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ASIA CUP TO BE HELD IN HYBRID MODEL 12 SPORT

Biparjoy touches down, batters Kutch

2 dead, 3 hurt; 1 lakh shifted from coastal dists to safer places; power lines damaged, areas flooded; PM Modi reviews situation

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI

Strong winds and heavy rain battered the coasts of Kutch and Saurashtra as Cyclone Biparjoy made landfall near Jakhau Port in Gujarat on Thursday evening after churning across the Arabian Sea for over 10 days. Power failure was reported in many areas, and low-lying areas near the sea were flooded.

According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) the landfall process completed by midnight.

A cattle-rearer duo of father and son died while trying to save their goats stuck in a flooded ravine in Bhavnagar district on Thursday. Three individuals were injured in Devbhoomi Dwarka district when a tree fell on them, according to a State Minister. In anticipation of Biparjoy's landfall, approximately 1,00,000 people residing in coastal districts were relocated to safer locations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel over the phone on Thursday night and enquired about the situation in the State.

IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra explained that the landfall process had commenced as dense convective clouds entered Kutch and Devbhumi Dwarka districts, with the process continuing until midnight.

Landfall refers to a cyclonic storm moving over land after being over water. Biparjoy, with an eye approximately 50 kilometres in diameter, is moving at a speed of 13-14 kilometres per hour, and it is estimated to take around five hours for the wall cloud and eye to completely cross over to



A view of heavy rainfall with strong winds as cyclone Biparjoy starts making landfall at Mandvi, in Kutch, on Thursday

PTI

land. The impact of the cyclone was evident as strong winds uprooted numerous trees and electric poles near Jakhau and Mandvi towns in Kutch. Tin sheets and plastic shades were also blown away by the destructive wind force.

However, as of 7 pm, there were no reports of any loss of life, according to Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghani.

In Devbhoomi Dwarka district, three individuals were injured due to a fallen tree and are currently receiving treatment. Ground-level teams comprising the Gujarat police,

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and the Army are working in various parts of Dwarka to clear uprooted trees and electric poles.

The IMD issued a statement in Ahmedabad, stating that the "very severe cyclonic storm Biparjoy" is centered over the north Arabian Sea but is approaching the Saurashtra coast with wind speeds of 115-125 kilometres per hour, gusting up to 140 kilometres per hour.

In response to the cyclone's potential for extensive damage, authorities evacuated approximately 100,000 people from vulnerable areas in coastal dis-

tricts of Gujarat following a timely warning from the IMD. This marks the second powerful storm to hit the state in three years, with Cyclone Tauktae striking in May 2021.

To tackle the situation, 15 NDRF teams, 12 State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams, and personnel from the Indian Army, Navy, Air Force, Indian Coast Guard, and Border Security Force have been deployed for relief and rescue operations.

The IMD had previously issued warnings of very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall in several districts, including Kutch, Devbhumi Dwarka,

Jamnagar, Porbandar, Rajkot, Morbi, and Junagarh. Additionally, the cyclone was expected to cause an "astronomical tide" with a storm surge of 2-3 meters, which could inundate low-lying areas in Kutch, Devbhumi Dwarka, Porbandar, Jamnagar, and Morbi during the landfall.

Due to the severe sea conditions, characterised by waves reaching heights of 10 to 14 meters, all activities in the northeast and adjoining east-central Arabian Sea, including oil exploration, ship movement, and fishing, have been suspended.

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When all fail, HAM radio only medium

PTI ■ JAKHAU

As powerful cyclone Biparjoy, packing wind speeds up to 140 kilometres per hour, threatens to cripple communication networks after landfall on the Gujarat coast on Thursday evening, authorities have turned to HAM radio for smooth exchange of information.

Learning from past experiences, Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA) has deployed six HAM radio teams, two of them in Kutch, and mobile units for seamless communication after Biparjoy hits the shore near Jakhau port.

HAM radio is considered a reliable mode of messaging during emergencies when wirelines, mobile phones and other traditional terrestrial means of communication fail. Also known as amateur radio, HAM radio involves the use of radio frequency spectrum for non-commercial exchange of messages.

"GSDMA has deployed six teams with HAM radio units where the impact of the cyclone will likely be the most. Of them, two are in Kutch," Kausal Jani, HAM radio operator of GSDMA, told PTI.

During a cyclone, when all communication networks fail and electricity is not available, HAM radio works, he said. "It does not require any mobile tower or internet to make calls," he explained.

Deal to buy 30 Predator drones OK'd ahead of Modi's state visit to US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the Indian Defence Ministry granted approval on Thursday for the long-awaited procurement of 30 Predator armed drones from the United States, valued at nearly 3 billion dollar dollars. This decision comes just days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled State visit to Washington, where he is expected to engage in discussions with President Joe Biden, with a particular emphasis on access to critical and high-end technology from the US.

The Pioneer on June 15 had highlighted that in addition to the Predator drones deal, India and the US are likely to collaborate on the joint production of GE-414 fighter jet engines for the domestically manufactured Tejas light combat aircraft.

Both nations are expected to explore opportunities for the joint manufacturing of armoured personnel carriers, ammunition, and other advanced defence equipment. Several crucial defence-related announcements are anticipated after talks between Modi and Biden.

The approval for the armed drones deal was granted by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday. However, the final clearance for the deal rests with the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), led by the Prime Minister.

The Predator drones, also known as MQ-9B Sea Guardians, are manufactured by General Atomics in the United States and have proven to be highly effective in com-

batting terrorist groups during the American war on terror against the Taliban and ISIS. These high-altitude long-endurance drones are equipped with precision strike missiles capable of targeting enemy assets with remarkable accuracy. The acquired drones will be utilised for long-range surveillance along India's borders and maritime regions.

Sources have revealed that the Indian Navy will receive 15 drones, while the remaining will be distributed to the Army



and the Indian Air Force. India currently operates two unarmed Predator drones, which were leased and have been instrumental in assisting the Navy with monitoring activities in the Indian Ocean region. The Predator, also referred to as the Reaper, features nine hardpoints capable of carrying various sensors, laser-guided bombs, and air-to-ground missiles.

With an endurance of over 27 hours and an operational ceiling of up to 50,000 feet, the drone can carry a payload of 3,850 pounds (1,746 kg), including 3,000 pounds (1,361 kg) of external stores.

It is also capable of accommodating multiple mission payloads. Apart from India, the United States Air Force, Department of Homeland Security, NASA, Royal Air Force, Italian Air Force, French Air Force, and Spanish Air Force have all incorporated Predator drones into their respective defence forces.

CAPSULE

BENGAL PANCHAYAT POLL PAPERS FILING: 3 SHOT

Kolkata: Three people were shot dead and several others injured in two districts of West Bengal on Thursday during the ongoing violence over filing of nominations for the July 8 panchayat elections, police officials said.

P5

INDIA'S DEBT BURDEN TO DECLINE: MOODY'S

New Delhi: Moody's Investors Service on Thursday said the key determinant of India's fiscal strength and the credit profile will be debt affordability and projected a downward trend for the debt burden.

3 ELEPHANTS KILLED BY SPEEDING LORRY

Palamaner (AP): Three elephants from a herd of four died when a speeding lorry hit them in Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh, forest officials said on Thursday.

Light rain to calm Delhi in a few days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi residents are expected to get some relief from the scorching heat in the next few days with light rain and thundershowers in the offing, the weather office said on Thursday.

Delhi is expected to receive light rain under the influence of Cyclone Biparjoy, which is gaining steam in the Arabian Sea, private forecasting agency Skymet Weather had said earlier this week. Delhiites woke up to an overcast sky as the minimum temperature settled at 29.1 degrees Celsius, a notch below the season's average.

Manipur Min house among many set on fire; cops, mob clash



Unidentified miscreants torch two houses belonging to a particular community in Manipal to retaliate the killing of nine civilians by Kuki militants in Manipur on Thursday

PTI

PTI ■ IMPHAL

At least two abandoned houses were set on fire by a mob here on Thursday afternoon a day after an attack in the Khamenlok area left nine people dead and injured ten others, officials said.

Later on Wednesday evening, other miscreants set on fire the official quarters of woman Manipur minister Nemcha Kipgen in the Lamphel area in Imphal West district. Firefighters reached the spot and doused the flames before the blaze could spread to the neighbourhood.

Security forces which tried to quell the mob used force and

fired tear gas shells at the mob at New Checkin in Imphal, they added.

No casualty was reported in the arson as the houses that were torched were abandoned. The occupants had left after the ethnic violence started in the State early last month.

The incident happened as the army and Assam Rifles intensified their "area domination" operations in the aftermath of the recent spurt in violence in the strife-torn state of Manipur.

Army and Assam Rifles columns intensified patrolling, taking down barriers wherever they had been created.

Continued on Page 2

K'taka Cabinet clears repeal of anti-conversion law

Do you want Hindus to be wiped out? Conversion mafia has influenced Siddaramaiah, says BJP

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday decided to repeal the anti-conversion law introduced by the previous BJP Government. The Government plans to introduce a Bill for this purpose during the upcoming legislature session, scheduled to commence on July 3.

HK Patil, the Minister of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, informed reporters after the Cabinet meeting. "The Cabinet discussed the anti-conversion Bill. We have approved the Bill to repeal the changes that were

brought in by them (the BJP Government) in 2022. It will be tabled during the session starting from July 3."

The BJP reacted sharply to the Congress Government's decision and dubbed the M Mallikarjun Kharge-led outfit as "new Muslim League". Is this "Mohabbat Ki Dukaan" @RahulGandhi?" asked senior BJP leader and former Union Minister Basanagouda R Patil (Yatnal) on Twitter.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's "anti-Hindu agenda" is exposed, he said.

Do you want Hindus to be

wiped out? Conversion mafia has influenced Siddaramaiah and his Cabinet to withdraw "Anti-Conversion Law" which was introduced by BJP, he added.

BJP national general secretary CT Ravi said the "conversion mafia" in Karnataka "ensures that the Anti-Hindu CONgress repeals the anti-conversion law brought in by the @BJP4Karnataka government." "CONgress is the new Muslim League and it will go



to any extent to hurt Hindus", Ravi alleged.

The Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Act, commonly known as the anti-conversion law, was enacted in 2022 despite Opposition from the Congress party.

The act aimed to safeguard the right to freedom of religion and prohibit unlawful conversions through means such as misrepresentation, force, coercion, allurement, or fraudulent methods.

It prescribed imprisonment ranging from three to five years and a fine of ₹25,000 for violations. In cases involving minors, women, and individuals from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), the

offenders could face imprisonment for three to ten years and a fine of not less than Rs 50,000.

The law also provided for compensation of up to ₹5 lakh to individuals who were coerced into converting.

Additionally, mass conversions could result in a jail term of three to ten years and a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh. It declared marriages solely intended for unlawful conversions or vice versa, where one spouse converts to another religion before or after marriage, null and void. Family courts or courts with jurisdiction over such cases were responsible for adjudicating petitions filed by either party involved.

Brij Bhushan indicted for sexual harassment, POCSO charge dropped

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has recommended dropping the charges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) against BJP MP and outgoing Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. However, Singh has been charged with sexual harassment and stalking of six women wrestlers.

The decision comes after the Government assured the agitating wrestlers, including Olympic medallists Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik, and Vinesh Phogat, that a chargesheet would be filed by June 15. As a result, the wrestlers suspended their protest, which was demanding Singh's arrest on allegations of



sexual harassment, including against a minor. Singh has consistently denied all the charges levelled against him.

Based on the statements of the complainant, who is the father of the minor wrestler, and the girl herself, the police recommended canceling the complaint filed by the minor.

Continued on Page 2

PM to attend Ram Temple consecration; Ayodhya aims for global beauty: Yogi

PNS ■ AYODHYA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the idol consecration ceremony at Ayodhya's Ram Lalla Temple in January. The CM highlighted the ongoing development projects worth ₹32,000 crore in Ayodhya, aiming to make it one of the world's most beautiful cities, a State Government statement quoting him said.

When one of the key milestones, the installation of Ram Lalla in the new temple takes place in January "after a wait of 500 years", Ayodhya's significance on a global scale will increase, he said, adding that the Prime Minister is scheduled to attend the event. Ram Lalla is the idol of Lord Ram, in his five-year-old avatar.



"Ayodhya holds a special place in the hearts of millions of people. The people have a strong sense of Lord Ram's presence in their lives, and the construction of the temple will be a manifestation of their devotion and belief," Yogi said at the programme organised to celebrate the completion of nine years of Modi Government at the Centre.

The CM set a target of lighting 21 lakh lamps during

the upcoming Deepotsav and called for lighting of lamps in every household of Ayodhya, in addition to the ghats, math-linked temples, Suryakund, and Bharat Kund. "The preparations for this should commence from now itself as it sets the stage for the arrival of Lord Ram to his home next year," he said.

Yogi also underlined the Government's efforts in improving Ayodhya's infrastructure. Adityanath said that within the next four to six months, roads in Ayodhya will resemble Delhi's Kartavya Path.

"In the past, the city road and rail networks were poor. However, due to recent development, the journey from Gorakhpur and Lucknow to Ayodhya, which previously took five to six hours, can now be completed in just one hour," he said.

No ties with MVA in Maha: KCR

Telangana CM bats for structural, qualitative change, brushes aside UCC 'hungama'

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababtu Naidu on Thursday said his Bharat Rashtra Samithi will not enter into an alliance with the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi in Maharashtra and asserted his party will fight every seat in the state in the civic, Assembly and general elections.



He also spoke on the Law Commission seeking the views of religious bodies on the Uniform Civil Code and accused the ruling dispensation in the country of "bringing dharma gurus into politics".

Addressing a press conference after inaugurating his party's office, the first in Maharashtra, on Wardha Road here, he said polls must be held using ballot papers instead of electronic voting machines (EVMs). Queried on whether his party would forge an alliance with the MVA, comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and

the Nationalist Congress Party, he said, "We have seen so many fronts, United Front, National Front but these were not adequate. Hence, we are preparing the BRS agenda."

"Any party which agrees with the BRS agenda for structural change can come with us," he said, adding the BRS was not thinking of any alliance as "we will not need an alliance at all".

Asked about the alleged misuse of Central agencies like the Enforcement Directorate and Income Tax department, Rao said political parties are a pillar of democracy and must

not be harassed in such a way. BRS will be the agent of "qualitative change" in the country and its expansion plans will involve Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Haryana after Maharashtra, he said.

The country's economy was in a bad shape under the present (Narendra Modi) dispensation and every section of society was unhappy, he claimed. In order to catch up with the world, the country needs to make "some structural change in respect of Constitution, judiciary, economic reforms, social reforms, electoral reforms,

administrative governance system", the Telangana CM said. Queried on talk about a Uniform Civil Code in the country, he said, "From where they (Central government) are bringing dharma gurus into politics? Dharma gurus must run mutts and do puja. They (ruling dispensation) are doing hungama by infiltrating into this." The Law Commission on Wednesday initiated a fresh consultation process on the UCC by seeking views from stakeholders including public and recognised religious organisations. On being asked about whether the BRS was the B-team of the BJP, the Telangana CM said such talk does not bother him. "It has now become a fashion in the country to call a party which is coming forward successfully as B, A or C team. Let them say whatever they want to, our work will be for the benefit of the people," he claimed.

DST: Indigenous scaffold from mammalian organs developed

'It will help rapidly heal skin wounds at low-cost with minimum scarring, lower import bill'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has finally got its indigenously-made scaffold from mammalian organs, an animal-derived product that can rapidly heal skin wounds at low-cost with minimum scarring. Developed by a team of scientists led by Professor TV Anilkumar from the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST), an autonomous institution of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the medical product 'Cholederm' has been given approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI).

Though the concept of using animal-derived materials as advanced wound care products is not new, indigenous technology was so far not available for fabricating quality products that satisfy the requirements of the DCGI. It is also hoped that this will help cut down import bill as so far the product is being purchased from abroad. It is expected that with the introduction of Cholederm to the Indian market, the treatment cost can be reduced from Rs 10,000 to Rs 2,000- making it more affordable to the common man. "Membrane forms of the



scaffold, identified as Cholederm, healed different types of skin wounds including burn and diabetic wounds in rats, rabbits, or dogs faster than similar products currently available in the market with minimal scarring as proved by several in-depth laboratory investigations focusing on Type I and Type III collagen," said an official from the DST. The team unravelled the probable mechanism of the healing reaction and showed that the graft-assisted healing was regulated by anti-inflammatory (pro-regenerative) M2 type of macrophages. Indeed, the scaffold modulated or mitigated the scarring reactions in subcutaneous, skeletal mus-

cle, and cardiac tissues. "Considering the stringency of the compliance requirements for Class D Medical Devices as per the 2017-Medical Device Rules and the general belief among stakeholders that development of animal-derived Class-D Medical Devices is not practical in India, this is a milestone achievement for the Institute, especially the research team as well as Alicorn Medical," said Dr Harikrishna Varma, the Head Biomedical Technology Wing of the institute.

The research has been published in the journal Comparative Medicine. The scientists also said that usage of the gallbladder of pigs, normally a slaughterhouse waste without any monetary value in a highly value-added raw material for the biopharmaceutical industry can boost income of the pig farmers.

However, as the application of membrane forms of the scaffold for treating cardiac injury was found to be cumbersome, the scientists are developing injectable gel formulations of the scaffold that permits transvenous on-site delivery of the scaffold and for surface modification of polymeric medical devices.

AAP targets Shah's rally to be held in Sirsa

'Can the people of Haryana not ask questions to their elected Chief Minister, says Gupta



PNS ■ GURUGRAM

Am Aadmi Party (AAP) State president and Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament (MP) Dr Sushil Gupta during a Press conference on Thursday targeted the Khattar-led Haryana Government regarding the rally of Home Minister Amit Shah to be held in Sirsa on June 18.

He said that the BJP Government is scared as earlier Amit Shah's rally in Gohana was a flop because people did not turn up. "Now the BJP rally has been fixed in Sirsa on June 18. They are worried that too, should not be a flop, so the Khattar Government has given notice to the AAP workers, farmers and sarpanchs to be placed under house arrest," he said.

The MP said that in the last nine years, the Khattar Government did nothing in the State. The result of this was that wherever Chief Minister Khattar went, he had to face the anger of the public.

"The Khattar Government has issued an order regarding Amit Shah's rally on June 18, in which FIRs would be lodged against AAP workers, farmers and sarpanchs if they disturb the peace. Notice has already been given to AAP workers in Sirsa," Gupta said.

He asked Khattar, "Can the people of the State not ask questions to their elected Chief Minister and Home Minister?" "The Khattar Government is misusing the law. Unfortunately, Aam Aadmi Party workers, farmers and sarpanchs are being intimidated, threatened and cases are being filed against them," he added.

The BJP and the JJP contested elections by abusing each other and later entered into a "Thugbandhan" and duped the people of the State, he stated. "The present Government has neither given good schools nor hospitals in the State and the State is number one in corruption, unemployment and crime," he added.

Significantly on Thursday, Congress general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala too attacked Haryana Deputy Chief Minister and JJP leader Dushyant Chautala, saying though he talks of being a sympathiser of farmers, he was "clinging" to power for his self interests.

He also termed the BJP-JJP coalition Government in the State as "anti-farmer" and said farmers have to struggle to get minimum support price (MSP) for their crops.

When they ask for MSP, which is their right, they get lathis, the Congress leader said. He was referring to the recent lathicharge on protesting farmers who had blocked a national highway in Shahabad in Kurukshetra to press for their demand for MSP for sunflower seed.

"When you don't have to procure crops at MSP, then why is MSP announced. For MSP, farmers have to struggle on roads. Farmer leaders were arrested and lathis rained on farmers," he said attacking the Manohar Lal Khattar BJP-led government.

"One who talks of being a sympathiser of farmers was clinging to power for his self interests," he said attacking Chautala while addressing a gathering of party workers and supporters on Wednesday night in Kaithal.

Biparjoy touches down, batters Kutch

From Page 1

Biparjoy, the first cyclone of the year in the Arabian Sea, underwent rapid intensification from a mere cyclonic circulation to a very severe cyclonic storm within 48 hours, defying earlier predictions. According to the IMD data, Biparjoy has become the cyclone with the longest lifespan in the Arabian Sea, lasting for approximately 10 days and 12 hours thus far. This surpasses the record held by the extremely severe cyclone Kyarr in 2019, which lasted for 9 days and 15 hours. As a precautionary measure, nearly 100,000 people residing in eight coastal districts of Gujarat have been relocated to temporary shelters. The cyclone is expected to bring

extremely heavy rainfall in Kutch, Devbhumi Dwarka, and Jamnagar, with high wind speeds persisting even on Friday despite a reduction in intensity, as stated by Manorama Mohanty, Director of IMD Ahmedabad.

Officials have warned of the potential for total destruction of thatched houses, extensive damage to "kachcha" houses and some damage to permanent structures. Power and communication poles are likely to be uprooted, and approach roads may suffer damage and flooding. District authorities have taken extensive measures to ensure uninterrupted power and water supplies. Various response teams have been deployed to assist with relief and rescue efforts. The

Army has dispatched 27 relief columns to different locations, while the IAF has placed helicopters on standby in Vadodara, Ahmedabad, and Delhi. The Navy has positioned teams at Okha, Porbandar, and Bakasura for rescue. The IAF has also confirmed its operational readiness for relief and rescue work and expressed its commitment to assisting citizens in dealing with contingencies arising from the cyclone. In view of the potential risks associated with reporting on the ground during the cyclone, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has issued an advisory to media organisations, urging them to exercise abundant caution to ensure the safety of their personnel.

Nations must work together to meet challenges in agriculture: Farm Min Tomar

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Thursday urged all countries to work together to face the challenges in agriculture as they are global. Tomar, who addressed a Press conference on the sidelines of the inaugural day of the three-day meeting of G20 Agriculture Ministers, said the G20 would be a useful platform for the nations to work together. "Mainly, the challenges in agriculture today are not only India's but global. All countries should work together. For this, a grouping like the G20

is a very useful platform. I feel all countries would be successful in finding solutions together to the contemporary challenges through consultation," he said.

"We try to learn from each other and collectively give solutions to the world. Such an effort will be there from this meeting," the Minister said.

Representatives of the invited countries and about 10 international organisations participated on the inaugural day.

Tomar said the G20 Agriculture Ministers meeting would discuss on various topics in different sessions.

ED arrests two M3M directors in fresh PMLA case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday said it has arrested Basant Bansal and Pankaj Bansal, directors of Gurugram-based realty group M3M, in a money laundering probe linked to an alleged bribery case against a former judge and others. The two were taken into custody by the federal investigation agency on Wednesday under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Basant Bansal and Pankaj Bansal were produced before a special PMLA court in Panchkula, which sent them to five-day ED custody, the agency said in a statement.

The money laundering case in which the arrests have been made pertains to a Haryana Police Anti-Corruption Bureau



(ACB) FIR filed in April against Sudhir Parmar, a former special judge for ED and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) cases who was posted in Panchkula, his nephew and a third M3M group director Roop Kumar Bansal.

According to the FIR, the

ED said, reliable information was received that Parmar was showing "favouritism" to the accused, namely Roop Kumar Bansal, his brother Basant Bansal and Lalit Goyal, owner of real estate firm IREO, in the criminal cases of the ED and other cases of the CBI pending

against them in his court.

"It was further stated (in the FIR) that as per reliable information, instances of grave misconduct, abuse of official position and demand and acceptance of undue advantage/bribe from the accused persons in the cases pending in his court were observed," the ED said.

Parmar was suspended by the Punjab and Haryana High Court after the registration of the ACB case.

The ED said it has collected "incriminating evidences such as bank statements and money trail, etc. With respect to the allegations in the FIR before making the (latest) arrests".

The agency, on June 1, carried out raids against the M3M promoters and some others in another money laundering case linked to the IREO group and

Goyal.

Subsequently, the agency arrested Roop Kumar Bansal. Basant Bansal and Pankaj Bansal obtained interim protection from arrest till July 5 from the Delhi High Court in this case.

However, the ED has now arrested them in the money laundering case linked to alleged bribery of the judge after filing a fresh case under the PMLA.

In a statement issued after the June 1 raids, the agency had alleged that a "huge amount of money running into hundreds of crores was siphoned off through the M3M group" in the case against the IREO group.

In one of the transactions, the M3M group received about Rs 400 crore from the IREO group through several shell companies in multiple layers, it had alleged.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the General Public that of Mr. Rakesh Kumar S/o. Mr. Ram Badan are the owner of FREE HOLD RESIDENTIAL HOUSE NO. 169-B, AREA MEASURING 83.77 SQ. METER, COMPRISING IN KHASRA NO. 190, SITUATED IN SARASWATI COLONY HADOBAST VILLAGE SHABABAD, PARGANA: LONI, TEHSIL AND DISTRICT: GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH. All Persons are hereby informed that Mr. Pankaj Kumar S/o. Mr. Ram Badan is purchasing the above-mentioned property from Mr. Rakesh Kumar S/o. Mr. Ram Badan, by way of registered Sale Deed and they are mortgaging the said property with Fullerton India Home Finance Company Limited. General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.
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Brij Bhushan indicted for sexual harassment, POCSO charge dropped

From Page 1

The Delhi Police PRO Suman Nalwa issued a statement mentioning that there is "no corroborative evidence" supporting the charges.

Under the POCSO Act, sexual offenses against children carry a minimum imprisonment of three years, depending on the section under which the

crime falls. However, the court will decide whether to accept the police's closure report or order further investigation.

The cancellation report will be considered by Additional Sessions Judge Rajinder Singh in Patiala House court on July 4. Meanwhile, when asked about their future course of action, Sakshi Malik's husband

and wrestler Satyawart Kadian stated, "We are still discussing the matter. We will let you know." The Congress strongly criticised the police's recommendation for cancelling the complaint, claiming that it disregards the cry for justice from India's daughters and is a result of Government intervention.

The BJP's new slogan is "Beti Darao, Brij Bhushan Bachao" (scare the daughter, protect Bhushan), said Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala.

In another case filed by women wrestlers, the chargesheet has been put up for consideration on June 22 by Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Deepak Kumar at Rouse Avenue court. The chargesheet includes sections 354 (Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354A (sexual harassment), 354D (stalking), and 506 (criminal intimidation). Vinod Tomar, a suspended assistant secretary of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), has also been charged under sections 109 (abetment of any offense), 354, 354A, and 506 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, on June 7, met with Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, assuring them that the charge sheet in the case would

be filed by June 15.

The Special Investigation Team has already questioned over 180 people and conducted investigations at Singh's residence in Gonda. Statements from Singh's relatives, colleagues, house staff, and associates have been recorded. Additionally, a woman wrestler was taken to Singh's official residence in New Delhi to recreate the sequence of events leading to the alleged crime.

The wrestlers have threatened to resume their protest if a charge sheet is not filed within the specified period. After his meeting on June 7, Thakur addressed a Press conference and said the wrestlers had suggested that the chargesheet in the case be filed by June 15 and the WFI elections be held by June 30. The wrestlers had also suggested that an Internal Complaints Committee of WFI headed by a woman be formed. All these proposals were agreed to unanimously by the Sports Minister.

Following the assurance, the grapplers suspended their agitation till June 15. The protesting wrestlers have been demanding the arrest of Singh, who they have accused of sexually exploiting women wrestlers, including a minor. Sources said the about 1500-page chargesheet filed against

Singh elaborates statements of all the six female wrestlers with supporting evidence, police sources said on Thursday.

Out of the over 200 statements of the witnesses recorded as part of the investigation, only statements of those relevant and supporting the allegations made by the victims have been mentioned in the chargesheet, they said. The sources also said only statements of 100 witnesses were found to be relevant to the case but among those, only statements of very few witnesses corroborated with that of the allegations made by the victims.

"All the six female complainants in the case recorded their statements in detail and we have collected supporting evidence which are in the form of call details record (available from last year), photos and videos are part of the charge sheet," a police source said. The chargesheet discusses each of the victim's case separately with supporting evidence in each, the sources said.

Statements of the eyewitnesses, co-participants, tournament referees and staff are part of the charge sheet, they said, adding a supplementary charge sheet will be filed as and when more witnesses and evidence related to the case are received. As part of the probe, the Delhi Police has also written to

wrestling federations of five nations seeking details in connection with the alleged incidents of sexual harassment by Singh, but their reply is awaited. Once these are received, the details will also be included in the charge sheet, the sources said. The notices were sent seeking photos and video of the tournaments and the CCTV footage of the places where the wrestlers stayed during their matches, they said.

The Government had assured the agitating wrestlers that the chargesheet in the case would be filed by June 15, following which they had suspended their stir.

In this case against Singh lodged on the basis of a complaint from six women wrestlers, the charge sheet has been filed for the offences under sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354A (sexual harassment) and 354D (stalking) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The chargesheet has also been filed against Vinod Tomar, a suspended assistant secretary of the WFI, for the offences under sections 109 (abetment of any offence, if the act abetted is committed in consequence, and where no express provision is made for its punishment), 354, 354A and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC.

Manipur Min...

From Page 1

The social media post by the Spear Corps of the Indian Army, whose operational area Manipur falls, said the "domination of fringe areas and higher reaches under way by long duration self-contained columns" was being enforced.

The security forces redoubled their efforts in the wake of an attack on a Kuki village in the Khamenlok area bordering Imphal East and Kangpokpi districts in the early hours of Wednesday, where 9 people died and 10 more were injured in a gun-battle which ensued between the miscreants who attacked the village and villagers.

More than 100 people have lost their lives in the ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki community people in Manipur that broke out a month ago. The state has imposed a curfew on 11 districts and banned the internet in a bid to stop the spread of rumours in the state.

Clashes first broke out on May 3 after a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals - Nagas and Kukis - constitute another 40 per cent of the population and reside in the hill districts.

Cong plagiarising our ideas, claims AAP

If Modi re-elected in 2024, he could declare himself king, change Constitution: Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj accused the Congress of plagiarising ideas and manifesto points from their party.

Addressing a Press conference on Thursday, Bharadwaj asserted that the Congress not only faced leadership issues but also a crisis of ideas. He warned that if Opposition parties fail to unite for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, there might not be an election in the country next time. Bharadwaj even claimed that if Prime Minister Narendra

Modi is re-elected in 2024, he could potentially change the Constitution and declare himself the country's "king" for life. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva dismissed Bharadwaj's claims as baseless.

Highlighting the alleged theft of ideas, Bharadwaj stated, "Not only is there a leadership crisis in the Congress, but there is also a crisis of ideas. Its connection with the people has ended."

The oldest party in the country has started stealing ideas and manifestos from the newest party in the country (AAP). The word 'Guarantee' has also been copied from us."



Bharadwaj pointed out instances where the Congress reportedly replicated AAP's initiatives, including the free bus rides for women in Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.

He criticised the Congress for opposing AAP's schemes in the past but implementing similar programs in other states.

The AAP leader mentioned that the Congress had previously mocked AAP's proposals but later announced similar schemes in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka, albeit with additional conditions.

The AAP leader accused the Congress of lacking talented individuals to lead the party, referring to them as the "CCC — Copy Cat Congress."

He claimed that the Congress was disconnected from the ground realities and lacked party workers who understood people's issues.

Regarding the upcoming Opposition conclave in Patna on June 23, Bharadwaj emphasized the need for opposition parties to come together to fight the BJP. He warned that the BJP was suppressing the opposition through various means.

Coaching institute inferno Students use ropes, smash windows to escape death

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A massive fire broke out on Thursday at a four-storey coaching centre in the northwest Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar area, resulting in injuries to 22 students. In a desperate attempt to escape, students of the coaching institute resorted to smashing windows, using ropes, and seeking help from ladders as the fire engulfed the top floor of the building.

The Delhi Fire Service Director, Atul Garg, received a call about the fire at 12.27 pm and immediately dispatched 11 fire tenders to the scene. Garg reported that approximately 10-12 students sustained minor injuries while panicking and descending via ropes. He assured that there were no major casualties and that all students had been successfully rescued. Mukherjee Nagar is a renowned coaching hub for government job aspirants.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the fire originated from the meter board installed on the fourth floor of the building. The building, consisting of a ground floor and four additional floors, became the stage for a daring rescue operation captured in a video shared by the fire department. Firefighters can be seen saving the lives of people, primarily students, through the windows while smoke billows out from the top floor.

In their bid for survival, terrified students utilized ropes on the opposite side of the building to evacuate the premises. The video depicts trapped students emerging from the top floor one by one with the aid of ropes. Some students even threw their bags and assisted one another during the rescue operation.

A large crowd gathered on the ground floor, with many onlookers recording videos of the incident on their mobile



phones. Garg added, "The firefighting operation has been successfully concluded, and so far, no major injuries have been reported."

Neha Mangal (19), a recent enrollee at the coaching institute, described the ordeal, saying, "There was smoke in the classroom, and I sustained burn injuries on both hands. We managed to open a window and descended using an AC wire."

"During the incident, the class was being conducted on the fourth floor. As news of the fire spread, some students escaped through the terrace. The staff members helped us flee the fire. I sustained minor injuries but managed to reach the terrace and escaped through an adjacent building," recounted another student named Moolchand.

Raid team thrashed by sand mafia

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A team of the mining department was attacked by a group of dozen men reportedly miners during a raid at Sancholi village in Sohna, police said.

Police said on Thursday, an eight-member team headed by mining officer Anil Atwal was attacked by a dozen men carrying sticks and rods while they went to conduct a raid on sand mining at Sancholi village in Sohna after secret inputs on Wednesday.

During the raid, however, the team impounded an earth-mover machine but was freed by the attackers and the suspects left an officer with a fractured arm.

The mining officer was rushed to hospital. The official vehicle of the team was also damaged. It is



said that the team was accompanied by a single cop carrying a stick.

"A team went to the spot after information but the alleged unknown miners attacked us and damaged the official vehicle. During the incident, one of the officers was badly injured and was referred to civil hospital, Gurugram. We have registered a complaint related to the incident," said Anil Atwal, mining officer.

BJP MLA Jitender trying to extort trader, alleges Durgesh

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP leader Durgesh Pathak on Thursday accused BJP MLA Jitender Mahajan of trying to extort a businessman and claimed that the complainant was "arrested in the presence of Mahajan" for filing a case against him.

Mahajan, however, denied the charges, saying it is AAP's character to level "baseless" allegations on others.

Addressing a press conference, Pathak said, "On May 28, two businessmen filed complaints with the police alleging that BJP MLA Jitender Mahajan used his goons and fired gunshots at them and also tried to extort Rs 2 crore from them. Days later, the police arrested one of the complainants."

Showing a CCTV footage at the presser, the senior AAP functionary further claimed that the businessman was arrested



ed in a private vehicle and alleged that the police is being "misused" by the BJP.

"This is the situation of law and order in Delhi. The businessman was arrested in front of Jitender Mahajan. He was in fact arrested in a private vehicle and we accessed the CCTV footage of it. This is a classic example of how the police are being misused," Pathak said.

he further said that Mahajan should be "arrested immediately", else the AAP leaders will stage protests against him.

"Action should have been taken against BJP MLA but the

police arrested the complainant. The Lieutenant Governor is responsible for the law and order of Delhi, he should tell whether he was aware of this or not?" he added.

Reacting to the allegations, Mahajan said that Pathak was "lying". "It is AAP's character to level baseless allegations on others. They do not have any faith in police or courts," he alleged. "The persons who had accused me of sending people and firing at their shop, have revealed that they lodged a fake complaint against me. There is also an evidence that their complaint was fake," the BJP MLA said.

Mahajan alleged that Pathak is trying to "settle" political score with him and shielding wrong persons. "The police should lodge an FIR against Pathak for lying and trying to hamper probe by issuing misleading statements," he added.

NDMC to hold 4-day yoga camps at 8 places from Sat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In the run-up to International Yoga Day, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) will commence four-day yoga camps from Saturday at eight locations in its jurisdiction, officials said on Thursday.

Being organised in association with the Ministry of Ayush and partner yoga institutions such as Art of Living, Patanjali Yoga Samiti and Gayatri Parivar, among others, these camps will create awareness amongst the general public about the health benefits of yoga, the NDMC said in a statement.

Nodal and assistant nodal officers designated by the NDMC will oversee the logistics and arrangement of the camp at the eight camp locations, including three major



parks owned by the NDMC — Nehru Park, Lodhi Garden and Talkatora Garden, the municipal council added.

The nodal officers will also coordinate with the yoga institutions for selecting yoga trainers and encourage people to participate in the camps, which

will be held at eight locations from June 17-20 from 6 am to 8 am, the NDMC said.

Kartavya Path, New Moti Bagh, Sanjay Jheel, Singapore Park, and Central Park in Connaught Place are the other locations where the NDMC will conduct its yoga camp.

1K students from Delhi Govt schools cracked NEET-UG this year: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As more than 1,000 students from Delhi government schools qualified for medical entrance exam NEET-UG this year, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday congratulated students, their parents and teachers and said the feat could not have been imagined "a few years back".

Taking to Twitter, Kejriwal shared a list of qualifying students from Delhi government schools in the past few years.

The tally of students from Delhi government schools who cleared NEET-UG saw a jump of over 40 per cent this year, with 1,074 of them qualifying the test. In 2022, 648 students from Delhi government schools cleared NEET. In 2021 and 2020, 496 and 569 students cleared the exams respectively.

"Wow. More than 1000 students from Delhi govt schools qualify NEET. This could not even be imagined just a few years back. Congrats to all students, parents and



teachers," Kejriwal tweeted.

A total of 11.45 lakh candidates out of 20.38 lakh have qualified the examination, up by 48 per cent from last year. NEET-UG is the qualifying entrance exam for admission to Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS), Bachelor of Ayurveda, Medicine and Surgery (BAMS), Bachelor of Siddha Medicine and Surgery (BSMS), Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery (BUMS), and Bachelor of Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery (BHMS) and BSc (H) Nursing courses. There are more than 80,000 MBBS seats in over 540 medical colleges in the country.

Plan to upgrade Vallabhbbhai Patel Chest Institute into multispeciality

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi University is planning to develop the Vallabhbbhai Patel Chest Institute (VPCI) into a multi-speciality hospital. Started in the 1950s, the Patel Chest Institute has sent a proposal to the Government of India to make it a full-fledged medical college.

According to Delhi University Vice Chancellor Prof Yogesh Singh, "We have Patel Chest Institute. We wish to make it a full-fledged medical institute, which is why the Patel Chest Institute has sent a letter to the Government of India. "It is now a specialised hospital if we could include more disciplines. We will open a multispeciality hospital in the coming days," Singh said.

The VPCI is a postgraduate medical institution devoted to research, teaching and patient care in the field of chest diseases.

It is a University of Delhi-main-tained institution and is funded entirely by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The Institute is ideally located in the heart of the main campus of the University of Delhi,



providing the requisite academic environment.

In 1946, the Committee constituted by the Vice-Chancellor for this purpose recommended the establishment of a chest institute. A proposal to this effect was accordingly formulated by the Vice-Chancellor and submitted to the government.

Sardar Vallabhbbhai Patel, the then Deputy Prime Minister, laid the foundation stone for the institute on

April 6, 1949.

Rajkumari Amritkaur, the then Union Minister of Health, formally opened the Institute on January 12, 1953 and Dr R. Viswanathan was appointed as the first Director of VPCI. The hospital wing, Viswanathan Chest Hospital (formerly known as Clinical Research Centre), was started around 1956. It was inaugurated by the then President Rajendra Prasad on October 24, 1957.

Saket resident held for uploading obscene videos, pictures of ex-girlfriend

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested a 24-year-old man was arrested for allegedly uploading obscene videos and pictures of his ex-girlfriend on social media to defame her and create pressure on her family to get her to marry him.

The accused, Kumar Avinash, a resident of Saket, also posted mobile phone numbers of the victim and her mother on social media, police said.

In a police complaint lodged on June 6, the victim alleged that she had been receiving messages and calls from unknown numbers since June 1 and found out later that someone had created her fake profiles on Instagram, Facebook and other social media platforms.

Obscene videos and pictures of the victim had also been posted on these social media platforms, the police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police

(Shahdara) Rohit Meena said the accused was arrested after analysing technical data and tracing IP addresses of the fake IDs.

During interrogation, Avinash disclosed that he and the victim studied in the same college and were in a relationship. However, the woman parted ways with him as her family did not approve of their relationship, he said.

"The accused wanted to be in a relationship with the victim, so he uploaded her obscene pictures and videos on social media platforms using fake IDs. He thought this would put pressure on her family and due to the defamation, they will get her to marry him," the officer said.

A laptop and two mobile phones used by the accused in the commission of the crime have been recovered and further investigation is underway, the police said.

Drain near IGIA to be completed by July to end waterlogging in area

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The crucial Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport drain being constructed by the Delhi Development Authority is expected to be completed by July and will bring respite from any possible waterlogging incidents in the area.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena inspected the progress of the work on the drain on Thursday, his seventh such visit, the statement issued by his office said.

During the inspection, the LG was informed by officials that 95 per cent of the work, like broadening and deepening of drains, construction of a culvert



beneath the passing railway track and construction of five water bodies in different sectors of Dwarka to absorb the

rainwater during monsoons had been completed, it said.

"Record efforts put in by the DDA along with the Railways and DIAL (Delhi International Airport Limited) during the last eight months under consistent supervision and personal guidance of Delhi LG have ensured that the 2.5-Km-long, 20-metre-wide and 2-metre-deep airport drain will be ready by July," the statement said. The drain will channelise rain and stormwater discharge from the airport to the Najafgarh drain.

"The project was stuck since 2019 due to the lack of permission to relocate trees at the site, which was finally granted by the Delhi government in November 2022 after the LG's inter-

vention," it said. According to the statement, the lack of drainage in the area had time and again led to embarrassing waterlogging at the IGI Airport, and created problems like traffic snarls for thousands of residents of neighbouring Dwarka sectors.

The existing two drains at the IGI airport have proved insufficient for discharging rainwater from the airport which has often resulted in severe waterlogging in and around the airport during heavy rains, the statement said.

Heavy waterlogging even forced closure of the IGI Airport on many occasions. It also causes flooding in the adjoining Dwarka Sector-8, which houses several prominent government organisations, it said.

Man carrying ₹37 lakh cash in car held in Greater Noida

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A Delhi-based man was held by police in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida after Rs 37 lakh in cash were allegedly seized from his car, officials said on Thursday.

Police said they informed the Income Tax Department and the man is being probed for a suspected tax evasion.

Jitesh Talwar, a resident of Krishna Nagar, was in his SUV along with his wife when officials of Sector Beta 2 police station intercepted the vehicle near the Chuhadpur underpass on Wednesday on the basis of a tip-off, a police spokesperson said.

"The couple was on their way to Punjab and Rs 37 lakh cash were recovered from their car. The income tax officials were informed about the incident and legal proceedings were carried out," the police spokesperson.

Initial probe has revealed that Talwar is a



salaried employee who had sold his flat in Greater Noida from where he got the money, a senior official told PTI.

However, he is being probed for suspected tax evasion and facts would be ascertained after the investigation is completed, the official added.

PM to review security with Rly Min, Board

Modi to seek info on safety protocol, road map for preventing repeat of Balasore train tragedy



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a meeting with Railway Minister Ashwani Vaishnav and the entire Rail Board on Friday to address the concerns regarding safety and security measures in the wake of the Balasore train tragedy, which claimed the lives of around 300 people and left many seriously injured.

The Prime Minister intends to be informed about the safety protocols in place and the Railway's road map for preventing such mishaps in the future.

While the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Commissioner Rail Safety are conducting their independent investigations into the triple train tragedy, Modi, during his visit to the accident site in Odisha earlier this month, had unequivocally stated that those responsible for the incident would not be spared.

"Strictest action will be taken against those found guilty in the train accident incident. No one will be spared," the PM had declared on June 4.

The crash on June 2 involved the Bengaluru-Howrah Superfast Express, the Shalimar-Chennai Central Coromandel Express, two trains carrying approximately 2,500 passengers, and a goods train, resulting in the

death of 288 people and over 1,000 injuries.

A senior railway official, without revealing the details of the scheduled PM-Rail meeting, mentioned that several infrastructure projects are currently underway with stringent targets. It is essential to sensitize officers and staff in the field about the importance of maintaining the integrity of the signaling system for the sake of safety. Vaishnav had suggested signal interference as a possible cause of the tragic crash.

The Ministry's presentation and briefing to the Prime Minister will include updates on the ongoing investigations and measures taken to fill vacancies across the railway sector. Opposition parties have raised concerns about the number of vacant positions.

Sources have indicated that the status report will also cover instructions given to officials to develop plans for making the railway network completely tamper-proof against external elements. The Railway Board has directed all General Managers to ensure that protocols around signaling systems are tamper-proof, as discussed in the first high-level meeting held by the railway minister after the accident.

Additionally, the Ministry had instructed zonal railways and its subsidiaries to conduct a week-long safety drive with

a focus on locking, interlocking, and signaling arrangements, which concluded on June 14.

Railway sources revealed that in April, the signaling staff was reprimanded by the Railway Board for taking shortcuts when reconnecting signaling equipment after maintenance work without proper testing of points. The board's letter dated April 3 stated that five such incidents had been reported from various railway zones.

"The signaling gears were reconnected by signal and telecom staff without proper testing of points after blocks for switch/turnout replacement, wrong wiring during preparatory works, attending signal failures, etc.," the letter highlighted. "Such practices reflect a dilution of manual and codal provisions. The same is a potential hazard to safety in train operations and needs to be stopped," it stated.

Expressing dissatisfaction with the signaling department, the board noted that these incidents indicate a failure to improve the ground situation despite repeated instructions. Signaling staff members continue to adopt shortcut methods for clearing signals without checking correspondence from the sites or properly exchanging disconnection or reconnection memos with the operating staff.

UNGA OK's India's proposal for memorial wall for peacekeepers

PM, EAM thank 190 countries for their support

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has granted approval for India's proposal to establish a memorial wall at the United Nations Headquarters, dedicated to honoring fallen peacekeepers. The resolution received overwhelming support from nearly 190 countries, marking a remarkable achievement for India's initiative.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar expressed their appreciation for the approval. The Prime Minister took to Twitter to thank the countries for their support, stating, "Delighted that the Resolution to establish a new Memorial Wall for fallen Peacekeepers, piloted by India, has been adopted in the UN General Assembly. The Resolution received a record 190 co-sponsorships. Grateful for

everyone's support." Jaishankar also conveyed his gratitude to all member states who co-sponsored the resolution, emphasizing that the overwhelming number of co-sponsorships reflects the faith in India's contributions and intentions. The adoption of the resolution coincided with Prime Minister Modi's forthcoming official state visit to the United States and his participation in the International Yoga Day celebrations at the United Nations headquarters on June 21.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, presented the draft resolution titled 'Memorial wall for fallen United Nations peacekeepers' in the UN General Assembly Hall



PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/UNITED NATIONS

on Wednesday, and it was unanimously adopted. The resolution welcomed the initiative of member states to "establish at a suitable and prominent place at United Nations Headquarters in New York a memorial wall to honor the memory of fallen peacekeepers, giving due consideration to the modalities involved, including the recording of the names of those who have made the supreme sacrifice." During the introduction of the resolution, Kamboj highlighted that the memorial wall would serve as a testament to the UN's recognition of the importance of peacekeeping. She emphasized that it would not only commemorate the sacrifices of the fallen but also serve as a "constant reminder of the cost of our decisions." India is the third-largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping, with over 6,000 military and police personnel deployed across various missions worldwide. Indian peacekeepers have made significant sacrifices, with 177 personnel having lost their lives, the highest number among all troop-contributing countries.

along the frontier. Despite some disengagement in certain areas, the two sides remain locked in a standoff at a few friction points.

In response to the escalated tension, the Indian Army has taken several measures to enhance its operational capabilities in the eastern sector. These measures include the procurement of all-terrain vehicles, precision-guided ammunition, high-tech surveillance equipment, radars, and weapons.

To address the ongoing standoff in eastern Ladakh, the two countries have conducted 18 rounds of high-level talks. The objective of these discussions is to advance the disengagement process in the remaining friction points and restore peace and tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. Extensive diplomatic and military talks have resulted in the disengagement of troops from several areas.

India has consistently emphasized that normalizing ties with China is contingent on peace in the border areas.

Def Min pays homage to 20 Galwan clash martyrs on anniversary

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On the third anniversary of the deadly clash between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley, Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, paid homage on Thursday to the 20 Indian Army personnel who lost their lives in the June 15, 2020 brawl, emphasising that their courage and sacrifice will inspire future generations. The clash in Galwan Valley marked the most serious military conflict between India and China in decades.

"Today, we pay homage to those brave soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice while protecting our nation in the Galwan Valley. Their courage, bravery, and sacrifice will continue to inspire coming generations," tweeted the Defence Minister.

The border standoff in eastern Ladakh escalated significantly following the clashes on June 15, 2020. While China officially acknowledged the deaths of five Chinese military officers and soldiers, it is believed that the actual Chinese casualties were much higher.

Both the Indian and Chinese militaries are engaged in talks to de-escalate tensions

along the frontier. Despite some disengagement in certain areas, the two sides remain locked in a standoff at a few friction points.

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33 academicians demand removal of their names from NCERT textbooks

They have been members of Textbook Development Committee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A group of esteemed academicians affiliated with the NCERT books has expressed their frustration and demanded the removal of their names from the textbooks, citing the jeopardizing of their collective creative effort. This comes shortly after political scientists Yogendra Yadav and Suhans Palshikar wrote to the NCERT, requesting the exclusion of their names from the textbooks.

These academicians have been members of the Textbook Development Committee (TDC), responsible for overseeing the NCERT textbooks.

In a letter addressed to the Director of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Dinesh Saklani, 33 academicians have signed their names, including notable figures such as Kanti Prasad Bajpai, former professor at JNU and currently serving as

the vice-dean at the National University, Singapore; Pratap Bhanu Mehta, former vice-chancellor of Ashoka University; Rajeev Bhargava, former director of CSDS; Niraja Gopal Jayal, former professor at JNU; Nivedita Menon, professor at JNU; Vipul Mudgal, head of civil society watchdog Common Cause; KC Suri, former professor at the University of Hyderabad associated with Gitam University, and Peter Ronald deSouza, former director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies.

The controversy surrounding the removal of various topics and sections from NCERT textbooks last month has sparked outrage, with the Opposition accusing the BJP-led Government of engaging in a "whitewashing" exercise. The NCERT initially referred to the omissions as a possible oversight but refused to reverse the deletions, stating that they were

based on expert recommendations. It also mentioned that the textbooks were scheduled for revision in 2024 when the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) comes into effect. However, the NCERT later changed its stance, stating that "minor changes need not be notified."

"In view of the substantive revisions made to the original texts, rendering them essentially different books, we find it difficult to associate our names with them... We now fear that this collective creative effort is under threat," expressed the academicians in their letter to the NCERT.

"The textbooks were the outcome of extensive discussions and collaborations among political scientists representing diverse perspectives and ideological backgrounds. They were originally designed to impart knowledge about India's struggle for independence, the con-

stitutional framework, the functioning of democracy, and key aspects of Indian politics while incorporating global developments and theoretical principles of political science," the letter further stated.

In a separate letter to the NCERT last week, Yogendra Yadav and Suhans Palshikar stated that the rationalization process has "mutilated" the books to the point of being unrecognizable and academically dysfunctional. They emphasized that the textbooks, which were once a source of pride, have now become a source of embarrassment.

The NCERT, on the other hand, has asserted that disassociating anyone from the textbooks is not possible, as school-level textbooks are developed based on collective knowledge and understanding of the subject, and individual authorship is not claimed at any stage.

Def Min inks ₹500 cr pact for Radio Relay Containers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to indigenous manufacturing of Defence equipment, the Defence Ministry on Thursday inked a contract worth Rs 500 crore here with ICOMM Tele Limited, Hyderabad for the procurement of 1,035 five to 7.5 ton Radio Relay Communication equipment containers. The delivery of the containers is scheduled to commence from the current Financial Year 2023-24.

The Radio Relay Containers will address a long overdue requirement of mobile communication detachments of the Indian Army. These containers will be utilised to provide a protected environment for communication equipment to function in a fail-safe and reliable manner. The containers will be mounted on authorised specialist vehicles and moved as per operational requirements, officials said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

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Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Nitish Raj/ Giraja Devi/ Ward No.26 Mohalla Navaratan Bazar Sasaram Rohtas Bihar Sasaram-821115/ LBGAY0006206701	Khata No.30, Plot No.346, Mouza- Mirza Pur, Thana- Sasaram, Thana No.139, Halka No.08, Sadar Registry Office Sasaram, District- Rohtas, Bihar. (Admeasuring an Area of Measuring an Area of 1.5 Decimals.	April 21, 2023 Rs. 8,70,647/-	05/02/2023

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : June 16, 2023 Place : Delhi Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

ICICI Bank Regd. Office: ICICI Bank Limited, ICICI Bank Tower, Near Chakli Circle, Old Padra Road, Vadodara, Gujarat. Pin- 390 007 Corporate/Branch Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra- Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai- 400 051

PUBLIC NOTICE – AUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSET

In terms of the policy of ICICI Bank Limited ("the Bank") on Sale of Financial Assets and in line with the regulatory guidelines, the Bank hereby invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from interested Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) for purchase of a portfolio of Non-Performing Assets ("Financial Asset") on the terms and conditions indicated herein under "Swiss Challenge Method". It is hereby clarified that confirmation of the name of successful bidder will be subject to final approval by the competent authority of the Bank:

Base-Bid	Term of sale	Minimum Mark Up
Rs.47.0 million	100% in Cash	Rs. 2.5 million

Schedule for E-Auction

Sr. No.	Activity	Date & Time
1.	Submission of EOI	June 17, 2023, latest by 5.00 PM
2.	Execution of Non-Disclosure Agreement ("NDA") (if not already executed with ICICI Bank)	June 21, 2023, latest by 5.00 PM
3.	Release of Offer Document along with Preliminary Information Memorandum ("PIM")	June 21, 2023
4.	Access to data room for due diligence	June 21, 2023 to July 07, 2023
5.	Submission of Bid Form	July 10, 2023 latest by 5.00 PM
6.	Process of e-bidding	July 11, 2023 from 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM with auto extension of 5 minutes till sale is completed

The sale of aforesaid Financial Asset is on "As is where is basis", "As is what is basis", "Whatever there is basis" and "Without recourse basis".

Interested buyers are requested to submit EOI via email to jignesh.shelani@icicibank.com or vijayc.kumar@icicibank.com and/or by post at ICICI Bank Limited, ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai- 400 051 before June 08, 2023 at 5.00 PM. The Bank will not be liable for non-receipt of EOI for any reason. Interested buyers are expected to take efforts to find out the status of communication sent by them to the Bank to ensure their participation in the auction process. The e-auction would be conducted under "Swiss Challenge Method" as per schedule above on the terms & conditions of the Offer Document, which will be shared with interested buyers on execution of Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) with the Bank.

For any further clarifications with regard to access to data room, due-diligence, terms & conditions of the auction and/or submission of EOI/BID, kindly contact Mr. Jignesh Shelani (+91 75748 21846) or Mr. Vijay Kumar (+91 98208 03292).

Date : June 16, 2023 Place : Delhi/NCR Authorized Signatory ICICI Bank Limited

BJP slams K'taka Govt over poll-time guarantees

State Finance Department says it has no money: Malviya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on various poll-time guarantees made by the Congress Government in Karnataka, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alleged on Thursday that the State's finance department has been unable to allocate additional funds for wage payments and fuel expenses.

The BJP further questioned whether the ruling party would now bear the cost of the promised free bus rides from its own resources.

Amit Malviya, the head of BJP's IT department, took to Twitter and shared a purport-

ed letter from the State's finance department. He wrote, "Revdi politics is bleeding Karnataka already."

"The Government of Karnataka's Finance Department informs RTCs (road transport corporations), including KSRTC (Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation) and BMT (Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation), that it cannot provide additional grant for payment of wages and fuel expenditure," Malviya stated. He continued, "Will Congress now pay for the promised free bus rides from its pocket?" Malviya also criticised the Congress Government's deci-



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Malviya remarked.

The implementation of five guarantees by the Karnataka Government, which involve offering free benefits, has sparked a war of words between the ruling Congress and the main Opposition, BJP.

In response to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's accusation that the central government was trying to undermine the state's free rice scheme for the poor, former Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Basavaraj Bommai retaliated, accusing Siddaramaiah of making "lame excuses" and engaging in "conspiracy politics" by shifting blame onto the Centre. Bommai claimed that the

Congress government in the state is resorting to such tactics because it will be unable to fulfill its guarantees. He suggested that the Siddaramaiah regime should deposit the funds directly into the beneficiaries' bank accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer until proper arrangements for rice distribution are made.

"The state government, on one hand, is deceiving the people of the state by failing to provide 10 kg of free rice to the poor, and on the other hand, to save themselves from the embarrassment of not fulfilling their promise, they are playing politics with the issue of rice supply," Bommai stated.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A recent global report released on World Oceans Day on June 8 highlights the alarming impact of noise pollution on marine wildlife due to the increasing number of marine vehicles and underwater surveys. The report, by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), provides practical guidance on reducing noise pollution from shipping, seismic airgun surveys, and pile driving.

The report emphasizes that anthropogenic noise can cause direct injuries and auditory threshold shifts in marine animals, impairing their communication, ability to detect threats, and find food, sometimes resulting in death. It also states that marine wildlife, including migratory species and their

Noise pollution adversely impacting marine life: Study

It is impairing communication, ability to detect threats, find food

prey, rely on sound for essential life functions such as communication, prey and predator detection, and orientation.

Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary of CMS, highlighted the importance of reducing noise to safeguard marine species and commended the report for providing essential guidance in this regard.

The report recommends the application of quieting technologies to reduce sound at the source as the most effective way to mitigate the negative impacts of underwater noise. These technologies not only benefit marine wildlife but also



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP). Measures like reducing the speed of container and cargo ships, known as slow steaming, can significantly lower the acoustic footprint, fuel consumption, and CO2 emissions. Quieting the loudest 10-15% of ships is particularly important as they contribute disproportionately to overall shipping noise.

Regarding seismic airgun surveys, the report emphasizes the need for quieter alternatives like Marine Vibroseis, which produces controlled, lower-frequency seismic signals, reducing the threats posed to marine

life. Mitigation measures are also outlined for situations where these alternatives cannot be employed.

For pile driving, the report highlights the availability of numerous quieting technologies and noise abatement systems, which have been developed in recent years to comply with noise limits set by regulators. However, the report acknowledges that despite the application of best available quieting technologies, further mitigation measures are often necessary to minimize the impact on marine life.

Dr. Lindy Weilgart, the author of the report and an ocean noise expert at OceanCare and Dalhousie University, cautions that certain activities may still have an impact on marine life, even with the application of best available technologies, necessitating additional mitigation measures.

3 DEAD, MANY HURT AS BOMBS, BULLETS FLY HC orders immediate deployment of CAPF for Bengal rural elections

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

As continuing civil-war like violence between Trinamool Congress workers and those of the other Opposition parties consumed three lives besides injuring dozens of others in a single day the Calcutta High Court on Thursday ordered deployment of central forces ahead of the forthcoming panchayat elections with immediate effect.

The order passed by the Division bench of Chief Justice S Sivagnanam tends to come as a major embarrassment for the Mamata Banerjee Government and the State Election Commission (SEC) which had earlier been asked by the same court to deploy "forthwith" central forces in only seven politically-sensitive districts.



Police personnel keep a vigil during a clash between supporters of Indian Secular Front (ISF) and Trinamool Congress (TMC) in Bhargore area ahead of the upcoming Panchayat poll, in South 24 Parganas. (Inset) View of a car set ablaze during a clash between supporters of ISF and TMC in Bhargore area ahead of the upcoming Panchayat poll, in South 24 Parganas PTI

central forces within 48 hours failing which it would suo motu take stronger action.

"It is not a slap ... rather it is a sandal that has landed on the cheeks of the State Government and the Commission," Bengal CPI(M) secretary Md Salim said adding, "Mamata Banerjee and her stooge administration has brought Bengal to such disrepute that the entire country is laughing at a State which was once seen as a pio-

neer of political views and movements.

Welcoming the decision State Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said that his party would file a caveat in the Supreme Court to preempt the Bengal ruling outfit from extracting any ex parte order from the Apex Court.

In Chopra, Uttar Dinajpur, a Left-Congress rally was allegedly fired upon by Trinamool Congress (TMC)

supporters, killing Mansur Ali, a CPI(M) supporter. Several supporters of the Congress and Left suffered injuries.

In the afternoon, a clash between TMC and the ISF was reported in Bhargar, leading to an ISF worker being shot dead.

Thursday's killings take the total number of poll-related deaths to three including the Congress worker who was shot dead at Murshidabad a few days ago. Both the places wit-

nessed day-long bombing and firing by alleged TMC men apparently in order to scare off the Opposition candidates approaching the respective BDO office.

A number of vehicles including pick-up vans were set on fire even as the miscreants charged bombs at the media men who proceeded to video-graph the felony. "We have no orders from above and so we are standing in the safe zone," a senior police officer requesting anonymity said at Bhangar.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee however, remained on the denial mode even as she said that the violence that had taken place had no TMC hands and that the Opposition parties had ignited them in order to sully the image of Bengal Government.

"Some local tensions had taken place but that had nothing to do with our party ... we want democracy to prevail and that will prevail ... we just want to remind the Left how they conducted polls in 2003 and 2008 when so many people were killed ... now they are blaming us ... the CPI(M) has provoked violence for many years this time."

After spat over ad-space, Shinde, Fadnavis share 'airspace'

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After a major controversy over sharing of the advertisement space in the media between the ruling Shiv Sena and BJP, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis flew together in the same helicopter to Mumbai from Palghar and returned to the metropolis later in the evening, signalling rapprochement between the two leaders.

A day after he made amends for having annoyed the ruling ally BJP by sharing space with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a full-page advertisement and claiming that he was ahead of his deputy Devendra Fadnavis in the chief ministerial race for 2024, Shinde along with Fadnavis hopped from Mumbai to

Palghar and returned in the same helicopter. State BJP President Chandrashekhar Bawankule said that the matter needs to be closed.

The helicopter took off from Mumbai, dropped the two leaders at Palghar. After attending a Government function, they returned to Mumbai by the same chopper a few hours later.

At Palghar, Shinde and Fadnavis were at a "Shan Aplya Dari Yojana" event held at CIDCO Maidan on the Palghar-Boisar Road. The two leaders used their sense of humour to put an end to the controversy between the two ruling alliance partners over the advertisements put out by the Shiv Sena on Tuesday.

Having ticked off his party's ally BJP in Maharashtra through the "Rashtra-madhe Modi, Maharashtra Shinde"



(Modi for India, Shinde for Maharashtra) advertisement published in many local newspapers on Tuesday, Shinde had on Wednesday sought to make amends by putting other ad that showed him and a grinning Fadnavis waving at people. Unlike Tuesday's advertisement that had only the photographs of just Modi and Shinde, Wednesday's ad carried the photographs of other BJP-Sena leaders

including Union Home Minister Amit Shah and his late Shiv Sena leaders Balasaheb Thackeray and his own "political guru" Anand Dighe.

Wednesday's ad carried the symbols of both the Shiv Sena's 'Bow-and-Arrow' and the BJP's 'Lotus which was missing in Tuesday's advertisement. The latest ad carried punch lines saying "People's choice only for Shiv Sena-BJP alliance", "We bow our heads of the people, Long Live Maharashtra"

In Tuesday's advertisement, the ruling Shiv Sena had quoted an election survey and said that as per the survey done for the chief minister's post, 26.1 per cent of people in Maharashtra "desire" Shinde to be the next chief minister of the state, while 23.2 per cent of the people "wish" to see Fadnavis as the next CM.

Sexual assault on woman in ladies compartment of Mumbai train

Opp raises issue of women's safety in wake of series of crimes in last few days



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A horrendous sexual assault on a 20-year-old girl by a 40-year-old porter in the ladies compartment of a running suburban train on Thursday sparked a public uproar over the issue of women safety in the country's commercial capital even after the accused was arrested within eight hours after the incident.

Coming as it did on the heels of the rape and murder of a girl in a hostel at Marine Lines in south Mumbai and the macabre Mira Road murder of a woman by her live-in partner, the alleged sexual assault on a girl on a running Harbour Line suburban train prompted the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) to pillory the Eknath Shinde-Devendra Fadnavis Government over the issue women's safety and the breakdown of law and order in the State.

departed from the CSMT on Wednesday morning - has come as a big shock to the lakhs of suburban commuters, especially women, travelling by the Central, Western and Harbour suburban railway networks.

The girl was on her way from Mumbai to Belapur in the satellite township of Navi Mumbai to appear in an examination when the incident took place on board the Panvel-bound train immediately after it left CSMT at 7.27 AM on Wednesday. After the girl raised an alarm, the accused porter jumped off the train at the Masjid station.

Acting swiftly, the joint teams of the Government Railway Police (GRP) and Railway Protection Force (RPF) arrested the accused -- Nawaz Khan -- within eight hours of the incident.

"Lakhs of women travel daily by suburban trains. There is a need to ensure their safety. We have asked the police and other authorities to take safety precautions to ensure against repeat of such incidents," Chakankar said.

Describing the incident as "outrageous" and "very disturbing" the newly-appointed NCP Working President Supriya Sule said; "This is very disturbing and the issue of security in Mumbai local trains has once again come to the fore... Criminals have no fear of the law in Maharashtra due to the inaction of the Home Department," said Sule, demanding the strictest punishment to the accused for the heinous crime.

Maharashtra Mahila Congress president Sandhya Savvalakhe wondered whether "the State Government, Home Department and the police in Maharashtra are alive or not".

"This shameful incident comes barely a week after the rape-cum-murder of a student in the (Savitridevi Phule Women's Hostel). The recent incidents show a growing trend of violence against women in Mumbai," Savvalakhe said.

Savvalakhe said that while the country's PM keeps showing the green flags to new trains, the infighting between the Shiv Sena-BJP in the State leaves them with no time to govern and ensure law and order, and demanded that "they must wake up now".

Condemning the incident, Leader of Opposition Ajit Pawar questioned the efficiency of the State home department - headed by Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis himself - "in view of the alarming increasing crimes and violence against women in the past few days".

Christians falsely charged with conversion in UP: KPCC chief

Section 3 of the anti-conversion Act being misused: Sudhakaran to PM

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief and senior Congress leader K Sudhakaran on Thursday alleged that the Christians have been falsely charged with offences related to illegal religious conversion in the BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh. Sudhakaran, representing Kannur constituency in Lok Sabha, wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, seeking his urgent intervention to address the issue.

In his letter, the senior Congress leader referred to a fact-finding report submitted to the KPCC by party leader Anil Thomas, which according to him, has found that a significant number of individuals, primarily from Kerala, have been falsely charged with offences related to illegal religious conversion

and other similar allegations in UP. "These individuals have dedicated themselves to social service and charity work in UP, where they have established reputable institutions such as hospitals, schools, and colleges. Instances of harassment, extortion, malicious legal actions, physical attacks, and vandalism have become alarmingly frequent. The report suggests that radical elements associated with Sangh Parivar organisations are attempting to gain control and ownership of these institutions, including churches and related structures," Sudhakaran alleged.

"These FIRs against them and some pastors were lodged without valid complaints from the aggrieved individuals or their relatives, as required by the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021," Sudhakaran alleged. He said Section 3 of the Act explicitly prohibits the use of deceptive means for religious conversion. "However, the report suggests that this provision has been misused against pastors and members of the Christian community," he said.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Anil Gupta/ Pratinha Gupta/ LBDL00004259648	Plot No D-535, 1st Floor, Block-D, Indraprastha Colony, Ghaziabad/ June 13, 2023	August 20, 2020/ Rs.23,05,641/-	Delhi/ NCR
2.	Dilip Roy/ Bechan Roy/ LBGHZ00005177041	Flat No- 803, 8th Floor, Tower- 4, Plot No- GH-6A, Sector- 5, Dream Homes, Greenwood Enclave, Wave City Nh-24 Ghaziabad 201001/ June 13, 2023	July 29, 2022/ Rs. 19,08,130/-	Delhi/ NCR
3.	Gopal Verma/ Soniya Verma/ LBDL00002432900	Unit No- PT/B 321, 3rd Floor, Block-B, Park Town Commercial complex, NH -24, Ghaziabad/ June 13, 2023	February 25, 2023/ Rs.4,54,935/-	Delhi/ NCR
4.	Khusbu Mehta/ Shyam Lal Mehta/ LBFDB00005148504	Flat No MJ/C-1204, Floor 12, Mehak Jeevan, Tower C, Village Morta, Nh-58, Raj Nagar Extension, Parganajalabad Tehsil And Ghaziabad, Up-201003./ June 13, 2023	November 15, 2021/ Rs.25,00,627/-	Delhi/ NCR
5.	Rekha Gupta/ Vandanesht Pratap Singh/ LBGHZ00003155354	Flat No. 1104, 11th Floor, Tower 8, Dream Homes, Sector-5 Greenwood Enclave "Wave City" NH-24, Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh/ June 13, 2023	June 18, 2019/ Rs. 13,02,971/-	Delhi/ NCR

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : June 16, 2023
Place : Delhi/NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, Pushpamangalam Estate, NH Bye pass road, Edapally, Cochin- 682024

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET
[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable assets

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price Earned Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Mr. Subhash (Borrower) Mrs. Vineetha B (Co-Borrower) (Loan Account no. LBKOL00005114435	4.65 Ares (11.49 Cents) Block No.27, Re Sy No 211/13/2/1, Enadimangalam Village, Adoor Taluk, Pathanamthitta. Property Is A Vacant Land Area 5005 Sq.ft	Rs. 26,85,841/- (As on June 12, 2023)	Rs. 17,42,000/- Rs.1,74,200/-	June 29, 2023 from 02:00 PM to 04:00 PM	July 15, 2023 from 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency **NexXen Solutions Private Limited (URL Link - https://www.disposalhub.com)** The Mortgagors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till July 14, 2023 before 04:00 PM else these secured assets will be sold as per schedule. The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at to **ICICI Bank Limited, Pushpamangalam Estate, NH Bye pass road, Edapally, Cochin- 682024**, on or before July 14, 2023 before 05:00 PM and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before July 14, 2023 before 05:00 PM along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at **ICICI Bank Limited, Pushpamangalam Estate, NH Bye pass road, Edapally, Cochin- 682024** on or before July 14, 2023 before 05:00 PM Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at Cochin.

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact **ICICI Bank Limited on 138023587/ 9004474395**.
The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit **www.icicibank.com/n4p45**

Date: June 16, 2023
Place: Gurgaon

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE

ICICI Bank Regd. Office: ICICI Bank Limited, Landmark, Race Course Circle, Vadodara 390007
Corporate Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra- Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai 400015

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd Plot No. 7, Community Centre S.D. Tower, Sector 8, Rohini, City-new Delhi, State- Delhi, Pin- 110085

A notice is hereby given that the following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non Performing Assets (NPA). The notice were issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses as provided to the bank by them, that in addition thereto for the purposes of information of the said borrowers enumerated below, the said borrowers are being informed by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Description of Secured Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	LVGUR00041020501/ Dharamender Yadav/ Jamalpur (28) Gurgaon Jamalpur Haryana// Gurgaon-122503	LPK 2518 FB1/ LPK 2518 FB1/ HR55AH4804	02-Nov-22 Rs. 19,87,586/-	02-May-2022
2.	LVGUR00041020515/ Dharamender Yadav/ Jamalpur (28) Gurgaon Jamalpur Haryana// Gurgaon-122503	LPK 2518 FB1/ LPK 2518 FB1/ HR55AH5004	2-Nov-22 Rs. 18,82,037/-	02-May-2022
3.	LVUGUR00041993448/ Dharamender Yadav/ Shree Krishna Job/ Shop 46 Near Krishna Petrol Pump/ Main Market/ Jamalpur/ Gurgaon-122503	TATA LPK 2518 CRE BS-IV HD/ TATA LPK 2518 CRE BS-IV HD/ HR55AH5004A	15-Apr-23 Rs. 10,47,274/-	02-May-2022
4.	LANOD00038343818/ Abhijeet Singh/ Bharat Foods And Beverages Private Limited/ B-54 Sec-67 Noida Ff G B Nagar/ Noida-201301	GLS/ 350 D/ UP16CB0011	15-Apr-23 Rs. 27,62,826/-	30-Jan-2023
5.	LANOD00038630532/ Sujeeet Kumar Singh/ Bharat Foods And Beverages Private Limited/ B-54 Sec-67 Noida Ff G B Nagar/ Noida-201301	ALTURAS G4/ 4X4/ UP13BH4011	15-Apr-23 Rs. 11,61,534/-	30-Jan-2023
6.	LUDEL00043282224/ Satish Kumar/ 318 323 Karolbagh/ Karolbagh/ Delhi/ Delhi-110005	CRETA/ 1.4 Base/ DL12CQ4500	15-Apr-23 Rs. 3,99,603/-	04-Jul-2022
7.	LADL00041286603/ Sunil Tokas/ House No.214 Munirka Gaon Jnu So/ Delhi/ Delhi/ Delhi-110067	I 20/ MAGNA PETROL/ DL4CAZ4195	15-Apr-23 Rs. 3,47,698.8/-	03-Oct-2022
8.	SPDEL00044899646/ Sunil Tokas/ House No.214 Munirka Gaon Jnu So/ Delhi/ Delhi-110067	I 20/ MAGNA PETROL/ DL4CAZ4195	15-Apr-23 Rs. 2,18,675/-	03-Oct-2022
9.	LADL00044683365/ Satish Kumar/ 5601 Gali No-1 Sant Nagar/ Karol Bagh Sant Nagar/ New Delhi/ Delhi-110005	NEW VERNA/ 1.5 S PLUS/ DL3CCU8580	15-Apr-23 Rs. 6,75,301/-	04-Jul-2022
10.	LVDEL00042961305/ Anita/ Satpal Singh/ 84 Nizampur Road/ Naya Pana Ladpur/ North West Delhi/ Delhi-110081	TATA 1412 BS 4/ TATA 1412 BS 4/ DL1GC9161	15-Apr-23 Rs. 2,26,2518/-	13-Jan-2022
11.	LVDEL00039935729/ Sakina Khatun/ Mohd Afroj/ Jhuggi No-1/16 Rajasthan Udyog Nagar/ Sarai Pipal Thala Jahangir Puri N.S/ Mandi North West Delhi/ Delhi-110033	AL ECOMET 1214/ AL ECOMET 1214/ HR38AA7363	15-Apr-23 Rs. 20,18,741/-	02-Jul-2021
12.	LVDEL00041950850/ Sakina Khatun/ Mohd Afroj/ Jhuggi No-1/16 Rajasthan Udyog Nagar/ Sarai Pipal Thala Jahangir Puri N.s/ Mandi North West Delhi/ Delhi-110033	AL ECOMET 1214/ AL ECOMET 1214/ HR38AA7363	15-Apr-23 Rs. 4,00,369/-	02-Jul-2021
13.	LVDEL00036894983/ Virender Kumar Sharma/ Vikas Transport of India/ 30 1st Floor/ Transport Center/ Punjabi Bagh/ Delhi-110026	PRO 5016/ PRO 5016/ NL01AB2023	15-Apr-23 Rs. 9,04,604.6/-	30-Jun-2020
14.	LVDEL00036894980/ Virender Kumar Sharma/ Vikas Transport of India/ 30 1st Floor/ Transport Center/ Punjabi Bagh/ Delhi-110026	PRO 5016/ PRO 5016/ NL01AB2024	15-Apr-23 Rs. 6,67,134.6/-	30-Jun-2020
15.	LVDEL00036895203/ Virender Kumar Sharma/ Vikas Transport of India/ 30 1st Floor, Transport Center/ Punjabi Bagh/ Delhi-110026	PRO 5016/ PRO 5016/ BODY	15-Apr-23 Rs. 3,80,936.2/-	30-Jun-2020
16.	LVDEL00036895288/ Virender Kumar Sharma/ Vikas Transport of India/ 30 1st Floor, Transport Center/ Punjabi Bagh/ Delhi-110026	PRO 5016/ PRO 5016/ BODY	15-Apr-23 Rs. 4,10,126.2/-	30-Jun-2020
17.	LAGUR00041851012/ Krishan Lal/ Abm Engineers/ Plot No-70/ Imt Mangesar Sector-6/ Gurgaon-122002	NEXON/ XZ PLUS/ HR26EJ3139	15-Apr-23 Rs. 7,38,110/-	11-Jul-2022
18.	LANOD00042007930/ Shwetank Mishra/ Gali No-2/11, Mamura, Sec-66, Gautam/ Buddha Nagar/ Noida/ Noida-201301	Kwid/ 1.0 RXT5/ UP16CQ4003	15-Apr-23 Rs. 4,16,510/-	30-Oct-2021
19.	LAFDB00042539983/ Satish Kumar/ H No 509 Sec 23 Sanjay Colony/ Faridabad/ Gurgaon-122001	VENUE/ SX (O)/ HR51CC5341	15-Apr-23 Rs. 6,84,748/-	09-Dec-2022
20.	LAGHZ00041307938/ Sachin Srivastava/ Building No 110 First Floor Flat No F 1/ Vaishali Sec 2a Pnb Sec 2a/ Pnb Sec 2a/ Ghaziabad-201010	TIAGO/ XZ PETROL/ UP14EH7782	15-Apr-23 Rs. 4,89,181.4/-	16-May-2022

The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (where ever applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of issuance of notice U/s. 13 (2), failing which further steps will be taken after expiry of 60 days from the date of issuance of notice U/s. 13 (2) as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

Date : June 16, 2023
Place : Delhi/NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Ltd.,

Police make 5th arrest in Raut brothers' threat case

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Within days after death threats were handed out to Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut and his brother and MLA Sunil Raut, the Mumbai police on Thursday arrested a political activist Mayur Shinde, considered close to them, taking the total number of arrests in the case to five.

The Kanjur Marg police who are investigating the case, produced Shinde before a city court which remanded him in police custody till June 19.

On his part, BJP leader Nitesh Rane, son of Union Minister Narayan Rane, claimed that a drama was enacted by Raut himself to spoil the reputations of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who had the State Home portfolio.

"This is Mayur Shinde, who has apparently been arrested by Mumbai police for giving death threats to Shree 420 and his brother Mini 420 ! The call recording that was played in the media was between Sunil Raut n his own Mayur Shinde! Golmaal Gang!", Nitesh tweeted.

The motive behind the death threats handed to Sanjay Raut and his brother Sunil has not been established yet. The accused Shinde had earlier posted photos and videos with Sunil Raut Acting on a complaint lodged by Sunil Raut with the Kanjur Marg Police Station, the police had earlier arrested four persons last week.

Shinde's arrest comes five days after the Raut brothers received the telephonic death threats.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Manipur mayhem

It is unfortunate that violence in the Northeastern state continues unabated

Backlash by villagers against an armed group that had been repeatedly attacking their hamlets in Manipur's Kangpokpi district over the past few days culminated in the state's worst bloodshed in a single clash since the ethnic conflict erupted on May 3. In the bloodiest incident nine people lost their lives while 10 were wounded. Manipur is a culturally diverse state, home to several ethnic communities, including the Meiteis, Nagas, and Kukis. Historical and social divisions among these groups have led to sporadic violence and conflicts over resources, territorial claims, and political representation. Manipur has witnessed the emergence of various insurgent groups, each with its own ideological agenda. These groups often resort to violence leading to a vicious cycle of retaliation and counter-violence. Besides, unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure have contributed to the sense of frustration and disillusionment among the youth of Manipur. These socio-economic factors create an environment where violence becomes an outlet for expressing grievances and seeking attention. Add to this the political superstructure which widens the schism for electoral gains. Frequent changes in political leadership and the absence of stable governance have impeded effective policymaking. Political instability creates a fertile ground for violence to persist and thrive. What is disturbing is that many insurgent groups are acting from Myanmar which compounds the problem.



Imphal Valley occupying about 10% of the land area of the state is mainly populated by the Meitei people. The surrounding hills are inhabited by Kukis in the southern portion and Nagas in the northeastern portion. The Meiteis make up 53% of the population. The tribal population, consisting of predominantly Christian Kukis and the Nagas, forms about 40% of the state's 3.5 million people. They reside in the reserved hill regions consisting of the rest of the 90% of the state. However, the Meiteis dominate political power in the Assembly and get the lion's share of Government benefits. Tribal groups complain that the government spending is concentrated in the Imphal Valley. The trouble this year started when the state government in Manipur began efforts to remove illegal immigrants from settlements in reserve forest areas. Officials have stated that illegal immigrants from Myanmar have been settling in Manipur since the 1970s. Tribal groups have said that illegal immigration is a pretext under which the Meitei population wants to drive the tribal population from their lands. In February 2023, the BJP state government began an eviction drive in districts of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal, declaring the forest dwellers as encroachers. It is common knowledge that the Kuki's have been at the receiving end. The Government must act proactively to bring all stakeholders to dialogue and sternly deal with the miscreants. It should also stop all operations which enrage any community and widen the schism in the society.

PICTALK



An artisan paints idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra ahead of the Rath Yatra in Bhubaneswar

PM's US visit will be pathbreaking

The PM's US state visit will address the growing expansionist intent of China and emphasise Indo-Pacific Cooperation

In the realm of international diplomacy, state visits play a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations between nations. The relevance of an official state visit by a major global leader to the United States lies in its potential to strengthen bilateral relations, promote dialogue on key issues, and enhance cooperation in various fields. State visits provide an opportunity for leaders to engage in high-level diplomacy, exchange ideas, and foster mutual understanding. It serves as a platform to address shared challenges, expand trade and economic partnerships, and coordinate efforts on global matters such as climate change, security, and human rights. One such significant event is the state visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the United States. Narendra Modi's proposed state visit to the United States carried profound implications for both countries, encompassing diplomatic, economic, and strategic dimensions.



democratic nations with shared values and interests. Through high-level meetings and dialogues, the leaders aim to foster cooperation on various global issues, including climate change, regional security, and counterterrorism. The state visit also serves as a platform for India to engage with other key global players. As India seeks a larger role in international forums, such as the United Nations Security Council, the visit offered a chance to garner support and build alliances.

The visit provides an opportunity to deepen the diplomatic ties between India and the United States, two

explore opportunities for investment in sectors such as technology, defence, and renewable energy.

On the technology Transfer and Innovation front, major collaboration in the fields of technology and innovation emerged as a key focus during the visit. India's burgeoning start-up ecosystem and the United States' leadership in technological advancements created possibilities for joint ventures, research partnerships, and knowledge sharing.

Finally, the proposed visit will have Strategic Implications for Defense Cooperation. The visit emphasized defence collaboration between India and the United States, with discussions on defence procurement, joint military exercises, and technology sharing. Strengthening defence ties would enhance the security of both nations and contribute to regional stability.

The visit will address the growing expansionist intent of China hence the Indo-Pacific Cooperation will become extremely relevant. The state visit highlighted the converging interests of



PRASHANT TEWARI

India and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. Closer cooperation in this domain, encompassing maritime security, freedom of navigation, and regional connectivity, aimed to balance China's growing influence in the region.

The role of the US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti has been vital in facilitating PM Modi's state visit to the US from 22 June 2023. The fact that immediately after his appointment as the US Ambassador to India, the proposed state visit of the Indian head of state is planned is a testimony to the US Ambassador's relevance in the entire episode. The proposed Indian Prime Minister's state visit is happening since the last Indian head of state visit of Dr Manmohan Singh on 24 Nov 2009.

The ambassador quickly started acting as a bridge between the two governments, facilitating direct communication and fostering understanding and ensuring fruitful discussions on a range of bilateral and global issues. (The writer is Editor-in-Chief Opinion Express & Columnist with The Pioneer)

India is a 'Union', not a federation



PRAFUL GORADIA

To create a federation on the lines of the USA was never intended, it would have been grave mistake had we done so

Several political figures and writers, including some foreign ones, have alleged that India is on a path of "anti-federalism" or centralism. However, they have coolly overlooked that over the last nine years, not once has Article 356 been used by New Delhi. Earlier, it was used 56 times when state governments were dismissed when the Centre decided that a particular state government was unfit to govern, or actually if it did not like particular state governments. Article 356 states: (1) if the President, on receipt of a report from the Governor of a State or otherwise, is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the Government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, the President may be Proclamation (a) assume to himself all or any of the functions of the Government of the State and all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor or anybody or authority in the State other than the Legislature of the State; (b) declare that the powers of the Legislature of the State shall be exercisable by or under the authority of Parliament. (c) make such incidental and consequential provisions as appear to the President to be necessary or desirable for giving effect to the objects of the Proclamation. Including provisions for suspending in whole or in part the operation of any provisions of this Constitution relating to anybody or authority in the State.

One prime minister used Article 356 to dismiss state governments 49 times! Not a single voice then alleged that federalism was in danger, or forced centralism. Far from any outcry about democracy or federalism being imperiled, the self-appointed watchdogs of democracy, namely the media, academia and intelligentsia chose to remain silent or look the other way during the rampant assault on state governments for not toeing the line of the central dispensation of those times. Worse is the fact that segments of the media were complicit in the misuse of political authority. Moreover, those parties that cry



foul about "democracy in danger" are little more than family fiefs who have kept even the pretence of democracy out of their parties.

The Constitution beings with the declaration: "India is a Union of States". There is no mention of the word "federal". This may have been because the provinces were already present at Independence. This was unlike the USA, where new states kept joining. Initially, there were only 13 American states while there are 50 today. No new states have joined the Indian Union since the Constitution was adopted. The Union has the right to create new states and alter existing ones.

We must not forget that on the eve of the Constitution being written, our country lost a third of its land area to Pakistan. The Muslim League believed that Hindus and Muslims cannot co-exist amicably in the same country. Nevertheless, India continued to be multi-religious as well as multilingual. The country's first law minister Dr B.R. Ambedkar believed the possibility of some state or the other wishing to secede in the future could not be dismissed. The Communist Party of India, in line with the Soviet



WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT ON THE EVE OF THE CONSTITUTION BEING WRITTEN, OUR COUNTRY LOST A THIRD OF ITS LAND AREA TO PAKISTAN

Constitution, which gave all its republics the right to secede, wanted such a model India. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) led by Thiru Annadurai had claimed the right to secession in its party constitution. In the late 1940s, there was a violent secessionist agitation in the Telangana region. In 1947, the diwan of Travancore Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar declared that the princely state would remain independent. The Maharaja of Jodhpur was ready to put his signature on a blank letter signed by Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah who wanted Jodhpur to join Pakistan. Sardar Patel intervened and persuaded Jodhpur to join the Indian Union. The Nizam of Hyderabad was determined to remain independent until he was forced to capitulate to the Indian army in September 1948. The Nawab of Junagadh had accepted to Pakistan when the people of the state forcibly overturned his decision. Several other states in Saurashtra were financing a highwayman called Bhupat to lead a revolt against New Delhi. The J&K problem is too well-known to narrate here. The Northeast would be on the boil from time to

time. This was the environment in the midst of which the Constitution of India was drafted and adopted.

To create a federation on the lines of the USA was not only unjustified by the birth of the Republic of India, it would have been unwise had we done so. Pakistan did not follow any constitutional niceties and yet broke apart in 1971. The emotional cause for its dismemberment was the issue of a national language. The eastern wing of Bengal felt offended that its language was not considered for the status of an alternative national language. On the other hand, Urdu, which is not the language of any of Pakistan's constituents, was given the honour of being the sole national language. Pakistan has ethnically cleaned out most of its religious minorities, while India has protected them within its territory. India therefore, had to have a constitution that could enable Delhi to have the luxury of being multi-religious and multilingual and yet remaining united.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

VICTIMISED AGAIN

Sir — When our rulers, our leaders, and teachers give speeches to their followers & students on law and constitution, they say that the Indian constitution and law look at everyone equally. But does this happen in real life? Does this country not discriminate between the common man and the special men, while following the law? If other than Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, an FIR filed against any common man, leave aside these well-known wrestlers, if a common woman had also filed an FIR for sexual harassment, would that man not have been arrested? Would the government and ministers have called that common woman and talked to her? Never. The law of this country is like a cobweb that is crossed by distinguishing the heavyweight and VIP classes. But the person who is normal and light gets trapped in that cobweb. That's why former Supreme Court judge Justice Madan B. Lokur criticized the Delhi Police for its handling of the cases registered against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and the treatment meted out to the protesting wrestlers. Participating in a panel discussion on 'The Wrestlers' Struggle: Accountability of Institutions', Justice Lokur on Tuesday said the victims have been "victimized again" as the wrestlers are still waiting for justice. It becomes clear from this that we are the biggest democracy only in books, in real life our system is worse than monarchy.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

WELL DONE DJOKOVIC!

Sir — Many congratulations to Novak Djokovic for creating tennis history at Roland Garros by winning a record 23rd Grand Slam title. With this win, Djokovic went past his rival Rafael Nadal's tally of 22 Slam wins and has reinforced the claim as the "GOAT" in tennis. The record-breaking French Open win serves as yet another feather in Djokovic's cap and is solid proof that at 36, the Serbian great still has in him what it takes to win a Major. Djokovic has now won three French Open titles and is the first player to win each

Cow vigilantes arrested



As per a report In a shocking incident, at least six cow vigilantes have been arrested by the Igatpuri Police for allegedly lynching a Thane man to death and injuring another, on suspicion of cattle smuggling, on Wednesday. The alleged lynching that took place last week came to light after the police recovered the body of the victim, identified as Lukman Sulaiman Ansari (25) of Padgha in Thane district, on Saturday (June 10). Ansari's body was found dumped in a 150-metre-deep gorge in the Ghatandevi area. The police launched a probe immediately, Nashik (Rural) Superintendent of Police, Shahaji Umap, told media persons. It was on Thursday (June 8) when Ansari along with his friends Atiq Paddi

and Aqueel Gavandi purchased a bullock, two cows and a calf for around Rs 18,000 from a farmer-woman in Shahapur and were transporting the same in an LMV tempo to Padgha. En route, they were intercepted by over 15 so-called cow-vigilantes, who came in three cars and motorcycles, near Shahapur. They attempted to extort money from Ansari and his friends, but when refused, they took over the tempo, 'rescued' the four bovines and drove the vehicle to Ghatandevi. They stopped the tempo at an isolated spot near the hilly areas and started brutally assaulting the trio with sticks and iron rods. While Paddi and Gavandi managed to escape, Ansari bore the brunt of the attack. His autopsy revealed death due to severe head injuries, said the investigators. "After recording the complaint of the injured duo, the police launched a manhunt and arrested six accused persons, who have been remanded to police custody for seven days," Senior Inspector at Igatpuri police station, Vasant Pathwe, told.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Grand Slam at least three times. With an astonishing 65 Grand Slam titles collectively, Federer-Nadal-Djokovic, the triad of tennis legends, will go down in the history of tennis as not only the best players of their generation but possibly the best of all time.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

DEMISE OF SILVIO BERLUSCONI

Sir — With the demise of Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, former P.M. Of Italy an era of fun, frolic and glamour has come to an end. Assuming charge of Office as P.M. in 1994, few could match his character tainted with countless allegations of corruption, sex scandals, narcissism and salaciousness. He navigated the complex political panorama with his carefully crafted personality, mass appeal and brazen disregard for the laws of the land and changing them whenever it suited him most to evade punishment. To achieve his ends he often treaded

between the imperious and the absurd. A real state developer, one of the forerunners of commercial television in Italy which can be equated with present-day social media, he always captured the media limelight. Despite all this, he was instrumental in not just transforming the political ecosystem but also preparing the groundwork for the rise of the right-wing. Georgia Meloni. Whether he will be remembered for different shades of personality traits and peculiar nature or despised by many for his wrongdoings, there is little doubt that he will remain a colourful personality in the realm of world politics. He had the rare distinction of remaining a dominant figure in the post-war politics of Italy notwithstanding his involvement in multiple scandals and the infamous Binge Binge.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

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FIRST COLUMN

PM'S HISTORIC US STATE VISIT

It would be a big opportunity to upgrade India-US bilateral ties



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

A historic one-of-its-kind state visit is slated for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he lands on the East Coast of the United States next week. The rush hour traffic of high profile leaders from both countries crisscrossing Washington and New Delhi to iron out a meaningful outcome document, the choice of venues during Mr Modi's visit to the US and the number of events being planned, including many for the first time, suggest that America is walking the extra mile to pull India into close friends' club. This is a departure from the cold war-infused reluctance of having warm ties, which India and the US have witnessed for nearly 4 decades.

The oldest democracy and the largest democracy chose partners on either side of the cold war aisle as trusted, till things started moving a decade and a half back. The US shed its reluctance of allowing India into the exclusive nuclear group, thereby providing access to high-end technology, Delhi around the same time had started realising the benefits of a free economy and therefore, the need to shed its old socialist ideological alliances. The 15-year journey has been, dotted with milestones each upgrading the bilateral relationship.

In the run-up to the state visit, with a promise of being the most significant and full of meaningful business outcomes, Secretary of State, US, Antony J Blinken while addressing the Idea of India summit commented "We are here almost literally on the eve of what we believe will be a historic state visit by Prime Minister Modi - one that will further solidify what President Biden has called the 'defining relationship' of the 21st century." He went on to highlight that the bipartisan approach to India's relationship has been consistent during the last years of the Clinton administration, through the Bush administration, Obama administration, and Trump administration, with an extra push coming in from the ongo-



ing Biden administration.

The aim is to bring India as a key player and close friend of the USA in the overall geo-political strategy with a sharp focus on the Indo-Pacific, where China is a growing threat to both nations, which was read out clearly in the Secretary of State's speech. He said "We see the importance of the partnership in a shared commitment to addressing regional and global challenges - promoting health security, working with our Quad partners to build a free, open, secure, prosperous Indo-Pacific where people, where goods, where ideas can travel freely and rules are applied fairly. I have witnessed India's constructive leadership on these issues up close these last two and a half years, and I see it in their ambitious agenda at this year's G20; in our new I2U2 group with India, with Israel, with the UAE, the United States; and in probably more than a dozen meetings that I've had with my counterpart, my colleague, my friend, Foreign Minister Jaishankar."

The emphasis on economic ties marks a new chapter for the bilateral where the US values India as an important economic ally, which over time could prove to be one the most crucial partnerships. Statistics like \$191 bn of trade between the US and India last year, robust investment by American companies in India and vice versa creating millions of job opportunities spanning from Kolkata to North Carolina and beyond, are all set to get a leg up, with the upcoming state visit.

The preparatory meetings by Defence Secretary US, National Security Advisor US, a visit by Finance Minister, India, Railways IT and Communications Minister, External Affairs Minister India and several high-level officials from India visiting the US in the recent past are sure to push the numbers higher. The industry stakeholders are cheering for a \$500 billion bilateral trade which will further create jobs in both countries. All eyes are now on Mr Modi in New York and Washington, next week.

The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

Need to rework the democratic process

All political parties must learn to adhere to the best practices of parliamentary protocol and work for the welfare of the people in tandem



VK BAHUGUNA



We are in the 75th year of independence and have grown from 30 crore in 1947 to 142 crore in 2023. People are happy that the country has got a new swanky Parliament building. Our generation who were born after independence is particularly lucky that we have not seen the days when our parents and forefathers were ruled by foreign powers, faced severe hardships and who were longing for freedom and a bright future for their children. Much water has flown in river Ganga since the midnight of 14th August 1947 when the erudite Jawaharlal Lal Nehru gave the historic famous "Tryst with Destiny speech" one of the best speeches ever given by Pandit Nehru in the Constitution Assembly igniting the fury of hope for a bright future for the people and the country. The Constitution Assembly enacted the Constitution of India and adopted it on 26th January 1950 and thus India that is Bharat became a Republic and our journey of modern democracy started in 1937 and took shape on firm footings. Ever since the British initiated some semblance of limited democratic self-rule in provinces, we have had a tumultuous start with a democratic electoral system after the 1935 Government of India Act.

Now the time has come to assess the type of Democracy we Indians are following in our country so that if needed a course correction can be done. The word Democracy is a Greek word "demos" meaning people "Kratos" meaning power when it was established in the 5th century BC in Athens under 'Cleisthenes' - the father of Athenian democracy. It is in simple words 'the power of the people' and very well defined by the former President of America Abraham Lincoln "Of the people, by the people and for the people". In modern world the two main principle of democracy are the concept of equality and the individual autonomy. However, Indian system of Democracy was very well described by the Vedas very beautifully in



THE WORD DEMOCRACY IS THE GREEK WORD "DEMOS" MEANING PEOPLE "KRATOS" MEANING POWER WHEN IT WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE 5TH CENTURY BC IN ATHENS UNDER 'CLEISTHENES' - THE FATHER OF ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

(The writer is former Director-General of ICFRE, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change)

some slokas of Rig Veda which mentions it as a thriving republican form of Government in India. There are slokas in Rig Veda which stated that there were self governing bodies in the villages' and Republican congregations. However, over the years the systems of kings and power brokers ruled the roost but even then there was a Panchayat (council of five persons) system of governance in each village and it continued in one form or the other. But during the Medieval period and thereafter village feudalism started becoming stronger and became further strong in the British period when the county's resources were exploited by the British and poverty got accentuated and compounded by many famines.

In the recent modern system, the principles of democratic government are - human dignity and protection of individual rights, liberty and freedom of choice for electing the rulers in a pluralistic multi-party system and separation of executive, legislatures and judiciary with a vibrant free press. One of the fundamentals of the success of democracy is respect for its core values and dissent. In most parts of the world, rulers profess to be democratic even those who rule through one-party rule like the communists call themselves democrats. One of the forms of democracy which India adopted is witnessed in Great Britain which is having an unwritten constitution under the monarchy. Then we have the French and American systems with their plus and minuses. In most African countries democracy falls between partial democracy to autocracy and dictatorship by misusing democratic norms.

So while assessing the Indian democracy we must look at the way we conform to the core values of Liberty, equality and fraternity in our governing system. On the positive side we have achieved a semblance of stability of governance with well-entrenched, fair and independent electoral proceedings; have ensured self-sufficiency in food grain production through the Green Revolution, increased life expectancy from 32 years in 1947 to 70 years in 2022, Eradication of Polio, Space, Nuclear and other Technologies including medical science, Gender equality, Education, Milk production through white Revolution and a robust Defence structure.

However, there are many negative fallouts of democracy that a country of immense diversity is facing and for which the people as well as the political parties are equally responsible. More than 80 per cent of politicians as well as people are not bothered about the real tenets of democracy and how to practice it. This is the only country in the world where citizenship can be obtained with fake documents and even Aadhar cards are made by procuring such documents. The reason for this is the lack of genuine commitment among the citizens, bureaucracy and political class for ensuring the national integrity and protecting its heritage. These documents obtained fraudulently are then used for getting voter identity cards.

One of the conditions for a voter's id is that the applicant should be ordinarily a resident of the locality where he wants to register as a voter. This condition is, however, never seriously examined with the results that several foreigners have become Indian cit-

izens and vote bank politics is seriously compromising the national interests. It ultimately foments social tensions and had created serious problems of security of the country and law and order-related issues. Take the example of the recent Manipur riots.

Till a few decades ago the population of Chuda Chandpur District was only sixty thousand but now it is several lakhs and unusually high due to the influx of Kuki and Naga tribes from Myanmar. The cross-border drug peddlers are one of the root causes of disturbance in Manipur and the vote bank politics have led to more and more influx of foreigners not only in Manipur but all over India. The Assam agitation was the fallout of the settlement of foreigners. In Uttarakhhand foreigners and outsiders are taking advantage of migration in the hills and settling in large numbers threatening the culture and ecology of the fragile border state.

We talk about foreign interference like George Soros's funding to destabilize the Indian government and Hinderberg publishing a report on Adani which led to the share market crash of Adani share but we must remember why only Asian and African countries are targeted by them. It is because we have chinks in our society and democracy in which we do not hesitate to take the help of outsiders to settle scores with opponents and ever since the telecast of our parliament's proceedings began that provides fodder for them to intervene in our affairs.

All political parties must ponder over and learn good things about other countries parliamentary protocols and work for the welfare of our people and make India a true world power.

Battle for OBC votes intensifies in Uttar Pradesh

As the SP and the BJP gear up for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, they want to ensure that they get the major chunk of the OBC vote

In preparation for the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections, both the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh are intensifying their efforts to gain the support of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Recognizing the significant influence of OBC voters, both parties are formulating strategies to secure their backing and consolidate their respective support bases.

The OBC category, which originated from the Mandal Commission report, consists of diverse castes and does not form a cohesive "political community." The OBCs can be classified into three groups based on caste and class criteria such as social status, income, and education. The first group includes a relative-



BISWAJEET BANERJEE

ly small number of economically prosperous OBCs who enjoy higher social standing and hold political significance. They are known as the "forward" or upper Backward Classes. The second group belongs to the middle category, primarily composed of landowners who hold influence in rural areas. They are gradually improving their socio-economic and educational status while being upwardly mobile. And the third group is referred to as the "Most Backward Classes" (MBCs) or "Extremely Backward Classes," representing those who are the most disadvantaged in terms of social status, income, and educational opportunities.

The OBCs make up a substantial 40 per cent to 45 per

cent of the state's electorate, making them a crucial target for both the SP and the BJP. The importance of this political caste can be gauged from the fact that Urban Body Elections were deferred and were held only after the Yogi government followed reservation as per the directives of the UP State Local Bodies Dedicated Backward Classes Commission.

As per the UP State Local Bodies Dedicated Backward Classes Commission's report, in 17 Nagar Nigams, OBCs account for 25.58 per cent, while in 200 nagar pikas (municipal councils) and 545 nagar panchayats (town councils), their ratio is on the higher side as the community members constituted 42.29 per cent and 49.55 per cent,

respectively. The document says that the population of OBCs is lower in bigger cities but higher in smaller towns.

These figures speak volumes about the OBCs' power in UP's political spectrum. The SP, to mobilize OBC support, has been organizing cadre training camps and undertaking Yatras aimed at rallying support for a caste-based census. Their goal is to unite all OBC groups under the party's umbrella, thus forming a formidable voting bloc. On the other hand, the BJP is taking a different approach by planning conferences and rallies that focus on establishing separate identities for each caste group. This strategy aims to prevent the consolidation of OBCs under a common backward class

grouping, as desired by the SP. In a recent rally held in Ghazipur district on June 10, the BJP sought to appropriate Maharaja Suheldev, a legendary king from Shravasti, as an OBC icon. This event was part of the BJP's broader strategy to consolidate its non-Yadav OBC vote bank.

Ghazipur was a strategic choice for the BJP's outreach to the Rajbhar community, considering that the party faced electoral challenges in the district during both the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and the 2022 Assembly polls. The Samajwadi Party is countering the BJP's efforts by planning conferences and conducting cadre training camps as part of the Lok Jagran Abhiyan. Their central demand is for a caste-based census in Uttar Pradesh,

which serves as a rallying point to mobilize all OBCs under the SP's banner.

The equation at that time was simple. Mulayam Singh Yadav's secular politics went beyond the protection of minorities and a strong stand against communalism. He genuinely considered Muslims as stakeholders in his politics. The Samajwadi Party's rise saw a significant increase in Muslim representation in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. With Yadavs supporting him, he was able to stitch the MY (Muslim-Yadav) social alliance. Besides championing the cause of the Other Backward Classes and the underprivileged class, Mulayam Singh Yadav's politics went beyond lip service to secularism and involved forg-

ing a social coalition between OBCs and Muslims at the grassroots level, fighting the inherent contradictions. This secular political moAs the SP devises its strategies to consolidate its base, it recognizes the need to address the concerns and aspirations of the OBCs while countering the BJP's appeal. Reclaiming the OBC vote bank will be a formidable task for the SP, given the BJP's sustained focus on this segment of the electorate. The ensuing battle for OBC support will shape the political landscape leading up to the 2024 elections in UP. Both parties are aware of the significant influence OBC voters hold, and their efforts to secure their support are poised to have a lasting impact on the electoral outcome.

PARTYGATE SCANDAL

'Boris misled Parliament over Covid lockdown breaches'

PTI ■ LONDON

Former British prime minister Boris Johnson deliberately and repeatedly misled Parliament when he denied knowledge of Covid-19 law-breaching parties in Downing Street, a cross-party parliamentary panel said on Thursday in its damning report into the Partygate scandal.



We have concluded above that in deliberately misleading the House Mr Johnson committed a serious contempt. The contempt was all the more serious because it was committed by the Prime Minister, the most senior member of the government," the Privileges Committee report said, in a historic admonishment of a former premier. "Although Mr Johnson's resignation as an MP

renders it impossible for a sanction of suspension to be imposed, we draw attention to the fact that before the events of Friday 9 June we had provisionally agreed to recommend a suspension long enough to engage the provisions of the Recall of MPs Act," it says, with reference to Johnson's resignation.

The committee notes that there is no precedent for a British Prime Minister having been found to have deliberately misled the House of Commons and also that Johnson misled it on an issue of the "greatest importance to the House and to the public, and did so repeatedly."

They accuse Johnson of committing further contempt in his attacks on the due parliamentary process with deprecated terms such as "witch hunt" and "kangaroo court."

"We put on record that if he had not resigned his seat, we would have recommended that he be suspended from the service of the House for 90 days for repeated contempts and for seeking to undermine the parliamentary process, by — Deliberately misleading the House; Deliberately misleading the Committee; Breaching confidence; Impugning the Committee and thereby undermining the democratic process of the House; Being complicit in the campaign of abuse and attempted intimidation of the Committee," the report concludes. In light of Johnson's resignation as an MP, the committee has recommended that he should not be granted a former member's pass — which would have allowed him limited access to Parliament, including for lunches and to see former colleagues.

Nottingham in mourning after stabbing of British Indian teen

PTI ■ LONDON

The city of Nottingham in central England is in mourning on Thursday as it prepares for a second vigil in memory of three people killed in a brutal stabbing spree, including British Indian teenage hockey star Grace O'Malley Kumar.

The 19-year-old has since been formally identified by Nottinghamshire Police as one of the victims of the attack in the early hours of Tuesday.

She was killed soon after the fatal stabbing of her friend Barnaby Webber, also 19, and the third victim, 65-year-old Ian Coates, was stabbed to death soon after on a nearby street of the Nottingham city centre.

A 31-year-old male suspect, believed to be of West African origin, remains in police custody as counter-terror officials help with the murder investigation.

"Right now, this is a city in mourning... the whole city is shocked and devastated by this



Man lays flowers on the Council House steps in Nottingham.

attack, which has killed three people and injured three — one of whom is in critical condition," Nadia Whittome, British Indian MP from Nottingham, told reporters.

"Nothing like this has happened in Nottingham, certainly not in my lifetime. But our community does have a proud history of coming together and looking after one another in times like this and I know that this time will be no different," she said. On Wednesday, the University of Nottingham held

a campus vigil in memory of their two students killed in the attack, which involved moving and tearful tributes from family, friends and fellow students.

"The love that we have out here, I just wish we had it everywhere. So, look after each other," said Dr Sanjoy Kumar, fighting back his tears for his daughter. "Grace was not just a sister to James but his best friend. He is completely heartbroken. As parents, words cannot explain our complete and utter devastation."

Man charged with murder of Hyderabad student in UK

PTI ■ LONDON

A 23-year-old man was on Thursday charged with the murder of Indian student Tejaswini Kontham and the attempted murder of her friend at a residential address in Wembley, north London. The Metropolitan Police said Keven Antonio Lourenco De Morais, previously referred to as a Brazilian national, has been remanded in police custody to appear at Uxbridge Magistrates Court in London.

Two other people, one man and a woman, arrested in connection with the murder investigation at the crime scene have now been released with no further action.

"Keven Antonio Lourenco De Morais, 23, of Neeld Crescent, Wembley was charged on Thursday, 15 June with the murder of Tejaswini Kontham and the attempted murder of a second woman," the Met Police said in a statement. On Tuesday, Met Police officers attended a flat in Neeld Crescent, Wembley, along with the London Ambulance Service and found Tejaswini and another woman, aged 28, suffering from knife injuries.

"Despite the efforts of emergency services, Tejaswini sadly died at the scene. Her family has been informed," the police said.

It led to a man-hunt for prime murder suspect De Morais, who was later arrested in the Harrow area of north London.

The second victim of the knife attack has been named locally as Akhila, also from India who remains in hospital but is said to be out of danger. The Indian National Student Association (INSA) UK issued a statement to say that she remains in a state of shock following the attack, which claimed the life of her friend. "On behalf of Indian students in the UK, we convey our sincere condolences to her family and friends and pray that her soul rests in peace," INSA UK said in a statement with reference to Tejaswini.

Man attacks 2 women in Germany killing one

Berlin (AP): A tourist died after a man attacked her and a companion near Neuschwanstein castle in southern Germany, authorities said on Wednesday. The incident near the popular tourist attraction close to the Austrian border happened on Wednesday afternoon. Prosecutors in nearby Kempenen said the two women, age 21 and 22, had met the 30-year-old suspect — who also had gone to the castle as a tourist — for the first time shortly beforehand. The attack took place near the Marienbruecke, a bridge over a gorge close to the castle that offers a famous view of Neuschwanstein, German news agency dpa reported. Authorities said the three apparently took a path to a viewpoint, where the man attacked the younger woman.

Sri Lanka's economy shrinks 11.5 per cent

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's economy shrank 11.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2023 from the previous year, government data showed on Thursday, even as the cash-strapped island nation struggles to overcome the economic crisis.

Sri Lanka is currently facing the worst economic crisis in the history of the island nation.

"The GDP for the first quarter of 2023 at the constant price has declined to Rs 3,114,187 million from Rs 3,519,400 million in the first quarter of 2022. The year-on-year GDP growth for the first quarter of the year 2023 has been reported as 11.5 per cent of negative growth rate," the statistics department said in a statement. While the agricultural sector had expanded by 0.8 per cent, the industry and service sectors had declined by

23.4 per cent and 5 per cent respectively during this quarter, it added.

In 2022, the economy had contracted by over 7 per cent as the economic difficulties forced people to take to the streets with protests across the island nations that also led to the ouster of Sri Lanka's powerful Rajapaksa family from politics.

In March, an agreement was struck with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a nearly USD 3 billion bailout pending debt restructuring with creditors.

Until the IMF facility, the island's economy was assisted by an aid package of USD 4 billion from India.

The Indian credit lines for fuel and essential imports provided relief to the public protesting against the government for its mishandling of the nation's economy.

N Korea launches 2 ballistic missiles to protest US-S Korea military drills

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea launched two short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters on Thursday, the South Korean military said, in a resumption of its weapons testing activities to protest just-ended South Korean-US live-fire drills, which it views as an invasion rehearsal.

The North Korean launch is its first since it failed in an attempt to put its first spy satellite into orbit in late May.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected the North Korean launches from its capital region on Thursday evening. It said South Korea's military boosted its surveillance posture and maintains readiness in close coordination with the United States. Japan's Defense Ministry also said it detected a possible ballistic missile fired by North Korea. Japan's Coast Guard alerted vessels in waters between



South Korea's K-2 tanks fire during a South Korea-US joint military drill at Seungjin Fire Training Field in Pocheon, South Korea on Thursday.

the Korean Peninsula and Japan and the North Pacific seas, warning them to avoid falling objects. There were no immediate reports of damage to ships or aircraft. The launch came hours after South Korean and

US troops ended a fifth round of large-scale live-fire drills near the Korean's heavily fortified border earlier Thursday.

About 30 minutes before the launch, North Korea's military also vowed an unspecified

response to its rivals' drills, which it called "provocative and irresponsible."

"Our response (to the South Korean-US drills) is inevitable," an unidentified spokesperson of the North Korean Defense Ministry said in a statement carried by state media. "Our armed forces will fully counter any form of demonstrative moves and provocation of the enemies."

Tensions have risen in past months as the pace of both North Korean weapons tests and US-South Korea military exercises has increased in tit-for-tat responses. North Korea has test-fired about 100 missiles since the start of 2022. On May 31, a North Korean long-range rocket carrying its first spy satellite crashed off the Korean Peninsula's west coast. North Korea admitted to its failure and vowed to push for a second launch.

'Stand with Trump' becomes rallying cry

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Moments after Donald Trump pleaded not guilty to federal charges that he hoarded classified documents and then conspired to obstruct an investigation about it, the Republicans in Congress had his back.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy dashed off a fundraising email decrying the "witch hunt" against the former president and urging donors to sign up and "stand with Trump."

The Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell steered clear of criticising the former president or assuring the nation justice will be impartial, refusing to engage in questions about the unprecedented indictment.

And at a public meeting in the Capitol basement, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene compared the case against Trump to the federal prosecution of people at the January 6, 2021 insurrection, suggesting in both



instances it was the Justice Department, not the defendants, under scrutiny.

The mounting legal jeopardy Trump finds himself in has quickly become a political rallying cry for the Republicans, many of whom acknowledged they had not fully read the 49-page federal indictment but are rushing to stand by the indicted former president, adopting his griev-

ances against the federal justice system as their own.

It's an unparalleled example of how Trump has transformed the Republican Party that once embraced "law and order" but is now defending, justifying and explaining away the grave charges he faces with multiple counts of violating the Espionage Act involving some of the country's most sensitive national security secrets. At the

same time, Trump is rewriting the job description of what it means to lead a major American political party. Making another run for the White House, Trump is attacking the bedrock system of US justice that is foundational to democracy and molding an emboldened generation of Republican members of Congress to follow along.

"Stand with Trump," tweeted Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, the fourth-ranking House GOP leader.

"I will be standing right next to President Trump tonight in total support," tweeted Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama before he dashed to join the former president at his private Bedminster golf club for a campaign event after the federal court hearing.

"I stand by him right now," said Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., outside the Capitol. "Ten toes down." Despite two impeachment trials, state charges of hush money pay-

ments to porn star, a pair of probes into Trump's efforts to undo the 2020 election and now the deepening federal case over his classified documents, Trump has shown an exaggerated ability to not just withstand legal scrutiny but to thrive off it.

As Trump's defenders in Congress see it, he will be rising politically, precisely because of all the investigations against him. Republicans in Congress are working strenuously to reframe the historic indictment of a former president as an unfair political persecution rather than stark federal charges of wrongdoing.

"I've been pretty clear on this all the way through: I think the country is very frustrated, when you don't feel like there's equal justice," McCarthy told reporters at the Capitol. "This president hasn't even been out of office for four years, but you're holding him to a standard you've never held anybody else to."

Slovakia's technocrat govt loses mandatory trust vote

AP ■ BRATISLAVA

Slovakia's new government of technocrats lost a mandatory confidence vote in Parliament on Thursday, just a month after taking office. President Zuzana Caputova, who swore in the 15-member Cabinet led by Prime Minister Ludovit Odor on May 15, now has to dismiss it.

At the same time, the president will ask the government to stay in office with limited powers till a new government is formed following the September 30 early election. Caputova's office later said.

The technocrat Cabinet was created with the aim to lead the country to that election, for which a date was set back in January.

Of the 136 lawmakers who were present in the 150-seat Parliament, the government

was defeated in a 34-43 vote.

Slovakia has been without a proper government since last December, when the coalition government led by Prime Minister Eduard Heger was ousted in a no-confidence vote called by the opposition, following months of political crisis.

Caputova initially asked Heger to lead a caretaker government until early elections could take place.

However, after four members of the caretaker administration gradually left their posts, Heger offered his resignation and Caputova opted for a government of technocrats.

Under Slovakian law, every government had to face a confidence vote in Parliament within 30 days.

Caputova said that in its limited time, the new govern-

ment should focus on stabilizing the current situation in the country, preparing next year's budget, and lead Slovakia to the September election.

Heger's government was a staunch supporter of Ukraine in its fight against Russian military aggression and gave the Ukrainian armed forces the arms they requested — such as 13 Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets and the S-300 air defense system.

Odor's government has been following suit but some current opposition leaders, including former populist Prime Minister Robert Fico, oppose military support for Ukraine and European Union sanctions against Russia.

Fico and his Smer-Social Democracy leftist party are the favourites to win the upcoming election, according to recent polls.

Pope joins imam in making calls for peace

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Pope Francis and a leading Sunni imam made calls for peace as the UN Security Council met Wednesday to discuss the importance of "human fraternity" and condemn the hatreds that kindle conflicts. The pope, who is in hospital recovering from abdominal surgery, sent a statement saying that a third world war is being fought "piecemeal" and with the potentially catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons "the time has come to say an emphatic 'no' to war."

Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, the 1,000-year-old seat of Sunni learning in Cairo, said in a virtual briefing that human fraternity was the key to global peace, a point he and the pope had made in a joint document released in 2019.

The UAE chose the importance of human fraternity in bringing peace as a centrepiece of its presidency of the council



this month. After the appeals by the pope and grand imam and council speeches, members adopted a resolution recognising that hate speech, racism, xenophobia, intolerance, gender discrimination and acts of extremism "can contribute to driving the outbreak, escalation and recurrence of conflict". The resolution, co-sponsored by the UAE and the United Kingdom, urges all countries and organisations to condemn these acts and work to prevent them. It was adopted unanimously even though some of the council's 15 members have been accused of some of the same actions they are condemning.

The Vatican confirmed that Archbishop Georg Gaenswein had officially ended his job as prefect of the papal household as of Feb. 28. A statement issued Thursday while Francis was in the hospital recovering from abdominal surgery said the pope had ordered Gaenswein to return to Freiburg, Germany, his diocese of origin, by July 1. While all papal secretaries usually return to their dioceses of origin following the death of the

Pope sends Benedict XVI's former aide back to Germany

Rome (AP): Pope Francis has fired the longtime aide to the late Pope Benedict XVI from his Vatican job and ordered him to return to his native Germany, the final chapter in a very public falling out that culminated with the aide's tell-all memoir that was highly critical of Francis.

The Vatican confirmed that Archbishop Georg Gaenswein had officially ended his job as prefect of the papal household as of Feb. 28. A statement issued Thursday while Francis was in the hospital recovering from abdominal surgery said the pope had ordered Gaenswein to return to Freiburg, Germany, his diocese of origin, by July 1. While all papal secretaries usually return to their dioceses of origin following the death of the

pope they served, the Vatican's announcement betrayed some of the ill-will that had developed between Francis and Gaenswein.

Francis gave Gaenswein no new assignment, and at 66, he is nearly a decade too young to retire. Speculation about Gaenswein's future had swirled following Benedict's Dec. 31 death and deepened a week later with the publication of the archbishop's memoir, "Nothing But the Truth." In the book, Gaenswein recounted his life serving Benedict. He revealed palace intrigues, settled old scores and cast Francis in a unfavourable light, puncturing the curated notion that the cohabitation of two popes, one active and one retired, had been a happy one.

Former Harvard morgue manager stole brains, skin and other body parts

AP ■ SCRANTON

A former manager at the Harvard Medical School morgue, his wife and three other people have been indicted in the theft and sale of human body parts, federal prosecutors in Pennsylvania announced on Wednesday.

Cedric Lodge, 55, of Goffstown, New Hampshire, stole dissected portions of cadavers that were donated to the school in the scheme that stretched from 2018 to early 2023, according to court documents. The body parts were taken without the school's authorities or permission, authorities said, adding that the school has cooperated with the investigation.

Lodge sometimes took the body parts — which included heads, brains, skin and bones — back to his home where he lived with his wife, Denise, 63, and some remains were sent to buyers through the mail, authorities said. Lodge also allegedly allowed buyers to come to the morgue to pick what remains they wanted to buy. Bodies donated to Harvard Medical School are used for education, teaching or research purposes. Once they are no longer needed, the cadavers are usually cremated and the ashes are returned to the donor's family or buried in a cemetery.

In a message posted on the school's website entitled "An abhorrent betrayal," deans George Daley and Edward Hundert called the matter "morally reprehensible." They said Lodge was fired May 6.

"We are appalled to learn that something so disturbing could happen on our campus — a community dedicated to healing and serving others," the deans wrote. "The reported incidents are a betrayal of

HMS and, most importantly, each of the individuals who altruistically chose to will their bodies to HMS through the Anatomical Gift Program to advance medical education and research."

The indictment charges the Lodges and three others — Katrina Maclean, 44, of Salem, Massachusetts; Joshua Taylor, 46, of West Lawn, Pennsylvania; and Mathew Lampi, 52, of East Bethel, Minnesota — with conspiracy and interstate transport of stolen goods. It was not known Wednesday if any of the defendants had a lawyer who could comment on their behalf.

According to prosecutors, the defendants were part of a nationwide network of people who bought and sold remains stolen from the school and an Arkansas mortuary. The Lodges allegedly sold remains to Maclean, Taylor, and others

in arrangements made through telephone calls and social media websites.

Taylor sometimes transported stolen remains back to Pennsylvania, authorities said, while other times the Lodges would mail remains to him and others. Maclean and Taylor resold the stolen remains for profit, authorities said.

Denise and Cedric Lodge both made their initial court appearances Wednesday in federal court in Concord, New Hampshire, and were each released on personal recognizance bail. They declined comment as they left the courthouse. Two other people have been charged in the case. Jeremy Pauley, age 41, of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, allegedly bought some remains from Candace Chapman Scott, of Little Rock, Arkansas, who allegedly stole them from a mortuary where she worked.

Pro-Khalistani activist dies in UK hospital

PTI ■ LONDON

Avtar Singh Purba alias Khandra, a prominent pro-Khalistani activist who was involved in the attack on the Indian High Commission in London, died at a hospital in the city of Birmingham on Thursday morning after a prolonged illness, a UK-based Sikh organisation said in a statement.

Sikh Federation UK, which has styled itself as one of the largest Sikh organisations based in the UK, said Avtar Singh was terminally ill with blood cancer. He was on a life support system for the last few days.

Wanted in conspiracy to kill Sukhbir Singh Badal (President of Shiromani Akali Dal-B), former Punjab DGP Smedh Singh Saini and senior advocate Rajwinder Singh Bains, Avtar Singh was allegedly involved in terrorist activities in the UK by joining the banned Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) remnants active in Britain and other countries.

Avtar Singh, who initially went to UK in 2007 on study visa but later took asylum there in 2012 and never returned since then, was linked to anti-India activities including the attack on the tricolour at the High Commission of India in London earlier this year - allegations that he had denied. His family still resides in Purana in Moga district.

"It is with the greatest sadness that we share the shocking news that the young Panthic Activist Bhai Avtar Singh Khandra (35) has passed away in a Birmingham hospital



be heading KLF outfit under code name Ranjodh Singh after the killing of erstwhile KLF chief Harmeet Singh alias PhD in Pakistan in January 2020.

He was close to militants like Jagtar Singh Tara of Khalistan Tiger Force (in incarceration in Beant Singh assassination case) and Harminder Singh Minto of KLF and Paramjit Singh Panjwar of KCF/P (both deceased).

In the last phase of his life, Avtar Singh was working in close association with UK based fugitive militant Paramjit Singh Pamma and Canada based KTF militant Hardeep Singh Nijjar who are spearheading secessionist campaign 'Referendum 2020' of banned organisation 'Sikhs For Justice'.

He was one of the persons behind turning late actor Deep Sidhu into a 'Khalistani icon' who had later denigrated the National Flag at Red Fort on January 26, 2021 during a farmers' rally in Delhi. Avtar was also working to lure Indian students and illegal immigrants in the UK to join Khalistani outfits in lieu of 'sponsorship' for political asylum. He was running Khalistani TV Channel KTV in the UK.

On Wednesday, India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) released five videos of suspects they believe were involved in the violent protest at the Indian High Commission in London by pro-Khalistani supporters. The central agency had taken over the probe after home ministry officials met UK representatives in the wake of the attack on March 19.

Chinese premier Li meets Prez of Palestine

AP ■ KALAMATA (GREECE)

Beijing (AP): Chinese Premier Li Qiang met with visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Thursday in a drive by Beijing to elevate relations and increase its overall presence in the Middle East.

Li, who took office just this spring with little foreign policy experience, called Abbas "an old friend of the Chinese people" who has made "important contributions to the promotion of China-Palestinian relations."

The meeting came a day after Abbas was greeted with full military honours by Xi Jinping, China's president and head of the ruling Communist Party. The sides then announced the formation of a "strategic partnership," paving the way to boost China's influence in the region at a time when Beijing's chief rival for global influence, the United States, is seen as withdrawing from the region following the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and complications in ties with regional power Saudi Arabia.

China, meanwhile, is seeking energy resources and markets for its military and civilian exports while also promoting its version of authoritarian government as part of joint challenge with Russia to the Western-led democratic world order.

Beijing has long maintained diplomatic ties with the Palestinian Authority, and it appointed a special envoy to meet with Israeli and Palestinian officials. But its experience in the region is mainly limited to construction, manufacturing and other economic projects.

Greece boat tragedy: Search on for hundreds feared missing

AP ■ KALAMATA (GREECE)

Rescue ships fanned out on Thursday in search of hundreds of migrants feared missing after their overcrowded boat capsized and sank as they tried to reach Europe. At least 78 people died.

Rescuers saved 104 passengers from a fishing boat that sank in deep waters off Greece's coast while trying to travel from Libya to Italy, but authorities fear that hundreds of others may have been trapped below deck.

If confirmed, that would make the tragedy one of the worst ever recorded in the central Mediterranean.

"The chances of finding (more survivors) are minimal," retired Greek coast guard admiral Nikos Spanos told state-run ERT television. The UN migration agency, known as IOM, estimated that the vessel was carrying 700 to 750 people, including at least 40 children, based on interviews with survivors.

Authorities revised the confirmed death toll from 79 to 78 following an overnight count of the bodies.

The people rescued were mostly men and included Egyptians, Syrians, Pakistanis, Afghans and Palestinians.

"The survivors are in a very difficult situation. Right now they are in shock," Erasmia Roumana, head of a United Nations Refugee Agency delegation, told The Associated Press after meeting the rescued migrants in a storage hangar in the southern port of Kalamata.

"They want to get in touch with their families to tell them they are OK, and they keep asking about the missing. Many have friends and relatives unaccounted for."

Mohamed Abdi Marwan, who spoke by phone from Kobani, a Kurdish majority town in northeastern Syria, said that five of his relatives were on the boat, including one who 14 years old. Marwan said he's heard nothing about his relatives since the vessel sank. He believes his nephew Ali Sheikh, 29, is alive, after family members spotted him in photos of survivors, but Marwan said friends are still making their way to the makeshift camp in Greece to confirm.

"Those smugglers were supposed to only have 500 on the boat and now we hear there were 750. What is this? Are they cattle or humans?"



Paramedics carry an injured survivor of a shipwreck to an ambulance at the port in Kalamata town, about 240 kilometers (150 miles) southwest of Athens

How can they do this?" Marwan said. He said that each of his relatives paid USD 6,000 for the trip.

Greece declared three days of mourning and politicians suspended campaigning for a general election on June 25. A Supreme Court prosecutor ordered an investigation into the circumstances of the deaths.

Greek authorities said that the vessel appeared to be sailing normally until shortly before it sank, and declined repeated offers of rescue, while a network of activists said they received repeated distress calls from the vessel during the same time. The Greek Coast Guard said that it was notified of the boat's presence late on Tuesday morning, and observed by helicopter that it was "sailing on a steady course" at 6 p.m. A little later, the

Greek Joint Search and Rescue reached someone on the boat by satellite phone, who repeatedly said that passengers needed food and water but wanted to continue sailing to Italy.

Merchant and ships delivered supplies and observed the ship until early Wednesday morning, when the satellite phone user reported a problem with the engine. About 40 minutes after the engine trouble was reported, according to the coast guard statement, the migrant vessel suddenly began to rock violently and then sank.

Coast guard experts believe the boat may have sunk after running out of fuel or suffering engine trouble, with movement of passengers causing it to list and ultimately capsize.

Alarm Phone, a network of activists that provides a hotline for migrants in trouble, said that the trouble began much earlier in the day. The network said it was contacted by people on the vessel asking for help shortly after 3 pm, who said "they cannot survive the night".

Around 6:20 pm, Alarm Phone wrote, migrants reported the vessel was not moving and that the captain had abandoned the ship on a small boat, according to the group. The two accounts could not immediately be reconciled.

Experts said maritime law would have required Greek authorities to attempt a rescue if the boat was unsafe, whether or not passengers requested it. Search and rescue "is not a two way contract, you don't need consent" retired Italian coast guard admiral Vittorio Alessandro told the AP.

Aus bid to stop Russia from building new embassy near Parl

Canberra (AP): Australia's House of Representatives passed legislation Thursday to prevent Russia from building a new embassy near Parliament House on security grounds.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the legislation would extinguish Russia's lease on the site based on the advice of security agencies.

"The government has received very clear security advice as to the risk presented by a new Russian presence so close to Parliament House," Albanese told reporters. "We are acting quickly to ensure the lease site does not become a formal diplomatic presence."

Albanese said Australia's government condemns Russia's "illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine."

Albanese said opposition and other lawmakers that are not aligned with the government were briefed on the legislation on Wednesday night and had agreed to pass it through both chambers Thursday.

The government holds a majority in the House but not the Senate.

"To be clear, today's decision is one taken in the national security interests of Australia, and I thank the coalition

(opposition) and cross-benchers in the House and the Senate for their cooperation in this matter," Albanese said.

Albanese did not directly answer when asked if there were also security concerns about the Chinese Embassy across a street from the Russian site. "We're dealing with this very specifically, and it's based upon very specific advice as well about the nature of the construction that's proposed for this site, about the location of this site, and about the capability that would present in terms of potential interference with activity that occurs in this Parliament House," Albanese said. The Russian Embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The government decided to act after Russia won a Federal Court case last month that prevented its eviction from the site now under construction. The lease was cancelled by local Canberra authorities on the basis of a lack of building activity since it was given the lease in the diplomatic precinct of Yarralumla in 2008.

Under the lease conditions, Russia had agreed to complete construction within three years, but the embassy remains partially built.

Chinese hackers broke into email security appliance in spying campaign

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Suspected state-backed Chinese hackers used a security hole in a popular email security appliance to break into the networks of hundreds of public and private sector organisations globally, nearly a third of them government agencies including foreign ministries, the cybersecurity firm Mandiant said on Thursday.

"This is the broadest cyber espionage campaign known to be conducted by a China-nexus threat actor since the mass exploitation of Microsoft

Exchange in early 2021," Charles Carmakal, Mandiant's chief technical officer, said in a emailed statement. That hack compromised tens of thousands of computers globally. In a blog post on Thursday, Google-owned Mandiant expressed "high confidence" that the group exploiting a software vulnerability in Barracuda Networks' Email Security Gateway was engaged in "espionage activity in support of the People's Republic of China". It said the activity began as early as October.

The hackers sent emails

containing malicious file attachments to gain access to targeted organisations' devices and data, Mandiant said.

Of those organisations, 55 per cent were from the Americas, 22 per cent from Asia Pacific and 24 per cent from Europe, the Middle East and Africa and they included foreign ministries in Southeast Asia, foreign trade offices and academic organisations in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the company said.

Mandiant said the majority impact in the Americas may partially reflect the geography of Barracuda's customer

base. Barracuda announced on June 6 that some of its email security appliances had been hacked as early as October, giving the intruders a back door into compromised networks. The hack was so severe the California company recommended fully replacing the appliances.

After discovering it in mid-May, Barracuda released containment and remediation patches but the hacking group, which Mandiant identifies as UNC4841, altered their malware to try to maintain access, Mandiant said.

The group then "coun-

tered with high frequency operations targeting a number of victims located in at least 16 different countries."

Mandiant said the targeting at both the organizational and individual account levels, focused on issues that are high policy priorities for China, particularly in the Asia Pacific region. It said the hackers searched for email accounts of people working for governments of political or strategic interest to China at the time they were participating in diplomatic meetings with other countries.

In an emailed statement on

Thursday, Barracuda said about 5 per cent of its active Email Security Gateway appliances worldwide showed evidence of potential compromise. It said it was providing replacement appliances to affected customers at no cost.

The US government has accused Beijing of being its principal cyberespionage threat, with state-backed Chinese hackers stealing data from both the private and public sector. China says the US also engages in cyberespionage against it, hacking into computers of its universities and companies.

NATO sees no change in Russia's nuclear posture

AP ■ BRUSSELS

NATO sees no sign that Russia has changed its nuclear posture, the head of the military alliance said Thursday, after President Alexander Lukashenko claimed that Belarus has already received some tactical nuclear weapons from Moscow.

In an interview on state television on Tuesday, Lukashenko brashly warned that he wouldn't hesitate to order their use if Belarus faced an act of aggression. Russian President

Vladimir Putin has said the weapons will be deployed to Belarus next month and will remain under Moscow's exclusive control. "We are, of course, closely monitoring what Russia is doing. So far, we haven't seen any changes in the nuclear posture that requires any changes in our posture," Stoltenberg told reporters before chairing a meeting of NATO defence ministers at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels. NATO's secretive nuclear defence planning group is set to meet on Friday. The meeting has long been planned

and is not a reaction to recent developments, but the alliance is concerned about Putin's threats and his decisions to pull Russia out of important arms limitation treaties. "Russia's nuclear rhetoric and messaging is reckless and dangerous," Stoltenberg said. "Russia must know that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." He noted that "Russia has invested heavily in new modern nuclear capabilities and also deployed more nuclear capabilities, including close to NATO borders, for instance, in the high north."

NZ economy dips into recession

Wellington (AP): New Zealand's economy has dipped into recession as higher interest rates take their toll, new figures released Thursday show.

Gross domestic product fell by 0.1 per cent in the March quarter, following a revised 0.7 per cent fall in the previous quarter, Statistics New Zealand said. That fulfils the nation's definition of a recession, which is at least two consecutive quarters of negative growth.

The slowdown comes after New Zealand's central bank raised its benchmark interest rate 12 straight times to 5.5 per cent as it tries to tame inflation. The rate is at its highest level

since 2008, making it more expensive for people to borrow money for homes, cars and other purchases. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand has indicated it doesn't plan to raise the rate any further for now and that its next move will be a cut.

The downturn in growth was in line with economists' expectations, and the currency was little changed, with one New Zealand dollar trading at around 62 U.S. cents.

Taken over the full year, the picture looked rosier. New Zealand's economy grew by 2.9 per cent after strong growth in the first two quarters. And with such a small dip in the March quarter, it's possible the

recession call could be reversed when the latest figures are revised next quarter.

Contributing to the drop in growth were a series of deadly weather events, including flooding in Auckland and a cyclone. "The adverse weather and resulting flooding caused significant damage and disruption, particularly across the North Island," Statistics New Zealand wrote in a release.

The biggest drivers of the downturn were business services, down 3.5 per cent, and transport, postal and warehousing, down 2.2 per cent. Going against the trend, media and telecommunications rose 2.7 per cent.

IMF raises issues with Pak budget

Islamabad (PTI): The IMF has raised several issues in Pakistan's budget for the fiscal year 2023-24, calling it a "missed opportunity" but expressed its readiness to work with the cash-strapped country to refine the budget ahead of its passage in Parliament.

The government unveiled a Rs 14.4 trillion budget for 2023-24 in the National Assembly last week as it battled to fend off a looming default due to shrinking foreign reserves. A day before its tabling, IMF Resident Representative for Pakistan, Esther Perez Ruiz, said Pakistan needed to satisfy the Washington-based lender on three counts, including on the budget for the upcoming fiscal year before its board reviews whether to release at least some of the USD 2.5 billion pending disbursement under the 2019 Extended Fund Facility (EFF) set to expire at the June end.

Two Pak journalists booked for inciting May 9 attacks

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan police have booked two journalists on charges of sedition and terrorism for their alleged involvement in the violence that engulfed the country on May 9 following the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan, a media report said on Thursday. The Aabpara police station here registered the case against anchors Sabir Shakir and Moeed Pirzada - and another individual - more than a month after the violence occurred, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The case was registered against the complaint of an unnamed citizen and includes various sections of the Pakistan Penal Code along with sections of anti-terrorism laws.

The FIR claimed that on May 9, the complainant was present at Melody Chowk, where an angry mob vandalised property, taking

instructions from Shakir, Pirzada and Syed Akbar Hussain via video messages, the report said. The complainant claimed that the persons named in the FIR incited people to commit violence and encouraged them to attack the installations of the armed forces, spread terrorism, provoke mutiny and create chaos in the country.

The case followed a similar FIR registered earlier this week where the police booked journalists Shaheen Sehba and Wajahat Saeed Khan, as well as Army officer-turned-Youtuber Adil Raja and anchorperson Syed Haider Raza Mehdi, for "abetting mutiny" and inciting people to attack military installations across the country.

Separately, global media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) urged Pakistan to immediately dismiss the "ludicrous mutiny accusations in a complaint with no credi-

bility" that an individual has brought against two journalists in the federal capital.

Although manifestly absurd, the charges could carry the death penalty, it said.

"The statements made by the two former army officers on social media video channels with those of 'rebel ex-army officers' is meant to intimidate the journalists into silence. The statement also mentioned the case of Imran Riaz Khan, a TV news anchor and political commentator who has been missing for more than a month. The US also urged Pakistan to respect democratic principles and the rule of law, noting that civilians arrested for May 9 protests in Pakistan will face military trials.

Bilawal to travel to China and Japan to boost relations

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will embark on a two-nation visit to China and Japan from June 27 to deepen bilateral cooperation. He will travel to China in the last week of June to attend the 14th Annual Meeting of the New Champions, also known as the World Economic Forum's (WEF) "Summer Davos", to be held from June 27 to June 29 in China's Tianjin Municipality, official sources told The Express Tribune newspaper on Wednesday.

Bilawal will also undertake a maiden visit to Japan in the first week of July.

Japan is a key development partner of Pakistan and the foreign minister's visit would likely further deepen the cooperation, it said. Pakistan has tried to maintain a fine balance while pursuing ties with its all-weather ally China and its rival Japan. Tokyo has old ties with Islamabad and supported the country financially.

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all, Anil Kapoor S/o Sh. Prem Prakash Kapoor R/o Flat No.178, Aravali Apartments, Alankanda, Kalkaji, New Delhi-110019 Allottee/owner of DDA SFS Flatno.17 8, First Floor (alongwith Scooter Garage), Call-Araveli Apartment, Alankanda, Kalkaji, New Delhi-110019 have applied for certified copies in DDA. The original documents i.e. Allocation Letter, Demand/Allotment Letter, Possession Letter, NOC for Water And Electricity Connect on site, Possession Slip & Other Relevant Documents of the above said flat has been lost. An F.I.R./NCR/LR No. 556756/2023 dated 15/06/2023 to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone No. 9717004075 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (Housing)-SFS or Director (H)-SFS, Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi-110023.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the general public at large that Mrs. SFS & CO. Mr. Rahul Goyal & Mrs. Khushboo R/o A-28, FF, Satyawadi Nagar, Ashok Vihar Ph-3, Delhi are availing loan from Axis Bank Finance Ltd. (SISL) in respect of Entire First Floor without roof rights (FLOOR) having area 165 Sq. Yards, Built on Freehold Property Bearing Municipal No. 889 (Old) and 1968 (New) Ward No. 18, Situated at Kucha Chelsin, Khe-Bali, Delhi-110028 said property. Mr. Rahul Goyal is the owner of said property by virtue of two Sale Deeds (I) Sale Deed dated 12/04/2022 vide Doc No. 4208, Book No. 1, Vol No. 9060, Pages No. 117-126 registered on 13/04/2022, SRO1, New Delhi/Delhi executed by Mrs. Anju Agarwal & Mrs. Seema Goyal in his favour (ii) Sale Deed dated 11/01/2023 vide Doc No. 340, Book No. 1, Vol No. 9565, Pages 31-39, SRO 1, New Delhi/Delhi executed by Mr. Mukesh Aggarwal in his favour. Further Axis Bank Finance Ltd. (SISL) is intending to create a registered/equitable mortgage over the said property in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone No. 9717004075 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (Housing)-SFS or Director (H)-SFS, Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi-110023.

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
(Established Under State Legislature Act No. 21 of 1969)
"University with Potential with Excellence" & "Category-I University" recognized by UGC
Expression of Interest (EoI)
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, invites EoI from interested banks for leasing out a space to a Bank for setting up an ATM/Lobby. Interested parties may submit their Expression of Interest (EoI) to the Registrar, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, on or before 29.06.2023 by 04:00 PM in the prescribed EoI form under sealed envelope superscribing "Expression of Interest for ATM/Lobby" by Regd. Post/Courier only. The prescribed EoI form, detailed site plan and other terms & conditions may be downloaded from the website: <http://online.gndu.ac.in>
Registrar
NA/12/17072/2023/25044 Dated CHD :- 6/15/2023

प्रधान महाप्रबन्धक, (आर) उ.प्र. राज्य औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण, ए-1/4 लखनपुर, कानपुर
अव्यक्तित्व ई-निविदा सूचना
एचए द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि प्राधिकरण के विभिन्न जनपदों में स्थित औद्योगिक क्षेत्रों में विद्युत विकार/अनुसंधान कार्य हेतु सरकारी विभागों/सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों/विनोद/प्राधिकरणों/परिचर्या/नगर निगमों में पंजीकृत फर्म/टिंकरदारों से अव्यक्तित्व ई-निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। निम्नका विवरण निम्नवत् है-
क्रमांक कार्य का नाम कार्य की लागत रु. (लाख में)
1. Providing street lights network along with AMC for three years under Atal Industrial Infrastructure Mission at I.A. Babrala (Samthar) 112.99
2. Upgradation of street light network along with AMC for three years under Atal Industrial Infrastructure Mission at I.A. Sikandrabad (Bulandshahr) 287.86
3. Upgradation of street light network along with AMC for three years under Atal Industrial Infrastructure Mission at I.A. Masuni Gulwathi Road (Hapur) 316.86
निविदा दिनांक 17.06.2023 को 11:00 बजे से दिनांक 24.06.2023 को 18:00 बजे तक अपलॉड की जा सकती है, जिसे दिनांक 26.06.2023 को 11:00 बजे या इसके पश्चात खोला जायेगा। निविदादाताओं द्वारा शपथ पत्रों की मूल प्रतियाँ निविदा खोलने के बाद 03 कार्य दिवस में पंजीकृत डाक/व्यक्तिगत रूप से कार्यालय में प्रेषित की जा सकती हैं।
नोट:- 1. निविदादाता अपनी निविदाओं में सरकारी रूप एवं की.एस.टी. सुविधा हेतु अक्षर को अलग से कोई संकेत नहीं होगा। 2. विद्युत कार्यों हेतु निविदादाताओं को निविदा अपलॉड करते समय "विद्युत सुरक्षा विभाग" उ.प्र. सरकार, लखनऊ में "क" श्रेणी, अनुसूचित साइबर-एन एल ईलैजिबिलिटी क्वालिफिकेशन का अनिवार्य प्रमाण अपलॉड करना अनिवार्य होगा, अत्यन्त निविदा को Consider नहीं किया जायेगा। निविदा सम्बन्धी विस्तृत जानकारी [website: www.onlineupsida.com](http://www.onlineupsida.com) पर स्थापित लिंक स्प्रेडशीट की [website: https://etender.up.nic.in](https://etender.up.nic.in) पर देखी जा सकती है। सौच्य प्रश्न(कु), उ.प्र. राज्य औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण, कानपुर

'India's debt burden likely to decline'

Key determinant of fiscal strength will be affordability: Moody's

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Moody's Investors Service on Thursday said the key determinant of India's fiscal strength and the credit profile will be debt affordability and projected a downward trend for the debt burden.

"As long as nominal GDP growth holds, India's debt burden will be stable or decline slightly," Moody's said.

In a report, it said India's fast-growing GDP, which is estimated to average 11 per cent in nominal terms, is a key driver of the projections of a downward trend in the country's debt burden.

"As in the past, the key

determinant of fiscal strength and the credit profile will be debt affordability and in particular the proportion of revenue absorbed by interest payments," Moody's said.

India has a relatively high level of general government debt, estimated at around 81.8 per cent of GDP for 2022-23, compared with the Baa-rated median of around 56 per cent.

The country also has a low debt affordability, in terms of general government interest payments as a percentage of revenues, which for India is estimated at 26 per cent for 2022-23, compared with the Baa median of around 8.4 per cent.



"At 26 per cent currently, it is a large proportion, which, if not further addressed via a continued broadening of the revenue base, will remain an important constraint on the government's ability to provide more support for growth and address developmental needs," Moody's added.

Moody's has a 'Baa3' sovereign credit rating on India, with stable outlook. Baa3 is the lowest investment grade rating.

On Friday, Moody's is scheduled to meet Indian government officials during which the latter is likely to make a strong pitch for a sovereign rating upgrade.



Exports dip 10.3% in May; trade deficit at 5-month high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Exports declined for the fourth-consecutive month by 10.3 per cent year-on-year to USD 34.98 billion in May, while the trade deficit widened to a five-month high of USD 22.12 billion. According to the data released by the commerce ministry on Thursday, key export sectors recording negative growth include petroleum products, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, ready-made garments of all textiles and chemicals.

Imports also declined 6.6 per cent, six-month in a row, to USD 57.1 billion against USD 61.13 billion in the same month last year, the data showed.

The trade deficit in May 2022 stood at USD 22.13 billion. The last high was in December 2022, when the gap was USD 23.89 billion. Cumulatively, exports during April-May this fiscal contracted by 11.41 per cent to USD 69.72 billion, while imports declined 10.24 per cent to USD 107 billion.

Briefing reporters on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said headwinds still continue at the global trade front as there is a "whole lot of" recession and slowdown in many countries. The fall in economic growth in certain developed markets has impacted import demand, he said, adding there is also low demand in OECD nations. However, he expressed hope that the demand will pick up in developed countries.

"We are expecting that slowdown conditions should

improve and demand should pick up," Barthwal said.

He also informed that the ministry is working on a trade strategy to promote exports.

As part of that, the Department of Commerce, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Invest India and Indian missions abroad would focus on 40 countries. These countries, including the US and European Union nations, account for 85 per cent of India's total exports.

There would be a focus on promoting exports along with catering to the needs of the domestic market, he said, adding both departments "are kind of forging an alliance in terms of promoting investments and exports and for that, both are working a trade and investment strategy".

Initially, they would be focusing on 11 countries and 8-9 commodity groups.

Under the strategy, they will also participate in some major exhibitions abroad, where teams from these departments would also go and do buyer-seller meets.

In fairs like World Food Show and World Spices Congress, there would be reverse buyer-seller meets for the industry. "So, now, there is a focused strategy to promote exports... We are bringing out the strategy... We will be using a multi-pronged strategy... We are talking about a twin strategy of export promotion and import substitution. Both industrial policy and trade policy would work in sync," he added.

DGCA: India's domestic air passenger traffic grows 15% to 132.67 lakh in May

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's domestic air passenger traffic grew 15 per cent year-on-year to 132.67 lakh passengers in May 2023, according to DGCA data.

The country's domestic air passenger traffic was 114.67 lakh passengers in the year-ago period.

Low-cost carrier IndiGo increased its market share to 61.4 per cent from 57.5 per cent during the previous month, carrying a total of 81.10 lakh passengers, as per the DGCA data released on Thursday.

Last month also saw the grounding of city-based carrier Go First.

Go First, which is currently undergoing insolvency proceedings at the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), has not flown since May 3.

All three Tata Group airlines -- Air India, AirAsia India and Vistara (which is 49 per cent owned by Singapore Airlines) -- also witnessed their

market share growing sequentially in May 2023, cornering 9.4 per cent, 7.9 per cent and 9 per cent of the total traffic pie, respectively.

The total number of passengers flown by Air India and Vistara during the month under review stood at 12.44 lakh and 11.95 lakh, respectively.

AirAsia India carried 10.41 lakh passengers in May 2023, the data showed.

The combined total of these three airlines was 34.8 lakh passengers, 26.3 per cent of the total domestic air passenger traffic in May 2023.

The market share of Akasa Air, which launched its air services in August 2022, also rose to 4.8 per cent in the previous month compared to 4 per cent in April 2023.

On punctuality parameters, Akasa Air recorded an on-time performance of 92.6 per cent, the highest among all the domestic carriers from four key metro airports in May, as per the data.

Market benchmarks halt 3-day rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure on Thursday as investors pared exposure to banking, IT and finance stocks after three sessions of gains amid the US Fed's hawkish stance on interest rates.

A weak opening in European markets and the depreciating rupee also sapped risk appetite, traders said.

After rallying for the past three days, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 310.88 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 62,917.63. During the day, it tumbled 357.43 points or 0.56 per cent to 62,871.08. The NSE Nifty declined 67.80 points or 0.36 per cent to end at 18,688.10.

"The domestic market is responding to the Fed's hawkish commentary, which suggests the possibility of 2 more rate hikes in the future this year, although they have currently



opted for a halt," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. Wipro was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack, slipping nearly 2 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, State Bank of India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC and Bajaj Finserv.

On the other hand, Nestle, Mahindra & Mahindra, ITC, HCL Technologies, Asian Paints and Maruti were among the gainers. Despite weakness in

the benchmark index, there is buying interest observed with the Nifty Mid-cap index trading at an all-time high, Nair said.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.30 per cent and smallcap index advanced 0.12 per cent.

Among the indices, bankex fell by 1.28 per cent, financial services declined by 0.92 per cent, realty (0.78 per cent), tech (0.60 per cent), IT (0.51 per cent) and metal (0.38 per cent). Healthcare, consumer discre-

tionary, auto, FMCG, capital goods and consumer durables were among the gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo ended lower, while Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the green.

Equity markets in Europe were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended mixed in the overnight trade on Wednesday. The US Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged Wednesday after having raised it 10 straight times to combat high inflation.

ONGC signs pact with IndianOil for petrochemicals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top oil and natural gas producer ONGC has signed a pact with the nation's largest oil refining and fuel marketing company Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) for exploring opportunities in the petrochemicals business.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and IOC "signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to explore downstream opportunities, especially in petrochemicals, both greenfield projects and through acquisitions," ONGC said in a tweet.

ONGC, which produces two-thirds of the nation's oil that is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel and more than half of gas that is used to make fertilisers and turned into CNG, already has two downstream petrochemical plants through subsidiaries.

As nations transition away from polluting fossil fuels to low-carbon sources of energy like hydrogen and use of electricity to power automobiles, oil companies the world over are reinventing themselves.

Crude oil, which is currently refined in refineries to produce petrol and diesel, is to be directly converted into petrochemicals that form building blocks for a range of plastics, paints, detergents and tires.

The demand for petrochemicals in India is projected to grow exponentially as the per capita consumption was much lower world average.

Last month, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri stated at a conference that the chemical market in India is projected to grow to USD 300 billion this decade from USD 178 billion.

Asset under management may cross magical number of ₹10 lakh cr by Sep: PFRDA chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The AUM under pension schemes is expected to cross the landmark figure of Rs 10 lakh crore in the first half of this fiscal, helped by regular contributions from subscribers, PFRDA Chairman Deepak Mohanty has said.

As per the latest figure, assets under management (AUM) — including National Pension Scheme (NPS), Atal Pension Yojana (APY) and NPS Lite — increased to Rs 9.58 lakh crore.

"We have reached an AUM size of about Rs 9.5 lakh crore. So, one will not be surprised that by the middle of this financial year, we could cross the magical figure of 10 lakh crore of NPS corpus," he told PTI in an interview.

It depends on so many other things like the return that the fund generates and the performance of the market, the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) chairman said.

Rupee falls 14 paise to close at 82.19 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee fell 14 paise to close at 82.19 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, pulled down by a strong greenback overseas and a negative trend in domestic equities.

Forex traders said the rupee depreciated slightly on recovery in the US dollar after the US Fed left key interest rate unchanged, but hinted more rate hikes this year.

However, FII inflows and weak crude oil prices supported the rupee at lower levels, they added.



The AUM corpus is market-to-market, so the adverse moment in the market impacts the corpus.

Out of Rs 9.58 lakh crore, he said, NPS alone has a fund size of Rs 9.29 lakh crore while the remaining Rs 28,538 crore is the corpus of APY.

In terms of numbers, Mohanty said subscribers under NPS have already crossed 10 lakh last year.

This year, he said, "We expect the number of subscribers to touch 13 lakh as this space is growing. We hope to

Customs clearance time for imports drops 11% at air cargo complex

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The average time taken for customs clearance of imports has dropped 11 per cent at air cargo complexes and 9 per cent across seaports, a CBIC study showed on Thursday.

The National Time Release Study (NTRS) 2023, presents the average cargo release time for seaports, air cargo complexes (ACCs), inland container depots (ICDs) and integrated check posts (ICPs), which account for approximately 80 per cent of bills of entry and 70 per cent of shipping bills filed in the country.

"The average import release time has continued to improve, achieving 20 per cent reduction in release time for ICDs; 11 per cent reduction for ACCs; and 9 per cent reduction for seaports in 2023 over 2022," the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) statement said.

With regard to APY, the regulator said penetration and expansion have been quite satisfactory.

"Last year, we crossed a landmark of more than one crore subscribers — to be exact 1.2 crore. And this year (2023-24), we are targeting about 1.3 crore," he said.

Open access solar capacity addition falls 37% to 518 MW in Jan-Mar: Mercom India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Open access solar capacity installations in the country fell by 37 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) to 518 megawatt (MW) in the January-March period of this year, according to Mercom India.

However, on a quarter-on-quarter (q-o-q) basis, the capacity addition was 68 per cent higher compared to 308 MW

installed in the October-December period of 2022, the research firm said in its latest report.

"In Q1 of the calendar year (CY) 2023, India added 518 MW of solar open access, an increase of over 68 per cent compared to 308 MW installed in Q4 2022. Installations were down 37 per cent y-o-y over 825 MW in Q1 2022," the 'Q1 2023

Mercom India Solar Open Access Market Report' said.

Solar power through open access is an arrangement where a power producer establishes a solar power plant to supply green energy to consumers.

As of March 2023, the country's pipeline of open access solar projects stood at 6.4 gigawatt (GW).

In Q1 2023, Karnataka

India's palm oil imports fall 15% to 4.39 lakh tonne in May

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's palm oil imports declined 14.59 per cent to 4,39,173 tonne during May this year, but there was a sharp rise in shipments of crude sunflower oil, industry body SEA said on Thursday.

India, the world's leading vegetable oil buyer, imported

5,14,022 tonne palm oils in May 2022.

However, the country's total vegetable oil imports declined marginally to 10,58,263 tonne in May this year from 10,61,416 tonne in the year-ago period.

The share of palm oil is about 59 per cent in the country's total vegetable oil imports. According to Solvent

Extractors' Association (SEA), import of palm oil products increased sharply to 5,348,396 tonne during November-May period of 2022-23 oil year due to price parity as compared to 3,739,783 tonne in the year-ago period.

"The share of palm oil increased to 59 per cent from 50 per cent, while soft oils import reduced."

SBI, LIC, two other sponsors to dilute stake in UTI Mutual Fund

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sponsors of UTI Mutual Fund, including SBI, Punjab National Bank and Life Insurance Corporation of India, have initiated the process to dilute their stake in India's oldest fund house.

According to sources, these entities have approached merchant bankers to advise on stake sales.

UTI Mutual fund is promoted by the State Bank of India (SBI), Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), Punjab National Bank (PNB) and Bank of Baroda (BoB), having a combined holding of 45.21 per cent in the paid-up capital.

US-based T Rowe Price Group Inc through its wholly-owned subsidiary T Rowe Price Global Investment Services Ltd (UK) presently holds a 23 per cent stake in UTI Asset Management Company Ltd (UTI AMC).

These sponsors diluted their stake through an initial public offering (IPO) in 2020 by selling 38,987,081 shares for Rs 2,100 crore. The entire proceeds of the offer went to all the promoters, including T Rowe Price.

BUSINESS BRIEF

MEIL'S ICOMM BAGS CONTRACT TO STRENGTHEN DEFENCE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

NEW DELHI: In what comes as a decisive push to boost the indigenous manufacturing of defence equipment and incentivize the private sector to engage in realising the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) on Thursday inked a contract with ICOMM Tele Limited for the procurement of 1,035 of 5/7.5 Ton Radio Relay Communication equipment containers.

SAAS LAUNCHES NEW PLATFORM

NEW DELHI: Chat-based CPA software-as-a-service (SaaS) startup Inkle on Wednesday launched a platform, Inkle Transfer Pricing Payments, to allow startups to make cross-border payments from the United States of America (USA) to India. The funds can be transferred within one day. The company launched the platform's beta version last month. Startups like GoBillion, Synth and 91SquareFeet have already transferred close to \$1 million using the platform.

Prannoy, Srikanth reach quarters of Indonesia Open

PTI ■ JAKARTA
Kidambi Srikanth and HS Prannoy registered straight game wins to advance to the men's singles quarterfinals but it was curtains for double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu at the Indonesia Open World Tour Super 1000 event here on Thursday.
Taking the court first, Srikanth used his vast experience to quell the challenge of Lakshya Sen 21-17 22-20 in an all-Indian second round duel.
It was a hard-fought battle between the two Indians but Srikanth bagged the crucial moments with his calmness and experience to prevail over Lakshya in the match that lasted 45 minutes.
The win ensured Srikanth's dominance over his younger compatriot as he took his head-to-head record to 3-0 over Lakshya. Seventh seed Prannoy then took just 43 minutes to get the better of Angus Ng Ka Long of Hong Kong 21-18 21-16.
However, world number 14 Sindhu made an early exit once again, losing 21-18 21-16 to her nemesis and world number 3 Tai Tzu Ying of Chinese Taipei in a women's singles second round match. Sindhu had made opening round exits in the last two events.
Tai Tzu, seeded third, has been the opponent Sindhu had struggled against the most in the international arena and it was no better here with the Chinese



Taipei shuttler enhancing her head-to-head record over the Indian to a staggering 19-5.
Sindhu and Tai Tzu's most recent meeting was at the 2023 Sudirman Cup, where the Chinese Taipei player won 21-14 18-21 21-17. With Sindhu's loss, the Indian challenge came to an end in the women's singles event. Earlier in the day, contrary to the final result it was Lakshya who started on a positive note, taking an early 4-0 lead in the opening game before Srikanth clawed his way back.
It was even-steven till 17 points, before Srikanth came out attacking and used the court to great effect to tire out his younger rival and win four straight points to pocket the first game.
The second game was no different as both shuttlers matched each other till 13 points, before Srikanth won six

sure to win the next two points and seal the affair.
Srikanth will next play Li Shi Feng of China, who upset fourth seed Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 21-19 21-14 in another second round match, while Prannoy will face third seed Kodai Naraoka of Japan in the last eight round.
Rising Indian shuttler Priyanshu Rajawat's campaign ended in pre-quarters as he went down fighting to the world No. 2 and home favourite Anthony Ginting 22-20 15-21 15-21 in one hour and three minutes.
A member of the historic Thomas Cup winning Indian team from 2022, who won his maiden World Tour title at the Orleans Masters earlier this year, Rajawat had got a walkover from Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand in the opening round.
Up against the heavy-weight, Rajawat showed a spirited fight when he bounced back from a 5-12 deficit to win the first game. But Ginting used all his experience to prevail over the 21-year-old Indian in the next two games and seal a quarterfinal berth.
Earlier, Birmingham Commonwealth Games champion and world No. 5 men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Ranikreddy and Chirag Shetty sailed past China's He Ji Ting and Zhou Hao Dong 21-17 21-15 in 46 minutes.
The Indian seventh seed will be up against top seeds Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Rian Ardianto in the quarterfinals.



Salah creates goal as Egypt win secures Cup of Nations place

AFP ■ JOHANNESBURG
Liverpool star Mohamed Salah set up the equaliser for Egypt in a 2-1 win over Guinea on Wednesday that secured a place at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations finals. Serhou Guirassy put Guinea ahead on 26 minutes in the central Moroccan city of Marrakech and substitute Mahmoud Trezeguet levelled three minutes before half-time off a Salah pass.
Former Aston Villa forward Trezeguet turned creator after 79 minutes with a cross that Mostafa Mohamed slammed past goalkeeper Ibrahima Kone in the Group D matchday five showdown.
An eventful night for Turkey-based Trezeguet ended with an added-time yellow card after he refused to be stretched from the pitch following an injury, preferring to limp off.
Salah displayed some exquisite touches as Egypt joined hosts the Ivory Coast, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia at the African showpiece from January 13.
Among the eight countries already assured of places at the 24-team tournament, only Burkina Faso has not lifted a trophy that symbolises African national team supremacy.
It was a third straight group victory of the record seventh-time Cup of Nations winners after a stunning 2-0 loss to Ethiopia on matchday two last June that cost coach Ehab Galal his job.
Defeat for Guinea leaves the second qualifying place from the group between them and Malawi, who play Ethiopia on Tuesday and the Guineans in the final round during September.
If Malawi win both matches they will finish level with Guinea on nine points and head-to-head records will determine who finishes runners-up.

Fitness celebrities and legendary bodybuilders to lex muscles at IHFF

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Fitness celebrities and legendary bodybuilders including Flax Wheeler, Kai Greene, Dennis James Vlad, Sergio Junior will, literally, flex their muscles at Pragati Maidan here as the three-day International Health, Sports and Fitness Festival (IHFF) opens on Friday.
The highlights of the festival are the 'Steadfast Nutrition Pro Show' and the 'Sheru Classic Pro Qualifiers' among India's biggest bodybuilding championships, powered by Steadfast Nutrition, a sports and wellness nutrition brand, the event organisers said. They added that the event aims to cater to diverse categories of age, capability, and strength as it draws athletes, fitness enthusiasts, businesses, and spectators from across the countries.

Bellingham paying 'homage' to Zidane with Madrid No 5 shirt

AFP ■ MADRID
New Real Madrid signing Jude Bellingham said he wanted to pay homage to club great Zinedine Zidane by wearing his number five shirt, at his presentation on Thursday in the Spanish capital.
The England international, 19, sealed his move to Madrid from Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday for 103 million euros (\$112 million) plus up to 30 percent more in bonuses, on a six-year contract.
Bellingham spoke alongside Madrid president Florentino Perez and explained why he was opting to wear the number five shirt.
Defender Antonio Rudiger currently wears the number 22, which Bellingham has preferred to date through his career, as it is the sum of shirt numbers 10, eight and four, representing his versatility in midfield and wide skill-set.
"I've said in many interviews how much I admire Zinedine Zidane, the legacy he's had at the club with this number -- I'm just trying to be Jude, but it's definitely a bit of a homage to how great he was," Bellingham told a news conference.
"The number 22 has a big meaning for me, and in my heart I'm still number 22, just with the number 5 on my back."
Bellingham said wearing Zidane's previous shirt did not mean he was trying to emulate the French midfielder maestro, who went on to win three Champions Leagues as Real Madrid's manager.
"The (Madrid) shirt itself is enough pressure... for me it's a bit of homage to a great player," said Bellingham.
"Maybe I can extend the legacy of the number, instead of trying to reach his."
Bellingham has plenty of other reference points still at the club to learn from, including veteran midfielders Luka Modric and Toni Kroos.
"The things I'll gain espe-



cially from the two older lads, Modric and Kroos, will be unbelievable, with their knowledge of the game," said Bellingham.
"I'll be like a sponge around them, trying to steal anything they've got. They'll probably get annoyed with me."
'GOOSEBUMPS'
The England international, who shone at the Qatar World Cup last winter, broke through as a 16-year-old at Birmingham City, who retired his shirt number after he moved to Dortmund in 2020 for 25 million euros.
Bellingham said he had other options on the table but quickly decided Real Madrid was his best option.
He said he wanted to stay out of his comfort zone, even though a return to England would have been an easy choice to make.
"I'd always been aware of the interest from England, that's pretty normal, but it was a bit of a surprise when my dad sat me down and told me, 12 to 15 months ago that you've had a bit of interest from Real Madrid," said the midfielder.
"I had goosebumps, my heart was close to stopping. When that manifests itself it's such an amazing feeling."
Bellingham, who turns 20 in June, was named the player of the season in the Bundesliga as he led Dortmund to the verge of the title, although they were pipped by giants Bayern Munich on the final day of the season.
The player said both learning and winning trophies was his aim at Real Madrid, and brushed off questions about his large transfer fee.
"It doesn't matter how much you come here for, the objective is the same, to help Real Madrid win trophies and keep being the biggest club in the world," said Bellingham.
"I'm a footballer, not a lawyer or an accountant, my job is to play on the pitch."



Colombo Strikers acquire Wahab Riaz, Niroshan Dickwella in auction

PNS ■ COLOMBO
The Colombo Strikers bolstered their side with several international and domestic players during the Lanka Premier League (LPL) 2023 auction after picking Pakistan pacer Wahab Riaz, Sri Lanka batter Niroshan Dickwella and others.
The experienced campaigner Iftikhar Ahmed emerged as the most expensive player for the Strikers. The Pakistan batter, who has scored 4,309 runs in T20s, was picked up for 50,000 dollars.
On the other hand, Ahmed's compatriot Wahab Riaz was acquired for 40,000 dollars. The fast bowler has taken a whopping 413 wickets in his T20 career so far.
The Strikers picked up Sri Lankan wicket keeper-batter Dickwella for 44,000 dollars. Dickwella has amassed 2,179 runs and effected 65 catches and 21 stumpings in T20s. Furthermore, the franchise also acquired Sri Lankan stars Pathum Nissanka and Lakshan Sandakan for 40,000 dollars and 30,000 dollars respectively at the LPL auction on Wednesday.
Top-order batter Nissanka has scored 2,040 runs in his T20 career while Sandakan has 83 scalps under his belt.

Croatia stun hosts Netherlands to reach Nations League final

AFP ■ ROTTERDAM (NETHERLANDS)
Bruno Petkovic and Luka Modric struck in extra time to fire Croatia into the Nations League final with a 4-2 victory over hosts the Netherlands on Wednesday. Zlatko Dalic's side, who reached the World Cup semi-finals last year, moved a step closer to earning their first ever trophy and demonstrated once again they are extra-time specialists.
Andrej Kramaric and Mario Pasalic netted in the second half after Donyell Malen sent the Dutch ahead, but Noa Lang snatched a 96th-minute equaliser to force an additional half hour. However Petkovic got away from Frenkie de Jong and drilled home from outside the box to decisively put Croatia ahead eight minutes into extra time, and Modric wrapped up the win with a penalty.
The Nations League represents one of the last chances for Croatia's elder statesmen, including Real Madrid midfielder Modric, to taste international triumph.
"It's a victory for the Croatian people, we beat the Netherlands in front of their fans, Croatia has one more medal -- it's impossible, unreal, but she deserves it," Croatia coach Dalic told his country's Nova TV.
"Nothing upset the team, they know what they are play-



Man City to face Burnley in PL opener

AFP ■ LONDON
Manchester City will kick off their bid for a record fourth straight Premier League title away to Burnley, managed by their former captain Vincent Kompany.
The fixture list released on Thursday confirmed the Treble winners will visit Turf Moor on August 11 to raise the curtain on the 2023/24 campaign.
It will be the second time Kompany, who won the title on four occasions as City skipper, will have faced his old side as a manager, with City winning 6-0 at the Etihad in the FA Cup quarter-finals in March.
Pep Guardiola's side, who won the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in 2022/23, are seeking to become the first English team to win four successive top-flight titles.
They have dominated the Premier League in recent years, winning the title in five of the past six seasons.
Premier League debutants Luton will play their first top-flight fixture since 1992 away to Roberto De Zerbi's Brighton the following day.
The other promoted side, Sheffield United, kick off with a home game against Crystal Palace.
The most eye-catching fixture of the opening weekend will be at Stamford Bridge, where Mauricio Pochettino begins life as Chelsea manager against Liverpool, with both sides looking to bounce back after disappointing campaigns.
Arsenal, who finished second in the Premier League, open at home to Nottingham Forest, while fellow Champions League qualifiers Newcastle host Aston Villa and Manchester United begin against Wolves at Old Trafford.
Ange Postecoglou's first game in charge of Tottenham will be away to Brentford.
Bournemouth host Europa Conference League winners West Ham, and Everton, looking to avoid a third straight re-

ing for, above all, Croatia. You endure everything for Croatia. "This is one of our biggest victories, to win 4-2 on their ground, we were losing, we conceded in the 96th minute. "Surely this is a victory which will go down in history." Croatia have only suffered one defeat in their last 16 matches, to World Cup winners Argentina, and quashed the Netherlands' bid to win their first competition since the 1988 European Championship.
Ronald Koeman's side finished as runners-up in the inaugural Nations League against hosts Portugal in 2019, while France triumphed in 2021.
"We fought like lions, but unfortunately it was just not good enough today," Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk told Dutch broadcaster NOS.
"It's very disappointing. We knew it would be difficult, but we actually did quite well. "We conceded two penalties, we have to be better there, it's hard to look for words now." Koeman selected Malen on the right of the attack, with exciting youngster Xavi Simons making his fourth appearance for the Netherlands on the left.
Both were involved in the opening goal, along with Liverpool forward Cody Gakpo, as the Oranje burst into life after half-an-hour. The match started sluggishly in the evening heat, both sets of players tired after a long season with the World Cup wedged in the middle.
After a tidy team move Feyenoord's Mats Wieffer, playing in his club's stadium De Kuip, fed Malen, who slotted past Dominik Livakovic -- Croatia's World Cup hero on their run to third in Qatar.

ASIA CUP TO BE HELD IN HYBRID MODEL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ending months of speculation around Asia Cup, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) on Thursday announced that the tournament will be staged in a hybrid model with four games in Pakistan and nine in Sri Lanka from August 31 to September 17.

The deadlock over the staging of the 50-over tournament was broken last week when the Jay Shah-led ACC accepted Pakistan Cricket Board's hybrid model of conducting four non-India games in Pakistan. The hybrid model was proposed as the BCCI had made it clear that it won't send its team to Pakistan due to the longstanding geo-political tensions between the two countries.

"We are delighted to announce that the Asia Cup 2023 will be held from 31st August to 17th September 2023 and will see the elite teams from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nepal, compete in a total of 13 exciting ODI matches. "The tournament will be hosted in a hybrid model with four matches being held in Pakistan, and the remaining nine matches being played in Sri Lanka," said the ACC in a statement.

The 2023 edition will feature two groups, with two teams from each group qualifying for the Super Four stage. The top-two teams from the Super Four stage will then face off in the final.

India, Pakistan and Nepal have been bracketed in one group while Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan form the other group.

The city of Lahore will host matches in Pakistan while the games to be



played in Sri Lanka will be held in Kandy and Pallekele.

The approval of the Asia Cup's schedule also means that Pakistan will travel to India for the ODI World Cup in October-November. The arch-rivals are expected to face off at the world's largest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad on October 15.

Now that the Asia Cup dates and venues have been announced, the schedule of the ODI World Cup in India will be made public soon.

It is understood that once ICC CEO Geoff Allardice and chairman Greg

Barclay visited Karachi to meet PCB chairman Najam Sethi last month, it was decided that Pakistan won't set any conditions for competing in the World Cup, provided four Asia Cup games are held in the country as they have the hosting rights.

Playing a tournament without Pakistan would have meant that the broadcasters would be giving ACC just half the amount committed for the tournament because of two assured India-Pakistan games and may be a chance of a third, if the two teams reach the final. "I am elated that our hybrid version

for the ACC Asia Cup 2023 has been accepted. This means the PCB will remain as the event host and stage matches in Pakistan with Sri Lanka as the neutral venue, which was required due to the Indian cricket team's inability to travel to Pakistan," said PCB chief Najam Sethi.

"Our passionate fans would have loved to see the India cricket team in action in Pakistan for the first time in 15 years, but we understand the BCCI's position. Like the PCB, the BCCI also requires government approval and clearance before crossing borders," he added.



We understand BCCI's position: Najam Sethi

IANS ■ LAHORE

Najam Sethi, Chair of the Management Committee of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), on Thursday said that he understands the position of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), while adding that the hybrid model was the most viable solution to host the Asia Cup 2023.

Sethi's comments came hours after the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) said the 2023 Asia Cup will be hosted by Pakistan and Sri Lanka in a hybrid model from August 31 to September 17.

It will be the first time since 2008 that matches of a multi-nation cricket tournament will be staged in Pakistan, who will be hosting the first

four matches of Asia Cup 2023, followed by Sri Lanka hosting the rest of the tournament.

"I am elated that our hybrid version for the ACC Asia Cup 2023 has been accepted. This means the PCB will remain as the event host and stage matches in Pakistan with Sri Lanka as the neutral venue, which was required due to the Indian cricket team's inability to travel to Pakistan."

Our passionate fans would have loved to see the India cricket team in action in Pakistan for the first time in 15 years, but we understand the BCCI's position. Like the PCB, the BCCI also requires government approval and clearance before crossing borders," said Sethi in a PCB statement.

The hybrid model of hosting Asia Cup came after India's decision to not travel to Pakistan due to political tensions between the two countries. A detailed schedule of Asia Cup 2023, though, has not been released yet.

"In this background, the hybrid model was the best solution and that's precisely why I advocated for it so strongly. The acceptance of the hybrid model means the event will take place as originally planned, the ACC will stay together and united, and the great game of cricket will continue to thrive and move forward in what will be interesting and exciting times for the subcontinent cricket fans in the coming 20 months," added Sethi.

We'll see a different Warner this time: Cummins

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Australian skipper Pat Cummins has expressed his confidence that David Warner will prevail over his long-time nemesis Stuart Broad and believes the opener will display a transformed version of himself during the 2023 Ashes, beginning at Edgbaston on Friday.

The English seamer proved to be Warner's nemesis, dismissing the Australian opener on seven occasions in the 10 innings during the 2019 Ashes as Warner managed just 95 runs at an average of 9.5.

England have selected their starting eleven for the Edgbaston Test on Wednesday with Broad got preferred over Mark Wood. "I don't think there'll be any surprises. They're guys we've played a lot and Davey's (War-



ner) I'm sure been thinking about Broad a lot over the last four years and if he got another chance how he is going to play against him. It didn't go Davey's way last time, but I think we'll see a different Davey this time," Cummins told WA Today.

Warner is assured his place in the side despite a lean run, managing just one score over 50 in 17 innings during the past year. However, he exhibited promising signs by scoring 43 runs under challenging conditions on the first day of the World Test Championship final against India at the Oval.

Bumrah, Shreyas could return for Asia Cup

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant, who is recuperating from injuries sustained in a serious car accident in December last year, is recovering at a faster than expected pace, which has surprised the BCCI and medical staff at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru.

A report in ESPNcricinfo says that the BCCI is attempting to fast-track Pant's rehab in order to try and get him ready for the ODI World Cup this year in October-November, while adding that the recovery process is likely to last longer.

"Pant is believed to be largely pain-free, and while skill work is still 'quite some time away', he is currently increasing his lower-body and upper-body mobility exercises under the guidance of physio S Rajnikanth, who has previously worked with several India age-group teams and has also been part of the Delhi Capitals support staff.

Rajnikanth had previously helped rehabilitate Hardik Pandya, Jasprit Bumrah and M Vijay from serious injuries. Thulasi Ram Yuvaraj, another NCA physio, has been with Pant ever since he was airlifted to Mumbai, days after the car crash," said the report.

Notably, the 25-year old Pant posted a video on his social media account on Wednesday of him climbing stairs without any support.

The report added that Pant's rehab is filled with sessions of aqua therapy, light swimming, and table tennis, while spending time conducting interactive sessions with batches of age-group cricketers — male and female — attending training camps at the NCA.

Pant, who made his international cricket debut in February 2017, was last seen in action when India sealed a 2-0 Test series victory over Bangladesh in December 2022. He has been keeping himself occupied and positive, and watched the recent



World Test Championship final with other India players doing rehab at the NCA, like Jasprit Bumrah, Shreyas Iyer and Prasadhi Krishna.

Meanwhile, the report also said NCA medical staff is optimistic about Jasprit Bumrah and Shreyas Iyer being available for the Asia Cup from August 31 to September 17.

Bumrah, who suffered a recurring back injury and has been out of action after T20Is against Australia last year, underwent a surgery in New Zealand in March.

"Bumrah is mainly doing physiotherapy but has recently started light bowling workloads, which will gradually increase," the report added.

On the other hand, Shreyas, troubled by a bulging disc in his lower back, had to be pulled out midway from the fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia in March in Ahmedabad. He underwent surgery in London in May and is now undergoing physiotherapy.



Eng ultra-attacking approach faces tough examination against Aus

IANS ■ BIRMINGHAM

The highly-successful ultra-attacking approach adopted by England ever since Ben Stokes and Brendon McCullum took over as captain and head coach in 2022 faces its toughest examination when the much-anticipated Ashes against recently-crowned World Test Championship winners Australia kick-starts at Edgbaston on Friday.

During the next six weeks that promise excitement, thrill and tension in equal measure, England, who have won 11 of 13 matches under Stokes and McCullum, will be put to a relentless Test at home to see if they can retain their style of play which has given them immense success, having not lost a series yet.

One can anticipate that the five-game series will be closer than it was in 2021/22 when Australia thrashed England 4-0 in their home. In England's bat-

ting line-up, they have the zeal and belligerence of Ben Duckett, Zak Crawley, Ollie Pope, Joe Root and captain Stokes himself. The timely return of Jonny Bairstow further boosts the explosive batting line-up.

But England have potential issues in the bowling line-up. All-rounder Moeen Ali has also come out of Test retirement and is confirmed to play as England's frontline spinner after Jack Leach was ruled out due to a lower back stress fracture. With Ali straightaway playing a Test match after two long years, there are doubts over how he will fare, especially with him averaging 65 with the ball against Australia in Tests.

There will be doubts over the fitness of James Anderson and Ollie Robinson, who will be playing Ashes after missing the Test against Ireland due to groin and ankle niggles, while Stokes' ability to bowl due to a nagging left knee issue is also under

cloud. Australia are also mulling their bowling options, with Scott Boland's five wickets in the 2023 World Test Championship Final giving him an edge over an injury-prone Josh Hazlewood, as Mitchell Starc, captain Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon give a settled look.

With the bat, Australia boasts of top three Test batters in Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, and Travis Head, though their opening pair of David Warner and Usman Khawaja needs to step up as well.

In the current cricketing era where franchise T20 leagues are mushrooming faster than the speed of light, the Ashes has always ensured that cricket fans get their share of excitement and fast-paced action from Test cricket. This time around, public imagination will be captured yet again when England's exhilarating approach will face off against the dominant mindset of Australians.

SL to take inspiration from 1996 WC: Maheesh



IANS ■ HARARE

Sri Lanka off-spinner Maheesh Theekshana has said that his side will look to take inspiration from the 1996 World Cup-winning team as they aim to qualify for the ICC Mens Cricket World Cup 2023 via the qualifying tournament starting from June 18 in Zimbabwe.

Sri Lanka must make it to be in the top two teams of the qualifying competition if they are to stand a chance of playing the ODI World Cup in India later this year and Theekshana believes it is time for a new generation to stand up and be inspired by the 1996 triumph.

"No one thought Sri Lanka would win the World Cup in 1996. So it is an inspiration, particularly the way they played as a team. We need to get all of this to our generation as well. The way Ranatunga acted as captain, there are a lot of memories there for everyone.

As a team, we have to do some things as they did in that period of time, but it's also a new generation so we have to do things differently. The way that cricket is going is so different, so I think it is our time to do our best and try and win the World Cup," Theekshana was quoted as saying by ICC.

Sri Lanka entered the qual-

ification tournament after finishing two places and 17 points behind South Africa, who took the final qualification spot from the 2020 ICC Cricket World Cup Super League. They have since moved up to ninth in the Men's ODI Team Rankings and enter the Qualifier as the highest-ranked side.

They will face Ireland, Scotland and United Arab Emirates, teams they are unbeaten against, in the group stage. But Theekshana believes it is Oman, a side Sri Lanka are yet to face in ODIs, who pose the biggest challenge for his team.

"We don't know much about them. It is not a big pressure but there is pressure there because we don't know about their strengths and weaknesses. We just have to bring our A game every time as we don't know what to expect, so we have to focus on our own game," the spinner said.

The 22-year old Theekshana became the first men's player born in the 21st century to play for Sri Lanka when he made his debut against South Africa in September 2021, taking a wicket with his first ball as his side won by 78 runs. He is itching to continue his fruitful partnership with leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga when Group B action gets underway from June 19.

Bangladesh leads Afghanistan by 370 runs on day 2

AP ■ MIRPUR

Bangladesh rebounded and extended its lead to 370 runs after bowling out Afghanistan for 146 in their one-off test on a hectic Thursday when 16 wickets fell.

Bangladesh suffered a sensational batting collapse in the morning, losing five wickets for nine runs to be bowled out for 382. Afghanistan was all out in just 39 overs, and Bangladesh chose not to enforce the follow on. It was 134-1 in its second innings by stumps on day two.

Pacer Nijatullah Masood raised Afghanistan prospects when his morning five-for was just the second by an Afghan bowler on debut.

His 5-79 was instrumental in triggering the collapse as Bangladesh added just 20 runs to its overnight total of 362-5.

A day after becoming the first Afghan to take a wicket with the first ball of his test career, Masood found swing and movement in the overcast conditions to rip through Bangladesh's batting.

Pace bowler Yamin Ahmedzai, who complemented Masood with 2-39, provided the momentum-shifting breakthrough when he had Mehidy Hasan caught by Amir Hamza at backward point with a delivery that was well outside off. Mehidy threw away his wicket for 48.

Masood then undid veteran-an Mushfiqur Rahim, who fended a short delivery to slip to be out for 47.

After their dismissals, Bangladesh crumbled in two overs. Masood complete his five-wicket haul by rattling the stumps of Shoriful Islam in the 86th over.



"For anybody to get that amount of wickets in a test match deserves recognition and he must have bowled well, hit the right areas," Afghanistan coach Jonathon Trott said of Masood.

"Admittedly, we could have batted a bit better as well, but you know, every time you get a haul of wickets in a test match you deserve to be recognized and celebrated."

The overcast conditions remained, and Bangladesh's fast bowlers used them impeccably to put Afghanistan in a tricky position. Ebadot Hossain led the home charge with 4-47 and regularly found edges that flew into gaps. He found success after left-arm pacer Shoriful Islam broke through with the wicket of opener Ibrahim Zadran for 6 in the sixth over.

Ebadot removed Abdul Malik (17) and Rahmat Shah (9) from extra bounce after setting up both with deliveries that shaped across.

"I am learning the art to set up the batters slowly," Ebadot said. "My plan worked well today and obviously the wicket was helpful. We hardly got wicket like this in Bangladesh.

"Our fast bowlers' improvement graph has been excellent over the past three years. I am not telling we grew up as an excellent bowling group but if we can continue like this, we'll be a dominating force."

Shoriful, who took 2-28, grabbed the key wicket of captain Hashmatullah Shahidi on 9, also baffling him with extra bounce.

Nasir Jamal and Afsar Zazair put up a brief resistance in a 65-run stand to take their side past 100 but the introduction of spin put a brake on them. "A few loose shots," Trott said. "Just lack of sort of game awareness and just general rustiness from not playing test match cricket or first-class cricket for a long time. These things sort of happen."