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BRIDGE LINKING UKRAINE'S MAINLAND TO CRIMEA DAMAGED

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NEW DELHI, FRIDAY JUNE 23, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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CHHETRI DEFIES AGE TO PRODUCE A MASTERCLASS
11 SPORT

DEMOCRACY IS IN INDIA'S DNA: MODI

GE Aerospace-HAL to make jet engines for IAF, NASA-ISRO's mission to Space Station in 2024, new H-1B visa rules among several pacts inked

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

As India and the US wrapped up several major defence deals on Thursday, taking the ties between the two countries to new heights, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to his critics in the USA by insisting that there is no discrimination on the basis of religion or caste in India. He stressed the country is run on the basis of the constitution and strong fundamentals of democracy, which is in its DNA.

Modi made this categorical assertion in Washington when asked about the status of religious minorities, including Muslims, during a media interaction after the summit with President Joe Biden. He also said that relations with the US are at a stage where "the sky is not the limit," as he mentioned in the joint press conference with Blinken.

"We are a democracy... India and America both have democracy in our DNA. Democracy is in our spirit, and we live it. It's written in our Constitution. So, no question of discrimination on the grounds of caste, creed, or religion arises. That is why India believes in 'sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas, sabka prayas' and walks ahead with it," Modi said when asked about steps the Government is willing to take to improve the rights of human rights.

The PM said that India and the US have "overwhelming respect" for each other because "we are democracies, and it is in the US and India's DNAs to expand democratic institutions."

When asked about religious minorities and dissent by a US reporter, Modi said, "Regardless of caste, creed, religion, gender, there's absolutely no space for discrimination." He also emphasised that resources and benefits are available to all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, or gender, adding that there is no discrimination.

Biden said he discussed the issue of human rights in a straightforward manner with Prime Minister Modi, adding that democracy is in the DNA of both countries. He went on to add, "So, I am really surprised when people say so (discrimination against minorities). India is a real democracy," he said, adding there is no space for discrimination in a democracy, and India believes in moving forward by taking everyone along.

Answering a question on the effects of climate change, Modi said, "We do not believe in the exploitation of nature. Of all the G20 countries, India is the only country that has fulfilled all the promises made during the G20 Summit. We are working to make India a green energy hub... The environment is an article of faith for us. We do not believe in the exploitation of nature."

Meanwhile, underlining some other issues discussed during the summit, the Prime Minister said that the two countries also agreed on the Artemis accord on space and remarked that "the sky is not the limit" in their relationship.

Additionally, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) have agreed to collaborate on a joint mission to the International Space Station in 2024.

The Artemis Accords, rooted in the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, provide a framework of non-binding principles to guide space exploration and utilisation in the 21st century. Led by the US, the Artemis program aims to return humans to the moon by 2025, with the ultimate objective of expanding space exploration to Mars and beyond.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during a news conference with US President Joe Biden at White House on Thursday

AP/PTI

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Modi meets US tycoons, invites Micron to boost semiconductor making in India

PM highlights India's competitive advantages

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with CEOs of prominent US companies in Washington on Thursday, where he extended an invitation to American chip maker Micron Technology to bolster semiconductor manufacturing in India. Modi highlighted India's competitive advantages across various segments of the semiconductor supply chain.

He also invited Applied Materials to invest in India for the development of process technology and advanced packaging capabilities. During his discussion with Gary E Dickerson, President and CEO of Applied Materials, Modi explored the potential of collaboration between the company and Indian academic



institutions to cultivate a skilled workforce.

In terms of semiconductor development, US companies are partnering with India to establish an ecosystem that promotes supply chain diversification. Micron Technology, with support from the Indian National Semiconductor Mission, announced an investment exceeding \$800 million.

With additional financial backing from Indian authorities, the total investment will amount to a \$2.75 billion semi-

'Pipeline of talent' needed to maintain growth: PM

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Underlining the shared priorities of the two nations, including education and workforce, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said in order to maintain the momentum of growth, a "pipeline of talent" is needed for India and the US. Modi made these comments at an event hosted by First Lady Jill Biden in Virginia late on Wednesday.

Later, US President Joe Biden and Jill hosted Prime Minister Modi for a personal dinner at the White House, signalling the warm friendship between the two countries.

Modi also met the immediate family members of President Biden.

"Prime Minister's participation in this special engage-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US First Lady Jill Biden, India's Ambassador to US Taranjit Singh Sandhu, US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti and others during the Skilling for Future event at National Science Foundation, in Washington, USA on Wednesday

PTI

ment reaffirms the warm friendship between our two countries," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a brief statement on the intimate dinner.

Taking to Twitter, Prime Minister Modi wrote, "I thank @POTUS @JoeBiden and @FLOTUS @DrBiden for

hosting me at the White House today. We had a great conversation on several subjects."

The Ministry of External Affairs said the intimate dinner was an occasion for two leaders who share close bonds of friendship to cherish special moments together.

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CAPSULE

TIHAR INMATES INJURE SELVES TO RESIST CHECK

New Delhi: Over 20 inmates of Tihar jail allegedly inflicted injuries on themselves in a bid to resist the prison staff from carrying out searches in the barracks for recovering mobile phones, officials said on Thursday.

2 TOURISTS DIE FROM HYPOXEMIA IN MANALI

Manali: Two tourists died after falling ill on the high-altitude on Manali-Leh road, a police official said on Thursday. Doctors diagnosed the cause of death in the two separate incidents as hypoxemia, a drop in oxygen level in the blood.

KEDARNATH PILGRIMS MISS PATH, RESCUED

Rudrapur: Four pilgrims from Madhya Pradesh's Indore lost their way on the way back from Kedarnath but were rescued by SDRF personnel and moved to safety, officials said here on Thursday. The pilgrims, all in their 20s, got lost along a river between Garud Ghatti and Rambara in Uttarakhand while returning late on Wednesday night from the temple, an SDRF official said.

I appointed SEC, he failed Bengal, won't OK his joining: Guv

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose refusing to endorse the joining report of newly-appointed State Election Commissioner Rajiva Sinha — for what the Raj Bhavan sources said his apparent failure to discharge his duties impartially — Bengal panchayat elections could be heading for a constitutional crisis, political circles and experts feared.

"I appointed him (Sinha) but he disappointed the people of Bengal," was what Bose said, holding the State Election Commissioner responsible for "each drop of blood" shed during the violence that erupted before or during the filing of nominations, claiming 8 lives in less than two week's time.

Bose had twice summoned Sinha, a former State Chief Secretary — known for his proximity to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her family — to the Raj Bhavan apparently to remind him of his constitutional responsibilities during pre-panchayat violence but the latter would not turn up showing preoccupations.

The Governor late on



Tuesday returned the SEC's joining report putting a question mark on his appointment in the midst of the poll process. The development came hours after the Calcutta High Court reprimanded the SEC, telling him that he should step down if he found it difficult to take orders for the deployment of Central forces in the State for the panchayat polls.

Following the 'Supreme Court and the HC orders the SEC had earlier requisitioned only 22 companies of Central forces to man more than 61,000 booths leading the Opposition parties to claim he had made mockery of the judicial orders.

The High Court rap on his knuckles came hours later with the Division Bench of Chief Justice TS Sivaganam and Justice Uday Kumar directing him to requisition more CAPF than was used in 2013 panchayat elections when 820 companies were requisitioned.

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Opp flock Patna to brainstorm anti-BJP front for 2024 battle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

Prominent Opposition leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal, Mamata Banerjee, Bhagwant Mann, and Mehbooba Mufti, arrived in Patna on Thursday evening for a high-level meeting aimed at charting a roadmap for the formation of an anti-BJP front ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

The meeting is being touted as a brainstorming session to discuss strategies and build consensus among Opposition parties. Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Kejriwal has been advocating for a discussion on the Centre's ordinance regarding control of administrative services in the national Capital. He expects the Congress to respond positively and support the AAP's stance. However, the Congress has not yet clarified its position on whether it will back the AAP when the ordinance is put to test in Parliament by the BJP-led Centre.

The possibility of an immediate walkout from the Patna meeting has been hinted at by certain sections of the AAP leadership if the Congress did



not support Kejriwal's demand. Kejriwal and Mann visited the Patna Sahib Gurudwara during their visit.

In response to the developments, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit stated that Kejriwal would not be missed at the meeting if he chooses to skip it.

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata first met with RJD chief Lalu Prasad, former Bihar CM Rabri Devi, and Bihar Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav. Later in the evening, she had a meeting with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Mamata emphasised the need for unity among Opposition parties and stated that they will fight together "like a family" to take on the NDA.

The Opposition meeting

aims to build a common ground and avoid contentious issues of leadership for the time being. Leaders from 15 parties, including several Chief Ministers, are expected to attend the deliberations.

The BJP has been capitalising on differences within the Opposition ranks and repeatedly questioning their leadership and prime ministerial face.

Continued on Page 2

Man gets ₹16L from builder for 5-year delay in flat possession



STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A Delhi-based man has received around ₹16 lakh as a delay penalty from the promoter of a residential complex project in Noida that handed over the possession of a flat to him five years after the promised deadline.

According to the Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA), the buyer had booked the flat in Mahagan Mezzaria in Sector 78 of Noida in 2017 and paid ₹1.35 crore to its promoter, NexGen Infracon.

"The promoter had promised to deliver the flat in December 2018. However, due to a delay in handing over the possession of the flat and with no resolution regarding the payment of a penalty, the buyer approached RERA in 2021," the authority said in a statement.

Continued on Page 2

Airport Express to zoom at 110 kmph; New Delhi Stn to IGIA 16 min away



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro on Thursday said the operational speed of the metro trains on the 23-km-long Airport Express Line (AEL) connecting New Delhi to Dwarka Sec-21 via IGI Airport has been increased from 100 kmph to 110 kmph from Thursday onwards.

The decision to increase the speed of the trains was taken after the Delhi Metro received the mandatory approval from the Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (CMRS), it said.

The Delhi Metro said with the increase in the operational speed to 110 kilometres per

hour, passengers can now reach Airport (T-3) from New Delhi station in just 16 minutes.

"This speed enhancement has also brought the airport much closer to the city centre Rajiv Chowk which is accessible within 15 minutes now. The total travel time from New Delhi to Dwarka Sec-21 metro station after the current increase will be around 20 minutes.

Further, the total travel time on the entire AEL will be reduced to 19 minutes only, after the maximum speed limit of 120 kmph is ultimately implemented in coming days," it said in a statement.

Continued on Page 2

5L hit, 1 dead as Assam flood situation worsens

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam deteriorated drastically on Thursday with one person losing his life and nearly five lakh people reeling under the deluge across 12 districts, an official bulletin said.

According to the daily flood report of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), one person died due to flooding in Tamulpur of Udalguri district.

This is the first official record of death on account of flood this year, an ASDMA official said.

The report said over 4,95,700 people are hit due to the floods in Baksa, Barpeta, Chirang, Darrang, Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Kamrup, Kokrajhar, Lakhimpur, Nalbari, Sonitpur and Udalguri districts.

Barpeta is the worst hit with over 3,25,600 people suffering, followed by Nalbari with more than 77,700 people and Lakhimpur with around 25,700 people suffering, it added.

Till Wednesday, nearly 1.2 lakh people were suffering from floods across 10 districts of the state.



The administration has been operating 83 relief camps in seven districts, where 14,035 persons have taken shelter, and running 79 relief distribution centres in eight districts.

Paramilitary forces, NDRF, SDRF, Fire and Emergency Services (F&ES), civil administrations, NGOs and locals have rescued 561 persons from different places. The administration has distributed 1,265 quintals of rice, dal, salt and 5,269.80 litres of mustard oil among the flood victims during the last 24 hours.

At present, 1,366 villages are under water and 14,091.90 hectares of crop areas have been damaged across Assam, the ASDMA said.

Massive erosions have been

witnessed in Sonitpur, Bongaigaon, Darrang, Dhubri, Lakhimpur, Morigaon, Nalbari, South Salmara and Udalguri, it said.

Places in Bongaigaon and Dima Hasao have reported incidents of landslides due to heavy rainfall.

Embankments, roads, bridges and other infrastructure have been damaged by flood waters in Barpeta, Sonitpur, Darrang, Nalbari, Baksa, Chirang, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Lakhimpur, Udalguri, Bongaigaon, Dhemaji and Dibrugarh.

Urban areas were inundated at many places across Barpeta, Darrang, Jorhat, Kamrup Metropolitan, and Kokrajhar districts.

J&K charting new path after Art 35-A, 370 repeal: Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Vice President of India, Jagdeep Dhankhar Thursday said that Jammu & Kashmir is charting a new path of remarkable growth and development post-abrogation of Articles 35-A and 370.

Addressing the Special Convocation Ceremony of the University of Jammu, at General Zorawar Singh Auditorium the Vice President said the region's integration into the national mainstream has paved the way for investments, development, and improved governance.

"Now we have a harmonious atmosphere in the J&K region that was never there earlier. This is the greatest homage to Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, who laid down his life for building a strong, united India. Though belatedly, we have realized his dream," Jagdeep Dhankhar said.

"Personally, for the last 20 years, I have been advocating the abrogation of Articles 35A & 370. These were temporary provisions in our Constitution but lasted for 70 years. We are happy it's not there now. The path of remarkable growth & development trajectory that J&K has charted following the abrogation of Articles 370 & 35-A is a testament to the vision of Dr



Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, who gave his life for it," the Vice President added.

Expressing his concern the Vice President said, "It is a cause of concern that some of us try to taint, tarnish, demean, and decry our institutions. We are the world's most functional democracy. In every part of the world, you will find Indian genius spearheading the corporate and institutions, making India proud and other countries respecting our talent. It is ironic that false narratives are set afloat in an orchestrated manner by forces that are inimical to this country."

He said, "No one is above the law. Stakeholders in corruption may get all their forces together to find an escape route, but the good thing is that all their escape routes have now been blocked. The message is now loud and clear. You may be anyone, with

any identity or any lineage, but you are accountable to the law. Some of us do not take this seriously. I appeal to all of you to not take it lightly. If a silent majority decides to remain silent, it will be silenced forever."

The Vice President also announced a Memorandum of Understanding between the Indian Council of World Affairs and the University of Jammu. This, he said, will facilitate greater exposure to the University in domains of culture, education and foreign affairs at a global level.

Stating that the convocation ceremony holds a significant essence in one's life, the Vice President advised the students to never be under tension or stress and never be afraid of failure. He praised the Lt Governor of J&K for steering the UT to newer heights of development.

'Dial Future', unique initiative of Raj School Education Dept



PNS ■ JAIPUR

The school education department will offer Career Counselling in all the government senior secondary schools in the state to guide the students who have passed class X and going to the next class to select subjects on the occasion of the beginning of the new academic session.

The school education department as per the intention and guidance of education minister Dr. B.D. Kalla and Minister of State for Education Zahida Khan has made a draft of a counselling programme in the government senior secondary schools in all the districts of the state from June 28 to July 5 under the 'Dial Future' initiative.

The department is busy making preparations for this programme.

HC slams Maha for delay in mobile procurement for Anganwadis



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court has upbraided the Maharashtra government and the Centres for the delay in procurement of smart mobile phones for Anganwadi workers engaged in the implementation of the Poshan Abhiyan Scheme and asked to deal with the matter on a priority basis.

Taking a strong exception to the submission made by the state government that it would take at six months for procuring 1.3 lakh Poshan Abhiyan Scheme-compatible mobile phones for Anganwadi workers in the State, a HC division bench Justices GS Patel and Neela Gokhale on Wednesday directed the Centre and the Shinde government to prioritise the matter and not leave things to the court to fix a timeline for completion of procurement.

India has ensured balance between development and conservation: Min Yadav

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has emerged as a leader in the fight against climate change and ensured a balance between development and conservation, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on Thursday.

He said India achieved the target of 40 per cent of its installed electricity generation capacity being from non-fossil energy sources nine years ahead of schedule.

As part of its updated nationally determined contributions or national plans to fight climate change, India now stands committed to achieving about 50 per cent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030.

With an installed renewable energy capacity of 175.74 Giga Watts (including large hydro), which is about 42.6 per cent of the country's total capacity (as on March 2023), India stands fourth in the world, the minister said.

"Its installed renewable energy capacity has increased by 396 per cent in the last nine years," Yadav told a press



conference where he listed the achievements of his ministry in the nine years of the Modi government.

India's installed solar energy capacity has increased 25.6 times in the last nine years, and stands at 67 GW as of March 2023.

The country's forest cover has expanded from 6.98 lakh square kilometers to 7.14 lakh square kilometers, while the mangrove cover has grown from 4,663 square kilometers to 4,992 square kilometers.

The population of tigers has risen from 2,226 to 3,167, and the number of Asiatic lions has increased from 523 to 674, the minister said, adding the leopard population has also grown from 7,090 to 12,852, and the count of one-horned rhinoceros has risen from 2,600 to 3,000.

DEMOCRACY IN...

From Page 1
The official said NASA and the ISRO are developing a strategic framework for human spaceflight cooperation this year.

In addition, NASA and ISRO have agreed to a joint mission to the International Space Station in the year 2024, said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"On advanced computing, artificial intelligence, and quantum information science, India and the United States have first established a joint Indo-US quantum coordination mechanism that will facilitate more collaboration between our industries, academia, and government," said the official.

They have also signed a new implementation arrangement on artificial intelligence, advanced wireless, and quantum technologies. The US on an Economic Development Consortium is now welcoming into its membership Indian Quantum universities and entities as well.

On advanced telecommu-

nications, the two countries are working together on 5G and 6G technologies, including Open Radio Access Network (RAN) systems. "Here we'll be announcing partnerships on Open RAN, field trials, and rollouts, including scale deployments in both countries with operators and vendors of both markets. This will involve backing from the US International Development Finance for cooperation and to promote the deployments in India," the official said.

In his joint statement with Biden, Modi said the deal signed between GE Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to produce fighter jet engines for the Indian Air Force was a "landmark agreement."

Earlier, GE Aerospace announced that it had inked a pact with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to jointly produce fighter jet engines for the Indian Air Force's Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-MK-II, Tejas. The deal is worth three billion dollars.

"The agreement includes the potential joint production of GE Aerospace's F414 engines in India, and GE Aerospace continues to work with the US government to receive the necessary export authorization for this," the US firm said in a statement in Washington.

It described the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the HAL as a "key element" in strengthening defense cooperation between India and the US. "This is a historic agreement made possible by our longstanding partnership with India and HAL," said H. Lawrence Culp Jr., Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer of GE and CEO of GE Aerospace.

The two sides also decided to open more consulates of their respective countries in each other's nations. Modi mentioned that the US will open its consulates in Bengaluru and Ahmedabad.

The US President reiterated the "overwhelming respect between the US and India" when questioned about Democrats pressuring him to raise the issue of human rights in India with PM Modi.

Man gets ₹16L from builder for 5-year delay in flat...

From Page 1

According to a RERA official, the promoter later pledged to hand over the possession of the flat to the buyer in 2021. Since the promoter did not honor the conditions of the builder-buyer agreement, the matter reached RERA for resolution, the official said.

Upon hearing the complaints, UP RERA passed an order in favour of the home buyer.

"During further proceedings for the execution of the

order, the promoter handed over the flat to the homebuyer, meeting all conditions, along with a delay penalty of around ₹16 lakh earlier this week. The satisfied home buyer has submitted a copy of the possession to the local authority," RERA said.

The official said the interest for the delay in handing over the possession of the flat was calculated based on the marginal cost of the lending rate, according to RERA rules.

According to a statement, UP RERA has so far received

requests in about 14,120 cases for compliance with orders issued by the Bench in matters related to refund and possession. Of these, around 10,470 cases have been complied with, it said.

"If a promoter is not complying with the order received from RERA regarding a consumer or complainant, the consumer should immediately inform UP RERA on the website www.Up-rera.in or www.Up-rera.in under the head 'Order Execution Request'" the statement added.

Airport Express to zoom at 110...

From Page 1

With this enhancement, the DMRC has set a new benchmark in the Indian metro sector by achieving a remarkable speed of 110 kmph and continues to hold the distinction of being one of the fastest metro systems in the country, it said.

On March 22, the Delhi Metro had increased the operational speed of metro trains from 90 KMPH to 100 KMPH on the Airport Express Line, DMRC officials said.

The speed of trains will further be increased from 110 KMPH to 120 KMPH after getting the necessary clearance subsequently, they said.

Modi meets US tycoons, invites Micron to...

From Page 1

Gary E Dickerson, after his meeting with the Prime Minister, emphasised the potential for incredible growth in India and expressed eagerness to work together for shared success.

During his engagement with H Lawrence Culp, CEO of General Electric (GE), Modi invited the company to play a larger role in India's aviation and renewable energy

sectors. Officials noted the Prime Minister's appreciation for GE's long-term commitment to manufacturing in India and discussed the potential for enhanced technology collaboration to promote manufacturing within the country.

India has been actively promoting semiconductor development and has introduced a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for

this purpose. Global companies are exploring India as an attractive investment destination for semiconductor manufacturing, positioning the country as one of the most appealing locations in Asia for electronics and semiconductors.

While the Indian semiconductor market was valued at USD 27.2 billion in 2021, it is projected to grow at a robust compound annual

growth rate (CAGR) of nearly 19 percent, reaching USD 64 billion by 2026. However, domestic chip manufacturing is still in its nascent stages.

Setting up semiconductor fabs (fabrication units) is a highly specialised, complex, and capital-intensive endeavor. Fabs require advanced technology, entail high risks, and have long gestation and payback periods.

The Prime Minister's

engagement with top US companies reflects India's determination to bolster its semiconductor manufacturing capabilities and attract investments in this critical sector.

These collaborations have the potential to enhance India's position as a key player in the global semiconductor industry, driving economic growth and technological advancement.

Opp flock Patna to brainstorm...

From Page 1

Notable leaders expected to attend the meeting include Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Kejriwal, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav, former Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray, and NCP president Sharad Pawar. The meeting is hosted by Nitish and his deputy Tejashwi.

Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin, CPI (M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, and CPI (ML) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya will also participate.

However, the Telangana-based Bharat Rashtara Samithi, the Biju Janata Dal of Odisha, and the YSR Congress Party are expected to skip the meeting. The RLD, which is in alliance with the SP, also cited prior commitments for its absence.

Mayawati criticised the participating parties, calling the meeting more about joining hands than hearts. It should be noted that she has not been invited to the Opposition meeting.

"We have invited parties that are willing to fight against the BJP in 2024 and want to be part of an anti-BJP front. Mayawati, Naveen Patnaik, K Chandrashekar Rao, and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy have not been invited, so there is no question of them skipping the meeting," clarified JD(U) leader K C Tyagi.

I appointed SEC, he...

From Page 1
Sounding unprecedented in

the history of State Election Commissions, the legal fraternity and the constitutional experts seemed to be vertically divided on the issue of Sinha's fate as the chief of the State poll panel.

According to one set of lawyers, though the SEC is a constitutional post and can only be removed through impeachment like the President, Vice President or for that matter Supreme Court and High Court judges, it could trigger an interesting debate in cases where his appointment procedure has not been completed.

"The appointment procedure is complete only when his joining is accepted by his appointing authority... till then you can at the most call him a care-taker or a man in the process of being appointed... it seems Sinha would be in trouble and all his actions may be ultra vires if the matter reaches the judiciary," said Rabindranath Bhattacharya, a constitutional expert.

'Pipeline of talent'...

From Page 1

"When friends meet! PM @narendramodi arrives at the WhiteHouse for a private engagement with @POTUS @JoeBiden, @FLOTUS @DrBiden and family. An occasion for two leaders who share close bonds of friendship to cherish special moments together," Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted earlier.

According to the White House, this evening, the president, the first lady and the prime minister also enjoyed a musical tribute to the regions of India. They were joined by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval, it said.

Earlier in the day, Modi called for focused on talent while participating in the 'Skilling For Future Event' organised by the National Science Foundation (NSF) late Wednesday and his visit to the Virginia-based agency was hosted by First Lady Jill Biden.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of our client that Mr. Ram Sunder is the owner of Plot N.20, measuring 50 sq. yards, situated in waka mouja Sarma, Tehsil & Distt.-Faridabad vide a Sale Deed dated 24.05.1988, Registration No. 3063. It has been informed that Owner has lost/misplaced some pages of Original Sale Deed dated 24.05.1988, Registration No. 3063 w.r.t. said property. All persons are hereby informed not to deal or carry out any transaction with anyone on the basis of the said missing document. If anyone has already carried out or being carried out kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS
CHANGE OF NAME.

I, Amit Kumar S/o Ved Prakash Singh R/o 84 Tej Garhi Garh Road Meerut (UP), hereby declare that in my B.Tech (CE) certificate (Roll no.-1409700020) from GCET, my Father's name had been incorrectly written as Ved Prakash. My Father's correct name is Ved Prakash Singh.

From Page 1
Sounding unprecedented in the history of State Election Commissions, the legal fraternity and the constitutional experts seemed to be vertically divided on the issue of Sinha's fate as the chief of the State poll panel.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform public in general that Kotak Mahindra bank Ltd has organized an auction in below mention respect of Vehicles. **VEHICLES FOR SALE**

1) TATA LPT407FB REG. NO. DL1LAD0748-YOM 2019 MINIMUM RESERVE PRICE-572436

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LG flags inordinate delay in Govt's hospital projects

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday dashed off a letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal flagging "inordinately delayed" hospital projects in the national Capital, alleging that the intention of the government has been only to create "publicity-supported hype" in public domain.

Sharing a list of 19 projects related to hospitals, Saxena alleged that the AAP government's claims about a revolution in the health sector are false.

Highlighting the "importance of execution over announcements", Saxena in his letter said it is starkly evident in the present case that the "intention of the government has been nothing but creation of publicity-supported hype in public domain".

"Rampant inaction on ground leads to the hype so created not getting fructified," he added. The LG further claimed that nothing big happened in the health sector despite big claims from the Delhi government. Saxena said



not only the construction work of the new hospital at Siraspur was running a year behind schedule, addition of beds in existing hospitals like Lok Nayak, Guru Gobind Singh, Dr BS Ambedkar, Rao Tula Ram and Aruna Asaf Ali was also delayed by more than three years.

"In the case of ambitious Indra Gandhi Hospital, works for which started way back in 2012-13, full completion is yet to be achieved despite 10 years having elapsed. It is unfortunate that works at the existing Bhagwan Mahavir, Aruna Asaf Ali and Deep Chand Bandhu hospitals, which were started in 2019 and were slated to be completed by 2020, remain held up with no fixed dates of completion even after three years," the LG asserted in his letter.

The LG also noted that the augmentation of beds in 17 hospitals and construction of one new hospital on time would have resulted in about 12,500 additional beds for the people of Delhi.

"The projects for many of these hospitals, announced with much fanfare way back in 2014 and 2019, with projected completion dates ranging from 2017 to 2020, if completed on time, would have come to the rescue of thousands of Delhi residents, who suffered on account of non-availability of beds during the COVID Pandemic," he said.

The LG cited media reports on the "inordinately delayed hospital projects that are running late and behind schedule by years against their stipulated time of completion".

"It is indeed a matter of grave concern for Delhi - also the National Capital of India - where even as population grows exponentially, something as basic as addition of beds and blocks to even existing hospitals is lagging behind for unfathomable reasons," the letter read. The Lt Governor noted that going by "the media

outreach undertaken by the GNCTD, the picture about public health infrastructure that emerges is one of robustness." "I am constrained to say that the situation on ground is completely to the contrary.

Not a single new hospital has come up and even in those, I would like to repeat, where incremental additions in terms of beds and buildings were announced, time and cost overruns running into years and hundreds of crores, (of rupees) seems to have become the norm of the day," he said.

"The performance of a Government or any entity is and should be determined by the actual work done by it on ground and not on the basis of Text Box: 3 of the Advertisements, Press Releases and Twitter posts that it issues. I am but, pained to say that Governments are run on well-established principles of governance and public delivery rather than propaganda posturings - something that seems to have become the norm as far as GNCTD is concerned. What is even more appalling, is the fact that the reasons for this almost criminal delay in ex-

ecution of hospital projects, as reported by the Media has been lack of funds amounting to Rs 600 crore," Saxena said.

"I fall to understand as to how a government that spent Rs.1,867.44 Cr., in advertising at DAVP rates during the corresponding period of last 05 years i.e. between 2019 to 2023 (including 02 years of severe Pandemic distress) at an average of Rs. 31.12 Cr. / month or Rs. 1.12 Cr. / day, and one that pays Rs.30 Lakh per month (Rs.1 Lakh per day) to an agency for issuing press releases alone, can hide behind the fig leaf alibi of not completing health and hospital projects due to paucity of just Rs.600 cr," reads the letter.

The Lt Governor further said that late Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit was able to achieve much more in terms of creating hospital and other infrastructure during her tenure, even as their total ad spend during 05 years of 2009-10 to 2013-14, amounted to a meagre Rs. 87.5 Cr., an average at Rs.1.45 Cr. per month as against your expenditure of Rs. 1.12 Cr. / day on advertisements.

Saxena's allegations baseless, says Saurabh

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Responding to a scathing letter by Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over "inordinately delayed" hospital projects in the national capital, Delhi health minister Saurabh Bhardwaj claimed that the LG's allegations were baseless. In a letter addressed to Chief Minister, Bhardwaj highlighting his concerns regarding LG spreading misinformation about Delhi Government's under construction hospitals.

"I have got to know about a letter dated 22.06.2023 written by Lt. Governor to you regarding the alleged delay in construction of hospitals in Delhi.

Interestingly, before you could seek any explanation from the Department of Health



this letter was given to media houses by the LG Office," Bhardwaj said. He said the allegation of LG that these hospital projects were started much before COVID are factually incorrect and misleading.

It is unfortunate that the LG, without confirming the factual history and the current status of these projects has accused that if the construction of these hospitals would have been completed and would have been functional, their beds would have been used

during Covid pandemic, Bhardwaj said. "It would have been prudent for the LG to have discussed the matter with the undersigned prior to leveling such baseless allegations which does not suit the stature of the office of Lieutenant Governor. I would have been more than happy to explain him the current status and the challenges being faced.

It is also pertinent to mention that I had called a meeting to review status of these projects on 16.06.2023 for which the meeting notice was issued on 13.06.2023. It is strange coincidence that a news was published regarding 'Hospital Projects' in newspapers on the day of meeting i.e. 16.06.2023 with all data. It is needless to say that some is doing overtime to create forums for LG to write such letters," Minister claimed.

AAP to move SC against DERC head pick: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A fresh tussle erupted between the Lieutenant Governor and the AAP Government over the appointment of former Allahabad High Court judge Umesh Kumar as the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) chairman as Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had suggested another retired judge for the post. Terming the appointment as "illegal and unconstitutional", Delhi Power Minister Atishi on Thursday said the AAP government will move the Supreme Court in the matter.

Lambasting the Atishi statement, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said, "it is shocking to see Power Minister Atishi trying to give political color and bad mouthing about the newly appointed DERC Chairman. He said the Centre is trying to break down power supply system of Delhi by appointing him. Addressing a press conference, Atishi has labelled this appointment as an absolutely unconstitutional and unlawful move

of the Modi government. Atishi further explained that "Electricity" is a transferred subject, and the Central Government is bound to act in accordance with the aid and advice of the elected state government on all matters falling under the Power Department. She highlighted that the BJP's deliberate ignorance of the elected state government's recommendation for Justice (Retd) Sangeet Lodha as DERC Chairperson is a clear violation of this principle.

She said the government had recommended the name of Justice Lodha for the post on June 21. The power minister accused the BJP of conspiring to shut down the free and 24x7 electricity scheme in Delhi.

However, it was "sidelined and former Allahabad High Court judge Umesh Kumar was appointed as the chairman by the BJP-led Centre. This has been done to 'trouble' the elected government of Delhi. In the coming days, we will approach the Supreme Court against this 'illegal' appointment," she said. The post has been vacant since January 10, when (retd) justice

Shabihul Husnain stepped down after reaching superannuation. According to Atishi, the BJP's discontent stems from the fact the AAP government, has successfully delivered the cheapest electricity rates in the country. Delhi currently boasts the lowest electricity tariffs compared to other states.

In contrast, BJP-ruled states impose the highest power tariffs, with Assam charging Rs 8.2 per unit, Uttar Pradesh charging Rs 6.5 per unit, Madhya Pradesh charging Rs 6.74 per unit, and Maharashtra charging a staggering Rs 10.38 per unit for consumers. The Power Minister further highlighted the significant impact made by the Kejriwal government in reducing electricity costs for the citizens of Delhi.

Reacting on her statement, Kapoor has said that it is regrettable that on every administrative issue the Kejriwal government behaves like a child who starts crying if his demanded toy is not given. It is regrettable that AAP government is repeating its childish behaviour on DERC Chairman's appointment too.

Dharna against temple grill removal in Mandawali

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A large group of people on Thursday gathered near a temple in East Delhi's Mandawali to protest against the removal of a grill, which was part of the temple, during an encroachment drive carried out by Public Works Department (PWD), following rumours that the authorities were demolishing the temple. According to police, the grille was removed peacefully in the heavy police presence. The drive was carried out within one-and-a-half hours.

Police said the massive protest also led to traffic congestion in the area which was later brought under control. When the authorities were carrying out the exercise, some protesters lay down on the road and raised slogans against the drive. The massive protest also led to traffic congestion in the area which was later brought under control, police said. The incident triggered a political slugfest between the AAP and the BJP. There was heavy deployment of paramilitary and police personnel in the area. Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Amrutha Guguloth said the encroachment drive by the



Police personnel and locals gather outside a temple to protest against the removal of a portion of the temple in Mandawali area of New Delhi on Thursday

Ranjan Dimri / Pioneer

PWD was scheduled to be held on Thursday. "We were intimidated about the encroachment drive by the PWD yesterday. The grille which surrounded the temple was encroaching upon the footpath and it was removed peacefully. We provided assistance to the PWD officials. The law and order situation is normal," she said.

Police said the locals who had gathered near the temple premises have now stopped the protest but are still at the spot standing on one side of the

road. The protesters raised slogans and also participated in prayers at the temple after the encroachment drive was completed, police said. An official from east Delhi district administration said that the temple was not touched.

"A grille on the footpath adjacent to the temple had been installed by some people a few months ago. This was affecting the access to the footpath. The PWD, which is the road owning agency, had requested for removing the grille. There was no proposal to

touch the temple or any of its portion. However, locals were misled into believing that the temple was being demolished which led to protests. The encroachment was removed," he added.

Meanwhile, the AAP targeted Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena over the issue, while the BJP called Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal "anti-Hindu". Atishi said she was informed by PWD officials that earlier in the year when the file to demolish these 14 religious structures had come to

the then Home Minister Manish Sisodia, through the Religious Committee, he had opposed it saying that the maps of the projects should be altered.

PWD minister Atishi said the permission for the encroachment drive was given by the Delhi LG despite opposition from the then PWD minister Manish Sisodia. Atishi took over as PWD minister after Sisodia was arrested for his alleged involvement in the Delhi excise policy case.

In a letter to LG, Atishi urged him to withdraw "his" decision to demolish 14 religious structures. "People's faith is attached to temples and other religious structures.

That is why I urge you to withdraw this decision of demolishing 11 temples and three mazars so that the religious feelings of people are not hurt," the Public Works Department Minister wrote in her letter to the LG.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said, "Not only BJP workers were opposing (the removal of portion of temple), but some of them including two BJP councillors also got injured. This action exposes (Delhi CM) Arvind Kejriwal's anti-Hindu face."

20 Tihar inmates hurt self during searches

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Over 20 inmates of Tihar jail allegedly inflicted injuries on themselves in a bid to desist the prison staff from carrying out searches in the barracks for recovering mobile phones.

The incident took place on Wednesday in one of the wards of central jail number 8/9, the same jail where gangster Tillu Tajpuriya was killed allegedly by four members of the rival Gogi gang on May 2.

Four of the inmates with injuries were referred to DDU hospital. According to the officials, a search was conducted around 5.30 pm on Wednesday on the basis of information

about usage of mobile phones in that particular ward which resulted in recovery of one keypad phone and one improvised weapon.

Subsequently, those monitoring the jail CCTV control room noticed unusual movement of inmates in the barracks from where the recovery was made.

Further inquiry was conducted and inmates were questioned, which resulted in recovery of one SIM card and an improvised mobile charger, a senior jail official said.

During questioning, another inmate admitted of possessing a phone which he was asked to hand over.

DU asks students not to join fake WhatsApp groups

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The University of Delhi's School of Open Learning has cautioned students against subscribing to "unauthorised" YouTube channels and joining unofficial WhatsApp groups, claiming that they are spreading fake news.

According to a statement from the Krantikari Yuva Sangathan (KYS), on June 3, an event organised to distribute degrees to a limited number of students graduating from the varsity was called off by the SOL as scores of students gathered at the venue believing that all of them will be conferred with a degree.

Payal Mago, Director of Campus of Open Learning, said an advisory has been issued after chaos erupted at the SOL centre as a number of students, including those of previous years, gathered to collect their degrees even though only a limited number of students were called. "We had



to distribute 75,000 degrees during the fair. The degrees were being distributed on an appointment basis for which students were asked to fill a google form days before the event. And we had decided to distribute the degrees in batches," said Mago.

"However, some Youtube channels and Whatsapp group spread false information that all, including the previous-year students, can turn up to collect their

degrees. We somehow managed the situation," she added. SOL said, "All concerned may please note that the distribution of degrees for passing out students of 2022 of SOL through the 'Degree Fair' scheduled on June 3 and 4 has been stopped with immediate effect due to unavoidable circumstances."

The notification further said, "The degrees will now be sent by post to the addresses of the students shortly." In a note addressed to its present and former students, SOL accused some YouTubers of gathering information from its official website, adding that after reframing that information, the social media influencers posted them on their channels and other groups in the "wrong manner".

The SOL has even posted a list of such Youtube channels with some of them being Ameen info, SOL updates, College Updates, Struggler Sachin, Prince Aggarwal, SOL Talks and Sarkari Results.

Ex-pharmacist arrested for storing illegally banned 36K bottles of cough syrup

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A former pharmacist was arrested for allegedly storing more than 36,000 bottles of banned codeine-based cough syrup in a warehouse at Azadpur, police said on Thursday. Cough syrups with an ingredient of codeine phosphate have an intoxicating effect on nerves and they are widely abused due to easy availability at pharmacies. The government has banned codeine-based syrups.

The drug license of the accused was cancelled twice in the past due to irregularities, officials said, adding that the grey market value of the seized syrup is around Rs 1 crore.

On June 16, information was received that a huge consignment of psychotropic substances was lying in a warehouse inside Aradhana Bhawan, Azadpur, police said. A raid was conducted and 36,238 bottles of 'Byerex' syrup, illegally procured and stored in the warehouse, were seized at the instance of warehouse

occupant Vipin Chawla, Special Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) H G S Dhaliwal said. The bottles were kept in 302 cardboard boxes, he said.

Chawla could not produce any document for valid possession of the syrup bottles which were procured and stored for illegal sale and drug abuse, police said.

Chawla was involved in the wholesale business of medicines for the last 12 years. Initially, he used to purchase medicines from authorised/legal distributors and would supply to local pharmacies through proper billing, police said.

However, while working in the sector, he realised that there was a huge demand for prohibited medicines. Hence, he started purchasing banned medicines from his sources and supplying them to his contacts in Delhi-NCR, Dhaliwal said. He got a drug license issued in the name of his wife Neha in May 2020 and owned a shop at Aggarwal Plaza, Mukherjee Nagar.

'Computer system to be used for water supply monitoring'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said the Delhi government will use special computer systems called SCADA to monitor the water supply more efficiently from July 1. This will help make sure water is distributed properly across the city, an official statement quoted Kejriwal as saying.

To make this monitoring possible, flow meters will be installed on the water pipeline network by the end of this year. These meters are connected to the SCADA system, which allows the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) headquarters to keep an eye on how much water is flowing in each pipeline all over Delhi, the statement said. SCADA systems are like smart

computers that help manage the water system. They allow the people in charge to watch over everything from one central location, it said.

During a meeting with DJB officials, Kejriwal emphasised the government's commitment to preventing wastage of water in Delhi. The DJB, in a statement, said it has been found that there are no proper records of water availability in the city.

Although water is being supplied to different areas, it is not being properly recorded. Over the years, the main water lines have been tapped and changed, causing some areas to receive low or no water pressure, it said. The government is thus installing flow meters to prevent leakage and wastage.

Yoga day celebrated on Najafgarh Drain

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The International Yoga Day celebration in the Capital took on a remarkable significance on Wednesday. In a turn of events that seemed unimaginable just a few months ago, public yoga programs were organized at eight different locations along the Najafgarh Drain. This drain, once a 57 km-long health hazard filled with filth and stench, has been transformed into a venue for yoga exercises.

Additionally, yoga programs also took place at the Supplementary Drain and the Yamuna River. The participation of hundreds of people at these venues is a testament to the tremendous progress made in cleaning and revitalizing



these water bodies.

Under the personal supervision of LG V.K. Saxena, sustained efforts have been made to clean the Najafgarh Drain and the Yamuna River. Various interventions, including innovative desilting methods, trapping sub-drains that flow into the main drain, removal of municipal solid waste (MSW) from the drain and the Yamuna, and the restoration of the Yamuna floodplain, have yielded significant and visible improvements.

Minor slapped 34K challan for car stunt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Noida Traffic Police have slapped a massive challan of Rs 34,500 to a minor performing car stunts in a public place in Greater Noida, after a video of them doing dangerous driving in moving vehicle was shared on social media.

The police action came as purported videos of a Volkswagen Polo with tinted windows surfaced on social media, showing the car with modified parts performing stunts outside the India Expo Mart in the Knowledge Park area.

Responding to complaints on Twitter, the traffic police said an e-challan of Rs 34,500 has been slapped on the car owner for violation of road safety norms. Police con-

firmed it was a minor who was driving the car. It was not known whether it was a boy or a girl. They also found that the car's pollution under control (PUC) certificate had expired in May this year. According to details of the e-challan issued by the police, the owner has been penalised under provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act section 184 (dangerous driving), 179(1) (disobedience of orders), driving vehicle in contravention of section 3 (driving without valid licence) or section 4 (driving by minor).

The car was also found being driven "without written permission of state government racing and trials of speed in any public place," in "violation of prescribed standards in relation to air pollution" and with "tinted glass," it read.

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NOTICE INVITING GeM

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US-India initiative to boost start-ups in defence production, AI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Defence announced a significant development on Thursday as the India-United States Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS X) was launched in Washington.

The initiative aims to bolster start-ups in defence production and drive advancements in artificial intelligence (AI).

Co-organised by Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) under the Ministry of Defence and the US Department of Defence (DoD), the INDUS X event was hosted by the US-India Business Council (USIBC).

Leading the Indian delegation during the two-day INDUS-X event held on June 20-21 was Anurag Bajpai, Joint Secretary (Defence Industries Promotion) from the defence ministry. A reception was organised on Tuesday for Indian and US government representatives, defence start-ups, think tanks, incubators, investors, industries, and other stakeholders.

US Ambassador to India



Eric Garcetti delivered the keynote address at the reception.

Highlighting the exponential growth of the India-US relationship, US Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall emphasised the immense potential for collaboration between start-ups from both nations in deep-tech innovations, particularly in the domains of space and artificial intelligence (AI).

In his welcome remarks on "Investing in the Future of US-Indian Defence Relations,"

Bajpai hailed the launch of INDUS X as a landmark event in the India-US relationship.

He viewed this moment as opportune, with the leaders of the two largest and oldest democracies meeting in Washington.

Bajpai emphasised the importance of Indian and US start-ups collaborating on co-developing and co-producing advanced technologies. He called upon participants to develop mechanisms for future collaboration spanning industries, academia, and investors.

The event showcased innovative technologies through a joint effort by Indian and US start-ups, covering various domains such as maritime, AI, autonomous systems, and space.

Fifteen Indian start-ups and ten US start-ups participated, demonstrating their technologies to stakeholders from both countries.

Prominent US officials, including Congressman Ro Khanna, who serves on the House Armed Services Committee and as ranking

member of the Subcommittee on Cyber, Innovative Technologies, and Information Systems (CITI), as well as co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, along with Radha Iyengar Plumb, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment at the US DoD, visited the exhibition. The event also featured the release of an INDUS-X factsheet. According to the US Chamber of Commerce, INDUS-X has the potential to act as a catalyst for India in achieving its target of USD 5 billion in defence exports by 2025 while diversifying its defence supply chain.

INDUS-X aims to pave the way for the goals outlined in the US-India roadmap for defence industrial cooperation. It seeks to capitalise on the expected tech-releasability outcomes of the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), explore collaborative opportunities in high-tech defence innovation, research and development, and strengthen bilateral trade relationships and defence establishment linkages.

Opp raps Shah's all-party meet on Manipur, seeks Modi's presence



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre's decision to convene an all-party meeting chaired by Home Minister Amit Shah to discuss the ongoing crisis in Manipur has sparked criticism from some Opposition parties, who are demanding the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The meeting, scheduled for Saturday, aims to address the ethnic clashes in the northeastern state that have resulted in over 110 deaths since May 3.

The Ministry of Home Affairs announced the meeting through a tweet, stating, "Union Home Minister Amit Shah has convened an all-party meeting on June 24th at 3 PM in New Delhi to discuss the situation in Manipur." The announcement came shortly after Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma met Shah in the national capital late Wednesday night.

The Congress party criticized the all-party meeting, deeming it "too little, too late." They argued that discussions held in Delhi would lack seriousness and called for efforts to bring the warring factions to

the discussion table. The party also pointed out that the meeting was scheduled only after former Congress President Sonia Gandhi expressed her concern over the turbulence in the northeast region.

In response, the BJP accused the Congress of making the "too little, too late" remark to create grounds for boycotting the meeting and avoid accountability.

Amit Malviya, the head of BJP's IT department, alleged that the violence in Manipur is a "legacy" of the Congress, as ethnic conflicts were sown when the party was in power at both the central and state levels.

"The Congress first demanded an all-party meeting, and now, when one has been announced, it is creating grounds to boycott it just two days ahead of the meet. It is obvious that the Congress' intent is not to find a solution, avoid accountability, and keep the pot boiling," claimed the BJP leader in a Twitter post.

Senior BJP leader and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis asserted that Home Minister Amit Shah is capable of handling the situation in violence-

hit Manipur, eliminating the need for the Prime Minister to visit the northeastern state.

This statement came in response to criticism from Shiv Sena (UBT) president and former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who questioned why Prime Minister Modi was undertaking a tour of the US instead of visiting Manipur to restore peace.

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi suggested that the absence of the Prime Minister during the all-party meeting indicates its lack of importance to him. He highlighted that Manipur has been engulfed in unrest for 50 days, but the Prime Minister has remained silent.

Congress General Secretary KV Venugopal emphasized the need for a meeting at the Prime Ministerial level, specifically in Manipur. He urged the Prime Minister to prioritize the peace and well-being of the state.

The opposition's demand for the Prime Minister's presence adds a new dimension to the upcoming all-party meeting, raising questions about the level of engagement and accountability in resolving the Manipur crisis.

HM on two-day visit to J&K today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is leaving for a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir on Friday during which he will attend various development programmes in Jammu and Srinagar. Shah will begin his tour of the Union Territory by laying wreaths on the statue of BJP ideologue and Bhartiya Jana Sangha founder Syama Prasad

Mookerjee in Jammu on Friday morning, sources said. Shah will lay the foundation stone of the Central Forensic Sciences Laboratory (CFSL) at Samba. He will also inaugurate and lay foundation stones of various development schemes in the city, they said.

Following these events, he will travel to Srinagar where he will attend a function at Raj Bhavan for the inauguration and laying foundation stones

of various development projects, they further said. Later, he will attend the 'Vitasta' festival organised by the Union Culture Ministry in the city.

On Saturday, Shah will lay the foundation stone of the 'Validan Stambh' in Srinagar before returning to the national capital. The Home Minister is likely to meet many delegations of political and civil society including those from the Gujjar,

Bakerwals and Pahari community. The minister is likely to review the preparations for the upcoming annual Amarnath Yatra and may visit Batal base camp to see the arrangements for the pilgrims. The security grid is already on alert mode in view of the upcoming pilgrimage and all the security agencies deployed in the Valley are maintaining a strict vigil on vulnerable points and highways.

Form No. 3
(See Regulation-15(1)(a)/16(3))
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL,
CHANDIGARH (DRT 2)
1st Floor, SCO 33-34-35,
Sector-17 A, Chandigarh
(Additional space allotted on
3rd & 4th Floor also)
Case No.: OA/701/2022
[Summons under sub-section
(4) of section 19 of the Act,
read with sub-rule (2A) of rule 5
of the Debt Recovery Tribunal
(Procedure) Rules, 1993]
Exh. No.: 18429
ICICI BANK LIMITED
VS.
JNANENDRA KUMAR JENA
To,
(2) KALPANA JENA
W/O JNANENDRA KUMAR JENA
FLAT NO K-1/100, NEW PALAM
VIHAR PHASE 1, GURGAON
HARYANA
Also At,
FLAT NO. DB 1116, 11TH
FLOOR, DLF CYBER CITY
CHANDAKA INDUS,
CHANDRASHEKARPUR
BHUVANESHWAR DISTT
KHORDHA, ODISHA
(3) JTK LOGISTICS PRIVATE
LTD, L-92/226, STREET NO 7
MAHIPALPUR, NEW DELHI,
DELHI

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that my Client, Mr. Shakir Ali, son of Mr. Babu Khan, and Mrs. Shehnaaz, wife of Mr. Shakir Ali, both resident of RZ-2108, Gali No. 28, Tuglakabad Extension, New Delhi-110019 hereby disown and sever all of their relations with their elder son (Mr. Jafar Ali) and his family i.e. their elder son's wife Mrs. Gulafasa, and their elder son's children for their bad behavior and misconduct. That my clients have also debarred and disowned their elder son (Mr. Jafar Ali) and his family from all of my client's moveable or immovable properties located in Delhi, and anyone interacting or dealing with their elder son (Mr. Jafar Ali) and his family will do so at his/her/their own risk and responsibilities and neither my clients nor the other legal heirs of my client shall be responsible for any act, deed or dealings done by their elder son (Mr. Jafar Ali) & his family.
Achin Sharma (Advocate)
G-2/210 & 210A, Tulsi Tower, Alaknanda Market, New Delhi. M: 9812021449, 9650865007

Publication
Form No. 3
(See Regulation-15(1)(a)/16(3))
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL,
CHANDIGARH (DRT 2)
1st Floor, SCO 33-34-35,
Sector-17 A, Chandigarh
(Additional space allotted on
3rd & 4th Floor also)
Case No.: OA/436/2021
Exh No: 16783
[Summons under sub-section
(4) of section 19 of the Act,
read with sub-rule (2A) of rule 5
of the Debt Recovery Tribunal
(Procedure) Rules, 1993]
ICICI BANK LIMITED
VS
SRIJITH GUPTA
To,
(1) M/S CHD FLOORS
LIMITED
R/O SF 16-17, 1ST FLOOR,
MADAME BHIKAJI CAMA
BHAWAN, 11, BHIKAJI CAMA
PLACE, NEW DELHI- 110 066
THROUGH ITS AUTHORIZED
OFFICER

G20 nations can undertake skill mapping at global level: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the G20 countries can undertake skill mapping at the global level, find gaps that need to be plugged and also play a key role in promoting research and innovation. In a virtual address from New York to G20 Education Ministers' meeting in Pune, Modi stressed the need to strike the right balance between opportunities offered by technology and the challenges posed by it.

At the meeting, the G20 ministers will formally accept the outcome documents, marking the culmination of the extensive deliberations carried out over the past several months within the education working group track. These outcome documents will serve



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden during their bilateral meeting at Oval Office of the White House, in Washington DC, on Thursday PTI

as a roadmap for the international community, guiding coordinated actions to ensure inclusive and high-quality education for all learners. "G20 countries can undertake skill mapping at the global level and find gaps that need to be plugged. Digital technology serves as an equalizer and pro-

motes inclusivity. It is a force multiplier in increasing access to education. Today artificial intelligence offers great potential in the field of learning, skilling and education, with opportunities, technology also poses challenges. We have to strike the right balance. G20 can play an important role in this,"

PM Modi said. The Education Working Group focused on finding inclusive solutions and collective actions to address the diverse global challenges of the day during four meetings in Chennai, Amritsar, Bhubaneswar and Pune.

It emphasised on four priority areas — ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy, especially in the context of blended learning, making tech-enabled learning more inclusive, qualitative, and collaborative; building capacities and promoting lifelong learning in the context of the future of work; and strengthening research and fostering innovation through enhanced collaboration and partnerships.

Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said the G20 countries have unanimous views on five major areas including capacity building of

teachers, role of education as critical enabler of human dignity and empowerment globally and recognising the important role of green transition and digital transformation.

Pradhan outlined the five outcomes after a meeting of G20 Education Ministers here. The G20 members also agreed to the importance of investment in supporting human capital development, and encourage collaborative solutions and innovations to promote quality teaching, learning and skilling as well as foster academic collaborations among educational institutions through joint programmes, student and staff mobility.

The minister said the members reiterated the commitment to overcome the digital divide for all learners by addressing the barriers to technological infrastructure.

SUMMONS
WHEREAS, OA/701/2022 was listed before Hon'ble Presiding Officer/Registrar on 12/04/2023.
WHEREAS this Hon'ble Tribunal is pleased to issue summons/notice on the said Application under section 19(4) of the Act, (OA) filed against you for recovery of debts of Rs. 3956439.63/- (application along with copies of documents etc. annexed).
In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendants are directed as under:-
(i) to show cause within thirty days of the service of summons as to why relief prayed for should not be granted;
(ii) to disclose particulars of properties or assets other than properties and assets specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the original application;
(iii) you are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of properties;
(iv) you shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of his business any of the assets over which security interest is created and/or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application without the prior approval of the Tribunal;
(v) you shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realised by sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business and deposit such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank or financial institutions holding security interest over such assets. You are also directed to file the written statement with a copy thereof furnished to the applicant and to appear before Registrar on 25/08/2023 at 10:30 A.M. failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence. Given under my hand and the seal of this Tribunal on this date: 09/06/2023.
Signature of the Officer Authorised to issue sommons.

PUBLIC NOTICE
ICICI Home Finance
Regd. Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai 400051
Closure of Branch
In terms of paragraph 39 of Master Direction Non-Banking Financial Company - Housing Finance Company (Reserve Bank) Directions, 2021, notice is hereby given that ICICI Home Finance Company Limited proposes to close its NDMA branch situated at 1st floor, XVI / 10200, 13/30 Beadon Pura, Padam Singh Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005 as a result of recalibration of business. Please note that other business operations (other than NDMA business) and branch will continue to operate from the said premises at Karol Bagh.
For ICICI Home Finance Co. Ltd.
Priyanka Shetty
Company Secretary

SUMMONS
WHEREAS, OA/436/2021 was listed before Hon'ble Presiding Officer/Registrar on 23/02/2023.
WHEREAS this Hon'ble Tribunal is pleased to issue summons/notice on the said Application under section 19(4) of the Act, (OA) filed against you for recovery of debts of Rs. 1,71,47,446.96/- (application along with copies of documents etc. annexed).
In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendants are directed as under:-
(i) to show cause within thirty days of the service of summons as to why relief prayed for should not be granted;
(ii) to disclose particulars of properties or assets other than properties and assets specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the original application;
(iii) you are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of properties;
(iv) you shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of his business any of the assets over which security interest is created and/or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application without the prior approval of the Tribunal;
(v) you shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realised by sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business and deposit such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank or financial institutions holding security interest over such assets. You are also directed to file the written statement with a copy thereof furnished to the applicant and to appear before Registrar on 04/09/2023 at 10:30 A.M. failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence. Given under my hand and the seal of this Tribunal on this date: 17/03/2023.
Signature of the Officer Authorised to issue sommons.

CBI to probe Lady Singham's death in Assam road mishap

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has taken over four separate cases connected to the death of Sub-Inspector Junmoni Rabha of the Assam Police. Her demise, believed to be the result of a road accident, occurred last month. Officials have stated that the agency will soon summon individuals for questioning and will also meet with the doctors who conducted Rabha's autopsy.

Junmoni Rabha, popularly known as 'Lady Singham' or 'Dabang cop', lost her life on May 16 in the early hours of the morning. Her vehicle collided head-on with a container truck in Sarubhugia village, located in the Kaliabor subdivision of Nagaon district.

Soon after Rabha's death, the circumstances surrounding the accident were contested by her mother. In an FIR, she alleged that Nagaon Superintendent of Police Leena Doley conducted a raid at their house between 1 AM and 2 AM on May 16, shortly after Rabha's demise. According to complaint, Doley compelled her to sign certain bank documents and also seized ₹4.30 lakh in

cash during the raid. The mother further asserted that Doley did not inform her about Rabha's death. It was only after daybreak that another police official informed her about the accident. The mother also claimed that Rabha had been killed and exhibited injury marks on her body. The CBI's special crime unit has now taken up the investigation into Rabha's death, as well as two additional cases.

One case pertains to a fake currency racket that was exposed by Nagaon Police on May 5 based on information provided by Rabha. The other case was filed against Rabha by a family member of individuals under scrutiny in fake currency probe. In this case, the complainant accused Rabha of raiding her residence on May 6 at 2 AM, holding her son captive, and extorting over ₹6 lakh from her.

According to the allegations, raided in Lakhimpur district, which is 200 kilometers away from her place of posting. During the raid, the police team reportedly assaulted the complainant, abducted her son, and seized ₹80,000 in cash, jewelry, and a Maruti Brezza car.

BJP warns of satyagraha if Sidda fails to implement 5 poll guarantees in K'taka

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP has warned the Siddaramaiah Government on the fulfillment of "five guarantees" in the state with veteran party leader and former Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa on Thursday announcing 'Satyagraha' both inside and outside the Assembly, if the dispensation fails to implement poll-promises before July three when the new Legislature is to begin its session.

BJP has maintained that barring 'free-ride' to women in the state buses, the Congress has failed to implement other four guarantees it promised to the voters of Karnataka. The opposition party is expected to intensify its protest with an eye on the Lok Sabha poll which is barely 10-11 months away. Karnataka sends 28 MPs to the Lok Sabha.

Yediyurappa also hit out at the Chief Minister and his government for "unnecessarily blaming" the Centre regarding the supply of rice for the state's "Anna Bhagya" scheme, calling it an "unpardonable offence" and "betrayal to the people". "Purposefully, attempts are being made by Siddaramaiah (CM) and Shivakumar (DCM) to point fingers at the Centre with regards to rice. Central



Government is already giving 5 kgs of rice for free. If they want to give additional quantities of rice, the state government should purchase rice to make arrangements for its supply; instead they are making false promises," Yediyurappa said in Davangere in central Karnataka.

The former Chief Minister warned the Congress government in Karnataka that his party will stage 'Satyagraha' (protests) both inside and outside the Assembly, if it fails to implement the five poll guarantees before the Legislature session, and asked it to quit, if not able to fulfill the promises.

"Implementing guarantees will lead to shortage of funds for developmental activities. There are already protests against the rise in power tariff. Congress is in a way enjoying power by troubling the people. I condemn it. People will respond to it," he said. The former Chief Minister said he too will stage demonstrations in front of

'Vidhana Soudha', the seats of state Legislature and Secretariat in Bengaluru. He said the Congress had given five poll promises, among them only the free bus service scheme for women has been launched and it is operational, amid a lot of hindrances.

"If the other four guarantees are not implemented before the Assembly session begins, it will be inevitable for us to stage 'Satyagraha' inside and outside the House (Assembly). I'm also ready to stage a 'dharana' (demonstration) in front of Vidhans Soudha. So immediately they (Congress) should fulfill their poll guarantees," he added.

The new Karnataka Legislature Session is scheduled from July 3 to 14, which will also see the new government tabling a fresh budget. The BJP agitations will be planned by the party legislators and leaders, and every one of them will be participating in it, Yediyurappa said.

Naturopathy mentioned in Vedas, Puranas: UP Guv

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Governor Anandiben Patel inaugurated the 40th National Conference of the All India Naturopathy Council on the subject of 'Indian Knowledge Tradition and Gandhian Way of Naturopathy' at Gandhi Adhyayan Peeth auditorium in Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith (MGKV) here on Thursday. The conference was organised under the joint aegis of All India Naturopathy Council and Yoga and Naturopathy Education Centre, MGKV.

Addressing the conference, the Governor said that naturopathy is an ancient system of medicine, which is mentioned in our Vedas and Puranas. "Its emergence has happened with nature itself. It is not just a resource for the diagnosis of diseases but a philosophy of life. The effect of the Indian system of medicine was seen during Covid pandemic where medicines were not working while herbs and yoga made invaluable contributions in saving life," she said, adding that Gandhi has been considered the first doctor of naturopathy in the modern Indian system of medicine. "We abandoned our traditional food tradition and started taking junk food and its side effects today," said Anandiben.

Expressing his views, Chairman of All India Naturopathy Council Prof Shankar Kumar Sanyal said that the naturopathy system is completely based on Vedic sci-



Governor Anandiben Patel at a naturopathy conference at MGKV in Varanasi on Thursday.

ence and it is also based on five elements of nature, in which there is no risk. "Naturopathy is very important in this era of environmental pollution," he said.

While presiding over the programme, Vice-Chancellor (V-C) of MGKV Prof AK Tyagi said that Indian knowledge tradition is amazing which needs to be presented in the right form. "Naturopathy education is an important part of that knowledge tradition. Coordination with nature is very important in daily routine and food. There is a plan to conduct subjects related to yoga and naturopathy at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the university in the coming session," he said.

The programme started with the offering of flowers on

the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and 'Rashtra Ratna' Babu Shivprasad Gupta by the guests. The function was also attended by Shobhit University Chancellor Kunwar Shekhar Vijender, former MGKV VC and Director SHEPA Prof Prithvish Nag, Registrar Dr Sunita Pandey, Deputy Registrar Harishchandra, Finance Officer Santosh Kumar Sharma and Registrar of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University Rakesh Kumar. Earlier, the guests were welcomed by Prof Sushil Kumar Gautam (Director of the conference) while the vote of thanks was proposed by Prof NP Singh. The function was conducted by Dr Aarti Vishwakarma.

The Governor also inaugurated the Kashi International

Art Exhibition-2023 (dedicated to Padmashree Baba Yogendra ji) organised at Ghamahapur, Gangapur under the joint aegis of Institute of Fine Arts and Sanskrit Bharti. Addressing the function there, she highlighted the need of fine arts for the proper and positive development of the society. Along with this, she gave certificates and prizes to the award-winning artists. On the occasion, IFA Director Dr Awadhesh Kumar Singh while welcoming the Governor gave detailed information about the Kashi International Art Exhibition. About 123 artists from India and abroad have registered their participation in this exhibition. Out of all the artworks that came in this exhibition, nine best creations were awarded.

Maurya reviews progress of rural development schemes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya reviewed the progress of the schemes being run by the Rural Development department in Varanasi and Vindhyachal (Mirzapur) divisions here on Thursday and gave necessary guidelines to the officials. Interacting with the kshetra panchayat pramukhs (heads) and block development officers (BDOs) of both the divisions, Maurya laid special emphasis on the implementation of public welfare schemes with quality and timeliness as per the intention of the government to help the public get their benefits properly and quickly.

He stressed the need for better coordination between the BDOs and block pramukhs so that the projects can progress well. "The work of MNRREGA should be ensured through the blocks in any case. Gram Pradhans, Gram Vikas Adhikaris and Gram Panchayat Adhikaris regularly sit jointly and review the progress of works among themselves," he said, adding that now there should be talk of smart village, so that the development of the villages can be done with the schemes of the government on the basis of priority.

"Corruption-free governance and development of the last person are the aims of the present government," he said, asking the concerned officers to



Deputy CM KP Maurya reviewing progress of rural development schemes in Varanasi on Thursday.

ensure availability of water in Amrit Sarovars. "By identifying 100 backward blocks deprived of development in the state, the government will pay full attention to them so that they too can be brought up in terms of development," Maurya said. Regarding the problems of paucity of funds in small gram sabhas, the CDOs and BDOs were asked to suggest measures so that their development could be ensured.

While interacting with the kshetra panchayat pramukhs, many apprised Maurya of the

problems in their areas apart from raising demands of some development works. Maurya said that after the formation of our government at the centre in 2014 and in the state in 2017, there has been rapid progress in development. "No obstacle in development will be accepted. The government will make efforts in this direction that the elections of district panchayat and kshetra panchayat pramukhs should also be held directly through the public," he said. On the occasion, UP Minister of State (Independent

Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal, Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, Mayor Ashok Tiwari, MLAs Saurabh Srivastava, Dr Awadhesh Singh, Tribhuvan Ram and Sunil Patel, MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma, District Magistrate S Rajalingam, senior officers of the Rural Development department were present along with the kshetra panchayat pramukhs of both the divisions. The programme was coordinated by Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal.

Rush on last day of Rathayatra Mela

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Despite a good rain that gave a lot of relief to the people from heatwave and cloudy weather conditions, rush was seen on the last day of the three-day famous Rathayatra Mela here on Thursday. During the wee hours on Friday, the idols of Lord Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra, whose idols were kept on the traditional wooden Rath (chariot) based on 14 wheels and placed near Rathayatra crossing, were brought back to Jagannath temple at Assi to mark the conclusion of the festival. On the last day, good number of locals reached there and offered prayers. Many of them also pulled the Rath to seek the blessings of the Almighty. With the wish of public welfare, the activists of Namami



Namami Gange activists offering aarti on last day of Rathayatra Mela in Varanasi on Thursday.

Gange led by its regional coordinator (Kashi) Rajesh Shukla also reached there and performed the aarti of Lord Jagannath. They also distrib-

uted saplings of Tulsi plant and jute bags to give the message of environmental protection. They appealed to the shopkeepers there not to use poly-

thene bags. Shukla also appealed to the visitors to keep the city clean saying that all types of worship are incomplete without cleanliness.

City co-coordinator Bina Gupta, city in-charge Pushpalata Verma, Sunita Jaiswal, Rita Patel, Geeta Sachdeva, Nidhi Agrawal, Krishnamohan Pandey, Suryanshu Shukla and many others were also present.

Elaborate security arrangements have been made in the fair areas during the last three days and no vehicles were allowed to move to Rathayatra crossing from any of the corners including Bhelupur, Luxa, Mahmoorganj and Siga. The history of this fair is old as since 1802 it has been celebrated here. In 1780, Pandit Nityanand, the chief priest and manager of Jagannath temple in Puri visited this holy city and then set up a temple of Lord Jagannath near Assi.

After Ajit, Bhujbal stakes claim to NCP chief's post

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after senior state Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and current leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Maharashtra Assembly Ajit Pawar indirectly staked a claim for the State party president's post, senior NCP leader and former deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal said here on Thursday that an OBC leader should be considered for the State party chief's post.

A leading OBC leader and founder-President of Akhil Bhartiya Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad, Bhujbal made a counter-claim for the State NCP chief's post, saying: "If the LoP is with Marathas, then the state party's chief should go to an OBC community or to a smaller community".

Apparently alluding to remarks made by Ajitdada - as Ajit Pawar is known in the state political circles, Bhujbal said here on Wednesday "Our party has internal democracy. Everyone has a right to express his right to express his opinion. We have someone who wants to occupy a different position and wants to work within the party. I also want to express my opinion. I was made the state party president in the past for a brief period of four months. As a consequence, the BJP also made an OBC leader like Babankule as the state party president."

"Our party also has OBC leaders. We have leaders like Sunil Tatkare, Dhanjay Munde and Jitendra Awahad... If I am given responsibility in the party I will also work... I strongly feel that a leader from the OBC community should be made the state party president," Bhujbal said.

Interestingly, party leaders like Tatkare and Awahad were vested with party posts at the national level, when NCP chief Sharad Pawar carried out an organisational re-jig on June 10.

While it is not clear yet if Bhujbal's claim for the post of state party chief is genuine one or an orchestrated one made with an intention to nullify Ajitdada's claim for the state party president's post.

Sena (UBT) accuses Shinde's family of role in Covid-19 fake bill scam

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided 14 locations in Mumbai, including the premises of those close to him and his party leader Aaditya Thackeray in connection with an alleged Covid-19 scam related money laundering case, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP and spokesperson Sanjay Raut on Thursday charged that the family members of Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde benefitted from a scam of severe crore of rupees in his home district of Thane.

Talking to media persons here, the Sena (UBT) spokesperson alleged that Shinde's family members were involved in were related purported fake bills which were issued by certain companies for Covid-19 facilities at Thane and the neighbouring Kalyan-Dombivali towns.

"I am speaking on the basis of evidence. Fake bills for crores of rupees were raised for providing the facilities. The alleged fake billing benefited Shinde's family at that time," Raut said.

Waving a bunch of documents and seeking an immediate reply to his allegations from the authorities concerned, Raut said: "The ruling Shiv Sena should first introspect themselves and their alleged involvement in the scam before hurling allegations at others".

Raut's allegation came on the heels of the ED raiding several locations in connection with the Covid-19 scam related money laundering case and also the State government's decision to order an SIT probe into the large-scale financial irregularities that took place during the Covid-19 period.



On Wednesday, Ajitdada - apparently upset after Sr Pawar appointed party's senior leader Praful Patel and his daughter-

MP Supriya Sule as the party's working presidents -- had said on Wednesday he had no interest in continuing as the

Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the State Assembly and instead he preferred to accept any responsibility in the party.

Speaking at a function organised to mark the NCP's 25th foundation day, Ajitdada - as Ajit Pawar is known in the state political circles - told the party leadership: "I am not interested in continuing in the post of the leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly. Relieve me of the Opposition leader's post and give me any post in the party. I will do justice to the party post".

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.

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.	Abhishek Aggarwal/ Rohit Aggarwal/ LBGUR0004287565	Flat No-1504, 15th Floor, Tower B, Araville, Sector-79, Gurgaon Haryana, Gurgaon/ June 20, 2023	March 25, 2021/ Rs. 1,56,85,411/-	Delhi/ NCR
2.	Anand Mohan Kumar Singh/ Priyanka Kumari/ LBDEL00005151770	Flat No. 1-1502, 14th Floor, Tower-1, Terra Elegance, Khasra No. 1289/ 1025, Village Khujunbas, Tehsil Tijara, Bhiwadi, Rajasthan/ June 19, 2023	June 23, 2021/ Rs. 29,88,119/-	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 23, 2023 Place : Delhi/NCR Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

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.

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.	Rajat Kumar Singh/ Vinita Singh/ Rishi Pal Singh/ LBROK0005428931	Part of Khasra No 1836, 1837, 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843/1, 1847, Situated at Mohalla-Krishna nagar, Gali No. 25, Village-salemur Rajputan, pargana- Bhagwanpur, Tehsil Roorkee Haridwar 247667/ June 19, 2023	January 25, 2023/ Rs.9,33,445/-	Haridwar/ Roorkee/ Gurgaon

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 23, 2023 Place : Gurgaon Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

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.

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.	Dinesh Sharma/ Sonpreet Sharma/ LBDEL00002312089	Unit No.C2-2FF, 1st Floor, Eideco Hill Side, Neemrana, Rajasthan/ June 19, 2023	August 18, 2020 Rs. 32,00,164/-	Delhi/ NCR/ Neemrana
2.	Sabina Hooda/ Virender Singh Hooda/ LBGUR00002412033	Flat No.304, 1st Floor, Tower C, Terra Heritage, Sector- 51, Alwar Express Highway, Rajasthan, Bhiwadi/ June 19, 2023	February 25, 2023 Rs. 25,66,216/-	Delhi/ NCR/ Bhiwadi
3.	Virender Singh Hooda/ Sabina Hooda/ LBGUR00003325133	Flat No- 106, First Floor, Block Z1, Krish City-2, Tapukara Distt. Alwar , Bhiwadi/ June 19, 2023	February 25, 2023 Rs. 16,56,541/-	Delhi/ NCR/ Bhiwadi
4.	Shishu Pal/ Raj Bel/ LBGUR00005124667	Flat No. D- 5603, Second Floor, Rlf "The Park" Sector-54, Khasra No 200 201 202 191 181 192 519/189 518/19 Village Shahpur Tehsil Tijara Bhiwadi Tijara/ June 19, 2023	July 06, 2021 Rs. 3,41,771/-	Delhi/ NCR/ Bhiwadi

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 23, 2023 Place : Delhi/ NCR Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

ICICI Home Finance Corporate Office: ICICI Home Finance Company Limited ICICI HFC Tower, Andheri - Kurla Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400059, India

Branch Office: 1st floor, Vishwakarma Complex, Plot No 17/18, Behind Yashoda Hospital, Koushombi, Ghaziabad- 201010

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable assets
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization 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 Home Finance Company Ltd., will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is", as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Legal Heirs. Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Himanshu Bajaj (Borrower) Hema (Co-Borrower) Loan Account No. LHGHZ0001340596	Entire Second Floor With Roof Rights (Said Floor) of House No. B-281 Situated at Sector 8, Tha, Briji Vihar, Tehsil and District, Ghaziabad, UP	Rs. 52,81,788/- 20th June, 2023	Rs. 34,18,200/- Rs. 3,41,820/-	July 10, 2023 11:00 AM	July 13, 2023 02:00 PM- 03:00 PM

The online auction will be conducted on website (URL Link - <https://BestAuctionDeal.com>) of our auction agency GlobeTech. The Mortgagors/ notice are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till July 12, 2023 before 05:00 PM else these secured assets will be sold as per above schedule.

The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) RTGS/ Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited, 1st floor, Vishwakarma Complex, Plot No 17/18, Behind Yashoda Hospital, Koushombi, Ghaziabad- 201010 on or before July 12, 2023 before 04:00 PM. The Prospective Bidder(s) must also submit signed copy of Registration Form & Bid Terms and Conditions form at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited, 1st floor, Vishwakarma Complex, Plot No 17/18, Behind Yashoda Hospital, Koushombi, Ghaziabad- 201010 on or before July 12, 2023 before 05:00 PM. Earnest Money Deposit Demand Draft (DD) should be from a Nationalized/ Scheduled Bank in favor of "ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd. - Auction" payable at Ghaziabad.

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Home Finance Company Limited on 7021072869 or our Sales & Marketing Partner NexXen Solutions Private Limited.

The Authorized 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 <https://www.icicifhfc.com/>

Date : June 23, 2023 Place : Ghaziabad Authorized Officer ICICI Home Finance Company Limited



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Democracy at gunpoint

Violence is rampant and threats are flying in the air in West Bengal before the panchayat elections

After the Supreme Court's Vacation Bench's decision to uphold the Calcutta High Court decision, West Bengal would have the Panchayat elections under the shadow of central security forces. The central forces would ensure free and fair panchayat elections on July 8. They would not be deployed on the polling stations alone but across the state to maintain law and order. The SC Bench maintained that the state has a "history of violence" during local polls. The Panchayat elections in Bengal are a mammoth exercise involving elections to 75,000-odd seats. The polling would take place across 61,636 booths in the State in just one day. The supreme court maintains that "Holding an election cannot be a license for violence." The supreme court order effectively takes away the state's role in maintaining the law and order in the state. The apex court summarily rejected the West Bengal contention that only 189 booths out of 61,000 were identified as sensitive and ignored the fact that the State had over 50,000 police personnel to watch over the 189 booths. It is unfortunate that the courts have to intervene at every step to ensure free and fair elections which is ideally the duty of the election commission which can direct the central and the state government to make adequate arrangements for providing an atmosphere where people can cast their vote without fear.

But, there is definitely merit in Congress's contention that there is an atmosphere of fear in the state. Around 4,800 candidates - 1,500 of them from BJP backed off from contesting panchayat elections on the last day for withdrawal of nominations; many of them citing "pressure" as a reason for their withdrawal. Now just over 2 lakh contestants are left in the fray amid continued violence in some rural pockets. Five Congress workers, including a former MLA, were wounded in a clash in front of the block development office at Murshidabad's Burwan after goons snatched poll documents from candidates. BJP and Congress drove candidates into party offices or set up camps to protect them from TMC cadres who were allegedly threatening them to withdraw their candidature. A total of 670 Independents, mostly disgruntled TMC workers who had decided to go solo after being denied tickets, also backed out of the poll. The situation is so bad that Bengal Congress chief Adhir Chowdhury sat in protest outside the BDO's office, accusing "TMC-backed miscreant" of fomenting trouble to win seats in Burwan. The violence in West Bengal's Panchayat elections is a grim reminder of the challenges faced by the democratic process. Breaking this cycle of violence requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses political polarisation and strengthens law enforcement. The Onus lies with the Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who should ensure that TMC cadre does not hamper the voting process. Bengal is one of the few states in the country where grassroots democracy thrives but it must be ensured that it is free and fair and not achieved through intimidation which smears the whole process.

PICTALK



A foreign tourist with a camel on World Camel Day, in Bikaner

The question of accountability

The very foundation on which democracies thrive is the rule of law, and that hinges on the simple premise that nobody is above the law



DEEPAK SINHA

Comparisons of where we stand in the rankings as a democracy, based on the likes of the Economist's Democracy Index, are obviously subjective and possibly biased to an extent. The only test that truly counts in these matters is whether those elected can be held accountable for actions while in office. The very foundation on which democracies thrive is the rule of law, which is premised on the belief that actions have consequences and nobody is above the law.

Former President Trump is finally learning this the hard way. Facing trial for allegedly stealing classified government documents, which if proved, may well see him behind bars. This is what accountability looks like in a working democracy, though Americans are not without their own set of challenges. Mr Trump remains extremely popular with the vast majority in the Republican Party, mainly white Anglo-Saxons, who, fearful that their power is rapidly slipping away as the country becomes more diverse, are willing to overlook his transgressions and forego their democratic values.

On applying similar norms to ourselves, despite our claims of being the largest democracy, we are clearly on life-support. Blatant obfuscation of facts, police connivance and judicial apathy, to give the judiciary the benefit of the doubt, ensure that our leaders are never held accountable, however revolting, corrupt or self-serving their actions may have been. In fact, the rule of law remains a mirage for the vast majority of our citizens. Examples over the years are too numerous to quote, the latest being that of Mr Brij Bhushan, the Chairman Wrestling Federation of India, and his alleged misbehaviour with women wrestlers.

Similarly, heads have not rolled over the tragic Orissa train accident. A foreign hand is suspected of sabotage, opening an escape avenue for those responsible. The fact that the Railway Board had pointed out shortcomings in the maintenance of signalling equipment that led to five similar incidents earlier, of vary-



ing degrees of seriousness, has been blithely ignored. As has been the CAGs report points out the misuse of funds, meant for maintenance and replacement of tracks, on items unconnected to maintenance. Despite this rather grim state of affairs, the Railways are busy promoting the Prime Minister's pet project, flagging off more Vande Bharat train sets, travel on which, to use Mr Tharoor's obnoxious phrase, the 'Cattle Classes', can ill afford. Instead of accepting responsibility and resigning, the railway minister seems comfortable, shamelessly meddling in the CBI investigation.

For that matter take the events unfolding in Manipur. Clearly, this is the "Bhindranwale moment" for Mr Modi's government, as their man on the spot has gone rogue. Allegations that the Chief Minister, Mr Biren Singh's, tacit support of hard-line Meitei groups has turned an insurgency on its last legs into a full-fledged ethno-religious civil war, akin to events in Africa, are being bandied about. Manipur's economic progress has now hit a wall, and events here will spread like wildfire to the rest of the North East, adversely impacting security in this strategic region. The influence wielded by tribal loyalties and trans-border criminal enterprises,

involved in drugs and arms smuggling and human trafficking, should not be underestimated.

In military circles, civil war is seen as the culmination of any insurgency, with insurgents confident enough to forsake guerrilla tactics and take on government forces head-on, with secession being their ultimate goal. While the situation in Manipur may not yet be so dire, instances of militants, especially Meitei Groups, confronting Army/Assam Rifle contingents openly have been reported. Undoubtedly, the huge quantity of sophisticated arms "looted" from police armouries gives these militants confidence, as must the fact that the military has not been given a free hand to act.

Yet, despite the ongoing violence, the significance of the government has made no serious efforts to salvage the situation, by either sacking the Chief Minister or declaring President's Rule, as well as the Prime Minister's unwillingness to engage or address the situation cannot be lost on anybody. Ironically enough, he has offered to mediate between Ukraine and Russia and his loquaciousness on his American sojourn is difficult to miss. Clearly, the government appears to be complicit in pushing through some mis-

conceived ideological agenda, despite the cost to the Nation, a cost that our Security Forces and citizens will continue to pay in blood and shattered lives in the coming months and years.

Let there also be no doubt that given the strategic importance of the region, it is only a matter of time before the Chinese commence pouring oil on troubled waters, if they have already not begun doing so. It seems that the Prime Minister is deliberately avoiding involving himself, in the vain hope that either the troubles will resolve themselves over time, or they can be left to his underlings to solve. Like many before him, he appears to have fallen into the Nehru trap of wanting to gain international recognition and respect by focusing on larger issues afflicting our world. Unsurprisingly, just like Nehru, he is likely to be overwhelmed by firestorms at home and find his legacy tarnished by his reluctance to confront China as it continues with its depredations on our sovereignty.

(The author, a military veteran is a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and a Senior Visiting Fellow with Peninsula Foundation, Chennai)



LET THERE ALSO BE NO DOUBT THAT GIVEN THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE REGION, IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE CHINESE COMMENCE POURING OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEEP WOUND

Sir — It's heartwarming to see Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi said that the ongoing violence in Manipur had left a "deep wound" on the conscience of the nation. Like every peace-loving citizen, Ms Sonia Gandhi also said that she was "deeply saddened" to see people "forced to flee" (when "our brothers and sisters who have coexisted peacefully turn against each other") from their homes, and leave behind all that they had built over their lifetime. Sonia Gandhi very rightly said that she could understand the pain the people of Manipur were going through being a mother herself, and appealed to the women of the state to lead the way in bringing peace.

Whereas, our Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi who gives 'gyan' (sermons) on so many issues has sadly not said a word for over 50 days on the tragedy that has engulfed the state. More shockingly even the PM has not given an appointment to representatives of political parties who sought time from him and has given no indication whatsoever that he even cares or is concerned. Modi may have forgotten that when under his nose Gujarat carnage had continued, in that period then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited a riot-shaken Gujarat and advised then Chief Minister, Narendra Modi to follow 'Raj dharma'. Alas! There is nothing wrong if one said his behaviour in Manipur is most shocking and beyond comprehension. Without a doubt, Manipur is burning today because of the divisive politics of the RSS/BJP. Hope, after the US and Egypt visit Modi not only opens his mouth and also follows the 'Raj dharma' to save a beautiful double-engine state.

Bidyut K Chatterjee | Faridabad

DELHI ORDINANCE

Sir — Before holding a high-intensity meeting in Patna about the 2024 general election led by Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Delhi's Chief

India lashes out at China



India hit out at China for blocking a move to designate Pakistan-based LeT leader Sajid Mir as a "global terrorist" the UN, saying it shows a lack of genuine political will to fight the scourge of terrorism. China on Tuesday blocked a proposal moved by the US and co-designated by India to blacklist Mir under the 1267 AI Qaida Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council as a global terrorist and subject him to assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo. Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist Mir is wanted for his involvement in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. In a strongly-worded statement, Joint Secretary

at India's permanent mission in New York Prakash Gupta said on Tuesday if efforts to ban terrorists fail due to "petty geopolitical interests", then "we do not have the genuine political will to sincerely fight this challenge of terrorism".

The 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks shook the collective conscience of the world's largest democracy, Mir, believed to be in his mid-40s, is one of India's most wanted terrorists and has a bounty of USD 5 million placed on his head by the US for his role in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. In June last year, Mir was jailed for over 15 years in a terror-financing case by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan. Pakistani authorities had in the past claimed Mir had died, but Western countries remained unconvinced and demanded proof of his death. This issue became a major sticking point in FATF's assessment of Pakistan's progress on the action plan late last year. Mir is a senior member of the Pakistan-based LeT and is wanted for his involvement in the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Minister Arvind Kejriwal convinced the non-BJP government for supporting Rajya Sabha the Transfer Posting bill. He blamed the BJP for wanting to snatch all power from the opposition, it will be tried in Delhi even if a verdict in favour of Delhi's people was given by the Court. But it was overturned by the Centre through the ordinance. When this law comes in the Rajya Sabha, it should not be allowed to pass under any circumstances. If they succeed in Delhi, automatically it would be imposed in all non-BJP states.

Md Ismayeel | Mumbai

ADIEU SYLVESTER DACUNHA

Sir — The passing away of Advertising-czar Sylvester daCunha, who was behind the iconic creation of the 'Amul Girl', with the tagline Utterly Butterly Delicious, is a huge loss to the advertising industry. For close to six decades, the Amul Girl's charismatic appeal has

made it into hoardings and on the front pages of Indian newspapers to stay in the hearts of millions of Indians. It was Dr Kurien, the late Chairman of Amul, who suggested a mischievous little girl as a mascot for the product, and the rest is history. Thanks to Sylvester daCunha, the 77-year-old brand which is synonymous with butter and has made its way into the kitchen of every Indian house, has a lot to do with the blue-haired girl with long lashes, in a polka-dotted dress. A brand doesn't stay relevant just by its logo or a celebrity endorsing it. It needs to consistently cater to the audience uniquely, and the concept of 'Amul Girl', linked with current topics, has caught the eye of the Indians powerfully and still does so.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Smart home technologies that raise your home's IQ

By automating and connecting devices in your home, you can enjoy more convenience, comfort, and control in your living environment

As a homeowner in today's world, you have access to technology that can raise your home's IQ and transform the way you live. Smart home technology is enhancing homes with automated systems, energy management, and security features that provide convenience, efficiency, and peace of mind. The rise of smart homes is rapidly changing the real estate landscape as more homeowners demand intelligent living spaces. If you want to keep up with the latest trends in home automation and experience an upgraded lifestyle, integrating smart home technology into your space may be the next step. With smart home devices and systems becoming increasingly affordable, accessible, and advanced, now is the perfect time to make your place a little bit smarter.

Energy Consumption: Smart home technology allows for efficient management of energy usage. Automated systems, such as lighting controls, optimize energy consumption by adjusting settings based on occupancy and preferences.

Better Security: Smart



home security systems provide enhanced protection for homeowners. With features like smart doorbells, security cameras, and motion sensors, homeowners can monitor their property remotely and receive real-time alerts on their smartphones.

Building Management: Smart home technology enables centralized control and management of various aspects of a building. Building automation systems can regulate lighting, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, ensuring optimal comfort and energy efficiency.

Unmatched Luxury: From voice-controlled virtual assistants that can manage various tasks to automated blinds and curtains, smart homes offer unparalleled

comfort and sophistication.

Parking Solutions: Smart parking solutions are becoming increasingly popular in the Indian real estate industry. Automated parking systems utilize sensors and advanced algorithms to optimize parking space utilization, reducing congestion and providing a seamless parking experience.

By automating and connecting devices in your home, you can enjoy more convenience, comfort, and control in your living environment. While the initial investment may be high, smart home technology can provide long-term savings, security, and energy efficiency benefits for homeowners. The rise of smart homes is transforming the way we live and interact in our homes. As a homeowner, reducing energy usage and costs is likely a top priority. Smart home technology allows you to efficiently manage energy consumption through automated control and monitoring systems. Smart lighting systems, such as Philips Hue, allow you to control lights remotely or on a schedule. Smart garage doors can also

be opened or closed from anywhere. While the initial costs of a smart home system may seem high, the long-term savings in energy, security, and insurance can offset expenses over time. The advanced automation and convenience these technologies provide are invaluable. For homeowners looking to improve home efficiency, smart home systems are an investment in the future that will pay off for years to come.

Smart home security provides an added layer of protection and peace of mind. With smart locks, you can control who has access and when. The latest technology integrated into smart security systems helps make your home as safe as possible. The rise of smart homes is transforming how we live and interact with our properties. Though technology will continue progressing, a smart home allows you to keep up with the pace of change and have an intelligent, forward-thinking space to call your own. The future is automated, and smart homes are leading the way. (The writer is Director & Co-Founder InfraMantra.)



GARVIT TIWARI

FIRST COLUMN

INDIA-US RELATIONS:
HEADING NORTHPM's state visit takes India-US
relations to the next

KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

It was nearly a decade and a half ago, when US President Barack Obama, chose to have PM Manmohan Singh as the first state visit of his administration, thereby underlining a significant upgrade to the India-US bilateral relationship. Many officials at that time had described the invite to India, not as an accident but as a carefully thought gesture, to bring a friend closer to Asia. 2009 wasn't the time when the US-China relationship, or the India-China bilateral was unstable, yet, both countries realised the future threat and started deepening their bonds.

This week the spectacle that unravelled before citizens of both countries with PM Modi's state visit to the US, the address by the Indian PM to the joint Congress, the curated business meetings with top CEOs and the rock star level diaspora events, are a couple of decades of relationship reset, now, visible. It may be worth remembering that just two and half decades back India was under US sanctions and there was almost a diplomatic freeze in relations, haunted by memories from the cold war. There was resistance (perhaps there is still some resonance of the initial fears) nursed by some old-world think tanks, academicians and strategists on both sides.



However, the relationship, one which is transformational and crafted for the 21st century has been expanded to include a vast spectrum of shared interests, which are difficult to be ignored in the next couple of decades. The political economy of both democracies has also accepted the new reality and there is bipartisan support for enhanced closer India-US partnership.

If one of the key opposition leaders, Rahul Gandhi was in the US a fortnight before the PM's visit, engaging with think tanks, government officials and the diaspora on the state of Indian democracy, the US congressional leaders meanwhile, led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives Mr Kevin McCarthy and Senate Majority leader Mr Charles Schumer, extended a rare invite for an Indian PM to address the joint sitting of congress, for the second time. The political message was loud, both countries acknowledge the relevance of each other in the new world order.

This state visit underscored the shift in India-US bilateral from primarily being focussed on a strategic defence partnership to taking giant steps towards a meaningful technology partnership. As PM Modi in his remarks before flying to the US noted "India-US ties are multifaceted, with deepening engagements across sectors. The USA is India's largest trade partner in goods and services. We collaborate closely in science & technology, education, health, defence and security fields. The initiative on Critical & Emerging Technologies has added new dimensions and widened collaboration to defence industrial cooperation, space, telecom, quantum, Artificial Intelligence and biotech sectors."

One of the most significant fillips to this new age partnership has been the creation of iCET (initiative on critical and emerging technologies), a platform, supervised by the Indian Prime minister and US President's office directly. US National security advisor, said "ICET is foundational, fundamental, critical because we believe that the future of our economies, societies security sectors will be determined by the extent to which we can effectively harness emerging technologies on behalf of our people and on behalf of our national interests." The markers have been set, the sprinters are in position, and perhaps the gunshot has been fired for the long haul US India cross country run for decades to come.

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

MSP guarantee will
spell disaster for farmers

UTTAM GUPTA

The hapless farmers must be liberated from the stranglehold of cartel licenced
traders by giving them options to sell their produce wherever they want

Union leaders may have called off farmers' agitation in Haryana over Minimum Support Price (MSP) for sunflower seeds following the State government's decision to agree to their demand. However, they maintain that their protest for securing legal guarantees for MSP across the country will continue.

A legal guarantee for MSP was a major demand of the farmers mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh during the year-long protest in 2020/2021 over the three Central farm laws. That protest ended when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on November 19, 2021, the repeal of those laws. Do the farmers understand the implications of this demand? MSP is a "minimum price" for any crop that the government considers as remunerative for farmers and hence deserving of "support". It fixes MSP for 23 crops grown in Kharif and Rabi seasons based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) - a statutory body that works under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.

The agencies of the government, such as the Food Corporation of India (FCI), buy wheat, rice/paddy, and coarse cereals, from farmers at the MSP. They also purchase other crops such as pulses and oilseeds which are procured by the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED). However, not all crops for which MSP is announced are purchased.

The procurement of food crops by state agencies is meant for giving to over 800 million beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) at a subsidized price of Rs 1/2/3 per kg. The excess of MSP, plus handling, storage and distribution costs over this price is paid as a subsidy by the government.

The government pays MSP to farmers under an 'executive order' introduced in the 1960s. It is not backed by any law. What would happen if the government decides to give a legal guarantee for MSP? The farmers would want it for all 23 crops for which MSP is fixed. The demand could be extended to cover all crops; in fact the entire agricultural produce.

Today, apart from government agencies, farmers' produce is picked up by private traders, processors, aggregators, exporters etc. When there is a law on MSP requiring that no purchase can be made at a price less than this minimum, they will all be scared of buying from farmers. Who will take the risk of landing in jail? A big chunk of private players (in fact, 'all') would desert farmers. The latter will be stuck with the crop only to rot in the fields. The ball doesn't stop here.

In view of a sizeable chunk of the crop produce not coming to the market (inevitable when there is no purchase/sale by private entities), there would be acute shortage resulting in an 'astronomical' rise in food prices and inflation. No measure fiscal or monetary aimed at reining in price rise would work. In such a scenario, farmers would expect the government/agencies to pick up their entire produce albeit at MSP - pointing at the 'legal guarantee'. Can the



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(The writer is a policy
analyst)



latter respond to their call? This is next to impossible.

The value of agricultural produce being about Rs 33,00,000 crore (estimated level for 2023-24), the Union government will have to spend nearly 75 per cent of its annual budget of Rs 45,00,000 crore (2023-24) on buying farmers' agri-produce. The remaining amount Rs 12,00,000 crore won't pay for bare essentials such as defence, maintaining law and order and payment of wages and salaries forget infrastructure, other development works and running welfare schemes.

Hundreds of thousands of crore are spent every year on subsidies for agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, irrigation, seeds, credit etc. All this goes towards helping farmers reduce production costs. With little money left after paying MSP, all this support would cease. Apart from financing, state agencies don't have the wherewithal to handle and store even the 'limited' quantities currently procured by them leading to huge wastages. One shudder at the very thought of a scenario where they will have to procure, handle and store the mountain of produce farmers offer for sale.

A related question is what would the state agencies do with this stuff? They can't hang on to it forever. The stock has to be offloaded to private trade sooner than later. This will entail huge losses due to sales at below MSP and the cost of handling and carrying it as long as they hold. These losses will have to be paid from tax payer's money. Moreover,

this will be a totally avoidable distraction for the government whose prime responsibility is delivering on governance.

There will be other collateral damage. Under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), aggregate measurement support (AMS) - a WTO nomenclature for agricultural subsidies - is capped at 10 per cent of the value of agricultural production for a developing country. If a member country gives AMS in excess of 10 per cent, it is a violation. Already, with limited purchases from farmers, India is facing a daunting challenge at the WTO due to AMS exceeding the 10 per cent threshold. Imagine, what would happen when the government/agencies buy the entire produce from farmers albeit at MSP? Defending our subsidies at WTO would become impossible.

It is abundantly clear that a legal guarantee for the purchase of farmers' produce at MSP is a despicable idea. The government should not even look at it. True, farmers don't get a good price. But, a solution to that problem lies elsewhere. The state laws viz. APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) Act permit the sale of agri - produce only at designated APMC mandis whose capacity is extremely limited. These mandis can't even cope with the quantities brought by large farmers even as small and marginal farmers who constitute 86 per cent of total land-owning farmers are forced to come to private local markets where 'sales are legally barred'.

At APMC mandis, a cartel of licensed traders and commission agents (known as artisans in local parlance, their job is to facilitate transactions between farmer and the buyer) rules the roost. They make sure that the farmer doesn't get a fair price. At local markets also, this very cartel forces the more vulnerable farmers (read: small and marginal) to sell their crops at throwaway prices. Having come to the mandi travelling a long distance, the poor fellow has no option but to sell and get whatever is possible.

All that needed to be done was to liberate hapless farmers from the stranglehold of this cartel by giving them 'multiple options' to sell their produce wherever they like. This is precisely what the three farm laws sought to do. Unquestionably, farmers would have got a good price probably even higher than MSP depending on the demand-supply scenario while artisans/traders needed to surrender a portion of their hefty margin. But, the latter masquerading as champions of the former spearheaded a year-long protest forcing Modi to withdraw the laws. The Supreme Court (SC) did its bit in letting this happen.

Meanwhile, Modi - government has taken several steps including an increase in MSP, hiking fertilizer subsidies and so on to help farmers but all this comes to naught as long as they remain strangled. The irony is that these very saboteurs castigate the Prime Minister for not fulfilling his promise of 'doubling farmers' income'.

Opposition must embrace political nationalism

The Opposition habitually opposes any decision taken by the government. It does not come up with positive agenda for the progress of the nation

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi had gate crashed into an ongoing presser at the Press Club of India in the politically fragile months of 2013. He tore apart a copy of an Ordinance promulgated to get around the Supreme Court verdict on barring elected representatives convicted with a jail term of two or more years. At that time Manmohan Singh, the prime minister who headed the UPA-II, was visiting the US on an official visit.

The political impulses of Rahul Gandhi sent him on a path to rob the credibility of the prime minister of the day. Manmohan Singh was rumoured to have seriously considered resigning from the office. But he was persuaded to stay in the office. It is an irony



SUMEET BHASIN

that Rahul Gandhi went on the US visit 10 days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official tour of Washington. Not heeding the political consensus that domestic politics should not seek foreign shores for mud-slinging, Rahul Gandhi launched personal attacks on PM Modi. The comparison of the two incidents is too relevant to ignore to read the prevailing mood of Indian politics.

The opposition parties have decided to hold a meeting in Patna on June 23. Even before the meeting takes place, the leaders from the opposition camp have begun saying that their agenda is not to win the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The agenda of the opposition parties is clearly negative. It

also is clear that the opposition parties seek to cause political instability in the country, as has been the habit of the Congress.

India is projected by the United Nations to emerge as the most populous nation in the world. Demographic bias favours the youth. The young population of India is aspirational. This section looks upon the political class to fulfil their aspirations. The opposition parties could have considered positive agenda for the aspirational people. Yet, it's not a surprise for the political observers in the country. The opposition parties are in a compulsive obsession with negative agenda. For them, it's immaterial that India is holding the G20 presidency. For them, it's also immaterial that India is emerging as an economic power-

house. For the opposition parties, what matters most is the question, of how to stop Modi from becoming the prime minister of the country once more after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Former Prime Minister H D S Deve Gowda also faced the no-confidence motion. At that time, the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was the leader of the opposition, had asked the Congress to shed light on circumstances leading to the motion in the Lok Sabha, as several internationally significant events were taking place in the country. Late Vajpayee had wondered in his speech while taking part in the debate on the motion that the timing of the event was perplexing. It begs an answer and the opposition parties must answer

that India is hosting the presidency of not only G20 but also of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and yet they invented reasons to boycott the inauguration of the new building of Parliament. Former Prime Minister H D S Deve Gowda did not join the boycott call and he very strongly rejected the move of the opposition parties.

The opposition parties cannot just invent reasons to disrupt historical events such as the inauguration of the new Parliament building. This politics of boycott has ulterior motives. This was proved as the chief ministers of the states ruled by the opposition parties stayed away from the eighth meeting of the Governing Council of the NITI Aayog, which was held at the newly-

built convention centre at the Pragati Maidan.

India is now a \$3.5 trillion economy. India will hit the \$5 trillion economy milestone in the next few years going ahead of Germany to become the fourth-largest economy. By 2047, India is aspiring to become the second-largest economy. There are 25 years before us to achieve the goal.

Modi's agenda for the country is before the people. The onus is on the opposition parties to reveal their agenda. To state that their agenda is to just stop Modi from becoming the prime minister of the country once more will be disrespectful to the people, as they want positive agenda from the political parties, as well as a credible roadmap to bring definitive changes in their

lives. The Opposition unity is not a new slogan. The people in Uttar Pradesh saw it in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, and they gave a verdict against the politics of negative agenda.

The Gandhi Peace Award was bestowed upon the Geeta Press for years of selfless service. Yet, the Opposition faulted the decision of the government without any cogent reason. The message is clear that the Opposition will just oppose any decision taken by the government. At the same time, the Opposition falls short of bringing a positive agenda for the progress of the nation. This calls for introspection from the leaders of the constituents of the Opposition camp to ponder what agenda they have to offer to the people of the country who are aspirational.

Titanic submersible search passes critical 96-Hour oxygen supply

AP ■ DUBAI

The search for the missing submersible on an expedition to view the wreckage of the Titanic passed the critical 96-hour mark Thursday when breathable air could have run out, a grim moment in the intense effort to save the five people aboard.

The Titan submersible was estimated to have about a four-day supply of breathable air when it launched Sunday morning in the North Atlantic — but experts have emphasized that was an imprecise approximation to begin with and could be extended if passengers have taken measures to conserve breathable air.

And it's not known if they survived since the sub's disappearance.

Rescuers have rushed ships, planes and other equipment to the site of the disappearance. On Thursday, the US Coast Guard said an undersea robot

sent by a Canadian ship had reached the sea floor, while a French research institute said a deep-diving robot with cameras, lights and arms also joined the operation.

Authorities are hoping underwater sounds might help narrow their search, whose coverage area has been expanded to thousands of miles — twice the size of Connecticut and in waters 2 1/2 miles (4 kilometres) deep.

The Titan was reported overdue Sunday afternoon about 435 miles (700 kilometres) south of St. John's, Newfoundland, as it was on its way to where the iconic ocean liner sank more than a century ago.

OceanGate Expeditions, which is leading the trip, has been chronicling the Titanic's decay and the underwater ecosystem around it via yearly voyages since 2021. By Thursday morning, hope was running out that anyone on board the ves-



sel would be found alive.

Many obstacles still remain: from pinpointing the vessel's location, to reaching it with rescue equipment, to bringing it to the surface — assuming it's still intact. And all that has to happen before the passengers' oxygen supply runs out.

Dr. Rob Larter, a marine geophysicist with the British Antarctic Survey, emphasised the difficulty of even finding something the size of the sub — which is about 22 feet (6.5 metres) long and 9 feet (nearly 3 metres)

high.

"You're talking about totally dark environments," in which an object several dozen feet away can be missed, he said. "It's just a needle in a haystack situation unless you've got a pretty precise location."

The area of the North Atlantic where the Titan vanished Sunday is also prone to fog and stormy conditions, making it an extremely challenging environment to conduct a search-and-rescue mission, said Donald Murphy, an

oceanographer who served as chief scientist of the Coast Guard's International Ice Patrol.

The passengers are also facing temperatures just above freezing. Meanwhile, newly uncovered allegations suggest there had been significant warnings made about vessel safety during the submersible's development. Broadcasters around the world started newscasts at the critical hour Thursday with news of the submersible.

The Saudi-owned satellite channel Al Arabiya showed a clock on air counting down to their estimate of when the air could potentially run out. Captain Jamie Frederick of the First Coast Guard District said a day earlier that authorities were still holding out hope of saving the five passengers onboard.

"This is a search-and-rescue mission, 100 per cent," he said on Wednesday. Frederick said while the sounds that have

been detected offered a chance to narrow the search, their exact location and source hadn't yet been determined. "We don't know what they are, to be frank," he said.

Retired Navy Capt. Carl Hartsfield, now the director of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Systems Laboratory, said the sounds have been described as "banging noises," but he warned that search crews "have to put the whole picture together in context and they have to eliminate potential manmade sources other than the Titan."

The report was encouraging to some experts because submarine crews unable to communicate with the surface are taught to bang on their submersible's hull to be detected by sonar.

The US Navy said in a statement Wednesday that it was sending a specialised salvage system that's capable of hoisting "large, bulky and heavy

undersea objects such as aircraft or small vessels." The Titan weighs 20,000 pounds (9,000 kilograms). The US Navy's Flyaway Deep Ocean Salvage System is designed to lift up to 60,000 pounds (27,200 kilograms), the Navy said on its website. Lost aboard the vessel is pilot Stockton Rush, the CEO of OceanGate. His passengers are: British adventurer Hamish Harding; Pakistani businessman Shahzad Dawood and his son Suleman; and French explorer and Titanic expert Paul-Henry Nargeolet.

At least 46 people successfully travelled on OceanGate's submersible to the Titanic wreck site in 2021 and 2022, according to letters the company filed with a US District Court in Norfolk, Virginia, that oversees matters involving the Titanic shipwreck. One of the company's first customers characterised a dive he made to the site two years ago as a "kamikaze operation."

Germany warns China over Taiwan

AP ■ BERLIN

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned Beijing on Thursday against using force to change the status quo with Taiwan and expressed concern about the human rights situation in China, days after holding bilateral talks with the new Chinese premier.

Scholz told German lawmakers that Berlin wants constructive relations with China because the country plays a key role in solving global problems such as food security, climate change and poverty.

"At the same time we clearly urged China to stick to international rules," he said of a recent declaration by the Group of Seven major economies.

"No country is another's backyard — that is true for Europe as much as anywhere else in the world."

"We strongly reject all attempts to change the status quo in the East and South China Sea by force or coercion," said Scholz.

"That is especially true for Taiwan."

Beijing considers the self-governed island to be part of China and has been expanding its military presence in the region.

"We also view with concern the human rights situation and the rule of law in China," he added.

"I underlined these messages the day before yesterday during the German-China government consultations."

Scholz's comments to parliament were significantly stronger than his public remarks at a joint statement Tuesday with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who was on his first foreign trip since taking charge of the world's second-largest economy as premier in March. The chancellor didn't mention Taiwan explicitly as he spoke alongside Li.

Journalists were not permitted to ask questions at that event, a decision that Scholz's office attributed to the wishes of the Chinese delegation.

Explosion at restaurant in China claims 31 lives



AP ■ BEIJING/YINCHUAN

At least 31 people were killed and seven others injured when a massive cooking gas explosion ripped through a barbecue restaurant in northwestern China on the eve of the Drago Boat festival, official media reported on Thursday.

The blast happened at around 8:40 pm on Wednesday on a busy street in the Xingqing District of Yinchuan, due to a leakage of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from the operating area of a barbecue restaurant, state-run Xinhua news agency reported on Thursday.

Nine people, including the owner of the restaurant, were detained.

The explosion resulted in 38 casualties, with 31 people confirmed dead, while seven individuals, including one in critical condition, are currently receiving medical treatment, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Regional Committee of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) said.

The explosion took place on the eve of the two-day nationwide holiday of China's Dragon Boat festival beginning on Thursday. The restaurant was reportedly packed with a holiday crowd.

The blast caused heavy damage to the surrounding

buildings. Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday called for an all-out rescue and treatment of the injured and a safety overhaul after a barbecue restaurant in Yinchuan.

Police have detained nine persons, including the owner, shareholders and staffers of a barbecue restaurant. The regional government has frozen their assets, Xinhua reported.

Yinchuan local government said on its social media account that the explosion occurred when the chef was replacing the valve on the gas tank after staff reported smelling a leak.

Xinhua reported that 64 families in the vicinity have been moved into hotels for safety.

According to local media reports, the restaurant was part of a well-known chain and covered two floors, with room for around 20 diners on the ground floor.

The more enclosed second floor had karaoke rooms, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

Barbecues are a popular dining style in northwestern China and it is likely that many of the restaurant's patrons were celebrating the start of one of the country's most popular festivals.

Gas blasts in restaurants

and apartment buildings have been common in recent years in China.

The country has also seen a number of fatal incidents this year, which included a mining accident in February in the Inner Mongolia region killing 53 people. It was followed by fire in a Beijing hospital in April in which 29 people were killed.

A joint work team, including members from China's Ministry of Emergency Management, Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the State Administration for Market Regulation, was dispatched to the scene to guide the rescue work.

Four medical experts went to the scene with the joint work team to carry out emergency medical assistance.

The local rescue team dispatched 102 people and 20 vehicles to the scene and rescue operations ended in the early hours on Thursday, the Xinhua report said.

Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is the home of China's Hui Muslims.

China has about 20 million Muslims who are mostly Uyghurs, an ethnic group of Turkic origin and Hui Muslims who are of Chinese ethnic origin.

'Critical to maintain US-China ties after Biden's dictator remarks'

AP ■ PARIS

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Thursday that it's "critical" the US and China maintain a relationship so they can "work together" on global challenges, coming just after President Joe Biden's remarks calling Chinese leader Xi Jinping a "dictator" drew condemnation from Beijing.

Speaking at a news conference in Paris, Yellen said that "with respect to the comments, I think President Biden and I both believe it's critical to maintain communication ... to clear up misperceptions, miscalculations. We need to work together where possible." "But we have disagreements, and we are also forthright in recognising we do have disagreements," she added.

Yellen has recently advocated for improving relations



between the US and China, arguing cooperation is needed for the sake of maintaining global stability.

Biden's remarks at a fundraiser on Tuesday, when he also said China had "real economic difficulties", opened a new rift just after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken concluded a visit to Beijing.

The trip sought to break the ice in a relationship that has

hit a historical low. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning condemned Biden's unusually pointed comments as "extremely absurd and irresponsible." Speaking at a two-day gathering gets underway in Paris on improving the global financial response to climate change and poverty, Yellen said that "I'm certainly pleased to see China participating in this summit."

Chinese Premier Li Qiang was among the dozens of heads of state and government, world finance officials and activists who converged on the French capital on Thursday to discuss ways of reforming the global financial system and address debt, climate change and poverty crises, especially for developing nations.

"I believe it's important, as President Biden does, that the world's two largest economies

are ... working together in addressing global challenges," Yellen said.

She also emphasised that debt restructuring was a US priority.

As a growing number of countries struggle with unsustainable debt aggravated by the fallout from climate change, Yellen encouraged all creditors to enter into negotiations to make the burden sustainable. China is the world's biggest government lender.

Citing Zambia, the southern African country she visited in January, Yellen said she was "encouraged by progress" regarding debt negotiations and was hoping "debt treatment can move forward soon". She did not provide details.

"Other urgent pending cases must also move forward quickly," she added, mentioning Ghana and Sri Lanka.

EU summons Kosovo, Serbia leaders for emergency talks

Brussels (AP): The European Union on Thursday summoned the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo for emergency talks to try to bring an end to a series of violent clashes near their border that is fueling fears of a return to open conflict.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that he would hold "urgent meetings" with Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in Brussels.

It was unclear whether the two would meet face-to-face, or only hold separate talks with Borrell. "We need immediate de-escalation and new elections in the north with participation of Kosovo Serbs. This is paramount for the region and (the) EU," Borrell tweeted ahead of the talks.

The 27-nation bloc has for years been leading talks aimed at reconciling the two foes, but with little success.

Myanmar regime foes support US sanctions

AP ■ BANGKOK

Opponents of Myanmar's military government applauded fresh financial sanctions imposed by the United States on the Southeast Asian nation but called on Thursday for further measures to pressure its ruling generals to restore peace and democracy.

The US Treasury Department announced on Wednesday it was imposing the sanctions on Myanmar's Defence Ministry and two state-owned banks, the Myanma Foreign Trade Bank and the Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank.

The move freezes any assets of the sanctioned entities that are in the United States or controlled by a US person. It also prohibits all transactions by US persons or carried out within or transiting the United States that the targeted entities would benefit from. That would make it difficult to carry out transactions through financial institutions involving US dollars. The sanctions are the

latest by the Biden administration against Myanmar's military-installed government, after army overthrew the elected civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, 2021.

The Treasury Department statement said the Defence Ministry since then has continued to import goods and material worth at least USD 1 billion, including from sanctioned entities in Russia.

The army's 2021 takeover prompted widespread public protests whose violent suppression by security forces triggered an armed resistance that now spans much of the country, amounting to civil war. Security forces have been accused of carrying out large-scale human rights violation to try to crush all opposition.

"To support its brutal repression across Burma, the military regime has relied on foreign sources, including sanctioned Russian entities, to purchase and import arms, dual-use goods, equipment, and raw materials to manufacture

weapons," said Wednesday's announcement from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, OFAC.

"The military regime and other designated state-owned entities have relied on state-owned financial institutions that act as the primary foreign currency exchanges in Burma to facilitate these transactions."

The US government refers to Myanmar by its old name, Burma.

An underground group of researchers and activists from Myanmar said it welcomed Washington's sanctions "targeting junta-controlled banks that help sustain the junta's campaign of terror."

"However, for sanctions to be effective, far more needs to be done to systematically target the junta's financial and arms procurement networks by the US and its allies, said the statement from the group, Justice for Myanmar.

It urged sanctions against Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, MOGE, "which

continues to bankroll the junta's ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as the junta's network of cronies and arms brokers."

About half of Myanmar's foreign exchange earnings come from MOGE, mostly from sales of offshore natural gas.

The US-headquartered organization EarthRights International called OFAC's action "the most consequential sanctions the US has placed against the Myanmar military", since the army's seizure of power in 2021.

"The military has used these banks to launder the vital revenues it strips from Myanmar's gems, jade, timber, and gas sectors," said a statement from the group.

"It can use these revenues to fund massacres and other crimes against humanity while it starves the Myanmar economy of foreign currency, ramps up its military budget, and turns off the electricity."

But it also demanded sanctions against MOGE.

UAE leader welcomes Iranian foreign min in latest softening of Persian Gulf tensions

AP ■ DUBAI

The president of the United Arab Emirates met with Iran's visiting foreign minister on Thursday in the latest sign of improving relations between Arab Gulf countries and the Islamic Republic. The UAE, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries have long harboured suspicions about Iran because of its nuclear program and support for militant groups across the region, and have cultivated close defence ties with the US. But in recent months they have charted a more independent path, reaching out to US adversaries as Washington increasingly focuses on Russia and China.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian "discussed the importance of building on positive developments to ben-



efit the people of the region and enhance regional stability and prosperity," the UAE's state-run WAM news agency reported.

Iranian state TV said the two met for 90 minutes and discussed further cooperation in different fields.

It said the Iranian foreign minister invited Sheikh Mohammed to visit Iran and

that the UAE president invited Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi to visit the Emirates. The meeting follows similar recent outreach by Saudi Arabia, which agreed to normalise relations with Iran for the first time in seven years in a deal brokered by China in March. The two countries have since reopened embassies and held high-level

official visits.

The UAE, home to the futuristic cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, is a close US military ally that hosts some 2,000 American troops at the Al-Dhafra Air Base.

US forces based there and in other Arab Gulf countries have long been seen as a deterrent to Iran.

The UAE was also the driving force behind the so-called Abraham Accords, in which it and three other Arab countries forged ties with Israel.

Israel views Iran as its greatest threat and hopes to further isolate it by pursuing closer ties with Arab states. Israel and the US are keen to reach a normalisation agreement with Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials say any such agreement would have to be linked to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

UK ex-teacher pleads guilty to child abuse in India

London (PTI): A former deputy head teacher of a London primary school has pleaded guilty to paying and instructing teenagers in India to abuse younger children. The UK's NCA revealed this week that it had arrested Matthew Smith, 34, from south London in November last year after its investigators identified that he was sharing abuse material on the dark web and he was convicted at Southwark Crown Court in London on Tuesday. According to the NCA, Smith was online at the time of his arrest, speaking to a teenage boy living in India and asking him to send sexual images of a younger child, in return for money. "Matthew Smith was a high-risk individual and we moved quickly to arrest and remand him so he could no longer pose a threat to children," said Helen Dore, NCA's Senior Officer.

UN warns Taliban over restrictions on women

United Nations (AP): The UN envoy for Afghanistan warned the country's Taliban rulers Wednesday that international recognition as the country's legitimate government will remain "nearly impossible" unless they lift severe restrictions on women and girls' education and employment.

Roza Otunbayeva told the UN Security Council that the Taliban have asked to be recognized by the United Nations and its 192 other member nations, "but at the same time they act against the key values expressed in the United Nations Charter."

In her regular discussions with the Taliban, she said, "I am blunt about the obstacles they have created for themselves by the decrees and restrictions they have enacted, in particular against women and girls."

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021 as US and NATO troops were in the final weeks of withdraw-



ing from the country after two decades of war. The group's decrees limiting the participation of girls and women have impacted foreign aid to the country, whose citizens face the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

The Taliban initially promised a more moderate rule than during their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001 but started to enforce restrictions on women and girls soon after the 2021 takeover.

Pope still feeling effects of surgery, short of breath

Rome (AP): Pope Francis said on Thursday he was short of breath and still feeling the effects of anesthesia from abdominal surgery two weeks ago. Francis made the comments to explain why he chose not to deliver a prepared speech to visiting charity workers for Eastern rite churches. Instead, the speech was handed out.

"I'm still under the effect of anesthesia," Vatican News quoted Francis as saying. "My breathing isn't good."

The 86-year-old pontiff underwent three hours of surgery under general anesthesia June 7 to repair a hernia in his abdominal wall and remove intestinal scar tissue. He was discharged on July 16, with his surgeon saying he was "better than before."

UK recession fears mount

Bank of England hikes borrowing rates by more than expected

AP ■ LONDON

Fears that the British economy is heading for recession mounted sharply on Thursday after the Bank of England raised borrowing costs by more than anticipated, seeking to combat stubbornly high inflation with a hike that will hit borrowers hard, particularly homeowners who have to refinance in the coming months.

On a busy day for central bank action in Europe, the Bank of England said its nine-member Monetary Policy Committee decided to lift its main interest rate by half a percentage point to a fresh 15-year high of 5 per cent.

All but two of the panel backed the half-point increase. The size of the bank's 13th hike in a row was somewhat of a surprise, with most economists predicting a smaller quarter-point increase.

Bank Gov. Andrew Bailey warned of further increases if inflation fails to show clear signs of heading down.

"We are committed to returning inflation to the 2 per cent target and will make the decisions necessary to achieve that," he said.

Clearly, rate-setters have been spooked by the failure of inflation in the UK to ease as fast as predicted.

Inflation has proven stickier than in other major economies, with many blaming the bank for being too slow to start raising borrowing rates and Britain's departure from the European Union, which has added to import costs.

Figures on Wednesday showed UK inflation unexpectedly holding steady at 8.7 per cent, fuelling concerns over the outlook for prices after predictions for a modest decline to 8.4 per cent. With wages rising

Will get through: Sunak

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Thursday struck a note of reassurance as the Bank of England raised the country's interest rate to hit a 15-year high of 5 per cent, and said he remains committed to his government's target of halving inflation.

Addressing a PM Connect event at Dartford in Kent, the British Indian leader reiterated that curbing inflation was not going to be easy but he remains determined to stay the course even as rising interest rates pile pressure on mortgage holders.

Pointing out that the economic pressures being faced by the UK are part of a wider global trend as a result of conflict and high energy costs, Sunak said he believes the UK will get through this tough phase.

"I'm here to tell you that I am totally, 100 per cent on it," said Sunak. "And it is going to be OK and we are going to get through this and that is the

most important thing I wanted to let you know today," he said.

Taking questions from a gathering of local workers and reporters, the Prime Minister also hit out at the Opposition Labour Party's borrowing plans, which he said would "make the situation worse".

"If I just gave into the easy thing every time, that would just mean more and more government borrowing, that just puts fuel on the fire of inflation and makes it worse, makes it last longer, means interest rates would go up even more. And that's not going to do anyone any favours," he said. Asked about tax cuts under his leadership, he added: "The biggest tax cut that this government could deliver for you and for everyone else is to halve inflation. That is a massive tax cut because it is inflation right now that is making everyone poor."

Banks around the world, from the US Federal Reserve to European Central Bank, have rapidly raised interest rates to bring down inflation first stoked by supply chain backups tied to the rebound from the pandemic and then Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Fed has since paused but indicated the possibility of more hikes this year.

Higher interest rates help lower inflation by making it more expensive for individuals and businesses to borrow, meaning they potentially spend less, reducing demand and pressure on prices.

The UK rate hike will pile further pressure on borrowers, particularly the 1.4 million or

so households that will have to refinance their mortgages over the rest of the year. The increases will clearly come at a cost, and there are concerns over the outlook for the British economy, which has so far avoided falling into recession even as Europe's economy contracted slightly in the six months ending in March.

"It is increasingly difficult to see how the UK avoids a recession as part of the process of bringing inflation down," said Luke Bartholomew, senior economist at asset management firm abrdn. "And today's large rate increase will probably be seen in retrospect as an important milestone towards that recession."

In a recession, unemployment would inevitably increase and home repossessions would become more prevalent — hardly the backdrop the Conservative government wants ahead of a likely general election next year. It is trailing the main opposition Labour Party in the polls.

Treasury chief Jeremy Hunt said the battle against inflation has to take priority despite the likely painful fallout.

"Our resolve to do this is watertight because it is the only long-term way to relieve pressure on families with mortgages," he said. "If we don't act now, it will be worse later."

Not everyone is convinced that the bank is doing the right thing, arguing that previous interest rate increases have yet to work their way through the economy — there's always a lag. "Pushing interest rates so high that the economy is driven into recession will only make the current crisis worse, costing people their jobs and their homes," said Paul Nowak, general secretary of the umbrella Trades Union Congress.

Directorate, did not confirm Ukraine's involvement but said on TV that a blow to the span would be part of an "ongoing process."

"If the stars are lit, it means it was done for a reason, right? We can only say that there will be a continuation," Yusov said, paraphrasing the opening of a well-known work by Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Russian state news agency RIA-Novosti cited an unnamed representative of Russia's Investigative Committee as saying Thursday that preliminary information indicates there were four missiles fired and the remains of one of them showed markings of being French-made. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu alleged this week that Ukraine planned to use US-made HIMARS and UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles to attack Russian territory, including Crimea.

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Pak PM meets IMF director

Last-ditch effort to get bailout

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on Thursday as the cash-strapped country made a last-ditch effort to get a much-needed loan from the global lender, a media report said.

The two sides exchanged views on the ongoing programmes and cooperation between crisis-ridden Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the meeting held on the sidelines of the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact at Paris in France, Radio Pakistan reported.

The IMF signed a deal in 2019 to provide USD 6 billion to Pakistan on fulfilment of certain conditions.

The plan was derailed several times and the full reimbursement is still pending due to insistence by the donor that Pakistan should complete all formalities. Recalling their recent telephone conversation on May 27, 2023, the prime minister appraised Georgieva of Pakistan's economic outlook and outlined the steps taken by the government for economic growth and stability. Shehbaz also

underscored that all prior actions for the ninth review under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) had been completed and the government of Pakistan was fully committed to fulfilling its obligations as agreed with the IMF. The prime minister expressed the

Women, kids oppressed under PML-N: Imran

Tearek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, law enforcement agencies have so far arrested over 10,000 of its workers across Pakistan, most of them from Punjab. Some 74 prisoners have been handed over to the military for their court-martial under the Army Act.

More than 140 PTI leaders and former lawmakers have succumbed to pressure so far and joined the Istekham-i-Pakistan Party (IPP) led by another deserter of PTI Jahangir Khan Tareen.

The IPP is being dubbed as the 'king's party' carved out of the PTI by the powerful military establishment. PTI's former aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar was the latest on Thursday who announced quitting the party in police custody. He said the PML-N government has stopped its lowest to isolate him.

"This level of fascism and oppression against women and children has never been witnessed before in our country, not even during the worst martial law days," Khan said in a tweet in reaction to the recent arrests of his party leaders.

According to the Pakistan

Bridge linking Ukraine's mainland to Crimea damaged in explosion

Ukrainian authorities have said that for the country's nearly 16-month war to end, Moscow must withdraw its forces from Crimea as well as from areas they seized during last year's full-scale invasion.

The damage to the bridge was not severe and likely will be repaired within several days, according to Vladimir Konstantinov, chairman of Crimea's parliament.

Vladimir Saldo, who heads the Russian-occupied parts of Kherson province, said the explosion appeared to have been caused by a type of long-range cruise missile that both France and the UK have given to Ukraine's military. The claim could not be independently verified. Numerous military analysts have said recent Ukrainian actions in the country's south and east indicated that Kyiv's troops were in the beginning of a long-anticipated counteroffensive.

Asked about the reported damage to the Chongar Bridge, Andrii Yusov, a spokesperson for Ukraine's Ministry of Defence Main Intelligence

Directorate, did not confirm Ukraine's involvement but said on TV that a blow to the span would be part of an "ongoing process."

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Nepal SC clears way for amended Citizenship Bill

Kathmandu (PTI): The Supreme Court of Nepal on Thursday cleared the way for the implementation of the newly amended Citizenship Bill which was recently certified by President Ram Chandra Paudel.

A division bench of Justice Ananda Mohan Bhattarai and Justice Kumar Regmi paved the way for the bill's implementation as it decided not to give continuity to the interlocutory interim order earlier issued by a single bench. The short-term order issued by Justice Manoj Sharma earlier blocked the way for the implementation of the amended provisions of the Citizenship Act, allowing thousands of children of parents, who got citizenship by birth, to acquire citizenship by descent.

An estimated 500,000 such people are waiting for their citizenship certificates. However, the court is yet to issue its final verdict in this matter.

Hungary broke law by forcing migrants to start asylum process abroad

Brussels (AP): The European Union's top court ruled on Thursday that Hungary flouted the bloc's laws and infringed on migrants' rights by forcing asylum seekers inside the country or at its borders to start the process at its embassies in Serbia and Ukraine.

Hungary's anti-immigrant government has taken a hardline on people entering the country since well over one million people entered Europe in 2015, most of them fleeing conflict in Syria. It erected border fences and forcefully tried to stop many from entering.

After the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020, the government pushed through a law forcing people seeking international protection to travel to Belgrade or Kyiv to apply for a travel permit at its embassies there to enter Hungary. Only once back could they file their applications.

The EU's executive branch, the European Commission, took Hungary to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) over the law, insisting that the country had failed to fulfil its obligations under the 27-nation's blocs rules. The rules oblige all member countries to have common procedures for granting asylum.

People have the right to apply for asylum or other forms of international protection if they fear for their safety in their home countries, or face the prospect of persecution based on their race, religion, ethnic background, gender or other discrimination.

The ECJ ruled that by "making an application for international protection subject to the prior submission of a declaration of intent at a Hungarian embassy situated in a third country," the government in Budapest "has failed to fulfil its obligations", according to a court statement.

Russia SC quashes Navalny's lawsuit

Moscow (AP): Russia's Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a lawsuit by imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny contesting prison regulations that allow prison officials to deprive him of stationery and pens.

Navalny is serving a nine-year sentence for fraud and contempt of court in a maximum security penal colony in Melekhovo 250 kilometers (150 miles) east of Moscow. This week, another trial against the Kremlin's archfoe began right



there in the penal colony on charges of extremism. If convicted, Navalny will remain behind bars for at least two more decades. In the lawsuit

considered by the Supreme Court on Thursday, Navalny complained that prison officials in the restricted housing unit, where he is held in isolation, no longer gave him a pen and paper.

"Some are being given a pen and paper for an hour. In some places, for 15 minutes, and a convict needs a week to finish a letter.

In my case, the time for writing materials was removed from my schedule entirely. How come? The prison chief

decided so, that's how," Navalny wrote in a typically sardonic social media post on the eve of the hearing.

The complaint is one of many the 47-year-old politician has filed against prison officials, alleging multiple violations of his rights as a convict. All of his lawsuits and petitions have been rejected by Russian courts.

Navalny appeared at the Supreme Court hearing via video link from the Melekhovo colony.

Palestinian attacker's home in occupied West Bank demolished

troops carrying out the controlled demolition of the suspected gunman's apartment. The military reported that troops came under attack during the operation in the city of Nablus, but no injuries were reported. The house belonged to Kamal Jouri, one of two Palestinians suspected of killing Ssgt. Ido Baruch in a drive-by shooting in the northern West Bank in October. He and a second suspect were arrested by the military in February, and the army demolished the second suspect's home earlier this month. A Palestinian militant group called the Den of Lions claimed the attack.

Israeli troops on Thursday demolished the home of a Palestinian who is suspected of killing an Israeli soldier last year, in the latest military operation in the increasingly volatile occupied West Bank, which has been gripped by surging violence.

The demolition came during a week of rising tensions and unrelenting violence in the West Bank and just hours after Israel carried out a rare airstrike that killed three Palestinian militants near the city of Jenin and Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian villages in retaliation for the killing of four Israelis a day earlier.

A daylong Israeli military raid on Monday killed seven Palestinians, including two teens, near Jenin, a militant stronghold in



Palestinian militants in the occupied territory.

Early on Thursday, the Israeli army released a video showing



troops carrying out the controlled demolition of the suspected gunman's apartment. The military reported that troops came under attack during the operation in the city of Nablus, but no injuries were reported. The house belonged to Kamal Jouri, one of two Palestinians suspected of killing Ssgt. Ido Baruch in a drive-by shooting in the northern West Bank in October. He and a second suspect were arrested by the military in February, and the army demolished the second suspect's home earlier this month. A Palestinian militant group called the Den of Lions claimed the attack.

was the latest in a long string of violence in the region over the past year and half that shows no sign of relenting. At least 135 Palestinians and 26 people on the Israeli side have been killed so far this year, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

Israel has been staging near-nightly raids in the West Bank in response to a string of deadly Palestinian attacks targeting Israeli civilians early in 2022. Israel says most of the Palestinians killed were militants, but stone-throwing youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed.

Israel captured the West Bank along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek those territories for a future independent state.



Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meets with managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Georgieva, in Paris, France. AP/PTI

underscored that all prior actions for the ninth review under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) had been completed and the government of Pakistan was fully committed to fulfilling its obligations as agreed with the IMF. The prime minister expressed the

Women, kids oppressed under PML-N: Imran

Tearek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, law enforcement agencies have so far arrested over 10,000 of its workers across Pakistan, most of them from Punjab. Some 74 prisoners have been handed over to the military for their court-martial under the Army Act.

More than 140 PTI leaders and former lawmakers have succumbed to pressure so far and joined the Istekham-i-Pakistan Party (IPP) led by another deserter of PTI Jahangir Khan Tareen.

The IPP is being dubbed as the 'king's party' carved out of the PTI by the powerful military establishment. PTI's former aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar was the latest on Thursday who announced quitting the party in police custody. He said the PML-N government has stopped its lowest to isolate him.

"This level of fascism and oppression against women and children has never been witnessed before in our country, not even during the worst martial law days," Khan said in a tweet in reaction to the recent arrests of his party leaders.

According to the Pakistan

Hungary broke law by forcing migrants to start asylum process abroad

Brussels (AP): The European Union's top court ruled on Thursday that Hungary flouted the bloc's laws and infringed on migrants' rights by forcing asylum seekers inside the country or at its borders to start the process at its embassies in Serbia and Ukraine.

Hungary's anti-immigrant government has taken a hardline on people entering the country since well over one million people entered Europe in 2015, most of them fleeing conflict in Syria. It erected border fences and forcefully tried to stop many from entering.

After the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020, the government pushed through a law forcing people seeking international protection to travel to Belgrade or Kyiv to apply for a travel permit at its embassies there to enter Hungary. Only once back could they file their applications.

The EU's executive branch, the European Commission, took Hungary to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) over the law, insisting that the country had failed to fulfil its obligations under the 27-nation's blocs rules. The rules oblige all member countries to have common procedures for granting asylum.

People have the right to apply for asylum or other forms of international protection if they fear for their safety in their home countries, or face the prospect of persecution based on their race, religion, ethnic background, gender or other discrimination.

The ECJ ruled that by "making an application for international protection subject to the prior submission of a declaration of intent at a Hungarian embassy situated in a third country," the government in Budapest "has failed to fulfil its obligations", according to a court statement.

Russia SC quashes Navalny's lawsuit

Moscow (AP): Russia's Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a lawsuit by imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny contesting prison regulations that allow prison officials to deprive him of stationery and pens.

Navalny is serving a nine-year sentence for fraud and contempt of court in a maximum security penal colony in Melekhovo 250 kilometers (150 miles) east of Moscow. This week, another trial against the Kremlin's archfoe began right

Palestinian attacker's home in occupied West Bank demolished

troops carrying out the controlled demolition of the suspected gunman's apartment. The military reported that troops came under attack during the operation in the city of Nablus, but no injuries were reported. The house belonged to Kamal Jouri, one of two Palestinians suspected of killing Ssgt. Ido Baruch in a drive-by shooting in the northern West Bank in October. He and a second suspect were arrested by the military in February, and the army demolished the second suspect's home earlier this month. A Palestinian militant group called the Den of Lions claimed the attack.

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APPENDIX-IV-A
[See proviso to rule 8 (6)]
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
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 to **Assets Care & Reconstruction Enterprise Ltd. (CIN : U65993DL2002PLC115769)** ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is", and "whatever there is" basis on 25.07.2023 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 49,54,957/- (Rupees Forty Nine Lakh Fifty Four Thousand Nine Hundred Fifty Seven only), pending towards the Loan Account No. D012XII [Old Loan Account No. HHLNOI00278931], by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 07.06.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan documents(s) w.e.f. 08.06.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **MR. DEEPAK GOPAL, MRS. RITU VARSHNEY, M/S. QUALITY ENVIRO ENGINEERS (THROUGH PARTNER) and MR. DEVENDER SINGH.**

The old Loan Account along with its underlying security(ies), including the Immovable Property, had been assigned by Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. to Indiabulls Asset Reconstruction Co. Ltd. ("IARCL") vide Assignment Agreement dated 31.12.2019. The said Loan Account has been further assigned by IARCL to and in favour of the Secured Creditor, acting as a Trustee of ACRE-102-Trust, vide Assignment Agreement dated 26.04.2021 read with Rectification Deed dated 26.08.2021. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 41,00,000/- (Rupees Forty One Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 4,10,000/- (Rupees Four Lakh Ten Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

PROPERTY BEING FLAT NO. H - 003, MEASURING (95.41 SQ. MTR.) 1027 SQ. FEET, AT GROUND FLOOR, TOWER-"H", IN THE PROJECT KNOWN AS "STELLAR JEEVAN", PLOT NO. GH - 03, SECTOR 1, GREATER NOIDA, UTTAR PRADESH - 201307, ALONGWITH ONE STILL - SINGLE CAR PARKING.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.acreindia.in; For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 22.06.2023
Place : GREATER NOIDA

SO/
AUTHORIZED OFFICER
ASSETS CARE & RECONSTRUCTION
ENTERPRISE LTD.
TRUSTEE OF ACRE-102-TRUST

SRF LIMITED
Regd. Office: The Galleria, DLF Mayur Vihar, Unit No. 236 & 237, 2nd Floor, Mayur Vihar Phase, Noida Link Road, Mayur Vihar Phase I Extn, Delhi-110091
Corporate Office: Block-C, Sector 45, Gurugram, Haryana-122 003
Tel. No (Regd office) : (+91-11) 49482870; Fax : (+91-11) 49482900
E-mail: cs@srf.com, Website: www.srf.com; CIN: L18101DL1970PLC005197

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Share Certificates pertaining to shares of the Company detailed below have been reported lost and request(s) for issue of duplicate Certificates in lieu thereof have been received by the Company. Shareholder(s)/Claimant(s) shall also be entitled to Bonus Shares in the ratio of (4:1) on these shares from Investor Education & Protection Fund Authority :-

Sl. No.	Folio No.	Name of the Share Holder / Legal Heir (Claimant)	Cert-No.	Dist-No. (from)	Dist-No. (to)	Lost Shares
1	V 0001642	VIJAY VASUDEV WADHWA (Holder)	33722	2258876	2258925	50
			33723	2258926	2258975	50
			1139546	296748242	296748641	400
2	S 0011280	SHARADA ANANTHARAMAN (Holder)	87870	3366034	3366043	10
			149096	5919791	5919795	5
			90042134	7667138	7667177	40
			90042136	7667218	7667237	20
			90042135	7667178	7667217	40
3	B 0002757	BHARAT MANSUKHLAL SHAH (Holder)	1138492	296549870	296550329	460
			305310-14	15800207	15800351	145
			454310-14	23819999	23820143	145
			90003257	2691226	2691250	25
			90003257	2852175	2852185	11
4	R0001107	RAMESH BHAGAVANTH SHET (Holder)	90003257-58	4165131	4165148	18
			1132398	295307974	295309349	1376
			1137891	296426540	296427581	1132
			12038	1635276	1635300	25
			369734-38	17041454	17041539	86
5	SRF0032960	INDIRA ANANTHA NARAYANA (Holder)	518734-38	25061246	25061331	86
			90143341-42	9046666	9046765	100
			90191391	14983775	14983824	50
			1138993	296641786	296648473	1288
			14401	1707176	1707200	25
6	R 0001274	RAMPRASAD KESHAVLAL GANDHI (Deceased)	74909	3540258	3540265	8
			139953	5700246	5700261	16
			1138955	296638834	296639029	196
			127019	5298624	5298628	5
			320231-35	16113400	16113437	38
7	K 0005703	KANTADEVI ARJANDAS LULLA (Holder)	469231-35	24133192	24133229	38
			90024901-02	6791610	6791669	60
			1132321	295289154	295289761	608
			13950	1694501	1694525	25
			65155	3374933	3374942	10
8	K 0000992	KAMALA MAHADEVAN (Holder)	124494	5237691	5237707	17
			317220-22	16050604	16050655	53
			466220-22	24070396	24070448	53
			90023054	6727870	6727909	40
			1139373	296710786	296711577	792
9	K 0004498	KAMALA KRISHNA MURTI MAHADEVAN (Holder)	67072	3404238	3404248	11
			126147	5272629	5272646	18
			319293-95	16091033	16091085	53
			468293-95	24110825	24110877	53
			90024233	6768346	6768385	40
			975965	18571277	18571301	25
			1137731	296391378	296392177	800

Any person having any claim/objection in respect of the above requests should lodge such claim/objection with the company at its Corporate Office within 15 days of the publication of this notice, failing which the company will consider to give effect to the above requests.

Public is hereby cautioned against dealing with the aforesaid share certificates.

For SRF LIMITED
SO/
RAJAT LAKHANPAL
Sr. VP (Corporate Compliance) & Company Secretary
Place: Gurugram
Date: 22-06-2023

Sensex, Nifty snap 2-day winning run on profit-taking in IT, oil shares

PTI ■ MUMBAI

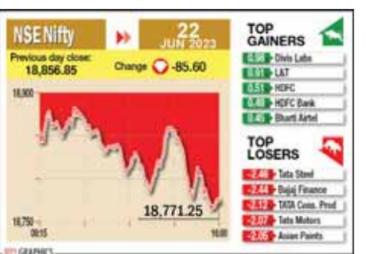
Benchmark BSE Sensex retreated from record levels and closed lower by 284 points in a volatile trade on Thursday due to profit-taking in financials, IT and oil shares after a two-day rally and negative trends in the US and European markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 284.26 points or 0.45 per cent to settle at 63,238.89 as 20 of its components declined. The barometer touched a record intra-day peak of 63,601.71 in initial deals. However, the index faced volatile trends and declined 322.52 points or 0.50 per cent to a low of 63,200.63 during the day.

The NSE Nifty closed lower by 85.60 points or 0.45 per cent to end at 18,771.25, snapping its two days of gains. The index closed at its all time high of 18,856.85 on Wednesday.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finance, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, Power Grid, NTPC, Infosys, Nestle, Reliance Industries and UltraTech Cement were the biggest laggards.

Larsen & Toubro, Tata Steel, HDFC, Bharti Airtel, HDFC Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the major gainers.

"A negative trigger, from the global perspective, is the Fed chief Powell's statement in the Congressional testimony yesterday that 'the process of



getting inflation back to 2% has a long way to go." This indicates further rate hikes, perhaps two more, in this rate hiking cycle," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge fell 1.07 per

cent and smallcap index declined 0.64 per cent.

All the indices ended in the negative territory, with power falling 1.47 per cent, utilities declining 1.16 per cent, telecommunication (1.05 per cent), commodities (0.98 per cent), IT (0.91 per cent), real-

ty (0.88 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.85 per cent), energy (0.77 per cent) and metal (0.68 per cent).

"Apart from weak global market cues, the US Federal Reserve's testimony that inflation would take longer to cool sent jitters amongst the investors as

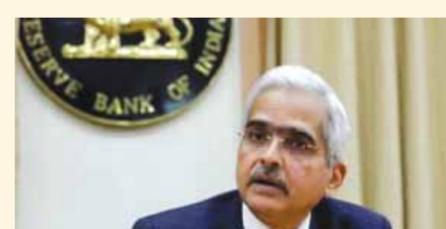
this would mean more rate hikes are in the offing.

"However, the highlight of the day was Sensex once again touching a new high before giving up gains due to profit-taking," said Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Research (Retail), Kotak Securities Ltd.

In Asian markets, Seoul ended in the green while Tokyo settled lower. Equity markets in Europe were trading lower. The US markets ended in negative territory on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.39 per cent to USD 76.05 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 4,013.10 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.



Job of taming inflation only half done: RBI Guv Das in June MPC meet

PTI ■ MUMBAI

"Our job is only half done, having brought inflation within the target band. Our fight against inflation is not yet over. We need to undertake forward-looking assessment of the evolving inflation-growth outlook and stand ready to act, if situation so warrants."

"Beyond this and given the prevailing uncertainties, it is difficult to give any definitive forward guidance about our future course of action in a rate tightening cycle," he said as per the minutes.

The government has mandated the RBI to ensure retail inflation remains at 4 per cent, with a 2 per cent margin on either side. The consumer price index-based retail inflation came down to 4.25 per cent in May.

While voting for keeping the repo unchanged at 6.5 per cent, MPC member and Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra said his vote for maintaining the status quo on the policy rate should be seen as taking middle stump guard to prepare for a bouncer pitch.

Infosys to provide certification in AI, generative AI skills on Infosys Springboard

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IT services company Infosys on Thursday announced it has launched a free Artificial Intelligence (AI) certification training on Infosys Springboard Virtual Learning Platform.

According to a statement, Infosys AI-first specialists and data strategists, responsible for delivering Infosys Topaz AI-first set of services, solutions, and platforms will help shape the curriculum, to arm learners with future-ready skill sets.

Infosys will provide certification in AI and Generative AI skills, crucial for landing jobs, through Infosys Springboard Virtual Learning Platform, it said.

The certification will offer a variety of courses that cover a slew of topics related to AI, including an introductory course on AI and Generative AI, with a focus on deep learning and natural language processing, and a masterclass on AI and the impact of Generative AI.

Moreover, a customised



course on 'Citizens Data Science' will aim to cover various aspects of the data science discipline, including Python programming, linear algebra, probability and statistics, and exploratory data analysis. Learners will get a certificate on successful completion of the course.

Infosys Springboard offers a curriculum-rich virtual platform that delivers corporate-grade learning experiences, on any device, with closer educator-learner collaboration for students from Class 6 to lifelong learners.

"This, alongside formal education, helps accelerate digital re-skilling for participating learners, ranging from school and college students to professionals and adults, it said.

PM-KISAN mobile app introduces face authentication feature

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Farmers registered under the centrally-sponsored scheme PM-KISAN can now complete e-KYC by scanning their face without one-time password or fingerprint as the government on Thursday launched a "face authentication" feature on the mobile application.

The new feature on the PM-Kisan mobile app was unveiled by Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, who said the implementation of the scheme has

become "much easier by using technology," an official statement said. "Through PM-Kisan mobile App, remote farmers can do e-KYC by scanning their face without OTP or fingerprint," it said.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), eligible farmers are provided with a financial benefit of Rs 6,000 per year in three equal instalments of Rs 2,000 each every four months.

The scheme was launched in February 2019 but is being implemented with effect from



December 2018. The 13th installment of PM-KISAN was paid to more than 8.1 crore farmers. The new mobile app is very easy to use and easily available for download on the Google Play Store. The app will also provide very important information related to the

scheme and PM-KISAN accounts to the farmers.

Farmers can also know the status of landseeding, linking of Aadhaar with bank accounts and e-KYC using the No User Status Module.

The Agriculture Ministry has also roped in India Post Payment Bank (IPPB) to open Aadhaar-linked bank accounts for beneficiaries at their doorstep and asked Common Services Centres to organize village-level e-KYC camps with the help of states/UTs, the statement added.

Sebi invites applications to hire 25 officials in legal department

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Thursday invited applications for 25 senior-level posts in the legal department.

The recruitment drive would beef up the headcount at the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for faster and more effective execution of its regulatory role.

In its public notice, Sebi has invited applications from Indian citizens for the post of Officer Grade A (Assistant Manager) in the legal stream.

The candidates can apply for the posts through online mode till July 9. The regulator will conduct online examinations for the recruitment of these positions during August-September.

To apply for this position, the applicants are required to have a bachelor's degree in Law from a recognised university or institute.

While inviting applications, Sebi has also cautioned candidates against falling prey to any unscrupulous elements who may try to deceive them by false promises of securing jobs in the



regulator, according to a public notice.

In case any candidate comes across such an offer, the same may be immediately brought to the notice of the regulator with full details, such as name and contact details, of the elements indulging in such practice.

In July 2022, Sebi invited applications for as many as 24 senior-level executives in the information technology department. Before that, in January last year, the markets regulator had earlier invited applications for the recruitment of 120 Officer

Grade A (Assistant Manager) in different streams.

In March 2020, the regulator invited applications for 147 senior-level officials and around 1.4 lakh people applied for these positions.

Formed by the government in 1988, Sebi was given statutory powers after the passage of the Sebi Act in 1992 after the Harshad Mehta scam hit the Indian markets.

As per its preamble, Sebi is mandated to protect the interests of investors in securities as well as promote and regulate the

securities markets.

It regulates business in stock exchanges and other securities markets, registers and regulates various market intermediaries, including brokers, merchant bankers, registrars, portfolio managers and investment advisers, as well as foreign portfolio investors, credit rating agencies, mutual funds and venture capital funds.

Besides, Sebi is mandated to check fraudulent and unfair trade practices, insider trading and other manipulative activities.



K.R. Mangalam University is awarded IRSD Academic Excellence Award 2023 at 10th International Conference on Interdisciplinary Research for Sustainable Development

Sebi slaps ₹20 lakh on 4 entities for non-genuine trades

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Thursday slapped penalties totalling Rs 20 lakh on four entities for indulging in non-genuine trades in the illiquid stock options segment on BSE.

The regulator imposed a fine of Rs 5 lakh each on Niruben Manojbhai Chudasama, Raj Kumar Lohiya, Nufact Merchandise Pvt Ltd and Nitu Agarwal.

Sebi had observed large-scale reversal trades in the illiquid stock options segment on BSE, leading to artificial volumes on the exchange. The regulator conducted an investigation into the trading activities of certain entities engaged in the segment from April 2014 to September 2015.

The four entities that have been fined on Thursday were among those who indulged in the execution of reversal trades.

Reversal trades are alleged to be non-genuine in nature as they are executed in the normal course of trading, which leads to a false or misleading appearance of trading in terms of generating artificial volumes, the regulator said.

By indulging in these acts, the entities violated the PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) norms.

TRAI consultation on encouraging innovative tech, biz models via regulatory sandbox

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom regulator TRAI has floated a discussion paper on encouraging innovative technologies, services, use cases, and business models through a regulatory sandbox in the digital communication sector.

The consultation paper proposes a draft sandbox framework and seeks inputs from stakeholders on its various aspects.

This draft sandbox framework includes information on the goals and scope of the architecture, participant eligibility requirements, prerequisites for applicants, supporting materials needed with applications, and application evaluation criteria.

Other elements include the application and approval process, waivers or modifications to the rules, validity period, revocation of permission, reporting, an oversight body, and funding of innovation for societal growth.

"The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has released a consultation paper on Encouraging Innovative Technologies, Services, Use Cases, and Business Models through Regulatory Sandbox in Digital Communication Sector," TRAI said in a statement.

Regulatory bodies in many countries have established sandbox frameworks for telecom tech innovation, TRAI said and explained that these frameworks allow testing new con-



cepts in controlled environments, granting exemptions, allowances, or time-bound exceptions.

These frameworks aim to promote regulators' desire for innovation with economic resilience and consumer protection. It is in this backdrop, that the telecom department asked TRAI to provide recommendations on the framework for the regulatory sandbox.

"The authority approaches the issue with the aim to promote creativity and accelerate the uptake of cutting-edge technologies in the field of digital communications," TRAI said.

Emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things, edge computing, and others are transforming and revolutionising the way in which people connect, interact, and access information.

According to TRAI, there is a need for providing an enabling environment for the development and deployment of novel technologies, ser-

vice, use cases, and business models to stay up with this dynamic environment.

The regulatory sandbox strategy has gained traction throughout the world as a way to encourage innovation across various industries.

A regulatory sandbox provides a regulated setting where companies and innovators can test their concepts, goods, and services while operating under fluid regulations.

"Regulatory Sandbox will help the startup ecosystem in the telecom industry by giving them access to the real-time network environment and other data so that they may test the reliability of new applications before releasing them on the market," TRAI said.

To provide the starting company with a single window for obtaining all clearances, the regulatory sandbox also seeks to encourage cross-sectoral collaboration for carrying out such tests by enlisting the help of other ministries and departments.

The consultation paper discusses some of the regulatory sandbox frameworks that are working in the digital communication sector globally and also details some of the frameworks working within the country in other sectors.

The last date for written comments on the draft sandbox framework is July 17, 2023, and for counter comments August 1, 2023.



ONGC links Panna field with sub-sea pipeline, saves cost

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Thursday said it has linked Panna oilfield in the Arabian Sea to shore through a sub-sea pipeline, helping save USD 43,000 a day in cost that was previously incurred in transporting crude oil through ships.

Panna field, which is part of ONGC's Bassein & Satellite (B&S) asset of western offshore, produces 9,600 barrels of oil per day. With "the successful linkage of Panna process platform with subsea pipeline," the company "has achieved a significant cost reduction of approximately USD 43,000 per day," ONGC said in a statement.

Oil from the field was previously transported through ships. Now it flows to shore through the sub-sea pipeline.

"The submarine pipeline connection minimizes the production downtime associated with tanker changeovers and eliminates demurrage charges during adverse weather conditions," it said.

"These combined savings and improved operational agility position ONGC for long-term success in the offshore oil and gas sector.

The job involved laying of two segments of 37.50 km of submarine pipeline and installation of three main oil line pumps (MOL) and 3 booster pumps. The Panna-Mukta oilfield consists of two adjacent offshore oil fields north-west of Mumbai.

'Gender pay discrepancies in blue-collar industry'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

WorkIndia, a leading tech-enabled platform for blue-collar recruitment, conducted a survey on pay parity within the blue-collar industry, revealing significant disparities between genders and comparing them to the white-collar sector. It highlighted distinct occupational preferences within the industry, with more males in manual work and more females in technical occupations.

The findings showed that 58 per cent of participants believed in existing pay discrimination, with 54 per cent of women personally witnessing gender-based pay disparities. Additionally, 61 per cent of men recognised pay disparities within and across gender categories.

The survey findings indicate that 58 per cent of participants believed there is existing pay discrimination, both in terms of gender and when compared to the white-collar industry.

Notably, a majority of 54 per cent of women reported having personally witnessed pay discrimination due to their gender.

Slow monsoon progress causing delay in sowing of oilseeds: SEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The slow progress of monsoon is causing a delay in the sowing of oilseeds in the ongoing Kharif season, industry body SEA on Thursday said while expressing a concern that likely El Nino condition might impact production.

Area sown to oilseeds

remained lower at 4.1 lakh hectares till last week as against 4.8 lakh hectares in the year-ago period of the 2023-23 kharif season, it said.

"The onset of monsoon in Kerala is delayed by a week and also the slow advancement of monsoon is leading to a delay in sowing in most of the states," Solvent Extractors Association of

India (SEA) Ajay Jhunjhunwala said in a letter written to members.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast near normal monsoon. "However, El Nino is not ruled out completely and may spoil the chances of normal monsoon, which may impact kharif crop and domestic availability of veg-

etable oils in next oil year 2023-24," he observed.

Stressing the need to ensure minimum support price (MSP) to the farmers, Jhunjhunwala said SEA welcomes the move to support farmers with MSP, but the government must defend MSP.

Currently, rapeseed is quoted at Rs 5,100 per quintal against an MSP of Rs 5,450 per quintal. In

Haryana, sunflower seed price is ruling blow MSP of Rs 6,400 per quintal, sparking farmer protests, he said.

Mustard farmers are discouraged because at the time of sowing (in October 2022) prices were quoted Rs 7,000-7,500 per quintal but currently, farmers are receiving Rs 4,700-4,800 per quintal.

"This may impact into lower

acreage under soybean this kharif and mustard in rabi season and over all production of oilseeds," he added.

India is dependent on imports of vegetable oils. The country imported 91.68 lakh tonne in the first seven months of this year till May, up by 18 per cent from 77.68 lakh tonne in the previous year, as per the SEA data.

Indian contingent cross 50-medal mark at Special Olympics World Summer Games

PTI ■ BERLIN

The Indian contingent continued its medal rush at the Special Olympics World Summer Games, crossing the 50-medal mark here.

At the end of the day's action, SO Bharat had 55 medals, including 15 gold, 27 silver, 13 bronze spread across five different sports -- athletics, cycling, powerlifting, roller skating and swimming. India registered five medals in swimming (3 golds, 1 silver and, 1 bronze) and six on the cycling course (3 Gold, 2 silver, one bronze) on Wednesday.

Every member of the cycling team won a medal with Neel Yadav being the first to do so with a bronze in the 5km road race.

Later Yadav, Shivani and Indu Prakash won golds in the 1km time trial, while Kalpana Jena, and Jayaseela Arbuttharaj took home the silver.

In the pool, India's medals almost doubled in number



thanks to the exploits of the freestyle swimmers, Diksha Jitendra Shirgaonkar, Pooja Giridharrao Gaikavada and Prashadhi Kamble winning golds, with Madhav Madan adding another medal to his tally (gold, 25m freestyle) and Sidhanth Murali Kumar winning bronze in the 25m freestyle.

Among others, Sonepat's Saket Kundu won silver in the mini javelin Level B.

The Little Angels School student is a multi-sport athlete, who has competed in table tennis, figure skating and athletics at the national level.

Among the probables for the 2023 Special Olympics World Winter Games, Kundu lost his chance to represent India when the Games were cancelled.

Shrugging his disappointment off he switched to mini javelin, an event that made its debut at the World Games in Berlin, and his medal was the first India has won in the event.

Rayaan wins bronze in Asian U-21 snooker

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian cueist Rayaan Razmi signed off with a bronze medal after suffering a heart-breaking 3-4 defeat at the hands of Milad Pourali Darehchi of Iran in the semi-finals of the Asian Under-21 Snooker Championship in Tehran, Iran.

The 21-year-old Mumbai-based cueist had topped Group-D and finished as the top ranked player in the knockout phase.

However, Darehchi on Wednesday managed to clinch the semifinal with the frame scores reading 23-86, 80-50, 71-11, 1-81, 24-59, 47-33 and 70-32 in his favour.

Pakistan's Ahsan Ramzan emerged champion after recording an authoritative 5-2 win.

The Pakistan cueist compiled breaks of 47 and 52 during his 48-46, 70-5, 61-6, 62-29, 30-71, 55-67 and 101-27 victory in the summit clash.

Rayaan started on a promising note, rolling in a

break of 75 points to pocket the first frame, but was unable to carry on the momentum and lost the next two to trail 1-2.

He constructed a break of 41 to win the fourth frame before taking the fifth to gain a 3-2 lead. But, the Iranian showed great fighting qualities to win a tight sixth frame to level the frame scores at 3-all and take the contest the distance.

In the decider, Rayaan once again failed to grab his chances while Milad pounced on every opportunity and with small efforts gathers the points to come out on top.

Ahsan defeated Tirdad Azadipour of Iran 4-2 in the other semi-final.

Earlier, Rayaan with breaks of 60 and 75 beat compatriot Ranveer Duggal 4-1 (70-50, 110-27, 49-86, 100-4 and 75-0 in the quarter-finals.

Results: Semifinals: Rayaan Razmi (IND) lost to Milad Pourali Darehchi (IRN) 3-4, Ahsan Ramzan (PAK) beat Tirdad Azadipour (IRN) 4-2.

Lebanon start campaign with 2-0 win over Bangladesh

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Strong contenders Lebanon opened their SAFF Championship campaign with a nervy 2-0 win over former champions Bangladesh at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium here on Thursday.

Hassan Maatouk netted the all-important goal in the 74th minute for Lebanon while Khalil Bader added a second in the injury time. But before those decisive moments, both the teams traded blows in equal measures to keep the match in balance.

Despite the massive gulf between the teams in the FIFA Rankings - Lebanon are 99th and Bangladesh stand at 192 - there was no dearth of excitement in the match.

The first half, though, was relatively less eventful as the teams could have been sussing up each other and the turf. Lebanon was the more dominant team in that phase as they created a couple of chances but lacked the finesse to convert them.

However, the nature and speed of play changed considerably in the second half. Both Lebanon and Bangladesh went at full tilt to break the deadlock.

As the intensity of the play went up, there were few



rough moves too by either side. Referee John Crystal had to pull out yellow cards twice in quick succession to book Ali Tneich of Lebanon and Bishwanath Ghosh of Bangladesh for some harsh tackling.

The first clear chance post the half-time came Lebanon's way. Zein Al Farran received a quick pass from the left-wing and evaded a couple of Bangladesh defenders, but could not go past the stretched arms of goalkeeper Anisur Rahman.

Lebanon custodian Ali Sabeh was also pressed into service very soon as he had to put his body on the line to save an advancing Mohammad Foysal, who was stopped a kick away from netting the goal.

Foysal was the standout player for Bangladesh as he remained a constant threat through his speedy runs.

Rose seeking to follow win in her pro debut with major at Women's PGA

AP ■ SPRINGFIELD

After stunning women's golf by winning in her first event as professional, Rose Zhang will try to take the next big step when she goes for her first major victory in the Women's PGA Championship at Baltusrol.

And it's been just a month in the making for the 20-year-old Californian, who many believed was going to be the next big celebrity in her sport, similar to when Annika Sorenstam and Lorena Ochoa returned in a two-year span ending in 2010.

Zhang has gone from win-

ning her second straight NCAA individual title to turning professional and then living up to all the hype by winning the Mizuho Americas Open earlier this month. It made her the first LPGA Tour winner in a pro debut in 72 years.

What followed was whirlwind of national television appearances, phone and in-person interviews, endorsement offers and then back to Stanford for a study week and finals, including a tough computer science test, in which all she wanted was to get a passing grade. She passed.

After some rest at home and little work on her game, Zhang



returns to work Thursday, when she takes on a field that includes all 11 LPGA Tour winners this year in the second major in women's golf.

While that might intimidate some, not Zhang. Walking up the microphone on Wednesday, there was a wide smile on her face. When the questions fol-

lowed, she was personable, humble, thoughtful and composed, a breathe of fresh air for any athlete.

"Biggest adjustment, I will say that I haven't been able to work on my game as much as I was able to before as an amateur," Zhang said.

"There's a lot more obligations that you have to do as a professional. You have a lot more press interviews, conferences, and it does take a lot out of you and a lot out of your time and energy. Therefore, I haven't been able to grind like I usually have been."

Grinding for Zhang was going out on the range and

smashing balls around for four hours. She hasn't done that recently because she was tired after a long college season and then the move into the pro ranks. This week is more fine tuning for the fourth women's event in New Jersey in seven weeks. Other than handling the demands on her time, Zhang believes she has not changed much. She credits that to her family and friends, who have not changed in their approach to her.

Socially, she is getting more tweets, including one from Warriors guard Steph Curry, one of her role models growing up. It left her speechless.

Vidhatri takes massive 9-shot lead in 9th leg of Hero WPGT

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Vidhatri Urs is all set to join the elite list of amateurs to register a win on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour even before joining the pro ranks as she built up a massive nine shot lead with just one round to go in the ninth leg of the 2023 season at the Prestige Golfshire here on Thursday.

Following up on her first round 7-under 65, Vidhatri, whose best on the Hero WPGT as an amateur has been a third place finish, added a 5-under 67 to get to 12-under 132, while rookie pro Kriti Chowhan added even par 72 to her first



round 69 to get to 141. Lying third was another amateur Saanvi Somu, who shot 69 after her first round 73. She was tied third alongside Sachika Singh (70-72) and Seher Atwal (69-73).

Jasmine Shekar (69), Sneha Singh (72) and Jyotsana Singh (72) were sixth, seventh and eighth respectively, while Hitaashee Bakshi (70), Ananya Datar (71) and Shweta Mansingh (73) were all tied ninth with a total of 146.

After a great first round, Vidhatri was once again fast off the blocks with birdies on first, third and fifth and added a fourth on eighth to make the

turn in 4-under. A birdie on 12th was followed by a bogey on 14th and then she closed the day with a birdie on 18th for a 67. In two days Vidhatri has dropped just one shot per day while picking up 14 birdies.

Kriti had four birdies against two bogeys and a double. Saanvi, another promising amateur, had four birdies on the front nine and two more on the back stretch but she dropped one shot on the third and two more on the back nine for a 69.

Sachika had three birdies on the front nine but three bogeys on the back nine negated that in her 72.



IOC banishes boxing governing body from Olympics, but sport will still be at Paris Games

AP ■ GENEVA

The International Boxing Association was banished from the Olympic family on Thursday, ending a years-long dispute fuelled by defying advice and instructions from the IOC.

Boxing, however, will keep its status as an Olympic sport at the 2024 Paris Games.

The International Olympic Committee voted to de-recognize the IBA at a specially called meeting - an outcome that was inevitable after being recommended two weeks ago by the executive board, a body chaired by IOC president Thomas Bach.

The vote was 69-1, with 10 members abstaining.

Boxing was never really in danger of being kicked out of the Olympics over the four years since the IOC suspended the sport's governing body in an effort to force changes.

"We highly value the sport of boxing. We have an extremely serious problem with IBA because of their governance," Bach told IOC members during their online meeting.

The dispute centered on the IBA's management under pres-

idents from Uzbekistan and Russia who the IOC disapproved of, its finances being backed by Russian state energy firm Gazprom, plus the integrity of bouts and judging.

"The boxers fully deserve to be governed by an international federation with integrity and transparency," Bach said.

The IOC is already overseeing boxing competitions for the Paris Olympics without IBA involvement, as it did for the Tokyo Games in 2021.

Boxing can now be confirmed on the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic program, which the IOC and Bach withheld as leverage against IBA. Boxing is "guaranteed" to be in Los Angeles, members were told Thursday.

The sport is good for Olympic business with broad appeal - 25 different countries won boxing medals in Tokyo, with nine taking gold - and the IOC repeatedly said its problem was with boxing officials, not its athletes. "We appreciate boxing as one of the most global sports. We embrace the values of boxing," Bach said, praising the sport's "important social role promoting inclusion."

Chhetri defies age, conditions to produce masterclass

PTI ■ BENGALURU

A huge banner tied across the West Block Blues Stand read: 'Immortal No 11'. It was a heartfelt tribute to Sunil Chhetri by the fans, who cheered every move the Indian captain made on the field.

Some of them invaded the turf multiple times trying to get close to Chhetri even as he was leading India's 4-0 buccaneering against Pakistan during the SAFF Championship match at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium.

What makes Chhetri a crowd-puller, then? He is 38, a stage when players generally think of pursuing less stressful options than playing football and follow rigid fitness plans.

But his performance on the field still does not have any reflection of his age. Last Saturday, India conquered Lebanon, a team that stands higher on FIFA Rankings, 2-0 in the Intercontinental Cup final at Odisha, and it was Chhetri who put the team on the track to win with the first goal.

The situation was no different on a rain-blanced Wednesday at Bengaluru.



Crowd that filled the stadium to the rafters did not want anything less than a win, and Chhetri could not have missed that vibe.

The whole India vs Pakistan narrative that has been running for decades now too might have fuelled Chhetri's desire to own the grand stage. He had offered us a peek at that feeling inside of him.

"Before the Pakistan match, whenever we met the boys, it was all hunky dory. Even when I was in Pakistan once or twice... we were all fine and friendly. They speak Punjabi and we speak Punjabi, the moment the whistle blows I don't know what happens," Chhetri had said in an ISL video.

PGA Tour's top golfers travel across country for \$20M purse at Travelers Championship

AP ■ CROMWELL

Nathan Grube, the tournament director of the Travelers Championship, used to worry about the years when the U.S. Open took place on the West Coast.

Many of the world's top golfers would make a decision to take a break the week following the major or head to Europe to begin preparing for the Open Championship, rather than travel across the country to play at TPC River Highlands in Connecticut.

But this year, in response to LIV Golf, the Travelers was elevated to one of 17 so-called "designated" PGA Tour events, with a much bigger purse and a near mandate for top golfers to play, giving the tournament the guarantee of a strong field.

"I can tell you with certain confidence that I probably wouldn't have been here even though I love the tournament so much," Masters champion Jon Rahm said Tuesday. "With that said, they've done a great job



making players comfortable. Having a charter flight always makes it a lot easier, maybe not for the best two or three players in the world, but for other people that are high quality players as well that come and compete in this event."

petition, they are the defending champions," said Fernandes.

"It won't at all be easy, but it's not impossible." "Funny things have happened in football, and you never know. We will go into the game as the underdogs, no doubt, but if a couple of chances go our way, and we play to the plans, we can get what we were looking for," he said.

This week's tournament field includes the top eight golfers in the world rankings and 38 of the top 50.

Grube and his team have gotten a reputation of pampering golfers in an effort to get them to Connecticut, including running those free charter flights for players from the Open.

Once in the state, there are perks including free laundry and hair cuts for caddies, day care on site, and day trips for spouses and children to amusement parks. This year, the tournament added a coffee and ice cream bar and lounge on the driving range.

Grube said it was in part because of its player-friendly reputation that the Travelers was chosen last fall to be among the first events to win elevated status.

"We've been auditioning for this for 16 years," Grube said, a reference to the length of time Travelers has been the event's title sponsor. "And when it came time to go ... We showed up."

U-17 Asian Cup: India up against mighty Japan in do-or-die battle

PTI ■ BANGKOK

With a quarterfinal berth at stake and still lacking in a few areas, India will go up against defending champions Japan in a do-or-die last group game of the U-17 Asian Cup here on Friday.

The Group D match -- India's toughest so far in the tournament -- will be played at the Rajamangala Stadium.

India head coach Bibiano Fernandes is aware of the mammoth task that lies in front of his side, but feels that it is one that his boys can scale, if they stick to the plan.

"It's quite simple for us. We need to win against Japan, and that should be enough to take us through to the quarter-finals. However, that is easier said than done. Japan are one of the best teams in this com-

petition, they are the defending champions," said Fernandes.

"It won't at all be easy, but it's not impossible."

"Funny things have happened in football, and you never know. We will go into the game as the underdogs, no doubt, but if a couple of chances go our way, and we play to the plans, we can get what we were looking for," he said.

Group D is still an open affair on the final matchday, as all four teams stand a chance to make it to the last eight. For India, it is a rather difficult equation, where they have to defeat Japan and hope for Uzbekistan to get at least a draw against Vietnam.

"It's difficult, but the boys are really motivated to do well against Japan. It's an opportunity to play against one of the best teams in Asia, and I am happy

to say that that is not lost on them," said Fernandes.

"We have to believe with all our heart, and hopefully providence will favour us once the match comes to an end."

The Blue Colts failed to win their first two games, drawing 1-1 against Vietnam and losing 0-1 to Uzbekistan. Fernandes has been working on certain areas where he feels India have been lacking. "The last game was not

a good result for us, though the boys tried their best. We know we have to do better, we know what is required in the game and how to approach it," he said.

"It's just a matter of putting ourselves together as one unit and executing those plans. We have been lacking some pace on the wings as well. We've worked on that before the Japan game, and we will try to achieve what we want to."

'ENGLAND IN DANGER OF REDUCING ASHES TO EXHIBITION'

PTI ■ LONDON

Former captain Geoffrey Boycott has lashed out at Ben Stokes and Co. For getting "carried away with Bazball" and not making winning a priority, adding that England are in danger of reducing the Ashes to an exhibition series.

England, playing an aggressive brand of cricket under coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Stokes, were on the wrong side of the result as they suffered a two-wicket loss in the Ashes opener in Edgbaston earlier this week.

"England are in danger of reducing the Ashes to an exhibition," Boycott wrote in his scathing column for 'The Telegraph'.

"England have got carried away with Bazball and seem to think entertaining is more important than winning. But England supporters want one thing more than anything else — to win the Ashes." The legendary cricketer said winning is more important than entertaining.

"Scoring fast runs, whacking

lots of fours and sixes is lovely. It is great. But only if England do not lose sight of the big prize which is to beat Australia. If at the end of the series Australia go home with the Ashes we will feel sick, regardless of how much we have been entertained."

Boycott claimed that the much-anticipated Ashes series between the two rivals would lose its importance if England don't play to win.

"If England are not playing to win then these Ashes Tests are not that important. They are only exhibition matches. They have got it back to front. It is not about entertaining and then winning. It is about winning first.

"By all means entertain but cricket is like chess. There are moments when you need to defend. Sometimes you need to be patient and accept it.

"Do not just attack, attack, attack. England need a bit of common sense and pragmatism. That is all that is required. They do not have to change being positive because they are a better side than



England skipper Ben Stokes reacts during day 5 of the 1st Ashes Test cricket match

Australia and will win if they just show that common sense," he added. The former opener felt England were guilty of not capitalising on their chances despite dominating the match.

"England outplayed Australia in nearly every session at Edgbaston but lost. When they are on top, be ruthless and not sloppy. We kept getting ahead of Australia and then letting them back in by being careless.

"They are in danger of letting hubris be their downfall ... It would be sad if playing exciting cricket for a year is going to their heads. They gave Australia a get out of jail free card. I find that silly."

Opting to bat, England declared their first innings at 393/8 despite Joe Root batting unbeaten at 118, raising eyebrows.

"The rule is to get as many runs as you can when the pitch is good before it deteriorates. England might have scored another 40-50 runs with Root on a hundred and Ollie Robinson, who can bat, but declared to get a wicket."

Boycott also questioned the home batters' all out approach in the second innings.

"When they batted in the second innings they went crazy. England were scoring at five and six an over but for some reason batsmen were trying to score at more than that and got themselves out.

"There were five: Ben Duckett, Root, Harry Brook, Jonny Bairstow and Moeen Ali. It was unnecessary."

Boycott, however, feels that this English side is better than its Australian counterparts and can go on to win the Ashes.

"Ben Stokes and Brendon McCullum have rightly received a lot of praise for the way they have changed the attitude around the England team but playing just one way is not using your brain. If we are more interested in praise than winning then we have it wrong.

"I and many ex-players think this England team have the beating of these Aussies. But do not waste that talent and commitment by letting it go to your head."

Injured Mandeep out of Duleep Trophy, Jayant to lead North Zone

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Haryana all-rounder Jayant Yadav will lead North Zone in the upcoming Duleep Trophy after senior batter Mandeep Singh was ruled out of the tournament owing to an injury, convenor of zonal committee Anirudh Chaudhry said on Thursday.

Punjab batter Nehal Wadhwa, who has recently made an impression in IPL for Mumbai Indians and was in stand-by, has been named in the main squad.

"We received intimation this morning from the Punjab Cricket Association that Mandeep Singh had gotten injured and would be unavailable for the Duleep Trophy," Chaudhry was quoted as saying in a press release.

"Pursuant thereto a video-conference was organised this evening with all the selectors of the North Zone Selection Committee and the same was chaired by Chetan Sharma. Selectors discussed the issue and unanimously decided that Nehal Wadhwa would be the replacement for Mandeep Singh," the release further stated.

"Since Mandeep Singh was the Captain of the side, the Committee also picked Jayant Yadav to lead the North Zone team in the Duleep trophy," Chaudhry said.

North Zone will meet North East Zone in the quarter-final at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru from June 28 to July 1.

New floodlights to be installed at Wankhede Stadium ahead of 2023 World Cup

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Wankhede Stadium will soon get a facelift with new set of LED floodlights set to be installed along with refurbished hospitality boxes ahead of the 2023 ODI World Cup, scheduled in October-November this year.

Along with one India game, there is a semi-final also slated to be held at the iconic ground.

The Wankhede Stadium is among five venues shortlisted by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) that are earmarked to undergo renovation and upgrade work ahead of the World Cup, which is a little over

three months away now.

While the Indian board is yet to start the work, the idea behind inviting tenders to change the floodlights is to ensure that such big initiatives are completed with ease and are not left for a tighter deadline.

As the home ground for five-time IPL winners Mumbai Indians, the Wankhede Stadium had hosted seven league matches during IPL 2023 before work began in improving the outfield, which started as soon as the league round of the IPL ended.

"Sealed tenders are invited for the proposed LED Floodlighting system with DMX



controls at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. The scope of work is described in the tender document," the Mumbai Cricket Association said in its website along with other necessary details.

Along with this, the MCA has also invited applications for the renovation work of the hospitality boxes in the stadium. Additionally, a few more decisions could be taken during the MCA's apex council meeting

here on June 30.

Mumbai Cricket Association would be undertaking the renovation of hospitality boxes at Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai. Association invites applications from reputed organizations to be appointed as Project Management Consultant who fulfil following eligibility criteria," said another release on their website.

One of the most famous and iconic cricket grounds in India, the Wankhede Stadium here had undergone an overhaul ahead of the last 50-over World Cup which the country hosted, 12 years ago in 2011.

'Oz can play at different tempos, England know just to go really hard'

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

It would be advantage Australia during the Ashes as they can play at "different tempos", while England only know how to play "really hard", feels former Test skipper of the touring side Time Paine.

Paine, a wicketkeeper-batter, had stepped down as Australia captain days before the last Ashes series at home due to a 'sexting' scandal and was replaced by pacer Pat Cummins as Test skipper.

Australia defeated Ben Stokes' England by two wickets in a thrilling Ashes opener at Edgbaston with Cummins scoring an unbeaten 44 and guiding the visitors to victory when things had started to look difficult.

Ahead of the second Test at Lord's from June 28, Paine, who made an unsuccessful bid to return to the Australia side, said, "They (Australia) can play at different tempos, they can play different scenarios and I think their game will stand up in different conditions.

"England, we know are going to go one way, they're going to go really hard," Paine told 'Sen Radio' on Wednesday. "I think from what I've seen earlier and what I thought going into the series, I think that's where Australia have got the advantage."

Paine said he had exchanged text messages post the opening Ashes Test victory with Cummins and the skipper

sounded thrilled.

"I actually spoke to Pat Cummins on text yesterday (Tuesday). He said, 'We've got one back for us, yeah look, it was nice sitting on my couch'."

The former captain added that when Alex Carey became the eighth Australian wicket to fall on 227 in the chase of a victory of 282, he almost gave up on his team. But Cummins' (44 not out) and Nathan Lyon's (16 not out) snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.

"At 4 am (Australia time) I must admit, when Alex Carey got out and Nathan Lyon strolled to the crease, I contemplated going to bed because I didn't want to have to watch the English win.

"But gee, what a partnership, it was two experienced, hardened cricketers, two absolute winners. It was an amazing partnership and a great Test match to watch made even better by the fact that we're on the right side of it for once."

He felt Australia will get better as the series progresses. "I think Australia as the series will go on will get better and better. I think there was some clear strategy from both sides, whether it's attack or defence when a Test match goes for five days, you've got to be able to do both. With a series that goes for five Test matches, you're going to have to do both."

Paine though said some of the Australian big guns will have to pull up their socks soon.

Robinson forgettable cricketer, says Hayden

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Legendary Australian cricketer Matthew Hayden has called England pacer Ollie Robinson a "forgettable cricketer", while wicket-keeping great Ian Healy has dismissed the 29-year-old quick, saying "Who, Ollie?"

Robinson was trolled for his expetive-laden sendoff of Usman Khawaja after he dismissed the Australian opener for 141 in the first innings of the Ashes opener at Edgbaston.

However in the second essay, he could not break the partnership between tail-enders Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon who chased down the target on the fifth day to give the visitors a 1-0 lead in the series.

Cummins remained unbeaten on 44, while Lyon scored 16 not out as Australia chased down the victory target of 282 for the loss of eight wickets.

Hayden said, Robinson had shown Australia the way to combat England.

"That's how you combat England as well. As soon as Pat Cummins started coming at Joe Root and hit a couple of sixes... Then the other bloke (Robinson), he's a forgettable cricketer," Hayden said on 'Sen Radio' on Wednesday.

"A fast bowler that is bowling 124 (kph) and he's got a mouth from the south," said Hayden about Robinson, who refused to apologise for his foul-mouthed send-off of Khawaja.

BCCI invites applications for North Zone selector's post

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Exactly four months after Chetan Sharma was asked to resign from national selection committee chairman's post for revealing classified information about the Indian team, the BCCI has formally invited applications to fill the post vacated by the former pacer.

The last date of submitting application is June 30, and it is expected that the new selection committee member would be a part of the panel that will pick the squad for the Ireland series, and before that, he is likely to watch the Deodhar Trophy Inter-Zonal competition.

The criteria is no different from earlier years as one needs to play either seven Tests or 10 ODIs or at least 30 first-class

matches with five years of retirement from active cricket.

Chetan's committee was sacked after the T20 World Cup debacle but he reapplied, and was reappointed, when the new panel took over in December last year.

However, the sting operation made his position untenable and he was asked to resign after most members of the Indian team didn't want to sit across the table with him.

"Technically, Chetan can apply if he wants to as he had resigned. Obviously, whether he would apply or not is a big question but rules can't stop him from applying once again," a senior BCCI official told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

While some like Lucknow Super Giants mentor Gautam

Gambhir (retired December 2018), Yuvraj Singh (retired July 2019) and cricketer turned media pundit Harbhajan Singh (retired 2022) are big names from up North, they don't technically qualify as they haven't completed five years of retirement on the date of application.

The only big name who is eligible is Virender Sehwag but it is a well-known fact that Sehwag, who is an analyst on various platforms and someone who earns a handsome amount from promotional activities, won't be interested in the job if the salary is Rs 1 crore. The rest of the panel members get Rs 90 lakh.

"There is nothing cast in stone that BCCI needs chairman from North Zone since Chetan held the post."

Saudi Arabia's lavish recruitment drive rolls on despite Messi miss

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Missing out on Lionel Messi hasn't slowed Saudi Arabia's ambitious recruitment drive as the oil-rich kingdom tries to establish itself as a viable destination for the world's top players.

Having already lured two of the sport's biggest stars in Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema, the Saudis, amid allegations of sportswashing, are targeting a host of other high-profile players from Europe's best leagues.

World Cup and Champions League winner N'Golo Kante became the latest stellar player to head to the lucrative Pro League, signing a three-year contract Wednesday to team up with Benzema at Al-Ittihad.

"It is part of the club's efforts to establish itself as a top choice for world-class players in the Saudi Professional League," Al-Ittihad said in a statement.

Messi opted for Inter Miami, rather than the Middle East, but the Saudis are pressing on. Premier League stars like Hakim Ziyech, Kalidou Koulibaly and Ruben Neves are expected to follow Kante this summer.

Chelsea had offered Kante a new contract to stay at Stamford Bridge. But just as Real Madrid discovered in the case of world player of the year Benzema, money talks. France



midfielder Kante is reportedly set to earn more than \$100 million across the length of his contract.

Benzema will reportedly earn \$107 million per year over his three-year contract.

Ronaldo joined Al-Nassr in December in a deal reportedly worth up to \$200 million a year.

At the time of that stunning move, it was not clear what Saudi's plan was beyond using

Ronaldo's fame to raise the profile of its league. It has since become evident that the former Madrid and Manchester United forward was just the start of a recruitment drive that the country hopes will turn its league into a major player in the sport.

Currently, the Saudi league is considered well below the standard of the top divisions in Europe and South America.

Ronaldo dismissed criticism of his decision, claiming in

January the league is "very competitive."

"People don't know that, but I know because I saw many games," he said. "In Europe my work is done. I won everything and played for the most important clubs in Europe. This is a new challenge."

It is impossible to ignore the riches on offer as a major motivation to players.

The reported salaries and commercial deals for Ronaldo,

Benzema and Kante could earn them a combined figure of nearly \$1 billion.

Other countries have embarked on similar projects in the past.

Major League Soccer in America has consistently signed big names like David Beckham, Thierry Henry, Wayne Rooney, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and now Messi. Before that, the North American Soccer League - most notably the New York Cosmos - enticed superstars like Pele, Franz Beckenbauer, Bobby Moore and George Best.

China went on a similar spree from 2015, signing internationals like Carlos Tevez, Pato and Hulk, but that initiative has fizzled out.

It looks like this is just the start of Saudi's plans to grow the profile and quality of its league, while expanding its influence in global sport.

The kingdom's sovereign wealth Public Investment Fund has taken a majority ownership stake in four of the country's top clubs, including Al-Ittihad and Al-Nassr, as part of a nationalization project encouraging public sector organizations to invest in sports. Soccer teams are seen as a priority under the initiative backed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

PIF is described as a "catalyst of Vision 2030," which is a wide-ranging plan to overhaul the kingdom's economy.

Toor, Sreeshankar, Tejaswin, Shaili in 54-member Indian team for Asian Athletics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday named a 54-member team headlined by star long jumper Murali Sreeshankar, Asian record holder shot putter Tajinder Pal Singh Toor and new decathlon champion Tejaswin Shankar for the Asian Athletics Championships, to be held in Bangkok from July 12 to 16.

The team, which has 26 women in it, was picked by the selection committee of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), which had set qualifying marks for the Asian Championships, after taking into account the performance of the athletes in the various competitions this season.

A preliminary team for the continental meet was already picked after the Federation Cup in Ranchi in May. The National Inter-State Championships, which ended on Monday in Bhubaneswar, was used as the "confirmatory" event for those who have not participated in the Federation Cup.

Olympic champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and Commonwealth Games silver medalist 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable were not named in the team as the duo will continue to train abroad for the World Championships in Budapest in August.

Indian athletics chief coach Radhakrishnan Nair had said during the National Inter-State Championships that the team



for the Asian event would be announced after a review meeting of the AFI selection committee.

THE TEAM:

MEN: Rajesh Ramesh and Muhammed Ajmal (400m/4x400m Relay/4x400m Mixed Relay), Ajoy Jacob (4x400m Relay/4x400m Mixed Relay), Nihal Joel William, Mijo Chacko Kurian and Muhammed Anas Yahya (4x400m Relay), Krishan Kumar and Mohammed Afsal (800m), Ajay Kumar Saroj and Jinson Johnson (1500m), Gulveer Singh (5000m/10000m), Abhishek Pal (5000m/10000m), Mohammed Nurhasan and Bal Kishan (3000m Steeplechase), Yashas Palaksha and Santhosh Kumar (400m hurdles), Tejaswin Shankar (Decathlon), Sarvesh Anil Kishore (High Jump), Jeswin Aldrin and Murali Sreeshankar (Long Jump), Praveen Chithravel and Abdulla Aboobacker (Triple Jump), Tajinderpal Singh Toor and

Karanveer Singh (Shot Put), Rohit Yadav and D P Manu (Javelin Throw), Akshdeep Singh and Vikash Singh (20km Race Walk).

WOMEN: Jyothi Yarraji (200m/100m Hurdles), Nithya Ramraj (100m Hurdles), Aishwarya Mishra (400m/4x400m Relay/4x400m Mixed Relay), Chanda and Lavika Sharma (800m), Lili Das (1500m), Ankita (5000m), Parul Chaudhary (5000m/3000m Steeplechase), Sanjivani Jadhav (10000m), Priti (3000m Steeplechase), Pooja and Rubina Yadav (High Jump), Baranica Elangovan (Pole Vault), Shaili Singh and Ancy Sojan (Long Jump), Abha Khatua and Manpreet Kaur (Shot Put), Annu Rani (Javelin Throw), Swapna Barman (Heptathlon), Priyanka and Bhawna Jat (20km Race Walk), Rezoana Mallick Heena and Jyothika Sri Dixi (4x400m Relay/4x400m Mixed Relay), Anjali Devi, Jisna Mathew and Subha Venkatesan (4x400).