leaders stage a protest dharna at the IGI Airport after the party leader Pawan Khera was allegedly deboarded from the plane owing to an FIR against him, in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI

them," a senior Delhi Police officer said.

A case has been registered at Haflong police station in Assam against Khera under various sections of the IPC, including 153 B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national interest), 500 (punishment for defamation) and 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), for his alleged remarks against the Prime Minister.

Khera had referred to the

PM as "Narendra Gautamdas Modi" while criticising the Government over the row involving the business conglomerate headed by Gautam Adani. Modi's full name is Narendra Damodardas Modi, with the middle name Damodardas standing for his father's name, a common practice in many parts of the country.

Since then Khera had been the subject of the BJP ire ever since his remark.

"The kind of language the Congress spokesperson has used (for PM) and the sort of reaction it has drawn from people from across the country... You will see Rahul Gandhi that the Congress will not be visible even through telescope after the Lok Sabha polls in 2024," Home Minister Amit Shah said at an election rally in Nagaland. BJP leaders in Delhi also took out a protest march in the city on the matter.

Continued on Page 2

Cong leaders not above law, retorts BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday lashed out at the Congress leaders for protesting police action against its spokesperson Pawan Khera, saying they should not "live under the misconception that they are above the law".

"Whatever is done is done lawfully. Congress leaders should not live under this misconception that they are above the law," BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia told newsmen after Khera was arrested by the Assam Police at the airport here after being deplaned from a Delhi-Raipur flight in connection with his alleged derogatory remarks against the Prime Minister.

The BJP spokesperson said the Congress is playing the "victim card" after using derogatory words against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his family members. The BJP leader said Congress leaders "flouted law" by starting protests on Delhi airport tarmac and endangered the lives of fellow passengers.

PM invites green energy investors

Modi for moving to gas-based eco to clean energy

DEEPAK KUMAR UPRETI ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that India has been the "fastest in renewable energy capacity addition among major economies since 2014", saying the potential of solar, wind and biogas in India is no less than "any gold mine or oil field for our private sector" as he invited global investors in the green energy sector in the country.

The Prime Minister sought the need to reduce dependence on fossil fuel and move towards the gas-based economy in the country. He also mentioned that the total renewable energy capacity of 500 GW will be achieved by 2030.

Addressing a webinar on various announcements made in the Union Budget 2023-24 on green growth, Modi invited global investments in the green energy sector stressing India's potential in renewable energy like wind, solar and biogas is no less than a "gold mine or oil field". "This Budget is not only an opportunity, but it also contains the guarantee of our



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the post-budget webinar on 'Green Growth' via video conferencing on Thursday

PTI

future security," he sought to say. He said India has been the fastest in renewable energy capacity addition among major economies since 2014.

"India will play an important role in green energy, I invite all stakeholders to invest in India," he said.

On the great opportunities for investors in India, he stated that "the potential of solar, wind and biogas in India is no less than any gold mine or oil field for our private sector".

Modi addressed the post-Budget webinar on "Green Growth" on Thursday, which is the first of a series of 12 post-Budget webinars, organised by the Government to seek ideas and suggestions for the effective

implementation of the initiatives announced in the Union Budget 2023.

The Prime Minister outlined three pillars for green growth and energy transmission.

First, increasing the production of renewable energy; second, reducing the use of fossil fuel in the economy; and finally, rapidly moving towards a gas-based economy in the country. He highlighted measures like ethanol blending, PM KUSUM Yojana, incentives for solar manufacturing, rooftop solar scheme, coal gasification, and battery storage in the Budgets of the past few years.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

RUSSIAN EMBASSY ROAD IN UK GETS UKRAINE FLAG

London: The road outside the Russian Embassy in London was painted yellow and blue in the colours of the Ukrainian flag on Thursday morning, in a show of solidarity with Ukraine.

INDIAN ORIGIN BIZMAN TO HEAD WORLD BANK

Washington: President Joe Biden on Thursday announced that the US is nominating Ajay Banga to lead the World Bank, saying the Indian-American business leader is uniquely equipped to lead the global institution at "this critical moment in history."

P8

PALANISWAMI TO REMAIN AIADMK INTERIM GEN SECY

New Delhi/Chennai: The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld a Madras High Court order allowing K Palaniswami to continue as interim general secretary of the party, in a setback to expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam.

7-YEAR RI TO THREE PAK NATIONALS FOR SPYING

Jaipur: A Jaipur court sentenced 3 Pakistani nationals to seven years of rigorous imprisonment for sending strategic information of the Indian Army to Pakistan's ISI.

MCD's Standing Committee poll sees BJP-AAP councillors clash

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With 15 back-to-back adjournments and high-decibel sloganeering, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House on Thursday morning witnessed full-fledged fistcuffs with the AAP and the BJP clashing over the election for the six members of the Standing Committee. The chaos forcing Mayor Shelly Oberoi to adjourn the House till 10 am on Friday.

Interestingly, after a relatively smooth first half, the chaos began around 6 pm as councillors sought to pick Standing Committee members. The MCD House witnessed high drama punctuated by as many as 15 adjournments since Wednesday evening through the night till early Thursday morning.

The uproar was sparked after Mayor Shelly declared that mobile phones would be allowed in the polling booth, which was protested by BJP members who called it a violation of the secret ballot process.

Meanwhile, in a report



Councillors raise slogans as Mayor Shelly Oberoi tries to put the House in order for the election of members of the Standing Committee, at the Civic Centre in New Delhi on Thursday

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

submitted to the Mayor and MCD Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti, the secretary of the MCD recommended fresh elections citing "badly bruised" election process.

Addressing a Press conference at the civic centre, Oberoi alleged that some BJP councillors threw the ballot box and tore ballot papers during the

election for the Standing Committee. "It's shameful what the BJP councillors did. The ballot box was thrown, ballot papers were torn and I was attacked," she said, adding that the BJP Councillors gheraoed the Well of the House and the proceedings had to be adjourned 13 times.

Continued on Page 2

Terror-gangster nexus: 6 arrested in NIA raids

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Post the recent raids by National Investigation Agency (NIA) at 76 locations across eight States to bust the known terrorist-gangster-drug smuggler nexus, the anti-terror probe agency has arrested six suspects, including Lucky Khokhar, alias Denis, who is an ideologue and a close associate of Canada-based "designated terrorist", Arshdeep Singh, alias Arsh Dala.

Others arrested in the raids, which were carried out in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, National Capital Region (NCR), Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, include associates of gangsters Lawrance Bishnoi, Jaggu Bhagwanpuria and Goldy Brar, officials said.

"Khokhar, a resident of Bhatinda, Punjab, who was nabbed from Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan, on Tuesday, was in direct and frequent contact with Arsh Dala in Canada, and had carried out recruitment for him and received funds from him for carrying out terror related activities," the NIA said



in a statement on Thursday.

The NIA alleged Khokhar had provided arms and ammunition to Arsh Dala's associates in Punjab on his directions, which were also used for carrying out the recent killing in Jagraon, Punjab on directions of Arsh Dala, the agency alleged.

The NIA had registered a case suo moto on August 20 last year against seven persons, including Harwinder Singh alias Rinda, Lakhbir Singh Sandhu alias Landia, and Arshdeep Singh alias Arsh Dala. One person, Deepak Ranga, was earlier arrested in the case by NIA.

Continued on Page 2

Khalistani leader's aide to be freed as supporters run riot

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Facing complete lawlessness following a clash between supporters of Khalistani sympathiser Amritpal Singh and the police outside Ajnala police station in Amritsar, leaving six cops injured, the Punjab Police on Thursday agreed to release his close aide on Friday.

At the same time, the police also constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the FIR registered against Amritpal Singh and six others in a kidnapping case.

Armed with swords and guns, the supporters of the self-styled Sikh preacher broke police barricades and marched towards the Ajnala police station, laying siege to the complex, demanding the release of their activist in 24 hours.

Later Amritpal also reached the spot and held a meeting with the top police officials at the police station, following which Amritpal set an hour deadline for the police to release his supporter

Lovepreet, currently lodged in judicial custody.

Protesting over the FIR and the arrest of three of his aides, they were demanding that the case against Amritpal be withdrawn. The protesters were also demanding that the aides, who have been arrested in the same case, be released immediately. Earlier, the supporters, owing allegiance to the pro-Khalistan leader, also blocked the Jalandhar-Amritsar national highway.

The development came less than a week after the FIR (first information report) was registered against Amritpal Singh — a self-styled preacher and head of pro-Khalistan outfit "Waris Punjab De" — and his six associates on the charges of abduction, rioting, theft, and voluntarily causing hurt on a complaint of one Barinder Singh. The complainant had alleged the people with links to Amritpal had abducted him during his visit to Ajnala to attend a religious programme.

Continued on Page 2

ED questions Kejriwal's PA in excise scam case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ED on Thursday questioned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's Personal Assistant Bibhav Kumar in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy scam. Kumar deposed before the court that the agency here and the investigators recorded his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), officials said.

Kumar's questioning is related to the ED's charges made before the court that at least 36 accused, including Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Bibhav Kumar, "destroyed, used or changed" 170 mobile phones to conceal evidence of "kickbacks" worth thousands of crores of rupees in the alleged scam.

Continued on Page 2

How to win 2024 LS polls focus of Cong plenary session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

A year ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha elections and crucial Assembly elections this year, the Congress is brainstorming how to gain its lost glory at the Centre. Beginning Friday, the three-day plenary session of the Congress at Raipur in Chhattisgarh will be attended by around 15,000 delegates where the grand old party, out of power since 2014, will also ponder upon forging poll tie-ups with like-minded parties to take on the BJP's juggernaut.

Seeking to carry on the momentum gained by 3,500 km Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, the

party may also formulate a plan to launch another yatra from East to West covering the north eastern States starting from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat. The Congress has formed several committees to work out on issues during the session and to organise the conclave.

While the Congress hopes to stitch an anti-BJP front for 2024 polls having said it alone has the moral and the organisational power to lead it, clouds of disunity hover all around. The TMC, the BRS and the AAP appear reluctant to accept the Congress stewardship and BRS chief K Chandrashekhhar Rao has been holding his own parleys to rein in the BJP.

Continued on Page 2

Selfie deaths! Engineering student, friend hit by train

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The selfie craze took two more lives in Delhi as a third year engineering student and his friend were killed after being hit by a train while making a video near Kanti Nagar in East Delhi on Wednesday.

Police got a call at 4.35 pm after which they rushed to the accident spot on a railway line near Kanti Nagar flyover.

Police identified the victims as 23-year-old Vansh Sharma and 20-year-old Monu, both residents of Kanti Nagar Extension, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Railways) Hareesh HP said.

Their bodies were taken to GTB hospital mortuary for the autopsy.

Continued on Page 2

G20 meet to address data privacy, security challenges: Jaishankar

PTI ■ PUNE

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday said data security and data privacy are the biggest challenges of the digital world and issues connected to them are expected to be addressed during the G20 meeting.

The EAM was addressing the "Festival of Thinkers" organised by the Symbiosis International University here. Jaishankar said the G20 meeting was taking place at a time when factors like the Ukraine-Russia war, the Covid pandemic and its effects on the world stage had created "multiple layers of stress".

Stressing that one of the new factors at play was digital, he said, "We still have not fully appreciated it but digital has changed our lives. Every



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaks at 'Festival of Thinkers Summit' at Symbiosis International, in Pune on Thursday

PTI

time you look at the screen, you are learning something but somebody is also learning something about you, your habits, your likes, dislikes, demands, and preferences."

Speaking on how power

among nations will be determined in the background of digitisation, he said there was a time when wealth and military strength and gold reserves decided this power, while later it was oil.

Continued on Page 2

'Pak in dire straits but need to read Indians' minds before help call'

PTI ■ PUNE

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday virtually dismissed the idea of helping Pakistan to come out of its economic mess. Speaking at the annual Asia Economic Dialogue organised by the External Affairs Ministry here, Jaishankar said he will consider the local public sentiment while making a big decision.

"I would have a pulse (on) what do my people feel about it. And I think you know the answer," he said.

Continued on Page 2

State has OK'd G'gram metro project: Khattar

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Thursday announced that the Gurugram Metro project has been approved by the Public Investment Board and the construction of the Gurugram Metro will start in the year 2023-24 as soon as the final approval of the Union Cabinet is received.

Khattar, who also holds the finance portfolio proposed a Rs 83,950-crore State budget for 2023-24 on Thursday.

Khattar announced that a proposal was also made to start new metro links for Gurugram city in the coming financial year. He announced the commencement of work on the Metro link from Rejangla Chowk to IGI Airport in Delhi, Southern Peripheral Road (SPT) to Global City, Panchgaon via Manesar.

The Chief Minister also announced the construction of a 700-bed state-of-the-art multi-speciality district hospital in Gurugram.

It was also informed in the budget that the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has given in-principle approval for setting up a new dispensary at Pataudi. For this project, land has



been provided to ESIC for a new 500-bed hospital in Manesar.

In the budget, Khattar made announcements for the expansion of public transport services in Gurugram in which a multi-modal bus port will be built in Gurugram and a city interchange terminal will be set up.

Along with this, city bus services will be expanded in Gurugram and Manesar. Khattar also informed that 26 acres of land has been made available for the proposed Helihub in Gurugram.

The budget also announced the opening of two new state-of-the-art Veterinary Pet Clinics in Faridabad and Gurugram. With this, model district-level e-libraries with digital content and maximum facilities will be opened in six districts of the State including Gurugram.

G20 meet to address data...

From Page 1

“Now, there is a new term ‘data is the new oil’. What does it mean? It actually means every digital transaction contributes to artificial intelligence, the creation of which will actually determine what the balance of power among nations is in the coming years,” he opined.

“The biggest challenge today when it comes to anything digital is data security and data privacy. What it boils down to is who sees your data, who harvests your data, who monetizes your data, who utilizes your data and what power do they have over you as a result of all this,” Jaishankar explained.

Having more resilient, reliable and multiple supply chains was a major concern and need in the manufacturing world, while, similarly, in the world of data, there is need for more trusted practices to ensure privacy is respected and conveniences of life do not become a vulnerability for each one of us as well as for the nation.

“This is a scenario of the world. It is a scenario where we have both east and west friction or tension flowing from (war in) Ukraine, north-south countries developing tension flowing from COVID and other issues,” he said.

Technology is a hugely complicated factor, the External Affairs Minister said.

“These (technology, its implications and complications) are really the issues which G20, in some form, is expected to address,” he added.

‘Pak in dire straits but need to read...

From Page 1

Pakistan is grappling with an economic crisis and has not been successful in getting an agreement from multi-lateral institutions either. In the recent past, India has helped neighbours like Sri Lanka as it struggled to come out of its economic woes and regularly helps others in the neighbourhood as well.

However, when it comes to Pakistan, the fundamental issue impacting the New Delhi-Islamabad ties is terrorism, Jaishankar said, adding that one must not be in denial of this problem.

“No country is ever going to come out of a difficult situation and become a prosperous power if its basic industry is terrorism. Just as a country has to fix its economic issues, a country has to fix its political issues too, a country has to fix its social issues,” he said without naming Pakistan.

Jaishankar also made it clear that it is in nobody's interest to see a country get into severe economic difficulties, and that too a neighbour. Once a country is in the throes of a serious economic problem, it has to make policy choices to get out of it, the career diplomat-turned-politician said, adding that others cannot solve it for the country.

The world can only provide options and support systems, Jaishankar said, making it clear that Pakistan will have to make “tough choices”.

He said India has also undergone the same challenges several times in its modern history, with the last one being 30 years ago with the balance of payment crisis. Meanwhile, Jaishankar said ever since Narendra Modi came to power in

2014, the country's approach to the neighbouring countries has undergone a perceptible change and also reminded all about the Prime Minister's decision to call heads of state for the swearing-in function to start a new relationship.

Citing the case of Maldives, he said India's help in the recent past includes the Greater Male project and also added that he was present at the foundation stone laying event a few weeks ago. India is also buying or selling power with many of its neighbours, Jaishankar said, adding that it recently started buying power from Nepal.

Going forward, the country is also mulling to up its focus on education and healthcare spending in the neighbourhood, Jaishankar said.

He also assured that India will also be using its G-20 presidency to give a voice to the problems of the ‘global south’ and asserted that India is the best-placed country to do that.

The prime minister and his top ministers have spoken to 125 countries in the past month in India's effort to be an effective voice of the global south, Jaishankar said.

Speaking at the same event, Maldives' Minister of Finance Ibrahim Ameer said climate finance is a big challenge and expected help to flow through on the commitment at the earliest. His counterpart from Bhutan, Lyonpo Namgay Tshering said an easing of global financial conditions is also the need of the hour.

Jaishankar said there are multiple second and third-order impacts of the major world events and policy decisions, which India will be flagging to the world as part of its G-20 presidency.

The EAM also said that the G-20, with nearly 200 events across the country, is a marketing of India to influential people across the world by exposing them to cultural and socio-economic changes taking place in the country.

MCD's...

From Page 1

“The BJP resorted to unconstitutional behaviour in the House once again. It is the loss of the people of Delhi. BJP's Rekha Gupta and Amit Nagpal resorted to hooliganism in the House and we will take action against them,” she said.

She further said there is no such act that says mobile phones are banned while casting votes. Senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh alleged that the BJP is “not being able to accept their defeat” in the mayoral polls and was resorting to “hooliganism” in the House.

“When the BJP resorted to hooliganism, 47 votes were already cast for the Standing Committee. Election can never be conducted in this manner. What if the BJP resorts to hooliganism again after 100 votes and asks to consider them invalid?” Senior AAP leader Atishi said.

He sought time for printing of new set of ballot papers, saying traditionally the elections were held with a stock of 300 ballot papers.

Meanwhile, videos of commotion in the House with AAP Councillors getting physically engaged in the ruckus went viral on social media. A video shared by the AAP showed BJP Councillor Rekha Gupta and other Councillors on the dias throwing away things kept there.

The BJP leaders, on the other hand, shared a video claiming party Councillor

Pramod Gupta was slapped by AAP Councillor Devender Kumar.

AAP convenor and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal could not attend celebrations at the AAP office over his party winning Mayor and Deputy Mayor posts, as the DDU Marg where it is located near ITO was heavily barricaded by police due to a protest by the Delhi BJP. The AAP accused the BJP of resorting to “hooliganism” as it was unable to digest its defeat in the MCD Mayoral polls while the BJP demanded fresh voting for elections of the MCD Standing Committee members alleging irregularities in the election process.

The AAP leaders alleged that the House was adjourned repeatedly because of the ruckus and vandalism caused by BJP leaders, who also allegedly attempted to damage the ballot box. On the other hand, the BJP said the MCD House proceedings went on peacefully till the election of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor but the AAP had “other plans” for the Standing Committee members.

After fighting all night and sleeping inside MCD House on Wednesday, the House met at 8.30 am on Thursday but was adjourned for an hour amid high-decibel sloganeering.

The morning session also witnessed a fist fight between women Councillors and a ‘flying’ ballot box. As the House reconvened at 9.30 am, the ruckus continued and the Mayor adjourned the proceedings till 10 am on Friday without electing any of the six members.

Khalistani leader's...

From Page 1

With Amritpal facing potential arrest in the matter, the police have reportedly arrested his supporters — Vir Harjinder Singh and gatka master Baldev Singh. Both were to proceed to Ajnala where Amritpal's arrest is likely to be recorded. His close confidant Lovepreet Singh, alias Toofan, was also arrested.

Tension gripped the border town of Ajnala in Amritsar after hundreds of supporters of Amritpal Singh clashed with the cops at the entrance of the police station. Breaking police barricades, they barged into the police station with swords, guns, and traditional weapons, leaving several cops injured.

The protest dharna was lifted from Ajnala police station after the senior police authorities agreed to release Lovepreet Singh alias Toofaan on Friday. The police have also formed an SIT to probe into the FIR registered against Amritpal Singh and his supporters at Ajnala police station. Till the release of Toofan, the protesters had stationed themselves at a nearby Gurdwara.

The decision was taken after senior police officials, including Amritsar Police Commissioner Jaskaran Singh, IG border range Mohnish Chawla and Amritsar Rural SSP Satinder Singh, held a meeting with representatives of the Amritpal supporters at Ajnala police station.

How to win...

From Page 1

The TMC had on Wednesday attacked former Congress chief Rahul for saying the ruling party of Bengal is working to help the BJP. In Bihar too Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has called a meeting of Grand alliance allies on February 25 to coincide with the plenary. These develop-

ments have left the Congress disturbed.

The plenary, leaders hope, will offer some clarity for the future. “It is a good thing that meetings of leaders have been frequent during the last couple of years, be it the Udaipur Chintan Shivir, or Bharat Jodo Yatra or the ongoing Haath Se Haath Jodo and now the plenary. Ideas converge in such congregations and it will help the party in all spheres,” AICC secretary Sanjeev Singh told The Pioneer.

Assembly polls will be held in nine States this year, including Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan

where the Congress rules, and Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka where the party is the main Opposition. Winning a few of the major States this year would be the key to Congress revival at the Centre ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The party currently rules three States on its own — Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

At the plenary, the party will also give direction to the rank and file to prepare for the State poll ahead in Karnataka, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram. Nagaland and

Meghalaya will witness polls on February 27. Tripura elections have already concluded.

As part of poll preparations, the party would also have to work out solutions to end factionalism in the State units, including those in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Telangana.

Party leaders said the mood in the party is quite upbeat and has in fact shaken the BJP which conducted ED raids in the State.

The Congress top brass, including former chief Sonia Gandhi, Rahul, Priyanka

Gandhi will be in attendance at the 85th plenary session that will primarily endorse the presidency of Mallikarjun Kharge and will pave the way for the new working committee led by him.

On the first day of the three-day session, the Steering Committee, which is playing the role of the Working Committee (the previous one was dissolved until a new CWC is formed), will also decide on whether there will be elections to the top decision-making body or not.

Sources said while a section within the party, especial-

ly the younger lot, wants elections to the CWC, elders in the grand old party want nomination instead to avoid dissidence within and enable cohesion in the top body as the party heads into a tough election cycle ahead.

The CWC has 25 members, including 12 elected members and 11 nominated ones, besides the Congress president and the leader of the party in Parliament, as per the party's constitution. The last time elections were held to the CWC were in Kolkata in 1997 under Sitaram Kesri, also attended by Sonia.

Selfie deaths! engineering student...

From Page 1

Police found that the two youths used to shoot short films on mobile and come to the railway tracks to make live videos. Their mobiles were also found on a track, the DCP said. Sharma was a third year B'Tech student, while Monu used to work as a salesman in a shop, police added.

Terror-gangster nexus...

From Page 1

Khokhar was working for Dala, who has been involved in smuggling arms, ammunition, explosives and Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs) across international and inter-State borders in India for several Khalistani terror outfits, including the Khalistan Liberation Force, Babbar Khalsa International and International Sikh Youth Federation.

Besides Khokhar, the NIA also arrested Lakhvir Singh (Gidderbaha, Muktsar, Punjab), Harpreet (Nihal Singh Wala, Moga, Punjab), Dalip Bishnoi (Bishanpura

Abohar, Fazilka, Punjab), Surinder alias Chiku Chaudhary (Narnaul, Mahendragarh, Haryana) and Hari Om alias Titu (Gurugram, Haryana).

While Hari Om alias Titu was arrested on Tuesday, Lakhvir Singh, was nabbed a day later in connection with a case registered against them and their associates in August last for allegedly attempting to motivate and recruit youth for terror activities by using social media. They were also using social media to ‘publicise’ their crimes in a bid to create fear among the general public.

According to the spokesperson, Surender Chaudhary and Dalip Bishnoi, are known associates of gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi and Jaggu Bhagwanpuria and Canada-based criminal Goldy Brar.

They were arrested for raising funds, recruiting youth and carrying out terrorist acts on behalf of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. This case was also registered by the NIA in August last and 10 accused, including Lawrence Bishnoi, Jaggu Bhagwanpuria, Kala Jatheri, Kala Rana, Joginder Singh, Rajesh Kumar, Raju Basoudi, Anil Chhippi, Naresh Yadav, and Shahbaz Ansari have been arrested.

Surinder Chaudhry, who was arrested on Tuesday, faces several cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, for attempt to murder and extortion allegations.

He has been involved in illegal liquor contracts, smuggling and extortion from liquor and mining contractors in Haryana and has been one of the main financiers of terror-gangster syndicates.

ED questions Kejriwal's PA...

From Page 1

According to the ED chargesheet, the IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) of Kumar's mobile number is said to have been changed four times between September 2021 and July 2022. The agency is grilling Kumar about the meetings that were held during the process of the formulation of the excise policy 2021-22 and his role at these discussions, sources said, adding, he will also be quizzed on his attendance in such meet-

ings along with his boss Kejriwal.

In its second chargesheet in the case, the ED has named the Delhi CM claiming that C Arvind, a DANICS officer who was earlier secretary to Sisodia, said in his statement recorded under the PMLA that he was given the Group of Ministers (GoM) report on the excise policy in the middle of March, 2021 when he was called by his boss (Sisodia) to Kejriwal's residence.

The agency further alleged that AAP communications in-charge Vijay Nair, arrested in this case by the ED and the CBI earlier, “arranged a video call

through facetime (a video calling facility on iPhone) on his phone for Sameer (Mahandru) and Arvind Kejriwal, where Sh Arvind said to Sh Sameer that, Vijay is his boy and that Sh Sameer should trust him and carry on with him.”

Mahandru is a Delhi-based liquor businessman and the promoter and Managing Director (MD) of wine company Indospirit Group. He was also arrested in the case earlier by the agency. Trashing the contents of the ED chargesheet, Kejriwal had said it has “filed 5,000 chargesheets under the tenure of the current Government.”

PM...

From Page 1

Underlining the significant announcements in previous years' Budgets, Modi highlighted schemes such as green credit for industries, PM Pranam Yojna for farmers, Gobardhan Yojna for villages, vehicle scrapping policy for cities, Green Hydrogen and wetland conservation in this year's Budget. Referring to the global efforts for diversification of the energy supply chain, the Prime Minister said this Budget has given a great opportunity to every green energy investor to invest in India. He also mentioned that India achieved the target of 10

per cent ethanol blending in petrol five months before time and emphasised that the nation strives to achieve 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2025-26 instead of 2030.

On the launch of E20 fuel, the Prime Minister noted the Government's emphasis on biofuels and said that it has brought new opportunities for investors. He observed the abundance of agri-waste in the country and urged the investors to not miss the opportunity of setting up ethanol plants in every corner of the country. About the National Green Hydrogen Mission, he stated that India is moving with a target of production of 5 MMT green hydrogen. An allocation of Rs 19,000 crore has been made to

incentivise the private sector in this field (green hydrogen). He also touched upon other opportunities such as electrolyser manufacturing, green steel manufacturing and long-haul fuel cells.

“India has been the fastest when it comes to renewable energy capacity addition among major economies since 2014,” the Prime Minister said.

He further added that India's track record shows its capability to achieve the objectives before time when it comes to renewable energy resources. The Prime Minister informed that India achieved the target of 40 per cent contributions from non-fossil fuels in the installed electricity capacity 9 years before the target date.

Deplaned, held for Modi slur...

From Page 1

The Supreme Court later in the day heard a plea on Khera's behalf and ordered that the Congress spokesperson be released on interim bail till February 28. A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said upon being produced before the competent magistrate in Delhi, Khera would be released on interim bail.

“In order to enable the petitioner (Khera) to apply for regular bail before the jurisdictional court, upon the FIRs being transferred to one jurisdiction, we direct that the petitioner shall be released on interim bail by the court of the competent magistrate at Delhi where he is to be produced this evening,” said the bench, also comprising Justices M R Shah and PS Narasimha. “The above order shall remain in operation till February 28, 2023,” the bench said, while making it clear that it was passing the order in connection with the case lodged in Assam.

The Supreme Court issued

notices to the States of Assam and Uttar Pradesh seeking their responses on Khera's plea seeking clubbing of multiple FIRs lodged against him at Assam, Lucknow and Varanasi for his alleged remarks against the Prime Minister.

After dictating the order, the CJI, apparently displeased with the Congress leader's remarks, told senior advocate A M Singhvi, who was representing Khera, “We have protected you (Khera) but there has to be some level of discourse.”

Terming it a “calculated statement”, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati played the audio-video clip of Khera's alleged remarks, in the open court and said he cannot use such “derogatory words” against a democratically elected Prime Minister of the country.

When Singhvi pointed out that Khera has already apologised for his remarks, Bhati said, “Please see the video whether it is a mistake or a deliberate act. It is the

demeanour which counts. There was laughter all around after these remarks.”

“The entire Press conference has to be seen....It is a very calculated statement. It is a statement which not just insults the Prime Minister but invites disaffection and disloyalty. After all, he is the duly elected Prime Minister of the largest democracy in the world,” Bhati said.

Congress leaders sat on dharna at the tarmac in protest and did not allow police to take him away without an arrest warrant. Senior Delhi Police officials later handed over a document from Assam Police seeking their help in the detention of Khera. Several party leaders got off the plane after Khera was deborded and staged a dharna on the tarmac.

As drama escalated at terminal one of the domestic airport here, flight staff told Congress leaders there was confusion with Khera's bags. They said police was on its way and would explain the reason to him. Several Congress leaders, including senior leader Randeep Surjewala, squatted on the tarmac and raised slogans against the Government. AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal accused the BJP of targeting the party's plenary session.

The New Delhi-Raipur flight was delayed and IndiGo staff said the passengers will be

put on another flight to Raipur. IndiGo said it was following the advice of concerned authorities. The majority of the passengers had boarded when drama ensued as Khera was asked to deplane. The passengers were taken back to the plane in buses later in the afternoon and headed to Raipur only around 4 pm, almost four hours after the scheduled time of 11.45 am.

Trinamool Congress national spokesperson Saket Gokhale was earlier arrested in December for a tweet endorsing an alleged fake news report about Prime Minister Modi's visit to Gujarat's Morbi town after the collapse of a suspension bridge in October. Gokhale was detained at Jaipur in Rajasthan and taken to Ahmedabad before getting a bail.

Khera told reporters outside the Dwarka court in south west Delhi that the law had come to his rescue and he was grateful the apex court had upheld his liberties. “I was asked to deplane as if I was a terrorist. This is not the only example of people's rights being curtailed... They arrested me illegally without serving me any notice,” the Congress leader said. In Raipur, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh described the police action against Khera as a new example of Modi's politics of “vendetta, harassment and intimidation”.

MCD secy recommends fresh Standing Committee poll

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) secretary has recommended fresh polls for electing members of the Standing Committee, claiming the sanctity of electoral process was "badly bruised" last night, amid a row over the Mayor allowing Councillors to carry mobile phones while casting votes.

The MCD House was adjourned earlier in the day as the deadlock, with BJP councillors opposing their AAP counterparts carrying mobile phones while casting their votes.

AAP leaders have supported the Mayor's decision, while BJP members look "strong exception" to it, saying it "vitiated" the electoral process. In a report filed to Mayor Shelly Oberoi and Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti, the MCD secretary has also said enough ballot papers not available for electing six members of Standing Committee, and it was important that the election is conducted afresh.

"The sanctimony of the



election process has been badly bruised," the municipal Secretary's report Sates, giving various reasons to support the claim. He also pointed out that there were only 245 ballot papers, while at least 250 are needed to take the process forward.

"It may be noted that the election process has traditionally been held with a stock of 300 ballot papers as the possibility of few ballot paper getting damaged is there," he reported,

seeking time for printing of new set of ballot papers.

A total of 55 ballot papers were issued during voting for standing committee members on Wednesday. It was not clear how many councillors cast their votes in the ballot box, said the report. It was stated in the report that due to protest of the BJP councillors and allegations that a few members who were casting vote inside the polling booth took snapshot of their votes, the House was adjourned

and the ballot box was moved to safety. Some members who could not cast their votes by then pocketed it, said.

Delhi BJP leaders and Councillors have also demanded fresh voting for standing committee members. Party MP Parvesh Verma claimed that a total of 55 ballot papers were issued out of which 45 were used for voting while remaining 10 were untraceable.

The municipal Secretary report said no mobile phones

or pens were allowed to be carried in the polling booth during the election of the mayor and deputy mayor for the sake of secretary.

"However, mobile phone was permitted by the Mayor during the election of six members of Standing Committee," it said. The BJP members look "strong exception" to the mayor's decision saying it "vitiated" the electoral process and "compromised" the secrecy of ballot, said the report.

The AAP leaders have supported the mayor's decision to allow mobile phones during casting of votes and opposed the BJP's demand for fresh voting. The BJP leaders have alleged that the AAP, fearing cross-voting by its councillors, allowed the use of mobile phones to take screenshots of their votes.

Verma has alleged that the AAP councillors who managed to vote in the election on Wednesday sent pictures to the party leadership including Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Deputy CM Manish Sisodia and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh.

BJP protests against Mayor for allowing AAP councillors mobile phone use during voting

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After a full night and morning of adjournments, pandemonium and fisticuffs, the Delhi BJP on Thursday demanded fresh voting for elections of the MCD Standing Committee members alleging irregularities by the AAP. In a joint Press conference, party MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma claimed that despite objections of BJP Councillors, newly-elected Mayor Shelly Oberoi of the AAP allowed members to carry mobile phones to the booth area during the voting.

He claimed that the municipal secretary too has recommended fresh voting for the election of the Standing Committee members in his report to the authorities. Verma claimed the use of mobile phones was allowed by the Mayor to keep a check on



cross-voting by AAP Councillors. AAP Councillors who cast their votes were clicking pictures and sending it to AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh, Verma claimed.

The election began on Wednesday evening but was hampered due to the BJP Councillors' protest against the decision of the Mayor, who was presiding over the poll process, to allow Councillors to carry mobile phones while casting votes.

Hours after multiple

adjournments overnight, the MCD House was finally adjourned for the day on Thursday morning without election of members of the standing committee. North East Delhi BJP MP Manoj Tiwari claimed the AAP leadership was fearful of cross-voting by its councillors and therefore, its mayor allowed mobile phones while casting votes. Tiwari also accused the AAP councillors of resorting to "hooliganism". He claimed that BJP councillor Pramod Gupta was slapped by AAP Councillors.

19-year-old girl student raped by 'Insta friend'



STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A 19-year-old Delhi-based girl student was allegedly raped several times over a year by her Instagram friend, who also threatened to kill her.

The victim, who had first met the man when she was underage, moved to police after he started blackmailing her into sleeping with his friends. According to the complaint she filed on Wednesday, she had met one Abhishek, a Gurugram resident, in July 2020 through Instagram. She met him first in a park in Gurugram.

"In September 2021 we met again in MGF mall from where he took me to a guest house in DLF Phase-2 area where he raped me," said the BA first year student.

Son of cop stabbed to death by snatcher to get SI job

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The son of Delhi Police Assistant Sub-Inspector Shambhu Dayal Meena, who was stabbed while nabbing a snatcher and later succumbed to injuries, will be appointed a sub-inspector in the force on compassionate grounds.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved the proposal of Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora, to appoint Deepak Meena, son of Shambhu Dayal Meena, as an Sub Inspector.

"The LG invoked his powers u/r 30 of the Delhi Police (Appointment & Recruitment) Rules, 1980 and relaxed the prescribed criterion to facilitate the appointment of Deepak Meena, and approved the recommendations of the Police Commissioner for such relaxation," a Raj Niwas official said.

Earlier, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had met the



family of Dayal and handed over a cheque for Rs one crore to the family.

In view of the facts and circumstances of the case and owing to the financial hardship that his family would have faced, since he was the sole bread winner of his family and in consideration of exemplary courage shown by the late Shri Meena in discharge of his duties, the LG directed the Police Commissioner to appoint Deepak Meena to the post of Sub-Inspector in Delhi Police.

The LG in his order has

noted that "the act of bravery and valour shown by the Late ASI Shambhu Dayal Meena, who sacrificed his life in line of duty, needs to be acknowledged, as he has set an example to the entire police force."

ASI Shambhu Dayal Meena, aged 57, was posted in west district's Mayapuri police station. While on duty, he received a complaint from a lady about snatching of her husband's mobile phone. He rushed to the spot and after the woman identified the accused, he overpowered the 24-year-old snatcher.

BJP demonstrates at AAP HQ, seeks Sisodia's sacking over 'snooping'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP staged a massive demonstration near the AAP headquarters on DDU Marg on Thursday, demanding the sacking of Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia from his post over the alleged "snooping scandal" involving the Feedback Unit (FBU) of the Kejriwal government. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has cleared the way for registration of a case against Sisodia by giving sanction for prosecution to the CBI over the alleged illegal collection of "political intelligence" through a Delhi government department.

Leading the protest, working president of Delhi BJP Virendra Sachdeva, Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, party MPs Manoj Tiwari and Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma alleged that the creation of the



FBU "endangered" national security. Sachdeva said the Feedback Unit reported directly to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and it was also directed to gather information about political opponents of the AAP, media organisations, business houses, among others.

The protesters raised slogans against Sisodia and demanded his removal from the post of deputy chief minister. Sachdeva appealed to the BJP workers to spread the

discussion on espionage scandal of the Kejriwal government to every street and corner of Delhi so that the people of Delhi can get to know about the misdeeds of this corrupt government. He said that this is not just an espionage scandal but a serious and worrying matter for the country as it is a threat to the security too.

Bidhuri said that BJP will never tolerate this playing with the security of the coun-

try. Sisodia should be immediately dismissed from the post and he should be arrested. Not only in India but also in a country like America, the government had to resign from its post for spying on the opposition parties or individuals. He said Rajiv Gandhi had accused Chandrashekhar's government of spying on his family after which Chandrashekhar resigned.

Tiwari said that due to the kind of espionage done by the Kejriwal government, now there is a fear that anyone's phone can be tapped. Verma said that Kejriwal government in Delhi has done only scams in the last eight years and each and every layer of the scams is getting exposed. Kejriwal will be the first Chief Minister of the country who has not only not spared the leaders of the opposition parties but even the media houses.

Dy CM again seeks LG's approval to send Govt schoolteachers to Finland for training

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday wrote another letter to Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena asking him to approve the proposal to send Delhi Government school teachers to Finland for a training programme. Citing Government rules, Sisodia said that the LG "cannot put such proposals on hold" for more than 15 days.

"According to Rule 49 of the amended Transaction of Business of GNCTD 2021, in case of a difference of opinion between the LG and the Minister regarding any matter, the LG must endeavour to resolve the difference of opin-



ion through discussion within 15 days. If the difference of opinion persists, the matter is to be referred to the Council of Ministers," reads the letter.

"The Council of Ministers must then deliberate on the issue within 10 days and take a decision. If the matter still remains unresolved or a decision is not taken within the stipulated time period by the Council of Ministers, it is

deemed that the difference of opinion continues to persist, and the matter must be referred to the President by the LG for a final decision as per Rule 50," he said in the letter.

The Deputy Chief Minister had sent a proposal to the LG on January 20th for a Finland-based teacher training program for Delhi Govt School teachers, but the file had remained stuck in the LG office since then. The LG had sent back the file under the pretext of clarifications to continue stalling the training program. When Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal reached the LG with his ministers and MLAs to discuss this obstruction, there was an outright refusal by the LG to meet them.

MCD sealed 16 illegal dairies in Feb during special drive

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of the menace of stray cattle on the streets of Delhi which is a result of illegal dairies, The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has decided to come down heavily on such illegal dairies. The MCD has issued a public notice warning those running illegal dairies in urbanised areas of proposed strict action against them.

During special drive between February 1 and 22, the civic body has impounded 1023 stray cattle in all its 12 zones which after being ear tagged have been sent to designated Gaushalas for their further upkeep. It has sealed 16 illegal dairies in all its 12 zones from 1 February to till date and 95



dairy owners have been prosecuted/challaned in the same period.

In a statement, it said that veterinary services department have caught stray cattle from different areas of MCD mainly Toddapur, Pan Mandi, Nabi Karim, Budh Vihar, Sector-23 Rohini, Sabholi, RK Puram, Sarita Vihar, Malka Ganj, Ganga Vihar, Sector-16 Rohini, Vasant

Kunj, Gokalpuri etc. And illegal dairy has been sealed in Ganga Vihar. "Stray cattle menace leads to traffic jams and pose serious threat to safety of public. Veterinary services department has also taken action against illegal dairies being run in urbanised areas which causes water pollution as dung and urine of cattle flows into the drains," it said.

Wear white bands, uniform in court: HC to lawyers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Judicial officers and lawyers ought to wear white neckbands as part of the dress code, the Delhi High Court said on Thursday while prescribing white shirt, black trousers and black tie for law interns attending courts.

Justice Prathiba M Singh said advocates appearing before any court, from civil courts to Supreme Court, will have to wear white bands along with the uniform prescribed for them. "Interns may enter court complexes with black tie, black pant and white shirt as prescribed by the Bar Council of Delhi (BCD)," the judge said.

The high court was hearing a petition by a law student chal-



lenging a 2022 circular issued by the Shahdara Bar Association resolving that interns appearing in Karkardooma District Court here ought to wear shirt and blue coat and trousers so they can be distinguished from lawyers.

The high court Thursday passed an order saying the Shahdara Bar Association's circular would be superseded by the BCD circular which will be followed uniformly across the national capital.

Bus driver held from Bihar for kidnapping, killing schoolboy 13 years ago in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A bus driver has been arrested from Bihar for allegedly kidnapping and killing a schoolboy in South Delhi's Kalkaji in 2010, police said on Thursday.

According to police, the accused, identified as Bharat Lal, was arrested from Sheohar in Bihar where he was working as bus driver. He was a Blue Line bus driver when the incident took place in August 2010. Lal was evading arrest by changing his last name and address in his identification documents, a senior police officer said.

The accused has admitted his involvement in the case and disclosed that he had left Delhi to evade his arrest and also got his name changed from Bharat Lal to Bharat Raut, the officer said.

₹2L luxury items seized from conman Sukesesh prison cell

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A shocking video shared on social media showed luxury items worth Rs 2 lakh (approx) recovered in jailed thug Sukesesh Chandrasekhar's Mandoli jail cell.

The Delhi Prisons Department has raided Sukesesh's cell in Mandoli Jail and recovered several luxury items including a pair of Gucci slippers worth Rs 1.5 lakh and three pairs of jeans worth Rs 80,000 among other things. Jail authorities could be seen conducting the raid in a CCTV visual from the Mandoli jail that is widely shared.

The video shows a team of officers and jail authorities barging into Sukesesh's jail cell, and he was seen weeping thereafter. In the video, Sukesesh could be seen alone in his cell as the search took place.

He can also be seen crying



profusely in the video.

The video footage clearly showed the 'VIP treatment' received by Sukesesh in his 'king size' jail cell wherein belongings could be seen strewn around.

A senior official said the routine raid, which included the Prisons Department and other security personnel, was conducted on December 15 last.

They further said that authority will conduct an enquiry and take action against the person, who leaked the

CCTV footage of Sukesesh.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has recently arrested Sukesesh in a fresh money laundering case linked to duping former Religare promoter Malvinder Singh's wife by posing as the Union home and law secretaries.

Sukesesh, 33, was taken into custody under criminal sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) from a local jail last week. A Delhi court later sent him to nine-day ED custody.

Women inborn multi-taskers, says Noida top cop while sharing her success journey

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

Gautam Budh Nagar Police Commissioner Laxmi Singh on Thursday said women are inborn multi-taskers and can manage several things simultaneously, whereas men do not possess the ability to multi-task.

Sharing her journey from struggles to success with the packed audience at Amity University, Laxmi advised the students of to always compete with yourself and never compare yourself with others.

"Coming from an engineering background, my journey was very tough as mechanical engineering is considered to be a career choice for men. Later, when I decided to become an IPS officer, I was faced with a different set of challenges as Police Force is also seen as a male-dominated career.



However, with firm belief in myself and strong family support, I was able to overcome the challenges successfully.

"It is up to women to break that mold and emerge as a strong and independent woman, who defines her own goals," Laxmi said at a panel discussion on the theme, "Women at Workplaces-Building and Nurturing an Equitable Workplace" under

the 23rd International Research Conference, "INBUSH ERA World Summit-2023".

Sharing her entrepreneurial journey from a small start-up to a well-established, globally renowned Corporate, Shahnaz Husain, Founder, Chairperson & Managing Director, the Shahnaz Husain Group, stated it was not easy for her to become an entrepreneur as she was married at a very young age of 13."

While working with a British company, I had to type so much that my fingers were bruised but I still did not give up since I had to earn money to pay for my education. You choose your own path and create your own destiny," Shahnaz said in the presence of Divya Chauhan, Chairperson, Amity Arts Foundation, Katie Reese, senior Vice President Corporate Development, Yorkville University.

Man held for duping 100 on pretext of giving jobs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 39-year-old man was arrested from Bangalore for allegedly duping over 100 people on the pretext of providing jobs in the Indian Air Force by impersonating a flight lieutenant, police said on Thursday. The accused has been identified as Kamal Sharma, a resident of Vikas Vihar, they said.

A woman, a resident of Libaspur here, lodged a complaint stating that she had come across one Kamal Sharma through online mode who used to run an NGO called "We Eliminate Poverty Now", police said. After some time, he introduced himself as a flight lieutenant and duped her of Rs 12 lakh in the name of a job in the Indian Air Force, a senior police officer said.

Blow to OPS as SC allows EPS to stay at helm of AIADMK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI / CHENNAI

The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld a Madras High Court order allowing former Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami (EPS) to continue as interim general secretary of the AIADMK, establishing his position as the single, supreme leader of the party. The apex court's judgment has brought an end to the more than two-year-long fight between Palaniswami and former Chief Minister O Panerselvam (OPS) for the

control of AIADMK. A Bench of Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and Hrishikesh Roy, which had reserved judgment on the matter on January 12, dismissed the petitions filed by Panneerselvam.

"We have upheld the order of the division bench of the high court dated September 2, 2022 and made our earlier interim order permanent. We have not dealt with the matter of resolutions before the party that were being heard by the single judge. We leave it open for the said resolutions to be dealt with in accordance in

law," the bench said.

The judgment came on batch of pleas concerning amendments made to party bylaws during the July 11, 2022 general council meeting, which elected Palaniswami, or EPS as he is known, as its single leader while expelling his rival Panneerselvam, popularly known as OPS and some of his aides.

In Chennai, celebrations broke out at the AIADMK headquarters here after news of the Supreme Court ruling came in. Elated over the Supreme Court verdict, Palaniswami said the ruling

has unmasked "betrayers" and the "DMK's B-team" that wanted to finish off his party. The favourable apex court was a result of the 'divinity' of party stalwarts, the late chief ministers MG Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa, he said.

On September 2, a Division bench of the Madras High Court had allowed Palaniswami's appeal, setting aside an order of the single judge who had nullified the July 11 General Council (GC) meeting of the AIADMK where the leader of opposition Palaniswami was elected the interim general secretary

of the party. Panneerselvam, a Jayalalithaa loyalist who filled in for her as the Chief Minister when she was in jail over corruption charges, was expelled from the party. The division bench had quashed the August 17 order of the single judge who had directed maintenance of status quo ante as on June 23, 2022.

After Jayalalithaa's demise, EPS became the chief minister and OPS his deputy. Under a reciprocity arrangement, Panneerselvam was appointed the party coordinator and Palaniswami the joint coordinator, till they



Northwest, Central, East India to record max temp 3-5 deg C above normal: IMD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday said that northwest, Central and East India are predicted to record maximum temperatures three to five degrees Celsius above normal over the next five days. Many parts of the country are already recording temperatures that are usually logged in the first week of March. It has fuelled concerns about an intense summer and heat waves this year.

"Maximum temperatures are very likely to be three to five degrees Celsius above normal over most parts of northwest, central and east India during the next five days," the IMD said in a statement. It said a significant change in maximum temperatures in northwest India is unlikely during the next two days. However, the mercury is predicted to rise by

two to three degrees Celsius thereafter.

The mercury may soar to 40 degrees Celsius and above in one or two meteorological subdivisions of northwest India in the first half of March, an IMD official said.

The IMD has attributed the unusually hot weather in February to several factors, with the absence of strong western disturbances being the primary reason. Strong western disturbances bring rainfall and help keep temperatures down.

Delhi on Monday recorded the third hottest February day since 1969 with the maximum temperature at the Safdarjung observatory, the national capital's primary weather station, soaring to 33.6 degrees Celsius.

The city had recorded an all-time high of 34.1 degrees Celsius on February 26, 2006, and a maximum temperature



of 33.9 degrees on February 17, 1993. The Met office has issued advisories, saying significantly higher-than-normal temperatures may have an adverse impact on wheat and other crops.

"This higher day temperature might lead to an adverse effect on wheat as the crop is approaching reproductive growth period, which is sensitive to temperature," it said. High temperatures during the

flowering and maturing periods leads to loss in yield. There could be a similar impact on other standing crops and horticulture, it said.

The IMD said farmers can go for light irrigation if the crop appears to be under stress. "To reduce the impact of higher temperatures, add much material in the space between two rows of vegetable crops to conserve soil moisture and maintain soil temperature," it said.

No reason to worry for wheat crops yet, says IARI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) of the Ministry of Agriculture said there is no cause of concern over wheat production as there is "less likelihood" of terminal heat condition till March 16. However, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had said on Wednesday that farmers from Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana should check for heat stress in their wheat crops as maximum temperatures are likely to be 3-5 degrees Celsius higher than normal in several parts of the country.

The Centre has also set up a committee to monitor the impact of rise in temperature on the wheat crop. Addressing a Press conference, IARI

Director AK Singh said there is no reason to worry based on the temperature forecast so far. The institute has weather forecast for 30 days. India's wheat production fell 107.74 million tonnes in 2021-22 crop year (July-June) from 109.59 million tonnes in the previous year due to heatwave in some key producing States.

Wheat, a major rabi (winter) crop, would be ready for harvest next month. "Though February has been warmer, mainly on account of dry weather due to lack of moisture usually brought by western disturbances induced rains, but as wheat remains in the anthesis to flowering stages during the period so no adverse impact is expected on wheat," Singh said.

Recently, the Centre has



set up a committee to assess the possible impact of rising temperatures on wheat crops and issue necessary advisories to the farmers. "Given the maximum and minimum temperature forecasts for March, when the wheat is in grain filling stage, there is less likelihood of terminal heat conditions till March 16 as

daily mean temperature are not expected to cross 32 degree celsius," he said.

On Wednesday, Singh said that the situation is not alarming right now even as he advised farmers to be ready to take contingent measures like light irrigation in case of temperature soars beyond 35-degree celsius in mid-March.

Globally 1 pregnant woman dies every 2 minutes: UN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A latest report by the United Nations agencies has flagged concerns that every two minutes, a woman dies during pregnancy or childbirth due to preventable reasons like severe bleeding, high blood pressure, pregnancy-related infections, complications from unsafe abortion, and underlying conditions that can be aggravated by pregnancy (such as HIV/AIDS and malaria).

Also, roughly a third of women do not have even four of a recommended eight antenatal checks or receive essential postnatal care, while some 270 million women lack access to modern family planning methods, says the report,



revealing alarming setbacks for women's health over recent years, as maternal deaths either increased or stagnated in nearly all regions of the world.

"While pregnancy should be a time of immense hope and a positive experience for all women, it is tragically still a shockingly dangerous experience for millions around the

world who lack access to high quality, respectful health care," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

"These new statistics reveal the urgent need to ensure every woman and girl has access to critical health services before, during and after childbirth, and that they can fully exercise their reproductive rights."

The report, which tracks maternal deaths nationally, regionally and globally from 2000 to 2020, shows there were an estimated 287 000 maternal deaths worldwide in 2020. This marks only a slight decrease from 309 000 in 2016 when the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into effect. While the report presents some significant progress in reducing

maternal deaths between 2000 and 2015, gains largely stalled, or in some cases even reversed, after this point.

In two of the eight UN regions – Europe and Northern America, and Latin America and the Caribbean – the maternal mortality rate increased from 2016 to 2020, by 17% and 15% respectively. Elsewhere, the rate stagnated.

In total numbers, maternal deaths continue to be largely concentrated in the poorest parts of the world and in countries affected by conflict. In 2020, about 70% of all maternal deaths were in sub-Saharan Africa. In nine countries facing severe humanitarian crises, maternal mortality rates were more than double the world average (551 maternal deaths per 100 000 live births, com-

pared to 223 globally).

Juan Pablo Uribe, Global Director for Health, Nutrition and Population at the World Bank, and Director of the Global Financing Facility suggested that, "with immediate action, more investments in primary health care and stronger, more resilient health systems, we can save lives, improve health and well-being."

Underfunding of primary health care systems, a lack of trained health care workers, and weak supply chains for medical products are threatening progress while exercising control over their reproductive health – particularly decisions about if and when to have children – is critical to ensure that women can plan and space childbearing and protect their health.

Post-Independence green laws focused on conserving environment, says U Lalit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Chief Justice of India, Justice UU Lalit said on Thursday that environmental laws in India have gone from being focused



on exploiting nature during the colonial period to conserving it in the post-Independence era.

"The legislation like the Indian Forest Act of 1928 was more for exploiting the natural resources. You have the gun carriage factory, you have the vehicle factory, you have everything next to Jabalpur forest because you would have wood easily and essentially available," said Justice Lalit elucida-

ting on the point at a two-day National Seminar on Law and Environment @75. Echoing the sentiment of judiciary, Justice Lalit said, "Conversation for the first time entered in our ethos in 1980s, when Forest Conservation Act was enacted by the Parliament. What preceded this the 1972 declaration and the 42nd amendment during the period of 1975-76, which made conservation part of the directive principles of the state policy. Today the spirit of environmental laws was of inter-generational equity."

The two-day seminar

organised by the Vivekananda School of Law & Legal Studies and the Indian Council of Social Science Research would undertake a legislative impact assessment of environmental laws and policies to identify deficiencies, and to analyze the measures taken for their effective enforcement.

Dr. Luther M. Rangreji, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, delivered the keynote address. He traced the evolution of international environmental law since early 1960s and underlined the regulation of environmental law in today's context with an emphasis on trans-boundary harm and pollution.



Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

PUBLIC NOTICE:

Builder Cancellation

This is to bring to your notice that **MUNESH KUMAR/ MANJULA DEVI** (borrower/s) has availed Home loan facility wide facility agreement number **LBGUR00003277032** located at **UNIT NO. C-402, "GREENWOODS" SITUATED AT G.H.-1, SECTOR 3, VASUNDHARA, GHAZIABAD, UP.** The borrower/s has failed to pay the contractual amount to the builder as per the terms and conditions of the agreement.

The Bank had informed the same to the borrower through letter dated **February 15, 2023** informing that **JNC CONSTRUCTIONS PVT LTD.** has cancelled the allotment of the above mentioned property. You are therefore requested to resolve this matter with the builder within 7 days from the date of this publication.

Please take further notice that post cancellation of the allotment of the said property ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any other allotment done by the builder.

Dated: February 24, 2023
Place: Delhi/ NCR

For ICICI Bank Limited
Sd-

NOTICE OF LOSS OF SHARES OF HINDUSTAN UNILEVER LIMITED (Formerly Hindustan Lever Limited (HUL))

Regd. Off. Hindustan Unilever Limited, Unilever House, B D Savant Marg, Chakala, Andheri (East) Mumbai- 400099

Notice is hereby given that the following share certificates has/have been reported as lost/stolen and Company intends to issue duplicate certificates in lieu thereof, in due course. Any person who has a valid claim on the said shares should lodge such claim with the Company at its Registered Office within 15 days hereof.

Name of the Holder	Sunil Kumar Patra
Folio No.	HLL2934116
No. of Shares (Rs 1/-F.V)	600
Certificate No.(s)	5260988
Distinctive No.(s)	1148512761 To 1148513360

Dev Bajpai

Company Secretary

Date: 24.02.2023

Allahabad HC gets three new judges, Madras HC gets one

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Four advocates were on Thursday appointed as Additional Judges in the High Courts of Madras and Allahabad. According to separate notifications issued by the Department of Justice in the Law Ministry, advocates Prashant Kumar, Manjive Shukla and Arun Kumar Singh Deshwal have been appointed as Additional Judges of the Allahabad High Court in that order of seniority for a period of two years.

Their names were recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium on January 17 along with six other advocates for appointment as Additional Judges. The other six were elevated recently. In another notification, the Ministry said advocate V e n k a t a c h a r i Lakshminarayanan is appointed as an Additional Judge of the Madras High Court for a period of two years.

His name was recommended by the apex court Collegium on January 17 along with Victoria Gowri and others, including advocates and judicial officers. She has since taken oath as an additional judge of the Madras High Court. Additional Judges are usually appointed for a period of two years before being elevated as permanent judges.

Biggest strength of democracy is discussion, dialogue: Birla at Legislators' conference

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GANGTOK

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday said that biggest strength of democracy is discussion and dialogues and being the forum to solve people's problems, legislature must be center of unhindered debate sans disruption. This will increase peoples' faith in democratic institutions, thereby strengthening our democracy, said Birla. He was inaugurating legislators' conference in Gangtok.

Speaking on the subject of making Parliament and Legislatures more acces-

sible to the public, Birla said that the manner in which active participation between Legislatures and the public has increased through the use of IT is remarkable, but we have to play a more active role. Referring to Digital Parliament, Birla said that the work of the legislature is being taken to the public with the help of technology; social media has also emerged as an important tool for



interaction. He called for greater participation of people in law making process so that laws can be made as per the hopes and aspirations of people.

'Forever chemicals' taking huge toll on wildlife worldwide: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Used in variety of products including daily usage such as rain clothes to repel oil and water, firefighting foams and fire protective clothing, non-stick coating for frying pans and pots, food packaging such as microwave popcorn bags and many fast food wrappings, cosmetic products, textiles for furniture et all, Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances (PFAS), also known as 'forever chemicals' are taking huge toll on wildlife around the world, says a new study.

The study, released by the Environmental Working Group, an American non-profit environmental group, with its first-of-its-kind map using rigorous data has shown that pollution from the "forever chemicals" contaminates polar bears, tigers, monkeys, pandas,

dolphins and fish along with more than 330 other species of wildlife around the world, some endangered or threatened.

PFAS are already known to cause health problems in humans too, and very low doses of PFAS have been linked to suppression of the immune system, said the study, adding that research increasingly suggests wildlife could suffer similar harms when exposed to PFAS.

They are known as "forever chemicals" because they do not break down over time and thus can remain permanently in the air, soil, water and in the body.

Researchers pointed out that hundreds of studies have found PFAS chemicals in a wide variety of other wildlife species globally, including many types of fish, birds, reptiles, frogs and other amphibians, large mammals, like hors-



es, and small mammals, such as cats, otters and squirrels.

"From country to country, and across continents, PFAS pollution is everywhere. No matter the location, no matter the species, nearly every time that testing is done we find contamination from these toxic chemicals," said researchers in the study.

There may be more than 40,000 industrial polluters that may discharge PFAS in the US

-- tens of thousands of manufacturing facilities, municipal landfills and wastewater treatment plants, airports, and sites where PFAS-containing fire-fighting foam has been used as potential sources of PFAS discharges into surface water, according to the study.

Researchers noted that national and international regulatory action is urgently needed to protect wildlife from PFAS contamination.

Scam in Kerala CM's Disaster Relief Fund puts CPM in a fix

Vijayan says steps will be taken to stop people from pocketing aid

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The CPI(M)-led Kerala Government suffered a major setback as the Director General of Vigilance unearthed a multi-crore scam involving the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund (CMDRF). However, a day after the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) unearthed an organised racket which had syphoned off large amounts of money from the CMDRF, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said stern action would be taken to prevent ineligible persons pocketing the aid.

"The Government is determined that no wrong tendencies crept into the CMDRF. Hence, the Vigilance was directed to conduct a comprehensive probe. The CMDRF is meant for helping the poor, particularly for their medical treatment. Stringent action would be taken against those ineligible persons, who made pecuniary gains, and those officials who helped that racket," Vijayan said.

Earlier, Manoj Abraham, Director General, Vigilance



Department told news reporters at Thiruvananthapuram that his office has come across many irregularities and improprieties connected with the CMDRF, a fund meant for reimbursement of medical treatment of people who come under the poverty line.

"There are agents working across the State to help people who are otherwise not eligible to get financial aid from this fund. We have seen one medical doctor certifying more than hundred applications seeking aid from the fund," said Manoj Abraham.

Officials of the Vigilance Department held raids across various civil stations in the State and unearthed names and phone numbers of the liaison agents who facilitate the transfer of funds from the CMDRF.

VD Satheeshan, the de jure Leader of the Opposition said that he was sure that many CPI-M leaders were involved in the scam and the Kerala Government would try and derail the probe. K Rajan, Minister for Revenue, said on Thursday that no stones would be left unturned to bring to book the persons behind the scam.

"No eligible persons would be denied financial assistance from the CMDRF because of this shocking development," said Rajan who represents the CPI in the LDF Government.

Meanwhile the Opposition's resentment against Vijayan is growing by the hour.

Congress and Yuva Morchha (the youth wing of the dysfunctional Kerala BJP) are waging pitched battles by holding black flag demonstrations.

MV Govindan, secretary, Kerala CPI-M alleged that the Opposition parties were trying to create bloodshed in the State by forcing their cadres to jump before the speeding car of the Chief Minister.

"We have deployed a big police force to save the lives of the youth who charge towards the Chief Minister's car. It is for their security that the number of cops has been increased," said Govindan.

There are reports in the local media that the demonstrations against the chief minister are being staged with the tacit support of a prominent section in the CPI-M.

New names, a Mumbai link emerge in SSC scam

Ex-CBI boss says person more powerful than Partha involved

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

New names continued to crop up in the school-level recruitment case with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) stumbling upon newer links in the multi-crore SSC scam. After Shahid Imam a schoolteacher-turned-Bengali actor it is the turn of a "mysterious woman" in Mumbai.

Kuntal Ghosh a Trinamool Congress leader and one of the accused arrested in the recruitment scam has allegedly told the CBI that Haimanti Ganguli — who operates from her plush office at Nariman Point — had regular monetary transactions with an influential politician in North Bengal.

The investigators are trying to find links between the arrested actor-cum-teacher Imam with Ganguli, sources said. Apart from working in a number of Bengali films Imam had recently published a music album featuring a famous Bollywood dancer-actor.

Ganguli's name on the other hand came up close on the heels of the name of Sujay Bhadra also referred to as the "Uncle of Kalighat," for his alleged links with the scam.



Incidentally Kalighat is a place in South Kolkata where Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her extended family reside.

Bhadra one of the directors in a consultancy company floated by the Banerjees of Kalighat however denied any links with the recruitment scam adding "efforts are being made to reach my Saheb (boss) Abhishek Banerjee but no power on Earth can touch him."

Meanwhile, former CBI Additional Director Upen Biswas who had cracked the animal husbandry scam has claimed that the CBI officials should try to focus on the "spider sitting in the midst of the cobweb," alleging there was a person or persons higher in authority and power than Partha Chatterjee who had masterminded the crime.

"This is an organized crime which would not have been possible without patronage from the highest level of power," Biswas, a former Bengal Minister who had during his stint in the CBI

was responsible for the arrest of then Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Yadav.

"I have information how the primary teachers' jobs were sold for around Rs 10 lakh and secondary teachers' jobs were sold for about Rs 25 lakh and how bags-load of cash were sent to Kolkata in vehicles," Biswas alleged.

Incidentally the CBI had earlier acted upon the leads provided by Biswas who spoke about one Chandan Mandal, a key agent who had allegedly transacted tens of crores by way of providing jobs in schools.

Referring to Chandan, a TMC Panchayat Pradhan from North 24 Parganas on Thursday said how he and his men had arranged for hundreds of illegal jobs for cash. "Cash was taken and the candidates were asked to leave blank OMR sheets and subsequently the SSC's websites were manipulated," he said adding as well as to how vehicles loaded with gunny bags stuffed with cash were sent to some destination in Kolkata."

Senior IAS officer collapses in Mumbai hotel after dinner, dies

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A 57-year-old Indian Administrative Officer (IAS) officer posted as Secretary in the Maharashtra Public Works Department (PWD) died just after finishing his dinner at a hotel in south Mumbai, police said on Thursday.

The senior bureaucrat, Prashant Dattatray Navghare, started feeling uneasy soon after finishing his meal and suddenly collapsed at the hotel on Wednesday evening.

The IAS officer was rushed to a private hospital, where he was declared brought dead, an official said. A cause was not immediately known.

Navghare had come to the hotel in the Kala Ghoda area with two colleagues, who are also Secretary-rank officers, he said A post-mortem on the body was later conducted at State-run JJ Hospital, the official said.

The exact cause of the death was yet to be ascertained and his viscera (internal organs) has been preserved for analysis, he said.

Reports of histopathology (study of tissue to look for disease) and other medical tests were awaited, he said. An Accidental Death Report (ADR) has been registered at the Mata Ramabai Ambedkar Marg police station and further probe was underway, the official said.



We will rid K'taka of graft, make it top State in South: Shah

PTI ■ BALLARI (KTK)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday asked the people of poll-bound Karnataka to repose faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa and said the BJP would give such a Government that it would rid the State of corruption and make Karnataka number one in South India within five years.

Addressing a public meeting at Sandur, a Congress stronghold, in this district, Shah also took potshots at the M Mallikarjun Kharge-led outfit and the JD(S), dubbing them as dynastic parties which cannot do any good for the people.

"Trust PM Modi and Yediyurappa once, and we (BJP) will give such a government that it will rid Karnataka of corruption and make it a number one state in South India within five years," Shah said.

Assembly elections are due in Karnataka by May. Shah recalled that in the 2018 Assembly election, the BJP had emerged as the largest party but

fell short of a few seats to form a Government.

"I want to tell the people of Karnataka that every vote to the JD(S) will go to the Congress and every vote to Congress will eventually go to Siddaramaiah and his 'ATM government', which was the ATM of Delhi and indulged in corruption," the Minister claimed.

Shah sought to mock the alleged infighting in the Congress camp ahead of the Assembly election. "There is only one post of Chief Minister, for which both Congress State president DK Shivakumar and former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah are fighting. There are other aspirants too in the race (in Congress). They will not do good for the people of Karnataka," he said. Shah said if the people want to do 'Kalyan' (good) to the 'Kalyan Karnataka region', where the programme was held, they should bring the BJP back to power in the State.

The Minister cautioned people against the 'divisive Congress' and said only Modi can protect India and make the country prosperous.

Corruption by NPP-led Meghalaya Govt encouraged by BJP: Cong

PTI ■ SHILLONG

Accepting Union Home Minister Amit Shah's accusation that the Meghalaya Government is 'one of the most corrupt' in the country, the Congress alleged that the BJP has "encouraged" such a state of affairs in the northeastern State.

The ruling NPP has been riddled with corruption charges by its former allies, including the BJP, as also by opponents such as the Congress and the Trinamool Congress.

Meghalaya's State Congress president Vincent Pala told PTI in an interview that he agreed that Union Minister Amit Shah was "correct" in saying that "the Meghalaya Government is one of the most corrupt" in the

country. Pala went on to claim that "this has been encouraged by the BJP".

The BJP was in the NPP-led coalition from its beginning in 2018, he pointed out.

Pala also claimed that the setback of desertions by its entire lot of MLAs who won in 2018 is a thing of the past, and said the party is pinning hopes on a turnaround in the upcoming Assembly elections in the northeastern state on fresh candidates sans any past baggage.

Leader of Opposition and former Chief Minister Mukul Sangma, ex-Assembly speaker Charles Pynogrope and 10 other Congress legislators had shifted their allegiance to the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC in 2021.

The Congress, which once



was the prime power in the hill State, has put up candidates in all 60 seats for the February 27 Assembly polls.

"Slowly, we are gaining ground as the new candidates bring fresh minds, ideas, hopes for the youth, and the anti-incumbency is quite high this time as compared to the previous elections," Pala said, adding

that the people are "coming back to the Congress with these points in mind".

"We have crossed the odds now and are in a position to fight. The party is campaigning very hard. We are quite confident of doing well," he said.

Of the 60 candidates fielded by the Congress, 44 are new faces, Pala said.

He also mentioned that people are 'viewing Congress as their best bet' in the February 27 polls as it mostly has "fresh faces devoid of any controversy".

"Majority of the nominees are qualified people. We have also put up as many women candidates possible," he said, expressing hope that "female voters' choice will tilt towards the grand old party."

Fresh movement for Gorkhaland brewing in Darjeeling: Tamang

PTI ■ DARJEELING/KOLKATA

Pro-Gorkhaland units in the Darjeeling Hills, including the GJM and the Hamro Party, have indicated that a fresh movement will be launched to press for separate statehood ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Binay Tamang, who had recently quit TMC to join hands with his former mentor, GJM supremo Bimal Gurung, asserted that this time, the agitation will not bow out under any pressure.

The Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) and the Hamro Party had called for a shutdown in the hills on Thursday in protest against a motion passed in the West Bengal Assembly opposing attempts to divide the State, but withdrew it in view of

the Class-10 Board exams.

"In the coming months, we will launch mass movements, which will only stop once we achieve Gorkhaland. This time there won't be any compromise or bowing out under pressure. It will be a fight to establish the identities of Gorkhas," Tamang told PTI.

The development comes days after the GJM walked out of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration agreement that was signed in 2011, claiming that the aspirations of the people of Darjeeling were not fulfilled.

The call for mass agitation comes six years after the 2017 stir for a separate state during which the hills witnessed a 104-day-long shutdown.

"We oppose the way the

motion was passed without caring for the ambitions of the people of the hills. The shutdown was called off due to exams. But, this is just the beginning of bigger mass movements in the days to come. We have already started a hunger strike," Hamro Party chief Ajay Edwards told PTI.

A new political realignment has taken shape in Darjeeling in recent months, with Edwards, Gurung and Tamang joining hands to renew the demand for Gorkhaland.

Darjeeling has witnessed several agitations over the years, with political parties promising people a separate Gorkhaland state and the implementation of the Sixth Schedule, which grants autonomy to the tribal-inhabited region.



A delegation of United Nations Permanent Representatives visits Taj Mahal in Agra on Thursday.

PTI

Raut mentally ill, says Shinde's son on 'supari' allegations

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's son and MP Shrikant Shinde on Thursday took a dig at Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and MP Sanjay Raut, by saying the latter was "mentally ill" and that he needed immediate medical treatment.

Breaking his silence over Raut's allegation that he had given a contract to a goon from Thane to attack the Sena UBT MP, Shrikant Shinde said that he was concerned about Raut's mental health and if needed he would recommend a good doctor for the latter to undergo treatment.

Talking to media persons at Ambarnath, the junior Shinde -

who is a doctor himself - said, "I am concerned about Raut. My sympathies are with him. He is mentally ill. I can see signs of mental illness in him. He suffers from hallucinations."

"Raut should take care of his mental health. Maharashtra needs him, because, every morning he provides entertainment to people across the State. If he so desires, I can recommend a good doctor to treat him for his mental illness," Shrikant said.

It may be recalled that Raut had on Tuesday alleged that he had received reliable information that Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's son Shrikant had given contract to a goon from Thane Raja Thakur, who was preparing to attack him.

FSSAI frames group standard for 15 types of millets

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As a part of its strategy to bring millets on the global food platter as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) on Thursday framed a comprehensive group standard for 15 types of millets specifying eight quality parameters such as maximum limits for moisture content, uric acid content, and extraneous matter to ensure that they are fit for consumption.

The standards have also set criteria for maximum limits that can be allowed in relation to "other edible grains, defects, weevil grains, and immature and shrivelled grains," so as to ensure availability of good

quality (standardized) millets in domestic and global markets.

Till now, individual standards for only a few millets like Sorghum (Jowar), Whole and deoiled Pearl Millet grain (Bajra), Finger Millet (Ragi) and Amaranth have been prescribed in the Food Safety and Standards (Food Product Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011.

However, at least 15 types of millets have been brought under the regulation for quality consumption by notifying vide Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Second Amendment Regulations, 2023. These standards will be enforced from September this year.



Those brought under the quality cover are Amaranthus (Chaulai or Rajgira), Barnyard Millet (Samakechawal or Sanwa or Jhangora), Brown top (Korale), Buckwheat (Kuttu),

Crab finger (Sikiya), Finger Millet (Ragi or Mandua), Fonio (Acha), Foxtail Millet (Kangni or Kakun), Job's tears (Adlay), Kodo Millet (Kodo), Little Millet (Kutki), Pearl Millet

(Bajra), Proso Millet (Cheena), Sorghum (Jowar) and Teff (Lovegrass).

Millets are a group of small-grained cereal food crops that are highly tolerant to

drought and other extreme weather conditions and require low chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. Most millet crops are native to India and provide most of the nutrients required for normal functioning of the human body.

According to Professor (Dr) Medha S. Kulkarni, Head of Department, Swasthyavritta Department in All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), Delhi, "Millet is a good source of protein, fiber, key vitamins, and minerals. The potential health benefits of millet include protecting cardiovascular health, preventing the onset of diabetes, helping people achieve and maintain a healthy weight, and managing inflammation in the gut. Millet is an adaptable grain."

Bold intentions

UP Budget is oriented around on infrastructure, fiscal prudence, and welfarism but politics will test it

On the face of it, the Yogi Adityanath Government's Budget for Uttar Pradesh is a typical one; like all governments under the Bharatiya Janata Party, this one is also focused on infrastructure and welfare. This reflects Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on these twin areas; this has yielded rich dividends to Modi as well as the BJP. Aimed at making the state a \$1-trillion economy, state Budget 2023-24 claims to lay "the foundation for Atmanirbhar Uttar Pradesh." What is conspicuous about the Budget is that it is for a state that has long epitomised all that is wrong with India—industrial stagnation, unemployment, law and order problems, criminalisation of politics and politicisation of crime, caste tensions, communal conflicts, environmental degradation, urban decay. You name a problem, and it is there. For years, politicians, insouciant about the plight of people, fought with each other on divisive agendas. UP was surely not a place that was high on the list of priorities of investors, global as well as domestic. That has changed. The change in the attitude and mind-set in the highest echelons is very important, because it suggests that the policies and programmes which reek of dirigisme would not be entertained. For example, it is unlikely that the Adityanath regime would entertain the populist, revenue-guzzling schemes that the erstwhile Congress-led UPA government became

infamous for. It may be recalled that in that period a bunch of incorrigible commies, green extremists, sundry bleeding-hearts, and pink intellectuals, as members of the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council, were calling the shots; that's not happening any longer in UP or any other party of India.

Now there is zeal for economic growth and development, which often gets articulated in hyperbole. Consider the assertions made by UP Finance Minister Suresh Khanna about the gross state domestic product (GSDP) growth rate; in his Budget speech, he claimed it would be 19 per cent for 2023-24. This seems very unrealistic, for the Union Finance Ministry's Economic Survey this year forecasts growth for the next fiscal in the range between 6 per cent and 6.8 per cent. Even the growth rate at nominal or current prices in 2023-24 is projected at 10.6 per cent. It is not clear what would make UP grow so fast. But it is good to find that Khanna has not gone on a spending spree with the Rs 690,242.43-crore Budget. The fiscal deficit, estimated to be 3.96 per cent in the current fiscal, is pegged at 3.48 per cent in 2023-24. This is also in tune with the Modi Government's insistence on fiscal prudence. Unsurprisingly, industry has hailed the UP Budget. So far, so good, but how the good intentions and ambitious announcements play out remains to be seen. Would the Adityanath Government be able to withstand the compulsions of electoral politics? Like the demand for farm loan waiver? That will be a big test.

PICTALK



A tiger at the Panna National Park in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh

PTI

Caste ban in Seattle

Though caste discrimination is anathema to any society, in the US it has different connotations

Seattle in the United States has done in 2023, what India did in 1948. It has banned caste discrimination in the city. India banned caste discrimination and enshrined that policy in the Constitution in 1950. Now Seattle has become the first US city to legally ban caste discrimination. Its local council passed a resolution, moved by an Indian-American politician, to add caste to its non-discrimination policy. This could have far-reaching implications on not only the issue of caste discrimination in the US but also on the discrimination of Indians on racial lines. Caste discrimination has no place in society anywhere in the world, including America. Equality Labs, which lobbied hard to pass the anti-caste discrimination resolution in Seattle has been spearheading a nationwide campaign. Though banning caste discrimination anywhere is welcome but doing so in the US, it has different nuances and could actually harm the Indian community as a whole. The biggest challenge the Indian community faces in the US is not caste or religion discrimination but racial discrimination.

Stratifying a community in this manner gives leverage to the perpetrators of racially motivated people. The Hindu American Foundation, which had campaigned against the resolution, has in fact condemned it, saying singling out South Asians in this manner and the addition of 'caste' to the non-discrimination policy violates the the US constitution. The City of Seattle has voted to treat South Asians in a manner that no other ethnic or racial community is treated under the guise of non-discrimination.

This may well be true as many Indian Americans fear that codifying caste in public policy will further fuel instances of 'Hinduphobia' in the US. Over the last three years, ten Hindu temples and five statues, including those of Mahatma Gandhi and Maratha emperor Shivaji, have been vandalised across the US as an intimidation tactic against the Indian community. Indian Americans are the second-largest immigrant group in the US. There are 4.2 million people of Indian origin residing in the United States. As a matter of fact, in passing this resolution, Seattle is now in violation of the US Constitution's guarantees of equal protection and due process that prohibit the state from treating people on account of their national origin, ethnicity, or religion. Implementing a vague, discriminatory and arbitrary category may actually end up harming the Dalits whom it seeks to protect.

What brewed at Davos?

Some suggestions to change the world at Davos were rather intriguing and potentially dangerous

As the world elite once again congregated at Davos to plan our world's future, some of their agendas stuck out. WEF founder Klaus Schwab's inaugural address calling for co-operations between governments, corporations, and civil society to "master the future" was eerie no doubt, but their lopsided agenda on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, brain transparency, battery passports, et al begged the question—are we headed for a Brave New World set in 1984?

Starting with WEF's "Ukraine peace formula", Zelenksy to Henry Kissinger called for steps to further contain Russia - more sanctions and arming Ukraine with heavier weapons. A peace deal means Ukraine's victory over all the lost territory Crimea included, by hook or by crook. And since the WEF is over, discussions are already in motion. Germany and the US have committed tanks to Ukraine, escalating tensions between Russia and NATO. The conflict has already destroyed millions of lives and directly impacted food and energy security around the world. Yet no call was given for diplomatic mediation making the Orwellian war is peace and peace is war, come alive again.

The next alarming session was on Disrupting Distrust, featuring representatives from the banking sector. What would banks have to do with stopping disinformation? Think about Julian Assange and Wikileaks being de-platformed by financial institutions like PayPal, etc for exposing the government. And more recently, Paypal announced fining users for spreading disinformation. Justin Trudeau also froze the bank accounts of protesting truckers. Strangely, all these incidences align with the session's agenda and provide a dangerous weapon in the hands of governments and private financial institutions against citizens. Even Elon Musk started a Twitter storm by tweeting, "WEF is increasingly becoming an unelected world government that the people never asked for and don't want."

In the days of vaccine nation-



alism, it was very surprising to only find one major American vaccine maker (Pfizer CEO, which has been swimming in controversy), addressing the session on pandemics. Although it called for more aggressive vaccinations, the poor citizens of the world cannot afford patented vaccines. It was odd to find no third-world representative in the discussion, despite the presence of an Indian cabinet delegation.

WEF's Brain transparency session made "thought crime" a reality. As per the session, current technology for decoding brain waves is available and over 5,000 companies monitor their employees' brain waves for productivity. Apart from "swiping with our minds", this technology is enabling employers to gauge individual work performances, mental focus, and even office intramurality. It sends alerts to your employer for your thought crimes including lethargy, social media surfing, etc.

Brain waves could be recorded by wearing special hats, a small tattoo, or earplugs. By end of 2023, earphones with brain wave reading capabilities will also be on the market. Soon, wearable fit bits for brains may be the primary way in which we interact with

AI MATCHED WITH BRAIN DECODING TECH CAN ANALYSE OLDER BRAIN WAVE HISTORIES TO FISH OUT EMPLOYEE MISDEMEANOURS AND CRIMES. BUT IF IN THE WRONG HANDS, THIS TECHNOLOGY PRESENTS A GRAVE DANGER TO EVERYONE

other technologies i.e computers, phones, electrical appliances, et al. AI can analyze older brain wave histories to fish out employee misdeemeanors and crimes.

But if in the wrong hands, this technology presents a grave danger to everyone as it can undermine individual privacy and autonomy over one's mind. The next step in a Minority Report kind of reality is when police and judiciary start using this technology to predict crimes and criminals. With the current pace, that day is not far.

The target is not only the brain but also our cars, as new battery passports are on the cards. Battery passports mean a unique tracker in your EV battery that is going to be recording and transmitting real-time data about your vehicle. The battery passport may in the future be used to calculate your travel credits and allowances. Further, it could be used to trammel the citizenry. Without approval from the source or travel visa, the battery passport may restrict automobile ignition. Certain regions in the EU are already experimenting with a no-car policy and creating travel allowances for their citizens. The battery passport fits right into these schemes. Carbon

neutrality may be used as a shield to pass these draconian measures, taking away our right to movement.

Finally, the overlap of AI and agriculture. WEF has been a key promoter of AI in India. The aim is to shift farmers out of farming, by unloading their work on AI. From farm planning to weather. But this AI model has already been proven inefficient, especially as last year's major crop losses were due to climate changes, which no AI was able to predict or warn. Overtime AI in Indian agriculture means- more farmers out of farming. Given the technological literacy required to operate phones, computers, etc, this tech only has limited benefits and huge human costs.

Now whether WEF 2023 heralds a brave new world or a better future, time will tell, but for now, it appears that they are promoting a military solution in Ukraine, introducing brain-hacking technology, and bolstering the technocratic control of humanity.

(The author writes on agriculture & environment, and is a former Director — Policy & Outreach, National Seed Association of India. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JAADUI PITARA - A LEARNING TOOL

Sir — The center has announced a learning tool Jaadui Pitara (Magic box) under the NEP (National Education Policy) released by Union Education Minister, it is an activity-based learning tool where children will learn different things like dancing, puzzles, story cards, worksheets, playbooks also local culture and accommodate with diverse needs from the foundational stage. 3-8 years olds will be taught from the technique based on Pancha kosha, Taittiriya, and Upanishad. The tool is planned accordingly to make it attractive for the children, making it joyful and creating enthusiasm in children. Education policy focuses on how to make fun and interesting.

Akankhya Rout | Dhenkanal

GOVT EMPLOYEES ARE NEGLECTED

Sir — Government employees are a neglected segment of society by the Government. It is because government employees are not the vote bank of politicians. Since the Government is the boss of employees, they are easy targets of the government if they do not tow the government line. The apathy of the governments towards employees is largely manifest in two areas. They are in respect of giving income tax relief and in respect of announcement of pay commissions. In the assessment year 2022-23, no tax relief was given in the budget. Some sops have been given in the assessment year 2023-24 because the election is fast approaching. Even while making announcements in budget speeches no finance minister treats it as a subject eagerly awaited by the salaried class.

The outlook of the government towards its own employees is abominable. In Karnataka, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai who also holds a finance portfolio is silent in his budget proposal about the promised 7th Pay Commission. This has disappointed the employees a lot. The plan for an agitational approach by the employees union is afoot. If the employees take recourse to an agitational approach, the service to the public gets

Strictest action to be taken



Orava's group's irresponsibility cost more than 130 people their lives in Gujarat's Morbi bridge collapse last year. The accident has sent shockwaves across the country.

Rishu Jaiswal | Cuttack

affected. It is the public who are caught in the crossfire of tussles between government and government employees. The government must not miss noting that 'employees' does not mean employees only. For the purpose of voting 'employees' includes their family members also. Their family members will not be willing to go against the wishes of their children to vote for a party that fails to protect the interest of their children in these days of an inflationary spiral. If prices of essential goods and services are stabilized, there will be no need for a hike in salaries and pensions.

A hike in salaries is necessary to meet the increasing cost and standard of living. It is the salaried class from whom tax is recovered by the government in its entirety. The raw deal to the employees at the hands of the government will dampen the enthusiasm to work.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

GRUESOME INCIDENT

Sir — Shocked to read that in a gruesome incident in Hyderabad, a four-year-old boy was mauled and killed by stray dogs in the Amberpet area on Sunday, after CCTV footage of the dogs surrounding the boy and not letting him escape went viral. In the past year alone, the government-run fever hospital in the city has seen at least four cases of people dying after contracting rabies from dog bites. Toddlers have

been killed by strays in various parts of the state. According to data submitted in Parliament, Telangana reported about 80,000 cases of dog bites last year. The victim, Pradeep, accompanied his father K Gangadhar, a security guard at a car service center, to his workplace on Sunday. The dogs attacked the boy while he was playing by himself. The 1:07-minute CCTV footage shows the child walking alone in the parking area of the service center and three dogs rushing toward him. The boy, surrounded by the aggressive canines, looked scared and tried to run away. Soon, a dog pounced on him from the rear, resulting in him falling to the ground.

The child gathered himself, got up on his feet, and tried to escape, but the dogs attacked him again. Within seconds, all three canines began mauling him. The dogs tried to pull him away in different directions even as three other sub-adult dogs tried to join them. A few seconds later, as the boy lay limp, the dogs tried dragging him away. The boy was rushed to a hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries on the way and doctors pronounced him dead on arrival. With this, Hyderabad has become a dangerous place to live due to the rising population of stray dogs.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Rahul Gandhi toured the country. He was ridiculed but he did not think about it. He kept walking and meeting people.



NCP Chief
— Sharad Pawar



One year ago, the world was bracing for the fall of Kyiv. Kyiv stands strong. It stands tall and, most important, it stands free.

US President
— Joe Biden

I looked up and saw two men on the terrace of my neighboring building with a camera right at me! In what world is this okay and allowed? This is a gross invasion of someone's privacy.



Actor
— Alia Bhatt



Cummo (Cummins) has so little experience captaining on spinning wickets... he just gets thrown in the deep end and we watch a lot of videos and make decisions.

Former Australian cricketer

— Geoff Lawson

This budget will prove to be a milestone in making Uttar Pradesh an economy of \$1 trillion within the next 5 years.



Chief Minister UP
— Yogi Adityanath

FIRST COLUMN

CHANGING GEOPOLITICS
AS UKRAINE WAR RAGES

Fallout of war is a push by US allies to
restart their weapon acquisition



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

This week marks one year of war in the heart of Europe, which has led to a massive shift in the geopolitical tectonic plates, spread across several continents. The war has led to a sudden rethink of diplomatic priorities for many countries in the west, including recalibration of security goals.

The first fallout of the Russian war in Ukraine has been a renewed push by some of the US' closest allies to restart their weapon acquisition and manufacturing programme. Germany, which post-World War had shunned weapons and accepted the US security shield under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) umbrella, has vowed to increase its defence expenditure by many folds from its current outlay.

In the east, Japan, another US ally, has also stepped up its domestic defence systems acquisition programme to keep pace with the changing geo-strategic landscape.



India and the US, meanwhile, have just energised the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), which is a significant beginning for the two countries. These two democracies (the largest in the world) had for decades viewed their bilateral relationship through the previous era prisms of the Cold War. India had a huge dependence on Russia for its defence equipment. India's own reluctance to engage openly with the US, while dabbling with old school trade unionism through bodies like Non-Aligned Movement, has played out in the old India-US bilateral relationship.

In a recalibrated world order, hit by two back-to-back setbacks, India and the US have found a common ground to move beyond their strategic defence ties to an era of collaboration on frontiers, where no Indian or American has gone before. These nations realise the next, strategic advantage for any aspiring or exiting global power can only be pivoted on development and deployment of emerging and critical technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and spacecraft.

The iCET promises to work as a technology corridor between skilled personnel of both nations to jointly develop technologies for the future. The subtheme here, which is hard to miss, is China which has already taken a huge leap in the existing technology category. One example regarding China's advantage, which is often bandied around, is the huge influence of Chinese equipment in the 5G telecom ecosystem.

Similarly, China with its ambitious and often reckless space programme has already started claiming important real estate, beyond earth's atmosphere levels, even as it pushes several satellites capable of offensive strikes or serve as tactical advantage in an event of military escalation.

However, it is this changed geopolitics which may make it difficult to arrive at a meaningful consensus framework with G20 members. India is pushing hard to find common understanding and possible financing around digital public infrastructure, (a bunch of citizen centric applications built on a technology platform financed by the public and private sector). China would like to have its greater say in any technology-based standard, while the western nations may have their own set of compulsions.

Meanwhile, China is finding it increasingly difficult to have a smooth economic partnership with the US and Europe, whose large enterprises (particularly in the technology domain) made China, the factory of the world, and pulled up several millions of its citizens out of poverty in just a couple of decades. China's "limitless friendship" with Russia is proving to be a major hindrance towards reinstituting fractured ties with western allies. Russia on its part is perhaps looking for an honourable exit from Ukraine, triggered by economic isolation, a fallout which may have an impact for many decades to come.

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

Governor must anchor
provincial autonomy



DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL

It is high time the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission are evolved into a Constitutional convention

The appointment of freshly retired judges and active politicians as Governors continues to stoke the old controversy. The speed with which many Governors have been appointed, soon after demitting offices, reminds us of the words of Hamlet in the eponymous play of William Shakespeare. Hamlet, the protagonist of the play and Prince of Denmark, is bewildered and shocked when his Queen Mother marries his uncle soon after the death of his father, reflects – "O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason/Would have mourned longer!—married with my uncle," and called it "most wicked speed."

Late Arun Jaitley had once remarked in a similar context that "post-retirement benefit is an inducement for pre-retirement judgments." Despite recommendations of the Sarkaria and Venkatachaliah Commissions, active party politicians have been appointed as Governors.

As a convention, ripened politicians, who have withdrawn from electoral politics and are considered politically neutral, ought to be appointed as Governors. The Constituent Assembly debated a number of ways for the selection of a Governor. The first method was election by an adult suffrage. The second was election by the members of the Legislative Assembly, and the third was selection by the President out of a panel prepared by the Legislative Assembly.

The aforesaid propositions were criticised on account of creation of a possible constitutional crisis, appeasement of the Legislative Assembly for election as Governor, and possible friction against the person selected from the panel if s/he was not the first option. After extensive deliberations and on a balance of consideration, appointment of the Governor by the President was finally chosen.

A wide range of functions are assigned to the Governor. But, except where he is required to act on his discretion, the Governor acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers which is accountable to the legislature. This view stands reinforced by the judgment of the Supreme Court in Shamsher Singh V. State of Punjab (AIR 1974 SC).

This is unlike the President, who is elected by an electoral college comprising the elected MPs and the MLAs and can be removed from office by way of an impeached by Parliament.

The Governor is appointed for five years by the President but holds office during the pleasure of the President. He can be reappointed as Governor for another term if "the pleasure" remains intact.

In order to retain the pleasure, a Governor, if not of sterner stuff, is bound to succumb to the bidding of the Union Government. Examples abound of the Governors who acted as instruments of the Union Government in toppling the elected State Governments. As early as 1953,



MANY MEMBERS
OF THE
CONSTITUENT
ASSEMBLY
FORESAW THE
DANGER TO
PROVINCIAL
AUTONOMY. DR
HV KAMATH, A
MEMBER, HAD
OMINOUSLY
CAUTIONED, 'I
FORESEE THE
DESTRUCTION
OF PROVINCIAL
AUTONOMY,
SUBVERSION OF
THE PROVINCIAL
AUTONOMY BY
THE UNION
GOVERNMENT'

(The author, a former Lok Sabha Additional Secretary, is a Delhi-based advocate)



instead of inviting the leader of the UDF having 166 MLAs, the Governor of Madras State invited the single largest party, Congress, which had 152 seats, paving the way for appointment of C Rajagopalachari as the CM. In 1953 again, President's rule was imposed in the erstwhile state of Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), due to internal party politics of the ruling party. There were other instances as well, like the dismissals of the government in Kerala in 1959, the NTR government and Farooq Abdullah governments in 1984, the Bommai government in 1989, and the subsequent dismissal of elected governments in Bihar, Jharkhand, UP.

After the Bommai judgment of the apex court, which acted as a sort of deterrent, new and ingenious measures have been devised to replace the state governments where majorities are thin or new legislative majorities could be forged against the popular mandate.

Taking a hindsight view of the role of Governors in the last seven decades, the institution of Governor has courted controversy right from 1951 in the imposition of President's Rule, in the appointment of Chief Ministers, in the matter of time limit for given for holding the floor test, unconscionable delay in convening the Assembly, etc. Being an appointee of the Union Government, and his continuance in office being contingent upon the pleasure of the President, his recommendations were procured and made the base for imposition of President's Rule.

The grounds for such recommendations are the ostensible inability of the parties in the state legis-

lature to stake the claim to form the government for want of clear majority, defection from the ruling party, reducing it to a minority and the inability of the Opposition to provide convincing claim of majority support in the Assembly, intra-party politics, political instability due to defections and a welter of claims and counterclaims by political parties to form the Government, the inability of the state government to uphold the Constitution, defeat of government on the floor of the House, etc.

Many members of the Constituent Assembly in their brooding spirit foresaw the danger to the provincial autonomy. Dr HV Kamath, a member of the Constituent Assembly, had ominously cautioned, "I foresee the destruction of provincial autonomy, subversion of the provincial autonomy by the Union Government." He very presciently said, "The Constitution will be in danger not so much from those who are agitating in the streets as from those who are in power."

Though expected to remain "a dead letter," the indiscreet invoking of Article 356 and the acts of omission and commission of many Governors have engendered controversies right from the year 1951. The Administrative Reforms Commission, 1968, voiced its worry in the matter. The Rajamannar Commission, 1971, recommended deletion of Article 356. The Sarkaria Commission, 1988, recommended its use sparingly, and made many recommendations of far-reaching import about the appointment of Governor and to prevent the misuse of his office.

The Justice Venkatachaliah Commission, 2002, recommend-

ed that Article 356 should be used as a remedy of the last resort. LK Advani, the then deputy prime minister and home minister, said at the Inter-State Council meeting on August 28, 2003, that "there was a general consensus on the Constitutional recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission." The Sarkaria Commission had recommended that the Governor should be an eminent person in some walk of life and from outside the state. He should be a detached figure without intense political links, or should not have taken part in politics in the recent past. Besides, he should not be a member of the ruling party. He should be removed from office before his tenure only on the grounds as mentioned in the Constitution or if aspersions are cast on his morality, dignity, constitutional propriety, etc. He should be appointed after effective consultations. The post of the Governor, a relic of the colonial era, often becomes a clog to democratic governance when provincial autonomy is diluted or elected Government is derailed.

Federalism is an integral part of the basic structure of our Constitution and it is intertwined inextricably with the unity and integrity of the nation. It's therefore opportune that the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission are developed into a Constitutional convention. Further, no retired public servant should be appointed as Governor before two years of demitting the office. A Governor should be debarred from contesting elections. It's time to have the names of prospective Governors ratified by the Rajya Sabha, the federal chamber.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER SPEAKS
A LOT, BUT I THINK HE SHOULD TRY TO
DEEPEN HIS UNDERSTANDING.
— CONGRESS LEADER
RAHUL GANDHI



IF HE HAS SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE,
IT'S OKAY WITH ME. LIFE IS A
LEARNING PROCESS.
— EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER
S JAISHANKAR

Pakistan's rulers are responsible for its bankruptcy

Pakistan must maintain financial discipline, avoid extravagance on defence, and reject the remaining projects of the CPEC

Pakistan is facing its worst economic crisis ever. In the last 25 years, the debt on Pakistan has increased from Rs 3 lakh crore (Pakistani rupees) to Rs 62.5 lakh crore (2022). In the last 25 years, whereas the government's debt has increased by 14 per cent annually, Pakistan's GDP increased at the rate of only 3 per cent annually. Due to this, the government debt has become unsustainable.

Its servicing is beyond Pakistan's capacity, because the debt service liability has reached Rs 5.2 lakh crores, which is much more than the total revenue of the government. Although Imran Khan's government fell due to this crisis, the current administration has



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

(The author is Professor, PGDAV College, University of Delhi)

also failed miserably to handle the situation.

On February 18, 2023, Pakistan's Defense Minister Khwaja Mohammad Asif gave a statement that the Government of Pakistan has already defaulted in servicing its debt. Economic experts are of the opinion that none but the rulers of Pakistan are responsible for the economic crisis of Pakistan.

Most of the big companies in Pakistan have announced their closure, including Pak Suzuki Motors, Millat Tractors, Indus Motor Company, Kandhara Tyre and Rubber Company, Nishat Chunian and Fauji Fertilizer Bin Qasim. Sixteen hundred textile mills closed down by 2022, due to which 50 lakh people lost their jobs. The

remaining companies are also restrained to utilise only 50 per cent of their capacity.

Under these compulsions, Pakistan has approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) several times for assistance. The IMF says that it can give help to Pakistan if it accepts its conditions. The IMF's condition is that Pakistan should make provisions for additional taxation of Rs 17,000 crore, including an additional levy on diesel. Experts believe that with the help of the IMF, Pakistan may be saved from defaulting in debt servicing for some time, but it will continue to be haunted by the economic crisis in the long run.

Economists have been critical about Pakistan's policies, both long-term and

short-term, and hold them responsible for their current plight. From excessive expenditure on defence to giving "freebies" and an unstable political environment, many issues have remained subjects of sharp criticism. Talking about the decisions of the rulers of Pakistan, it comes to mind that many policy decisions were taken by them which were in the political interest of Pakistani leaders, but not in the economic interest of Pakistan.

Governments took the path of freebies just to please the people. Populist measures were used to keep the prices of commodities low, which increased the burden on the exchequer. It is observed that despite the fall in international oil prices,

the prices of petrol and diesel were not much reduced in India but the Government of Pakistan tried to keep the price of petrol and diesel low. Ultimately, we see that India has emerged the fifth largest economy in the world and Pakistan has become a pauper. The Indian Government used the revenue, raised through petroleum products, to build infrastructure, while Pakistan borrowed heavily in the name of building infrastructure.

Moreover, due to paucity of funds, Pakistan's infrastructure building was not according to its needs but to suit the requirements of a foreign power, China, due to which it is getting less benefit. The debt burden, though, has increased, much beyond

the capacity of Pakistan to repay the same. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an example of this. It is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Some power plants are also part of this project. Pakistan's problem is that it took heavy loans to build such infrastructure, which was of no use to the Pakistani people. The reality is that Pakistan does not have adequate grid connectivity, so CPEC power projects are of no use to Pakistan per se.

This loan only created balance of payments problems for Pakistan and led to an unprecedented depreciation of the Pakistani currency. Today, the exchange rate for Pakistan is 261.7 Pakistani rupees an American dollar.

Pakistan is so deeply indebted to China that out of the bilateral debt of \$27 billion, about \$23 billion is Chinese debt. Pakistan's total external debt is a whopping \$126.3 billion. Total public debt and liabilities of Pakistan are estimated to be about \$222 billion, which is 393.7 per cent of the GDP of Pakistan.

The people of Pakistan have to understand that nothing is going to be achieved by changing governments. The only way to save Pakistan is to fix its policies, maintain financial discipline, avoid extravagance on defence, focus on saving industries, and come out of China's clutches as soon as possible and reject the remaining projects of the CPEC.

Oman opens airspace to Israel

Move to help direct flights to India: Netanyahu

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday welcomed the authorisation for Israeli carriers to fly over Oman as a “great day” for the aviation industry as it will connect the country directly with India and also help establish Israel as the main transit point between Asia and Europe.

“The Far East is not so far away and the skies are no longer the limit”, Netanyahu said in a statement after receiving the Omani authorisation.

“This is a day of great news for Israeli aviation. Israel has, in effect, become the main transit point between Asia and Europe”, the Israeli prime minister added.

Israel received authorisation from Saudi Arabia and the Israeli leader said that he worked since his 2018 visit to



Oman on getting permission for Israeli carriers to fly over its airspace so that they could go directly to India and onwards to Australia. Oman and Israel do not have diplomatic ties.

“This was achieved today, after considerable effort, including in recent months. Here is

good news – Israel is opening up to the east on an unprecedented scale”, Netanyahu stressed.

Until now, Israeli airlines’ flights to East Asia, India and Thailand were forced to fly south to avoid the Arabian Peninsula – a route that added

two and a half hours and wasteful expensive fuel, local media reported.

With the Omani announcement, Israeli flights can shave off two to four hours to popular destinations like India and Thailand.

The development could potentially reduce ticket prices as well, given that airlines would save money on fuel.

Air India has been flying from Tel Aviv to Delhi directly using Saudi and Omani airspace, which saves time and makes the flights much more cost-efficient.

Last year Saudi Arabia allowed Israeli airlines to use its airspace but because Omani airspace was closed, Israeli carriers could not use the route to fly to Asia. The Saudi Arabian decision came after United States President Joe Biden visited the region last year.

Gaza rockets, Israeli strikes follow deadly West Bank raid

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Palestinian militants in Gaza launched rockets at southern Israel and Israeli aircraft struck targets in the coastal enclave early Thursday after a deadly gun battle with Israeli troops in the occupied West Bank killed 10 Palestinians.

A 66-year-old man died after the raid from tear gas inhalation. The bloodshed extends one of the deadliest periods in years between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank, where dozens of Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the start of the year. Palestinian attacks on Israelis in 2023 have killed 11 people. The violence comes in the first weeks of Israel’s new far-right government, which has promised to take a tough line against the Palestinians and pledged to ramp up settlement construction on lands Palestinians seek for their future state.

Israel was bracing for a

retaliation and police were stepping up security in sensitive areas. A day after a raid in January on the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank that killed 10 Palestinians, a Palestinian shot and killed seven people outside a synagogue in east Jerusalem.

On Thursday, police said security guards at the entrance to a West Bank settlement shot a woman who police said attempted to stab the guards. Her condition was not immediately known.

The Israeli military said Palestinian militants fired six rockets from the Gaza Strip toward the country’s south early Thursday. The Israeli military said air defences intercepted five of the rockets, which were fired toward the cities of Ashkelon and Sderot. One missile landed in an open field. Israeli aircraft then struck several targets in northern and central Gaza, including a weapons manufacturing site and a military compound

belonging to the Hamas militant group that rules Gaza. There were no reports of injuries in Israel or Gaza.

Violence in the West Bank often sets off a response from militants in Gaza, although the rocket attacks were not immediately claimed by Palestinian militant groups.

Among the 11 killed in Wednesday’s raid in Nablus were three Palestinian men, ages 72, 66 and 61, and a 16-year-old boy, according to health officials. Scores of others were wounded.

It was one of the bloodiest battles in nearly a year of fighting in the West Bank and east Jerusalem and raised the likelihood of further bloodshed. Israeli police said they were on heightened alert, while the Hamas militant group in Gaza said its patience was “running out.” Islamic Jihad, another militant group, vowed to retaliate. In response to the raid, a strike was called across the West Bank and schools, uni-

versities and shops all shut down in protest. Schools and universities were shuttered in Gaza.

The four-hour operation left a broad swath of damage in a centuries-old marketplace in Nablus, a city known as a militant stronghold.

In one emotional scene, an overwhelmed medic pronounced a man dead, only to notice the lifeless patient was his father. Elsewhere, an amateur video showed two men, apparently unarmed, being shot as they ran in the street.

Israel has been carrying out stepped-up arrest raids of wanted militants in the West Bank since a series of deadly Palestinian attacks in Israel last spring. Israel says the raids are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks. But the raids have shown few signs of slowing the violence, and in cases like Wednesday’s operation, can raise the likelihood of reprisals.

Imran seeks release of party leaders

PTI ■ LAHORE/PESHAWAR

Fearing that the notorious intelligence agencies may torture senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf politicians at undisclosed locations, ousted premier Imran Khan’s party on Thursday filed a petition in a court seeking the release of the leaders who offered their arrests under the mass court arrest movement a day earlier.

The interim Punjab government on Thursday confirmed that police had arrested 81 PTI activists, including former federal ministers Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Asad Umar and Hamid Azhar, Senators Azam Swati and Waleed Iqbal (grandson of poet of Allama Iqbal) and former Punjab governor Omar Sarfraz Cheema.

Khan’s party, however, insists that around 250 party workers have been detained by police in Lahore.

Iran acknowledges it has enriched uranium

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran on Thursday directly acknowledged an accusation attributed to international inspectors that it enriched uranium to 84 per cent purity for the first time, which would put the Islamic Republic closer than ever to weapons-grade material.

The acknowledgement by a news website linked to the highest reaches of Iran’s theocracy renews pressure on the West to address Tehran’s programme, which had been contained by the 2015 nuclear deal that America unilaterally withdrew from in 2018. Years of attacks across the Middle East have followed.

Already Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who recently regained his country’s premiership, is threatening to take military action similar to when Israel previously bombed nuclear programmes

in Iraq and Syria. But while those attacks saw no war erupt, Iran has an arsenal of ballistic missiles, drones and other weaponry it and its allies already have used in the region.

The acknowledgment Thursday came from Iran’s Nour News, a website linked to Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, overseen by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Nour News separately is sanctioned by Canada for having “participated in gross and systematic human rights violations and perpetuated disinformation activities to justify the Iranian regime’s repression and persecution of its citizens” amid nationwide protests there.

The comments by Nour News follow days of muddled comments by Iran not directly acknowledging the accusation by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran had enriched

up to 84 per cent.

Bloomberg first reported Sunday that inspectors had detected uranium particles enriched up to 84 per cent. The IAEA, a United Nations agency based in Vienna, has not denied the report, saying only “that the IAEA is discussing with Iran the results of recent agency verification activities.”

In its comments Thursday, Nour News urged the IAEA to “not fall prey to the seduction of Western countries” and declare that Iran’s nuclear programme was “completely peaceful.”

“It will be clear soon that the IAEA surprising report of discovering 84 per cent enriched uranium particles in Iran’s enrichment facilities was an inspector’s error or was a deliberate action to create political atmospheres against Iran on the eve of the meeting of” its board, Nour News said on Twitter.

Biden backs Ajay Banga as WB chief

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden on Thursday announced that the US is nominating Ajay Banga to lead the World Bank, saying the Indian-American business leader is uniquely equipped to lead the global institution at “this critical moment in history.”

If confirmed by the World Bank Board of Directors, Banga would be the first-ever Indian-American and Sikh-American to head either of the two top international financial institutions: International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Banga, 63, currently serves as Vice Chairman at General Atlantic. Previously, he was President and CEO of Mastercard, leading the company through a strategic, technological and cultural transformation. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 2016.

“Ajay is uniquely equipped to lead the World Bank at this critical moment in history,” President Biden said in a statement.

“He has spent more than three decades building and managing successful, global companies that create jobs and bring investment to developing economies, and guiding organisations through periods of fundamental change,” Biden said.

Banga has a proven track



record managing people and systems, and partnering with global leaders around the world to deliver results, he said.

He also has critical experience mobilising public-private resources “to tackle the most urgent challenges of our time, including climate change,” the US President said.

Raised in India, Banga has a unique perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing developing countries and how the World Bank can deliver on its ambitious agenda to reduce poverty and expand prosperity, he added.

The White House said

Banga is a business leader with extensive experience leading successful organisations in developing countries and forging public-private partnerships to address financial inclusion and climate change.

According to the White House, over the course of his career, Banga has become a global leader in technology, data, financial services and innovating for inclusion.

He is honorary chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce, serving as chairman from 2020-2022. He is also chairman of Exor and independent director at Temasek. He

became an advisor to General Atlantic’s climate-focused fund, BeyondNetZero, at its inception in 2021.

He previously served on the Boards of the American Red Cross, Kraft Foods and Dow Inc. Ajay has worked closely with Vice President Kamala Harris as the Co-Chair of the Partnership for Central America.

He is a member of the Trilateral Commission, a founding trustee of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, a former member of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, and Chairman Emeritus of the American India Foundation.

Banga is a co-founder of The Cyber Readiness Institute, Vice Chair of the Economic Club of New York and served as a member of President Barack Obama’s Commission on Enhancing National Cybersecurity. He is a past member of the US President’s Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations.

He was awarded the Foreign Policy Association Medal in 2012, the Ellis Island Medal of Honour and the Business Council for International Understanding’s Global Leadership Award in 2019, and the Distinguished Friends of Singapore Public Service Star in 2021.

UK supermarkets impose purchase limit on fruit & veg amid shortage

PTI ■ LONDON

Some of Britain’s leading Supermarket chains have imposed purchase limits on certain fruits and vegetables amid a supply shortage due to adverse weather conditions and the knock-on effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with the UK government warning on Thursday that the situation could last up to a month.

Tomatoes, peppers or capsicums, cucumbers, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower and boxes of raspberries are among the produce being limited to around three for each customer by the likes of Tesco, Asda, Morrisons and Aldi.

The shortage has been linked with bad weather in southern Europe and Africa as well as high energy prices restricting greenhouse farming in the UK and the Netherlands.

“We anticipate the situation will last about another two to four weeks,” Environment Secretary Therese Coffey told the House of Commons in response to an urgent question in Parliament.

“It is important that we try and make sure that we get alternative sourcing options,” she said.

The minister said her Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has been in discussion with retailers to get over the crisis and avoid similar situations in the future.

“I wish to reiterate UK food security does remain resilient and we continue to expect industry to be able to mitigate supply problems through alternative sourcing options,” she added.

Opposition Labour Party flagged genuine concern among the public over shortage of some of the basic food items in their shopping basket.

Labour Party sets out 5-point plan with eye on UK election

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK’s opposition Labour Party on Thursday set out a five-point plan to provide the country with a “mission-driven” government in time for the next general election, due to be held next year.

Labour leader Keir Starmer said his five goals – to secure the highest sustained growth in the G7, build a National Health Service (NHS) fit for the future, make Britain’s streets safe, break down the barriers to opportunity at every stage, and make Britain a clean energy superpower – will form the core of the party’s manifesto for the 2024 polls.

With the opposition currently holding a 20-point lead on the governing Rishi Sunak-led Conservative Party, the latest announcement is seen as firing the starting gun on Labour’s ambitions to form a government.

“These missions will form

the backbone of the Labour manifesto. The pillars of the next Labour government,” Starmer, 60, said in a speech in Manchester.

“They will be measurable, so we can track progress and be held to account. Long-term so we can look beyond the day-to-day. Informed by experts and the public so we can build a coalition for change. And each will support our drive for growth. Each will help us get our future back,” he said.

Starmer promised to achieve his goal for the British economy “by the end of the first term” and said this would be “powered by good jobs and stronger productivity in every part of the country.”

On law and order, he invoked predecessor and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair as he promised to be “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime.”

Starmer said he is “not concerned about whether

investment or expertise comes from the public or private sector – I just want to get the job done”. The five central missions are in contrast to the Labour Party’s position in the last general election in 2019 when the party pledged to nationalise energy, rail, mail, and water.

During his speech, the Labour leader repeatedly hit out at the Conservatives for “13 years of sticking plaster politics” which he blamed for many of the country’s problems.

Conservative Party chairman Greg Hands said the Labour leader would “say anything if the politics of that moment suit him”.

In his New Year speech last month, British Prime Minister Sunak, 42, set out his own five goals for the country as growing the economy, halving inflation this year, ensuring the UK’s debt is falling, cutting NHS waiting lists, and passing new laws to stop small boat illegal migrant crossings.



Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) attends a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, near the Kremlin Wall during the national celebrations of the ‘Defender of the Fatherland Day’ in Moscow on Thursday. The Defenders of the Fatherland Day, celebrated in Russia on February 23, honors the nation’s military and is a nationwide holiday.

Afghanistan’s Taliban reopen key trade route with Pakistan

AP ■ PESHAWAR

Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers reopened a key border crossing with Pakistan Thursday, allowing thousands of trucks carrying desperately needed food and other items to creep forward for the first time in days, officials said.

The jam at the Torkham crossing between the two nations began to ease after Islamabad sent a high-level delegation to Kabul to discuss a range of issues, including the Taliban’s closure of the border on Sunday.

Taliban-appointed officials in Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province confirmed the reopening of the Torkham border. The Afghan embassy in Pakistan also posted news of the reopening on Twitter.

Thousands of vehicles, some carrying fresh produce like vegetables and fruit, began



moving along the Khyber Pass in northwest Pakistan Thursday, said Ziaul Haq Sarhadi, a director at the Pakistan-Afghanistan joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The latest development comes a day after Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Mohammad Asif made an unannounced visit to Kabul,

where he met with senior Taliban officials, including Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban-appointed deputy prime minister for economic affairs.

The group discussed the closure of Torkham, which the Taliban said Sunday was shut because of immigration issues faced by sick Afghan people on the Pakistani side of the border,

according to officials on both sides.

On Monday, security forces from the both sides traded fire, wounding a Pakistani soldier.

The Taliban government said they closed the Torkham border crossing because of Pakistan’s alleged refusal to allow Afghan immigrants and their caretakers to enter Pakistan for medical care without travel documents.

For Pakistan, the Torkham border crossing is a vital commercial artery and a trade route to Central Asian countries. But Pakistan has also accused the Afghan Taliban of providing sanctuary for Pakistani militants whose cross-border attacks have led to a spike in violence in this Islamic nation.

A statement issued by Baradar’s office Wednesday said the Afghan Taliban told

the Pakistani delegation that “necessary facilities should be provided for all passengers” at Torkham and also at Spin Boldak, another trade route located to the south, across from Chaman in Pakistan’s restive southwestern Baluchistan province.

Baradar said special facilities should be provided for the transportation of patients needing emergency medical care, according to the statement, which said the Pakistani side promised to resolve these matters quickly.

The reopening of Torkham was a relief for the traders and others on both sides who were jammed at the border for four days. It was also an indication of easing tensions between the two neighbors.

Closures, cross-border fire and shootouts are common along the Afghan-Pakistan border.

According to Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry, the Pakistani delegation during Wednesday’s visit also discussed “the growing threat of terrorism in the region,” particularly by Pakistani Taliban who are known as Tahreek-e Taliban-Pakistan and Islamic State.

The Pakistani Taliban are a separate group, but allied with, the Afghanistan Taliban, who seized power more than a year ago as the US and NATO troops withdrew. The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan emboldened TTP, whose top leaders and fighters are hiding in the country.

TTP in recent months has stepped up attacks in Pakistan, where security forces often carry out raids on their hideouts. In the latest raid in the northwestern district of Lakki Marwat, security forces on Thursday killed six Pakistani Taliban, according to police.

UK ruling delivers rare win for Beirut blast victims

Beirut: A British court has ruled a London-based company that delivered the explosive ammonium nitrate to Beirut’s port is liable towards the victims of a devastating blast in 2020, Lebanon’s Beirut Bar Association said on Thursday.

On August 4 2020, hundreds of tons of the chemical, typically used in fertilisers, detonated, killing more than 200 people, injuring over 6,000 and damaging large parts of Beirut.

Families of the explosion’s victims saw the development as a rare step towards justice and against the political intervention that has obstructed the investigative judge leading a probe in Lebanon for over two years.

The ruling in London is an unusual judicial success for the victims’ families, members of whom have advocated for an unimpeded national investiga-

tion. Some have opted to file lawsuits abroad.

The London-registered chemical trading firm, Savaro Ltd, is suspected of having chartered the shipment of the ammonium nitrate in 2013 that ended up in Beirut. Documents show a handful of senior political, judicial and security officials were aware of the substance in the port for years, but did not take decisive action to get rid of it. The Beirut Bar Association, alongside three victims’ families, filed a lawsuit against Savaro Ltd over a year ago.

The judgment by the High Court of Justice in London means that the proceedings now move to a “damages phase” of the case that determines the firm’s compensation for the families, Camille Abouleiman, one of the lawyers involved in the case, told The Associated Press.

CHINA MINE COLLAPSE

More bodies found, 48 still missing

AP ■ ALXA LEAGUE

Rescuers with backhoes and bulldozers dug through tons of earth and rubble on Thursday for 48 people missing after a landslide buried an open-pit mine in northern China. State broadcaster CCTV reported that the confirmed death toll in the disaster rose to five.

Conditions in the area remain dangerous, and the search had to be suspended for several hours because of a second landslide at the gigantic facility in Inner Mongolia's Alxa League. On Thursday afternoon, more than a dozen bulldozers, trucks, SUVs and fire engines were seen passing through a remote police checkpoint about 25 kilometers (15 miles) southwest of the mine.

Nearly all personnel were stopped by police and checked for entry approvals before being allowed to proceed along the road leading to the mine.

A police officer said only those with government approval would be allowed access to the area. She said people living close to the mine had been sent to stay in a nearby town.

Security was also tight at another checkpoint in the neighboring region of Ningxia, 15 kilometers (9 miles) east of the mine, with dozens of officers inspecting every vehicle that sought to pass in either direction.

Cranes and other pieces of heavy equipment could be seen, along with covered trucks. It was unclear what the trucks were carrying.

Rescuers used heavy digging equipment and cameras that could snake down into the debris, along with thermal imagers and equipment to detect vital signs, Chang



In this aerial photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, rescue vehicles are parked near the site of a collapsed open pit coal mine in Alxa League in northern China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Thursday, Feb. 23, 2023. An open pit mine collapsed in China's northern Inner Mongolia region on Wednesday, killing multiple people and leaving dozens more missing, state media reported.

Zhigang, the head of the rescue operation, told reporters Thursday.

Crews were using extreme caution to avoid more secondary disasters, Chang said.

"We will continue to increase the rescue force, race against time, and do our best to search and rescue the lives of every trapped person," he said. Police are investigating the cause of the collapse and some people have been detained, Chang said.

"We will publicize the result of the investigation in due course," he said.

The initial cave-in of one of the pit's walls occurred at about 1 p.m. Wednesday, burying people and mining trucks below in tons of rocks and sand. It was followed about five hours later by the additional landslide, forcing the work suspension.

The official Xinhua News Agency said about 900 rescuers with heavy equipment were on

the scene and they had resumed the search by Thursday morning.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for "all-out efforts in search and rescue" and for "ensuring the safety of people's lives and property and maintaining overall social stability."

Images of the collapse distributed by CCTV showed a massive wall of debris rushing down a slope onto people and vehicles below.

The company running the mine, Inner Mongolia Xinjing Coal Industry Co. Ltd., was fined last year for multiple safety violations including insecure routes into and out of the pit, unsafe storage of volatile materials and a lack of training for its safety staff, according to the news website The Paper.

Inner Mongolia is a key region for mining of coal and various minerals and rare earths that critics say has ravaged the region's landscape of

mountains, grassy steppes and deserts.

China overwhelmingly relies on coal for power generation but has tried to reduce the number of deadly mine accidents through a greater emphasis on safety and the closure of smaller operations that lacked necessary equipment.

It has recorded a slew of deadly industrial and construction accidents in recent months as a result of poor safety training and regulation, official corruption and a tendency to cut corners by companies seeking to make profits.

Despite those high-profile incidents, the overall number of industrial accidents fell by 27% in 2022, when much of China's economy was shut down under its "zero COVID" policy, from the previous year, the Ministry of Emergency Management announced last month.

The number of deaths in the accidents also fell 23.6%, the ministry said.

Af Taliban vows to help Pakistan address growing TTP terror threat

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Afghan Taliban leaders have promised to cooperate with Pakistan on its concerns about the presence of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants and sanctuaries on their soil after Islamabad delivered a stark warning to them to rein in the outlawed outfit amid a rise in terror attacks across the country.

The promise came during a day-long trip by a high-level Pakistani delegation led by Defence Minister Khawaja Asif to Kabul on Wednesday, amidst the worsening of ties between the two neighbours over the issue. Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the TTP and IS-K threat was discussed and "the two sides agreed to collaborate to effectively address the threat of terrorism".

The delegation included ISI chief Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum, Foreign Secretary Asad Majid, Special Envoy on Afghanistan Muhammad Sadiq and Pakistan's chargé d'affaires in Afghanistan Obaid Nizamani.

Baloch said the high-level delegation met top Afghan leaders, including Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Baradar, Defence Minister Mawlawi Yaqoob, Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani and Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi.

"The two sides agreed to collaborate to effectively address the threat of terrorism posed by terrorist entities and organizations. It was also agreed to strengthen multifaceted bilateral cooperation between the two countries," she said at the weekly media briefing here. She added that the talks with Afghan leaders were focused on security and counterterrorism matters and all aspects of this issue were discussed.

"The two sides have agreed that they would collaborate to effectively address the threat of terrorism posed by terrorist entities and organisations, including the two entities that were mentioned," she added.

EU bans TikTok for employees over cybersecurity

AP ■ LONDON

The European Union's executive branch said on Thursday that it has temporarily banned TikTok from phones used by employees as a cybersecurity measure, reflecting widening worries from Western officials over the Chinese-owned video sharing app.

In a first for the European Commission, its Corporate Management Board suspended the use of TikTok on devices issued to staff or personal devices that staff use for work.

TikTok faces intensifying scrutiny from Europe and the US over security and data privacy amid worries that the hugely popular app could be used to promote pro-Beijing views or sweep up users' information.

It comes as China and the West are locked in a wider tug of war over technology ranging from spy balloons to computer chips.

The EU's action follows similar moves in the US, where more than half of the states and Congress have banned TikTok from official government devices.

"The reason why this decision has been taken is to ... increase the commission's cybersecurity," commission spokesperson Sonya Gospodinova said at a press briefing in Brussels.

Mexico's Senate gives nod to electoral reforms, Opp protests

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexico's Senate on Wednesday approved a reform of the country's electoral institute, a move that opponents say will undercut democracy but which the president contends will save money and reduce political privileges.

Lawmakers voted 72-50 in favour of the controversial overhaul of the body overseeing Mexico's elections. Opponents immediately said they will challenge the changes in the supreme court. Protests are planned in multiple cities.

The reform still needs to be enacted by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, but that is seen as a formality since he backs the initiative, which would reduce the size of the institute and limit its supervisory and sanctioning powers.

Some opposition lawmakers held up posters reading: "Morena wants to steal the elections," referring to López Obrador's ruling Morena party. Mexico has presidential elections

'Seattle city resolution on caste shows rise of Hinduphobia'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Condemning a resolution passed by the Seattle City Council on caste discrimination, an eminent Indian-American state senator alleged the move showed the rise of 'Hinduphobia' in the United States.

"I condemn in the strongest terms the ordinance passed by the Seattle City Council. Caste discrimination simply doesn't exist now," Niraj Antani, the first Hindu and Indian-American state senator in Ohio's history, said.

"Adding it to their non-discrimination policy is Hinduphobic, and is a tool those that are anti-Hindu use to discriminate against Hindus in America, in India, and around the world," he said.

Antani is the youngest Indian-American elected official in the nation.

"Instead of passing this racist policy, Seattle should be passing policies to protect Hindus from discrimination," he

said.

The resolution moved by Kshama Sawant, an upper-caste Hindu, was approved by the Seattle City Council by six to one vote on Tuesday. Seattle has now become the first US city to outlaw caste discrimination.

The ordinance adds "caste" to the city's anti-discrimination ordinances.

The Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), along with numerous organisations who had signed a joint letter opposing the Seattle City Council's caste ordinance, in a statement condemned the decision to include caste as part of its anti-discrimination policy.

The groups, while fully supporting attempts to tackle discrimination, raised concerns that such serious allegations require data showing systemic abuse – a standard the city had failed to meet by relying on faulty data that was also pointed out in the survey from Carnegie Endowment in 2021, the statement said.

"This law itself is inherently discriminatory because, unlike other categories such as race, gender, religion, ancestry, etc. it singles out the South Asian community as requiring special monitoring," said CoHNA president Nikunj Trivedi.

"In taking this step, the city has relied on information from groups that have openly called for a dismantling of Hinduism – thus becoming an avenue for platforming hate against a minority group. It seems Seattle city is also openly saying that South Asians require more monitoring than all other groups," he said.

"I was disappointed at how my voice was ignored. The council gave voice only to selected voices, without taking into consideration the fact that not all groups in the Dalit-Bahujan community support such a divisive and discriminatory bill," added CoHNA Steering Committee member and Dalit community activist Aldrin Deepak.

Lanka's apex court postpones petition seeking halt of local body elections

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court on Thursday postponed the hearing of a writ petition seeking an order to halt the March 9 local body elections until May 11, casting uncertainty on the conduct of elections in the island country.

The apex court postponed the hearing of the petition filed by a retired Sri Lanka Army Colonel seeking an order to invalidate the preparations being made for the Local Government Election until May 11, two months after the scheduled date.

Speaking in parliament on Thursday, President Ranil Wickremesinghe also hinted that the local election may not take place.

"There is no election declared by the election commission. So no question of a postponement," Wickremesinghe said.

Wickremesinghe, citing a

technical point, claimed that the election commissioners lacked unanimity when the poll was announced for March 9. "Only three of them had agreed, but the decision was announced by one of them," he said, adding that the five-member Election Commission is acting on an interim basis, as its term ended on October 31 last year. Wickremesinghe stressed that his job as the pres-

ident was, at this stage, to revive the crisis-struck economy, hinting that conducting the local election with already lean state finances would only bring additional pressure.

The Election Commission informed the Supreme Court that it was difficult to conduct local body polls on March 9 due to various reasons linked to the cash-strapped country's current economic crisis.

TV reporter killed while covering fatal shooting

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Florida television station identified Thursday a 24-year-old reporter who was fatally shot while covering a shooting death in an Orlando area neighbourhood, as well as its photojournalist who was critically injured in the rampage.

Spectrum News 13 reporter Dylan Lyons and photojournalist Jesse Walden were in their unmarked news vehicle on Wednesday afternoon when a man approached and shot them, Orange County Sheriff John Mina said in a news conference.

The man then went to a nearby home where he fatally shot a 9-year-old girl and crit-

ically injured her mother.

The sheriff said they've detained Keith Melvin Moses, 19, who they believe is responsible for both shootings.

"I want to acknowledge what a horrible day this has been for our community and our media partners," Mina told a room full of reporters. "I work closely with all of you and know many of you and know the very difficult job that you do and also the very important job that you do for our community and for law enforcement. No one in our community — not a mother, not a 9-year-old and certainly not news professionals — should become the victim of gun violence in our community."

Mina said they don't

immediately have a motive for any of the shootings.

"So, the suspect is not saying much right now," Mina said. "It is unclear if he knew they were news media or not. We're still trying to work all that out." Mina said the News 13 vehicle did not look like a typical news van with TV station markings. Deputies had initially responded to the Pine Hills area, just northwest of Orlando, on Wednesday morning following reports of a woman in her 20s being shot.

Moses "was an acquaintance of the woman this morning, but as far as we know, had no connection to the reporters and no connection to the mother and the 9-year-old," Mina said.

Pentagon releases selfie taken by US pilot showing Chinese spy balloon in air

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Pentagon has released a selfie taken in the cockpit of a U-2 spy plane, as an Air Force pilot flew above the large suspected Chinese surveillance balloon before it was shot down by the US military this month.

The selfie image, taken by the pilot of the U-2 on February 3, shows the shadow of the aircraft on the balloon and a clear image of the balloon's payload as it crossed across the continental United States.

The balloon, carrying a payload the size of three coach buses, was first spotted by the



US military on January 28 and ultimately shot down by a US Air Force fighter jet off the coast of South Carolina on February 4 after crossing the country.

The US defence depart-

ment did not identify the U-2 pilot in the selfie but the authenticity of the image was confirmed during a Pentagon briefing on Wednesday by Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh.

India to host event at UN on Gandhian thought and philosophy

LALIT K JHA ■ WASHINGTON

India will host an event on Gandhian thought and philosophy at the UN headquarters in New York to discuss how the fundamental values of pluralism, democracy and rule of law can be strengthened to build peaceful and inclusive societies.

Thursday's event comes as the UN Security Council is scheduled to hold a discussion on Ukraine on Friday.

To be organised jointly by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations and the University for Peace at the Economic and Social Council Chamber, the event is expected to be attended by diplomats from across the world.

Announcing the event in a tweet, India's Permanent

Mission to the United Nations said, "Join us tomorrow at UN for a thought-provoking initiative on the centrality of Mission Life & sustainable development to Gandhian thought as part of the India Roundtable series."

It also shared a quote by Gandhi: "In a gentle way, you can shake the world."

According to the UN's website, the meeting will discuss examples of how sustainable lifestyles can be promoted to combat the adverse effects of climate and environmental degradation and how the fundamental values of pluralism, democracy and rule of law can be strengthened to build peaceful and inclusive societies.

The objective of this meeting is to shine a light on Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine

of 'Trusteeship' and its relevance in today's world with a focus on the concept of 'Human Flourishing' to promote sustainable lifestyles and enduring peace. The announcement comes as the UN General Assembly held an Emergency Special Session on Ukraine.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the one-year mark of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine stands as a grim milestone for the people of Ukraine and for the international community.

"The invasion is a violation of the United Nations Charter and international law and is having dramatic humanitarian and human rights consequences," he said.

"The position of the United

Nations is unequivocal: We are committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders," Guterres said.

Csaba Korosi, President of the General Assembly, said Wednesday marked the grim first anniversary of the war in Ukraine, highlighting the despair, displacement, destruction and death that Europe has not seen in decades.

"No one can be complacent," Korosi said. He also assured all those suffering from the war's consequences that they have not been forgotten.

"This war will come to an end, and the time of reconstruction, reconciliation and transformation will come," Korosi said. "We know it will

not be easy. We know the scars are deep. Culture, family bonds, sports, arts and the acknowledgement of the shared destiny of humanity will certainly help nations currently facing each other in the trenches."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba introduced a draft resolution calling for just and lasting peace in his country. Calling this "a decisive moment to show support, unity and solidarity," he recalled, standing in the assembly urging its member nations to prevent war days before Russia's February 24, 2022 invasion.

Ukraine exercised its legitimate right to self-defence, enshrined in the Charter as its people chose to fight for their lives. "Against all odds, we were able to stop the much stronger aggressor and kick

him out of half of the newly occupied territory," he said, adding, "No one should be fooled by Russia's empty calls for negotiations." In his remarks, Vassily A Nebenzia of Russia alleged that Ukraine is nothing more than a pawn.

"While Moscow is ready for a diplomatic solution, its opponents have not recovered from the futile illusion that they could defeat a nuclear power," he said.

US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said that President Vladimir Putin had chosen war in an assault on the United Nations that struck at the heart of its Charter.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

No SSA-12018/13/2022-MIS-SEC-SSA/129299/2023 Date: 23.02.2023

Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom , Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites following bids through GeM portal.

1.GEM/2023/B/3143837 dated 16.02.2023 for supply, installation & commissioning of ICT Laboratory equipments and provide service in 145 block Resource Centre.

Interested bidder may visit GeM portal and submit their bid on GeM portal accordingly.

Sd/-Mission Director
Samagra Shiksha, Assam
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyogi/CF/4546/22

Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar

Tender Notice Reference No. GNDU/Gen/Feb/02/2023

The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsar invites online bids for the following:

Sr. no.	Item	Quantity
2.	Stationery, cockery and Misc items	52 items

Closing date & time: 160.3.2023 at 5:00 p.m.
For details log onto www.eproc.Punjab.gov.in
Note: Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.

Assistant registrar (Genral),
Guru nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Name of work and its location	30-Elect-65-T-R1-22-23-E3 Electrical work regarding repairing & rewinding of submersible & monoblock submersible pumps over Delhi Division.
Approx cost of the works in	Rs. 60.86 Lacs
Address of the office	Sr. Divtl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi
Bid Security	Rs. 121700.00
Date & time of submission of tender	21.03.2023, 12.00 Hrs.
Opening of tender	21.03.2023, 12.00 Hrs.
Website & Notice board	www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divtl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

594/23

UJVN LIMITED

H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dohradun-248006,
Telephone.: 0135-2763806, Fax: 0135- 2763508
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvn.com

Ro. No. 178 Dated 23/02/2023

e-Tender Notice

Office of the Executive Engineer (E&M), Vaysi Dam, Juddo Dakpathar, UJVN Ltd. invites online bid from interested party's Brief summary of tender is given below

NIT No : 02/EE(E&M)/Vaysi Dam/2022-23. Name of work : Annual operation of Dam related control system & associated equipment of Vaysi HEP at juddo. **Estimated cost:** Rs. 61,45,427.00 (GST Extra) **Date of Availability of bid document on website:** 25.02.2023 from 17:00 hrs. **Last date for submission of bids on website:** 18.03.2023 upto 17:00 hrs
For fuller & further details kindly visit e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>

Executive Engineer (E&M)

"Avoid Wasteful use of Electricity"

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF PSYCHIATRY

KANKE, RANCHI-834006, JHARKHAND

The Director, Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi, Jharkhand, invites applications to fill up the following posts :

Sl. No.	Name of post	Mode of Recruitment	Pay Level	No. of post
1.	Professor of Clinical Psychology	Deputation (including Short term Contract)/ Promotion	Level 12 of Pay Matrix (Rs.78800-209200/-)	01 (One)
2.	Professor of Psychiatric Social Work	Deputation (including Short term Contract) or Promotion	Level 12 of Pay Matrix (Rs.78800-209200/-)	01 (One)
3.	Associate Professor of Psychiatric Social Work	Deputation (including Short term Contract)	Level 11 of Pay Matrix (Rs.67700-208700/-)	01 (One)
4.	Library and Information Officer	Deputation (including Short term Contract) or Promotion	Level 11 of Pay Matrix (Rs.67700-208700/-)	01 (One)

(The details including application format, essential qualifications and other eligibility criteria are published in the Employment News dated 18-24 February 2023 as well as available on the CIP website i.e. www.cipranchi.nic.in)

Sd/-Director

Investors become poorer by ₹7.48 L cr

Markets fall for 5th day

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Equity investors became poorer by ₹7.48 lakh crore in five consecutive days of market fall, where the BSE Sensex has declined by nearly 3 per cent.

In the past five days, the BSE Sensex has tumbled 1,713.71 points or 2.79 per cent.

This has led to an erosion of ₹7,48,887.04 crore from the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms in five trading sessions. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms now stands at ₹2,60,82,098.56 crore.

On Thursday, the BSE benchmark ended 139.18 points or 0.23 per cent lower at 59,605.80.

"The equity market traded cautiously between gains and losses as the minutes of the central bank policy meeting revealed concerns over high



inflation and its commitment to bring inflation under control. In response to the heightened fears of rate hikes, the US 10 yr treasury yield continued to stay high, near 4 per cent," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said. On Wednesday, the Sensex plunged 927.74 points or 1.53 per cent to settle at 59,744.98.

"Yesterday's sharp cut of 927 points on the Sensex was caused by a combination of factors: weak US cues, the continuing rout in Adani stocks and concerns of the Adani cri-

sis impacting the banking system," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

He further said that the FOMC minutes reveal the fact that some have even argued for a 50 basis points rate hike.

"This is the biggest near-term negative for equity markets globally," Vijayakumar added. On Thursday, in the Sensex pack, Asian Paints, IndusInd Bank, Larsen & Toubro, Bharti Airtel, Titan, Bajaj Finserv, Infosys, HDFC Bank, Power Grid and HDFC were the major laggards.

India lacks quality market research firms: Murthy

PTI ■ PUNE

Infosys co-founder NR Narayana Murthy on Thursday said India lacks quality market research firms, which leads to over-estimation of the opportunity by unicorns and eventually reporting of huge losses.

"One of the lacunae in India at this point in time is that we do not have a company that specialises in quality market research," Murthy said.

This leads to the entrepreneurs who have created unicorns to overestimate the market opportunity and investments in venture capital funds as well, he added.

Companies spend much more than what they should because of this and then wake up to reverses in the business, Murthy said while speaking at an event organised by Symbiosis International here.

"...The reality sinks in at the end of the year. Your revenues have not gone up, but the expenses have gone up, with



the result you make huge losses," he noted.

Murthy made the point while underscoring the importance of market research during an interaction with students and said he had to shut his first company Softronics founded in the late 1970s in Pune itself due to lack of market research itself.

He said it is very important for companies to earn the respect of everybody and underlined that if it is successful, it will get support from all important stakeholders.

Wheat crop in good condition; Govt's wheat procurement to be normal: FCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wheat crop is in good condition and the government's procurement would be normal at 30-40 million tonne in the 2023-24 marketing year starting March, FCI Chairman and Managing Director Ashok K Meena said on Thursday.

"Area sown to wheat is higher than last year. The current condition of wheat crop is very good. Our procurement should be normal at 30-40 million tonne in 2023-24," Meena said in a press conference.

The wheat procurement had declined last year due to a fall in domestic production and higher exports, he said.

Asked whether there would be any impact on wheat crop due to rise in temperature, as forecast by the Met Department, Meena said it is unlikely to have any impact and the short duration crop will not be affected.



He also said restrictions on wheat exports, which was imposed in May last year, will continue to remain.

The Government has projected a record wheat production at 112.18 million tonne in the 2023-24 crop year (July-June) as per the second estimate of the agriculture ministry. Last year, wheat procurement for the central pool had declined to 187.92 lakh

tonne from 433.44 lakh tonne in the 2021-22 marketing year, as per the official data.

FCI (Food Corporation of India) is the government's nodal agency that undertakes procurement and distribution of foodgrains for the Public Distribution System (PDS) and welfare schemes.

The procurement of wheat will begin from March 15 onwards.

Eight Adani Group firms end lower; some hit lower circuit limits

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of eight Adani Group firms out of the ten listed entities ended the day in the negative territory, extending their previous day decline, amid an overall weak trend in the equity market.

On Thursday, Adani Transmission stock declined by 5 per cent, Adani Green Energy dipped 5 per cent, Adani Total Gas (4.99 per cent) and Adani Power (4.98 per cent) on the BSE. Shares of Adani Wilmar fell 3.97 per cent, Adani Enterprises slipped 1.51 per cent, ACC (0.82 per cent) and NDTV (0.45 per cent).

Some of the group firms also hit their lower circuit limits during the day.

However, two group firms managed to end the trade in the green, with Adani Ports climbing 0.96 per cent and



Ambuja Cements gaining 0.43 per cent.

Shares of Adani Group firms had fallen sharply on Wednesday, with all the listed firms ending in red.

In the broader market, the BSE Sensex fell 139.18 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 59,605.80, registering its fifth day of decline.

Adani Group stocks have taken a beating on the exchanges after US-based short seller Hindenburg Research last month made a litany of allegations, including fraudulent transactions and share-price manipulation, against it.

Not sufficient emphasis on jobs in FY24 Budget, says ex-RBI Guv

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former RBI governor D Subbarao on Thursday said there was not 'sufficient emphasis' on jobs in the Budget for 2023-24 and it failed to grapple with the unemployment problem head on, except to believe that growth itself will generate jobs.

Subbarao noted that the unemployment problem was quite bad even before the Covid and it has become alarming as a result of the pandemic.

"I was disappointed that there was not sufficient emphasis on jobs (in the Budget for 2023-24) ...Mere growth will not do; we need job intensive growth," he told PTI in an interview.

The former RBI governor was asked what was his biggest disappointment with the Budget.

Salaries in India likely to increase by 10.3% in 2023, says survey

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Salaries in India are expected to increase by 10.3 per cent in 2023, highest among major world economies and Asian peers, according to Aon plc. In 2022, salaries in India witnessed an actual increase of 10.6 per cent in 2022.

As per Aon plc's 28th Annual Salary Increase Survey in India, double-digit salary growth will continue in India despite economic volatility, largely as a response to high attrition rates.

At 21.4 per cent, the attrition rate in India for 2022 remained high – a consequence of an ever-changing talent strategy and the ongoing gap between supply and demand of talent.

"With back-to-back double-digit increments, India Inc continues to be bullish on tal-



ent despite fears of global macro-economic uncertainty.

"Organisations are increasingly prioritizing their spends towards top performances, key talent and high potential talent," said Pritish Gandhi, Aon Director & India Practice Leader, Executive Compensation & Governance.

The study, that analyzed data across 1,400 companies from more than 40 industries noted that India continues to have the highest salary increases in the region and among major world economies.

Samsung's commitment to India R&D high: Official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Samsung's commitment to Research and Development capabilities and talent in India is "extremely high" and "will continue to grow", Dipesh Shah, Managing Director of Samsung R&D Institute India-Bengaluru said on Thursday.

As many as 700 engineers from Samsung R&D Institute India-Bengaluru (SRI-B) collaborated with the company's global research centres to contribute to the Korean smart devices maker's newest line up of Galaxy S23 smartphones.

"Software engineers in India have over multiple years (helped) creating very important products by collaboration with global R&D centres...That's why our commitment to India research and development is very high," Shah told reporters during a briefing outlining the key contribution of SRI-B engineers in



Galaxy S23.

The Bengaluru set-up is the largest R&D centre for Samsung outside Korea and it has 3,500 people.

"In Noida and Delhi, we have R&D centres for mobiles, smartphones, televisions, and home appliances. We have semiconductor R&D centre in Bengaluru...So the commitment to R&D as in India as a country is extremely high and will continue to grow," he said.

Globally, the company has multiple research and development centres which collaborate to create Samsung prod-

ucts.

"About 700 engineers in SRI-B worked for creation of this product in collaboration with many global R&D centres," Shah explained.

The Bengaluru centre focuses on areas such as wireless communications (including 5G related activities), camera software (vision related Artificial Intelligence or AI), on-device AI, Smart things cloud.

Earlier this month, Samsung said it will manufacture its premium Galaxy S23 smartphones in India to cater to local market needs. The launch price of Galaxy S23 series in India is in the range of Rs 75,000 to Rs 1.55 lakh per piece.

According to the company, Galaxy S23 Ultra, Galaxy S23+ and Galaxy S23 devices are a generational leap with innovation that have significantly less environmental impact.

NSE gets final nod from Sebi to launch Social Stock Exchange

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading bourse NSE on Thursday said it has received final approval from markets regulator Sebi to set up a Social Stock Exchange (SSE) as a separate segment on its platform.

The final clearance was received on February 22, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) said in a statement.

The Social Stock Exchange segment will provide new avenue for social enterprises to finance social initiatives, provide them visibility and bring in increased transparency in fund mobilisation and utilisation by social enterprises.

"To bring in awareness, we have been conducting various events and hand holding social enterprises currently at various stages of onboarding on the exchange," NSE MD and CEO



Ashishkumar Chauhan said.

Also, he has urged social enterprises to get in touch with the NSE to understand the mechanism and benefits from registering and listing on the social stock exchange segment.

Under the rules, any social enterprise, Non-Profit Organization (NPOs) or For-Profit Social Enterprises (FPEs), that establishes its primacy of social intent can get listed on SSE segment.

For eligible NPOs, the first step for onboarding starts with the registration on the Social Stock Exchange segment.

ONGC to invest \$2 bn in Mumbai offshore to raise oil, gas output

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top oil and gas producer ONGC will invest over \$2 billion in drilling a record 103 wells on its main gas-bearing asset in the Arabia Sea as it pivots a turnaround plan that will add 100 million tonnes to production, a company official said.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has three main assets off the west coast - Mumbai High, Heera and Neelam, and Bassein and Satellite, which contributed the bulk of 21.7 million tonnes of oil and 21.68 billion cubic metres of gas it produced in 2021-22.

"We have released a record 103 locations for drilling of wells on the Bassein and Satellite (B&S) assets over the next 2-3 years," ONGC



Director (Offshore) Pankaj Kumar said.

The wells will tap smaller and hereto untapped reservoirs and help raise output.

"We estimate that this development drilling will enhance production by over 100 million tonnes of oil and oil equivalent gas over the life of the field," he said. "The investment involved in drilling and facilities will be over USD 2 billion."

Flipkart tightens purse, no increment for top 30% employees

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce major Flipkart has tightened its purse and will not be doing out any increment for top 30 per cent employees for January-December 2022 performance development cycle this fiscal, according to internal communication sent out to the employees.

The move impacts around 4,500 employees in the grade 10 and above.

Flipkart Chief People Officer Krishna Raghavan in an email informed employees about the decision.



Quality control for Cotton good for industry, says Aditya Birla Group's Thomas Varghese

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Quality Control Order for mandatory certification of cotton bales is good for the Indian industry as there is a need to improve the quality of cotton exported from the country, according to an Aditya Birla Group official.

"If they have done anything on quality control it is good for the industry. Cotton is an internationally traded commodity and India is the largest producer of cotton in the world. So obviously, you need to improve the quality of cotton which is exported out of the country. It must meet international standards," Thomas Varghese,



Business Head — Textiles at Aditya Birla Group, said.

He was speaking on the sidelines of an ASSOCHAM Summit here on Thursday.

The government on Wednesday said it has approved the Quality Control Order for mandatory certification of cotton bales to augment the supply of good quality cotton to the textile industry.

Vertex Hydrogen signs pact to supply 1K MW H2

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Vertex Hydrogen, a joint venture of Essar group and UK's Progressive Energy, has signed agreements to supply over 1,000 MW of low carbon hydrogen to leading industrial names in the UK, the company said on Thursday.

"This is a similar amount of energy that powers a major city like Liverpool, secures the entire initial hydrogen production capacity of Vertex and enables the vital hydrogen infrastructure investments in the region," the company said in a statement.

Vertex is building a hydrogen manufacturing unit at Essar's Stanlow refinery com-



plex in the UK. The joint venture, in which Essar Oil UK holds 90 per cent, will produce 1 gigawatt (GW) of hydrogen per year from two units from 2026.

The project, which will see over 2 billion pound of direct investment in the hydrogen plant, will capture some 1.8 million tonnes of CO2 per annum to be stored by the HyNet project.

Apparel sector to contribute in taking exports to \$1 tn by 2030: AEPC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The labour intensive apparel sector will contribute significantly in taking the country's merchandise exports to \$1 trillion by 2030, AEPC said on Thursday.

The Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) said that the incentives in the Budget will help the apparel industry focus on market and product diversification.

The council chairman Naren Goenka said that providing an ease-of-doing-export environment would enhance the sector's competitiveness.

Sebi bans Capital Worth, its partners from securities market for three years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has banned Capital Worth Research House and its partners from the securities market for a period of three years for providing unauthorised investment advisory services.

Besides, they have been directed to refund more than ₹1.54 crore to clients within three months.

The debarment of the entity and its partners will continue till the expiry of three years from the date of completion of the refund to investors, according to an order passed on Wednesday.



Capital Worth is a partnership firm and its partners are Ankit Shrivastav, Mohammed Aamir Shaikh, Shahid Rangrej and Sameer Memon.

Sebi found that Capital Worth by engaging in the activities and holding itself out as an 'investment adviser', without having a valid certificate of reg-

istration violated Investment Adviser (IA) rules.

The regulator also noted that the partners of Capital Worth are fully responsible for the contravention committed by the firm.

More than ₹1.54 crore was credited in the account of Capital Worth between March-December 2018, as per the order. In a separate order, the regulator slapped a fine of ₹16 lakh on three individuals for misrepresenting the financials in the matter of Geodesic Ltd.

Sebi imposed a fine of Rs 6 lakh on Prashant Mulekar and ₹5 lakh each on Pankaj Kumar and Kiran Kulkarni.

Lukaku fires Inter past Porto

AP ■ MILAN

Romelu Lukaku boosted Inter Milan's chances of reaching the Champions League quarter finals for the first time in over a decade after scoring the only goal in Wednesday's 1-0 win over Porto.

Belgium forward Lukaku struck with four minutes remaining of the first leg at the San Siro on the rebound from his own header to decide an absorbing encounter at the San Siro.

Simone Inzaghi's side travel to Portugal next month to decide who will go through to the last eight with a slight advantage thanks to Lukaku's second goal in as many games in all competitions.

The 29-year-old, who has struggled with injury all season, struck his first league goal since August at the weekend and came off the bench in the second half to ensure Inter will have a lead to protect in the second leg as they seek a first quarter-final tie since 2011.

"Winning is the most important thing... I'm focusing on trying to do what's best for Inter," said Lukaku to Amazon Prime.

"I'm pleased for the win, let's hope we can keep it going."

Lukaku stuck as Sergio Conceicao's Porto were playing with 10 men after key midfielder Otavio, in his first appearance since the start of February, was sent off in the 78th minute for two bookable offences.

The Portuguese champions have been a bogey side to Italian teams in recent seasons but will have to turn the aggregate score around if they are to add to the series of Serie A scalps which include Juventus and Roma.

"It's a slight advantage that we'll try to make count against a good, physical team which is used to playing in the last 16 and quarter-finals... It's a great win," said Inzaghi.

"It was deserved for what we did on the pitch, but we know



it's not finished here and the second leg will be difficult."

Inter should have been ahead in the 13th minute when Federico Dimarco found Lautaro Martinez with a deep cross, but the Argentina striker sent his header way of the bar.

LUKAKU STRIKES

Five minutes later Hakan Calhanoglu forced a fantastic save from Diogo Costa, the Turkey international playing a one-two from his own corner and whipping a beautifully struck effort shot which nearly went in at the near post.

However, it was Porto who wasted the best chance of a nig-

gly half in the 37th minute after a lovely team move, their first decent attack of the match.

From Otavio's pass Mehdi Taremi played the perfect layoff to Marko Grujic, who should have done better in front of Andre Onana before Wenderson Galeno headed wide with the goal gaping.

Costa then made sure that the teams would go into the break level with another superb stop, this time reacting brilliantly to keep out Alessandro Bastoni's flicked header from Dimarco's inswinging free-kick.

Barella flicked just wide before Porto missed two more great chances to take the lead.

In the 54th minute, Taremi shot weakly at Onana at the end of a lightning break led by his striker partner Pepe, and then three minutes later Onana twice save Inter's bacon in the space of seconds.

Milan Skriniar did well to block Zaid's low shot before former Cameroon goalkeeper Onana grasped at the Porto left-back's second effort and then recovered in time to stop what looked like a certain Taremi goal.

"We had plenty of opportunities to score. We created situations in second half where we should have been more aggressive, because we were lacking in the finish," Conceicao later told

reporters.

"Inter played well, but if we look at the chances at the end of the match, I think we should have got a different result."

Lukaku almost immediately replaced the disappointing Edin Dzeko and in the 72nd minute the Belgium striker almost laid on the opener for Martinez, who just couldn't quite meet an inviting low cross as he slid into the six-yard box.

Just as the match looked destined for a goalless draw despite Otavio's dismissal, Lukaku headed Nicolò Barella's cross against the post before slotting in the winner on the rebound.



Man City held at Leipzig

AP ■ LEIPZIG

RB Leipzig centre-back Josko Gvardiol scored a second-half header, cancelling out Riyad Mahrez's strike to earn a 1-1 with Manchester City in their Champions League last 16 clash on Wednesday.

One of the breakout stars of the Qatar World Cup as the cornerstone of Croatia's miserly defence, Gvardiol showed his attacking flair, launching himself above the City defence to head in the equaliser in the 70th minute.

City took the lead after 27 minutes through Mahrez and looked on course for a comfortable away win but their fluency deserted them after the interval in the first leg tie.

The home side, who have only lost once in their past 20 games, found their zip in the second half and looked the team most likely to head to the Etihad for the return leg with a victory under their belt.

City's star striker Erling Haaland suffered for a lack of service, with the Norwegian clearly missing ill midfielder Kevin de Bruyne.

City dominated possession in trademark fashion for the first quarter of the match, but failed to carve out any

opportunities against a well-drilled and structured home side.

"At the end, we were a little nervous, the coach told us to calm down, there are 90 minutes left to play," said Mahrez.

Leipzig coach Marco Rose added: "Two very, very different halves. We just didn't happen in the first half, just chased the ball, were very bad when we had it. The second was quite different, we were better with the ball, won it back better and played how we had envisioned to play."

The breakthrough came in the 27th minute, when City midfielder Jack Grealish took advantage of a sloppy pass from Xaver Schlager, pouncing with threading a vertical ball goalwards.

City captain Ilkay Gundogan attracted the attention of the Leipzig defence but let the ball run through his legs into the path of Mahrez, who cut a shot past the fingertips of keeper Janis Blaswich and into the net.

Rodri went close to doubling City's lead just three minutes later but put his header just wide.

Former Chelsea striker Timo Werner had half a chance

in first-half injury time, but waited too long to unleash a shot and his deflected effort was easily claimed by Ederson.

Leipzig swapped out wing backs Lukas Klostermann and Benjamin Henrichs at half-time looking for additional penetration.

The new man went close to scoring an equaliser twice in the space of two minutes early in the second half, first through a looping header and second when he shanked a close-range attempt when one-on-one with Ederson.

The introduction of Christopher Nkunku in the 66th minute came during the home side's best period of the game and gave them an immediate boost, striker Andre Silva forcing a rushed save from Ederson a minute later.

Gvardiol snuffed out an Haaland counter attack and got the home side on the scoreboard soon after, climbing a metre higher than the City defence to head in the equaliser from a Marcel Halstenberg corner.

Man City held on as Leipzig searched for a winner, meaning both teams head to Manchester on an equal footing ahead of the return fixture on March 14.

Murray advances with marathon win over Zverev Eng unchanged for 2nd NZ Test

AP ■ DOHA

Andy Murray teetered on the brink before beating Alexander Zverev in a marathon that lasted more than three hours on Wednesday to reach the quarter-finals of the Qatar Open. Murray won 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-5 after he was twice two points from defeat on his serve in the third set.

In his on-court interview after the victory, Murray said the crowd helped him.

"It makes a big difference for the players when we come and get a lot of energy and a great atmosphere from the crowd," Murray said. "I obviously enjoyed playing in that atmosphere tonight."

The British former World No. 1, will face French qualifier Alexandre Muller, who upset Dutch eighth seed Botic van de Zandschulp 6-2, 6-4. Murray and Muller have never met.

"Not so familiar," said Murray. "But he's obviously had a good week this week coming through qualifying. He will have played four matches now, so obviously likes these conditions."

"My coach will obviously watch video and stuff tonight to get a bit more familiar with his game, but it's an opportunity for me in the quarters tomorrow."

Top-seeded Andrey Rublev, the Doha winner in 2020, was in danger of suffering a fourth opening-match exit in five tournaments this year before fighting his way back from 2-5 in the third set to edge Dutchman



Tallon Griekspoor 1-6, 6-1, 7-6 (8/6). Griekspoor squandered three match points on his serve in the ninth game of the third set.

He then saved two match points in the tie-break before Rublev won in one hour 54 minutes. Rublev will face Jiri Lehecka, a 21-year-old Czech, who beat Finn Emil Ruusuvuori, 6-2, 7-6 (7-2).

Canadian second seed Felix Auger-Aliassime struggled against Jason Kubler's serve in the first set but recovered to overcome the Australian 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 after two hours and 16 minutes.

Kubler had won the only previous meeting in Newport last year.

Alcaraz wins rain-delayed Rio opener

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

World number two Carlos Alcaraz overcame 556th-ranked Mateus Alves of Brazil in a rain-delayed opening match on Wednesday to advance to the second round of the ATP Rio Open.

Reigning Rio champion Alcaraz, who returned last week after four months out because of injury, started his title defense at the clay-court tournament on Tuesday.

However, he and Alves had their match interrupted by a torrential downpour with the 19-year-old Spaniard leading 6-4, 5-3.

Home-crowd favorite



Alves, 22, who had pushed Alcaraz harder than expected on Tuesday, looked determined to mount a comeback when play resumed on stadium court, winning the first game.

But US Open champion Alcaraz held serve in the second to take the match, 6-4, 6-4.

Alcaraz, who made his 2023 debut last week by winning his seventh career ATP title at the Argentina Open, will next face 86th-ranked Fabio Fognini of Italy Thursday in the round of 16.

Fognini, 35, beat Tomas Barrios of Chile in another rain-delayed match finished Wednesday, 6-2, 6-3.

Oversight Committee gets two more weeks to complete probe against WFI chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry has extended by two weeks the deadline given to the Oversight Committee to submit its report on sexual harassment allegations against WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

The committee, led by legendary boxer MC Mary Kom, was formed on January 23 to investigate into the claims made by country's top wrestlers that Brij Bhushan has sexually harassed several women wrestlers and intimidates the athletes.

The wrestlers had not provided the names of the 'victims'.

The committee, which is running the day-to-day func-

tioning of the sports body, was asked to submit its report in four weeks.

The ministry extended the deadline following requests from the committee members and now it will submit its report by March 9.

"The Sports Ministry has given a two-week extension to the Oversight Committee for the submission of its report, following a request," a ministry source told PTI.

The ministry was forced to form the panel after top Indian wrestlers, including Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Ravi Dahiya and Sakshi Malik, staged a sit-in protest at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar, demanding that



Brij Bhushan be removed from the top post and WFI be disbanded.

The BJP MP was asked to step aside till the completion of the probe into his alleged misconduct.

The Mary Kom-led com-

mittee has former wrestler Yogeshwar Dutt, former shuttler Trupthi Murgunde, SAI member Radhica Sreeman and Rajesh Rajagopalan, ex-CEO, Target Olympic Podium Scheme and CWG gold medallist Babita Phogat as its members.

Since the formation of the committee, the top Indian wrestlers have not competed at the international meets, missing the UWW Ranking Series events in Zagreb and Alexandria.

UWW, the world governing body of the sport, has reportedly taken away the hosting rights of the Asian Championship from India, citing a complaint from the top wrestlers.

AP ■ WELLINGTON

England named an unchanged team for the second and final Test against New Zealand in Wellington starting Friday, after captain Ben Stokes said they had played "the perfect game" to go 1-0 up in the series.

The tourists dominated the first Test in Mount Maunganui to win by 267 runs with 40-year-old fast bowler James Anderson claiming seven wickets.

The haul has seen him return to the top of the Test bowling world rankings for the sixth time in his career and the first time since 2018, deposing Australia captain Pat Cummins.

Stokes was not surprised Anderson had returned to the pinnacle after claiming match figures of 7-54 at the Bay Oval, forming part of a potent pace trio with Stuart Broad and Ollie Robinson.

"I don't think he'll be that fussed by it, to be honest. He'll just keep doing his thing," Stokes said on Thursday.

"I think, and a lot of guys in the dressing room do, that Jimmy has been certainly one of the best in the world for a long,



long time.

"He's someone I know I can throw the ball to when I need a wicket, so having someone like him along with Broady and Robbo is a real treat to be able to captain at the moment."

Stokes said consideration had been given to resting one or more of his front-line seamers for the Basin Reserve contest but all three informed him on Thursday they felt fresh and ready to go.

He hinted the trio may have

been motivated by the grass-laden nature of the pitch, which appears to hold the promise of sideways movement.

"It is a fine line between picking your strongest 11 but then also making sure your bowlers are a hundred percent ready," Stokes said.

"It was pretty easy to name the team, once they gave the all-clear they were all good to go."

Last week's win was England's 10th from 11 Tests under Stokes, and England's first on

New Zealand soil in 15 years.

A draw or win in Wellington would subject New Zealand to their first home series defeat in six years.

Black Caps skipper Tim Southee hopes a forecast for rain on each of the first two days proves inaccurate, believing his team have the pedigree to square the series.

They have fashioned a strong record at the Basin Reserve, having notched seven wins and just two losses from 14 Tests there over the last decade.

"We know these conditions reasonably well and having won a few series and a lot of games in that time, I guess that's where home advantage comes into it," he said.

"England, strategically, played it beautifully last week and we had a couple of tough sessions under lights.

"But we're now moving forward into a traditional Test match, you can't dwell on what happened."

Southee confirmed seamer Matt Henry would play after missing the first Test to attend the birth of his child but wouldn't divulge who will make way.

Sumi Nagal goes down fighting in Bengaluru Open

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Sumit Nagal gave a tough fight before going down to Australia's Max Purcell 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 in the pre-quarterfinal of the Bengaluru Open here on Thursday.

The Indian camp, however, had something to cheer about as their doubles pairing of Anirudh Chandrasekhar and N Prashanth reached the semi-finals, overcoming Benjamin Lock of Zimbabwe and Australia's Akira Santillan 3-6, 6-4, 12-10 at the KSLTA Stadium.

Nagal had to fight through a tough three-setter against Nam Hoang Ly of Vietnam in the previous round.

The Indian was solid in all aspects of the game and he did not lose a single point on his second serve.

No. 5 seed Luca Nardi and Dimitar Kuzmanov also made their way into the quarter-finals with contrasting wins. While Nardi defeated Jason Jung 7-5, 5-7, 6-2, Kuzmanov thrashed Alibek Kachmazov 6-3, 6-4.

Tickner eager to beat Poms and cheer cyclone victims

AP ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand fast bowler Blair Tickner wants to bring some cheer to the victims of Cyclone Gabrielle by helping the Black Caps win the second Test against England, starting Friday.

Tickner joined the clean-up operation in his devastated home region still reeling from the deadly floodwaters.

Tickner, 29, made his debut in New Zealand's 267-run defeat against England in the first Test, before being released for two days this week to help his father, whose home was wrecked by the cyclone which claimed 11 lives.

Tickner said he will give his all to beat England and square the two-match series before heading home again to offer more help.

"I definitely want to get my first win in Test match cricket and really want to do it for the people of Hawke's Bay," Tickner told reporters.

Floodwaters left thousands without power, marooned communities and damaged properties, especially in the eastern region of Hawke's Bay, where



Tickner's dad John lives.

"My father's house has been fully destroyed. It was good to get back, help them out," said an emotional Tickner.

"It's just hard times for the whole region so we helped out neighbours and whoever we could.

"It's been tough, it's really tough at the moment, but Hawke's Bay is staying strong.

"Having grown up there, it's hard to talk about," he said,

choking back tears.

"Test cricket doesn't feel hard after seeing stock dead on the side of the road and grown men crying about their homes with their lives flipped upside down.

"Cricket is nothing compared to what people are going through at the moment."

Tickner took 4-127 against England on his New Zealand debut despite knowing his home region had been ravaged.

INDIA OUT OF WOMEN'S T20 WC

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

India wilted under the pressure of a knock-out game yet again after skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's freak run out as defending champions Australia entered their seventh successive Women's T20 World Cup final with a five-run win here on Thursday.

India's shoddy fielding and catching allowed Australia to post a challenging 172 for four after Meg Lanning opted to bat in the semi-final.

At 28 for three, India were down and out but Harmanpreet (52 off 34) and Jemimah Rodrigues (43 off 24) produced a counter-attacking 69-run stand off just 41 balls to bring the team back in the game.

India needed a very gettable 39 off last 30 balls with five wickets in hand but as it has been the case in the past, the team came up short to finish at 167 for eight.

India had lost to five-time champions Australia in the previous World Cup final and more recently in the CWG final last year.

Another loss in a knock out game extended India's long wait for a world title.

Despite losing the destructive Shafali Verma and star batter Smriti Mandhana cheaply, Jemimah and India skipper ensured boundaries.

Harmanpreet, who was a doubtful starter for the do-or-die game due to high fever, got going with a crisp six over long on off Jess Jonassen.

Rodrigues looked in sublime touch from the get go, dispatching

Ashleigh Gardner for consecutive fours off her first two balls. Her inside out lofted drives over extra cover off the spinners was the highlight of her innings.

At 93 for three in 10 overs, India were very much on course for a famous win. Jemimah and Harmanpreet's ominous stand ended when the former tried to a guide a slow bouncer Darcie Brown but ended up edging it to the wicketkeeper.

Harmanpreet, who is known to bring out her best against the Aussies, looked at her vintage best with her sizzling strokeplay. Like Jemimah, she too made good use of her feet to get the fours.

She got to her fifty with back-to-back fours off Wareham in the 15th over before a freak run out brought another twist in the game.

It was a comfortable double but on way to completing the second run, Harmanpreet's bat got stuck in the ground and Alyssa Healy was quick to take the bails off with the Indian out of the crease.

It was turning point of the game.

India's bowling effort also left a lot to be desired as Beth Mooney extended her envious record against India with a classy 54 off 37 balls.

One of the best power-hitters in the game, Ashleigh Gardner, hurt India with 31 off 18 balls while skipper Meg Lanning made 49 not out off 34 balls.

Australia opted to bat at a sunny Newlands and Harmanpreet did not seem to mind Lanning's call.



There was no swing on offer, making life a lot difficult for star pacer Renuka Thakur, whose first ball of the game was a half volley to Alyssa Healy (25 off 26) and she duly put it away.

Healy is usually the aggressor in her opening partnerships with Mooney but it wasn't the case on this occasion.

It was Mooney who got the boundaries more regularly in their 52-run stand as she manoeuvred the field beautifully with her nimble footwork against the spinners. Shafali dropped a regulation catch off Mooney at long on when she was on 32.

Deepti, India's most consistent spinner in the tournament, bowled too short in her opening spell. Her second over went for 12 runs as Mooney stepped out for a six over wide long off.

Besides the inconsistent line and length, poor fielding and catching cost India a lot of runs.

Lanning, who was dropped early in her innings, made India pay with an unbeaten 49 off 34 balls. She collected two sixes and a four in the 20th over bowled by Renuka, who went wicketless in her four overs and conceded 41 runs.

Sneh Rana, playing in place of Pooja Vastrakar, was unfortunate not pick any wicket as she troubled the batters with her flight. She could have had Lanning caught behind in her first over but wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh dropped the chance. Richa also fluffed a stumping chance of Lanning.

The last five overs yielded 59 runs for Australia.



Warner vows to keep playing till 2024

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Struggling Australia opener David Warner on Thursday vowed to keep playing white-ball cricket till 2024 if the selectors decided to end his illustrious Test career.

Warner arrived in Sydney on Thursday after being ruled out of the remaining two Tests of the four-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India due to a fractured elbow.

Warner struggled in the opening two Tests against India, managing just 1, 10 and 15 in three innings, while he didn't bat in the second innings of the Delhi Test after being subbed out due to concussion.

"I've always said I'm playing to 2024; if the selectors feel that I'm not worthy of my spot (in Tests), then so be it, and I can push on to the white-ball stuff," Warner told reporters at Sydney Airport.

The 36-year-old veteran left-hander, however, still has hopes of making the cut for this year's Ashes tour despite dismal form.

"I've got the next 12 months, a lot of cricket's ahead for the

team and if I can keep scoring runs and putting my best foot forward for the team and I can help my spot, it'd be great for the team," Warner said.

"It's easy pickings (for critics) when you're 36 going on 37. I've seen it before with the ex-players as well.

"So for me if I'm taking pressure off the rest of the other guys, and no one's worrying about the rest of the team, I'm happy to do that," he added.

Warner's Test career came under the cloud following his prolonged lean patch in the format. He had scored just one Test century in the last three years. On Wednesday, Australia selector Tony Dodemaide refused to comment on Warner's Test future and whether he would be considered for Ashes selection.

"We'll address the Ashes planning (at a later time), but we are committed to picking the best fit and available players for Test series, particularly something as big as the Ashes," he had said.

The five-match Ashes series will start on July 16 in Birmingham.

Maxwell, Marsh, Richardson return for India ODIs

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

All-rounders Glenn Maxwell and Mitchell Marsh were on Thursday named in Australia's 16-member squad for the next month's three-match ODI series in India along with pacer Jhye Richardson.

The trio will make its long-awaited return to international cricket alongside Pat Cummins, David Warner and Ashton Agar, who have also been named in the squad.

The upcoming three ODIs will be played in Mumbai on March 17, Visakhapatnam on March 19 and Chennai on March 22.

Cummins returned home after the second Test in Delhi due to family illness, while Agar was released from the touring squad to play in domestic cricket. Warner, on the other hand, has been ruled out of the remaining two Tests due to an elbow injury.

Cummins, however, is set to return ahead of the third Test to be held in

Indore from March 1.

Maxwell and Marsh both sat out of the game for a considerable amount of time after undergoing surgeries for broken leg and ankle injury respectively.

Maxwell, who broke his leg in a freak accident in November, has returned to the game only the last week while Marsh last featured in the three-match ODI series against England in November last year.

But pacer Josh Hazlewood has been ruled out of the ODIs as well after returning home from the Test series, failing to recover from his Achilles tendonitis.

Richardson, who has recovered from his soft tissue injuries, has been out of the game since the limited overs tour to Sri Lanka in the middle of last year.

"It would be great for Josh to be part of this series but we have taken a conservative view ahead of a very important winter in England of which he will be an integral part," Australia's selection



chief George Bailey said while announcing the squad.

Cummins will continue to lead Australia in the ODIs after Aaron Finch's retirement in October last year.

Travis Head is expected to partner Warner at the top in the ODIs.

Marnus Labuschagne, Adam Zampa, Cameron Green, Marcus Stoinis, Steve Smith, Josh Inglis, Alex

Carey and pace duo of Sean Abbott and Mitchell Starc are the other members of the squad.

The three-match rubber is one of two bilateral ODI series Australia are set to play in India before the 50-over World Cup to be held there in October-November this year. The other series between the two sides is scheduled for September just prior to the World Cup.

"With the World Cup just over seven months away, these matches in India are an important step in our preparation," Bailey said.

"Glenn (Maxwell), Mitchell (Marsh) and Jhye (Richardson) are all important players in what we think the squad might look like come October."

Australia ODI squad: Pat Cummins(c), Sean Abbott, Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Jhye Richardson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, David Warner, Adam Zampa.

MARKRAM TO LEAD SRH IN IPL 2023

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

South Africa all-rounder Aiden Markram was on Thursday named as captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad for the upcoming India Premier League (IPL) season, starting March 31.

"THE. WAIT. IS. OVER. #OrangeArmy, say hello to our new captain Aiden Markram," SRH announce on its twitter handle.

New Zealand's Kane Williamson had led SRH in the last season, where they finished a disappointing eighth in 10-team tournament with six wins and eight losses.

Williamson was released by SRH ahead of this year's auction, where Gujarat Titans bought his services.

SRH will play their opening match against Rajasthan Royals in Hyderabad on April 2.



Markram was front-runner for the job after leading SRH's sister franchise, Sunrisers Eastern Cape to the inaugural SA20 title in Johannesburg recently.

The 29-year-old batting

all-rounder was in tremendous form in the SA20 league, leading his team from the front and in the process won the player-of-the-tournament award for his 366 runs and 11 wickets.

KL Rahul shouldn't be singled out for lack of runs: Gambhir



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India opener Gautam Gambhir feels that it is a tad unfair to single out KL Rahul for scathing criticism as every player goes through lean phases in their respective careers.

In his last 10 Test innings, Rahul has averaged a dismal 12.5 with not a single score of above 25. His sequence of scores read 8, 10, 12, 22, 23, 10, 2, 20, 17 and 1, raising questions about his place in the playing XI. There are strong calls to induct Shubman Gill in playing XI.

"KL Rahul should not be dropped from the Indian side. One should not single out any player. Everyone goes through a lean patch. No one, no cricket pundit or anyone should tell him that he is not doing well and be dropped," Gambhir told PTI

during an interaction on the sidelines of IPL pre-season camp organised by Lucknow Super Giants.

Gambhir is the mentor of LSG and Rahul is the skipper of the same franchise.

The two-time IPL champion former captain of KKR also cited current India captain Rohit Sharma's example of how he was backed to the hilt by the erstwhile team management so that he is successful in Test cricket. Once Rohit started opening, things looked up for him in traditional format.

"You have to back players who have talent. Look at Rohit Sharma. He also had a lean patch. Look at the way he started his career. He had a late flourish. Compared (earlier times) to how he is performing now. Everyone could see his talent

and backed him. Now see the result. He is going great guns. Rahul can do the same," Gambhir seemed confident of his abilities.

The southpaw is of the opinion that if the team is winning matches comfortably, there is no point in tinkering with winning combination and single out one player for harsh treatment.

"India is 2-0 up and not 0-2 down. So let's not axe anyone and appreciate the team's performance. I think the Indian team management is right in backing KL Rahul. He is a great player. He had scored runs in international cricket."

On the Indian women's team's semi-final encounter against Australia in ICC T20 World Cup, Gambhir said: "I think India has got the talent to beat Australia. Obviously, Australia is a good team but I am sure the Indian women's team has the potential to beat Australia. If you can play those 240 balls better than Australia, then the team can beat them."

While Indian women lost badly to England in a group league match, Gambhir feels that they have been consistent enough.

"I think the Indian team has been very consistent the way they are playing this tournament. Now the occasions should not matter. You know people will talk about the semi-final. Ultimately it is not the occasion, it is the contest of the bat and ball," he added.

On inaugural Women's Premier League (WPL), he said it was a historic step taken by the BCCI. "We keep talking about gender equality. What better than this to have gender equality and I am sure it is going to promote a lot of young girls to start playing cricket and I think WPL can go a long way."

Stokes won't mind sacrificing IPL final for Eng duty

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

World's premier all-rounder Ben Stokes won't allow Indian Premier League (IPL) come in the way of national duty, saying he would prefer to fly back and lead England against Ireland in the build-up Test ahead of the high-stakes Ashes series even if his franchise makes the final.

Stokes had missed the last edition of the world's most popular T20 tournament but is set to wear the yellow Chennai Super Kings (CSK) jersey this season, starting March 31.

The IPL final is slated for May 28 while England take on Ireland in the one-off warm-up Test from June 1.

CSK play their first game of the season against Lucknow

Supergiants on April 3.

"Yes, I'll play," Stokes said when asked if he would play for England even if CSK qualify for the title clash.

"I'll be making sure that I give myself enough time to get back and play that game (against Ireland)."

There has been a debate in international cricket whether players are preferring private leagues over national duty.

Stokes said he can't say about the choice of his England colleagues.

Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Jofra Archer, Mark Wood and Harry Brook all have IPL contracts.

"I think it's a little bit too far ahead to say for others, but one thing I've got to look at is we've got the Ashes after the



Ireland Test, so I'll probably get round the individuals and ask them what they want to be ready for the Ashes," Stokes said.

"Those five games are obviously the big ones of the summer and you've got to think about what lads want, but you also have to think about if something was to happen in that game and we lose someone for the Ashes.

"It's just one of those where you have to weigh up the options of what the individual person actually wants out of that week versus do we really need to play that one? Because I'm obviously right in saying that series is bigger than that game against Ireland."

The five-match Ashes will begin on June 16 in Birmingham.