

OPINION 6

FAKE DIAGNOSIS, FAKE
PRESCRIPTION

WORLD 9

US SPEEDS UP ABRAMS TANK
DELIVERY TO UKRAINE WAR ZONE

MONEY 10

'UNLIKE GLOBAL ECONOMY, INDIA
WOULD NOT SLOW DOWN'

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PARLIAMENT IMBROGLIO

BJP calls Rahul 'Mir Jafar';
Cong won't budge on JPC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For the sixth day in a row, Parliament was again adjourned for the day on Tuesday amid bedlam with the Opposition demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the alleged Adani share manipulation issue and the ruling party members seeking Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's apology over his alleged critical remarks abroad against democracy in India.

Queering the pitch of its "Mafi mago" campaign against Rahul on his alleged "insult" to Indian democracy in London, the BJP on Tuesday compared the latter with Mir Jafar and pledged that "come what may" he will have to offer apology to the "people of India". Jafar was the commander of the Bengal Army under Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah but betrayed him during the battle of Plassey.

The Lok Sabha, however, managed to pass a ₹1.185-lakh



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi interacts with the elected UDF and LSGI members from Wayanad district at Kalpetta in Wayanad district on Tuesday PTI

crore Budget for 2023-24 for the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir through the ruckus. Parliament will meet again on Thursday. Wednesday is a holiday on account of the Hindu new year.

As soon as the proceedings started in the Lower House after the first adjournment in the morning, mem-

bers of the Opposition benches raised the JPC issue and shouted slogans like "we want JPC".

Speaker Om Birla made repeated appeals to the protesting MPs to allow the Question Hour to function, giving the assurance that everyone will be given a chance to speak.

Pak skips SCO meet
after India objects
to flawed J&K map

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan on Tuesday reportedly skipped a meeting under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) here after India raised objection to Pakistan map incorrectly depicting borders of Jammu & Kashmir.

The meeting pertained to military medicine specialists under the SCO and when India asked Pakistan to refrain from showing its map, its delegation decided not to attend it.

India had reportedly urged Pakistan not to show the map or not attend the seminar here, it was learnt. India has in the past also raised objections to Pakistan's inaccurate maps in the SCO meetings.

In September, 2020, India walked out of a virtual meeting

of national security advisers (NSA) of member-states of the SCO after the Pakistani representative projected a map that inaccurately depicted the borders of the two countries.

"At the meeting of the national security advisers (NSAs) of member-states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), hosted by the chair of the SCO (Russia), the Pakistani NSA deliberately projected a fictitious map that Pakistan has recently been propagating," said External Affairs Ministry then said.

"This was in blatant disregard to the advisory by the host against it and in violation of the norms of the meeting. After consultation with the host, the Indian side left the meeting in protest at that juncture," it said.

Tremors in
Delhi-NCR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Strong tremors jolted parts of north India, including Delhi-NCR, on Tuesday night as an earthquake of magnitude 6.6 struck the Hindu Kush region in Afghanistan.

Panic-stricken people rushed out of buildings as the earthquake struck around 10.20 pm and was also felt in Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan. There was disruption in mobile services in some parts of the Jammu region immediately after the earthquake, an official said.

CAPSULE

KANNADA ACTOR HELD
FOR TWEET ON HINDUTVA

Bengaluru: Kannada actor Chetan Kumar, popularly known as Chetan Ahimsa, has been arrested by Bengaluru police after his tweet on Hindutva went viral. The complaint against him stated that his tweet, which says that "Hindutva is built on lies", allegedly hurt the sentiments of Hindus. He was taken into custody by the Sheshadripuram police in Bengaluru.

NIA CHARGESHEETS 12
PRO-KHALISTANI OUTFITS

New Delhi: The NIA on Tuesday filed its first Chargesheet against 12 accused, found to have links with pro-Khalistani outfits and Pak-based conspirators, in one of the three terror-gangster nexus cases it is investigating.

Where're 80K cops, HC slams
Punjab for Amritpal's escape

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Punjab & Haryana High Court on Tuesday slammed the Punjab Government over the "intelligence failure" that led to pro-Khalistan preacher giving police the slip. "You have 80,000 cops. What were they doing? How did Amritpal Singh escape?" the High Court asked Punjab Government.

The State Government informed the HC that the stringent National Security Act has been invoked against Amritpal. Police arrested four people who helped the radical preacher on Saturday carry out his escape as police cars gave chase.

Amritpal switched from one car to another, changed clothes at a gurdwara and then fled along with three other associates on two motorcycles. About 154 people have been arrested since police began its crackdown against those linked with the preacher and "Waris Punjab De".

Three more people, including the preacher's uncle Harjit Singh, were brought Tuesday to the central jail in Assam's Dibrugarh. Four others were sent there on Sunday. The jail now holds seven men caught during the operation that began weeks after Amritpal Singh and his supporters stormed the Ajnala police station near Amritsar on February 23.

According to the affidavit submitted by police in the



Tight security arrangements at Dibrugarh Central Jail where close aides of 'Waris Punjab De' founder Amritpal Singh are lodged, in Dibrugarh on Tuesday PTI



Pro-Khalistan supporters vandalise the Consulate General of India during a protest in San Francisco on the USA PTI

High Court, a non-bailable warrant was also issued against the extremist on Monday.

The detention order against him under the NSA was issued by the Amritsar district magistrate on Saturday, it said. The tough law allows preventive detention of anyone who could threaten peace and national security.

The trigger for police action was the storming of the Ajnala police station near Amritsar by the Amritpal Singh and his supporters on February 23 to force the release of an arrested man.

The HC was hearing the habeas corpus petition filed by Imaan Singh Khara that claimed that Singh was already in police custody, and sought his production in court.

US raps Khalistani vandals; diaspora in
UK stands by Indian High Commission

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/ WASHINGTON/LONDON

Assuring security to Indian diplomats and their premises in the US, Washington has condemned as "absolutely unacceptable" the attack on the Indian Consulate in San Francisco by alleged Khalistan supporters during a protest.

The US State Department issued a statement indicating that those behind the act would be held accountable. "The US condemns the attack

on Sunday against the Indian Consulate in San Francisco. Violence against diplomatic facilities within the US is a punishable crime," it said.

Senior Indian diplomats have told their American counterparts that they anticipate more such protests by anti-national and anti-social elements in the coming weeks and months. Security has been increased at all the Indian diplomatic missions in the US.

Taking a serious note of the incident on Sunday, India late Monday summoned US

Charge d'affaires in New Delhi to register a protest. The US was also asked to take appropriate measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

The US official condemnation late Monday came after the protestors on Sunday broke open the makeshift security barriers raised by the San Francisco police and installed two so-called Khalistan flags inside the Indian Consulate premises. Two consulate personnel soon removed these flags.

SC upholds State Administrative Tribunal abolition

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld the abolition of the Orissa Administrative Tribunal (OAT) by the Central Government. A Bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud quashed the challenge to the decision by the OAT Bar Association.

"We hold that abolition of Orissa Administrative Tribunal (OAT) was constitutionally valid. Article 323A (dealing with Administrative Tri-

bunals) does not preclude the Union of India to abolish State Administrative Tribunals. The decision to abolish the tribunal is not violative of Article 14 of the Constitution," the apex court said.

The Supreme Court was hearing an appeal filed by the OAT Bar Association challenging an order of the Orissa High Court that upheld the Central Government's notification abolishing the OAT.

"Central Government was correct to invoke Section 21

of General Clauses Act to rescind the decision to set up the tribunal. Decision to abolish the tribunal is not violative of Article 14 of the Constitution," the Supreme Court held.

"There is violation of reasonable classification. High Court was already hearing the cases which were before OAT. The failure of the Centre to conduct a judicial impact assessment does not vitiate the decision to abolish the OAT," it said.

5T, rice issues rock State Assembly

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Assembly on Tuesday witnessed pandemonium as the ruling BJD and opposition BJP locked horns over the 5T issue and deduction of 5 kg of rice by the Centre.

During Zero Hour, Leader of Opposition Jayanarayan Mishra targeted the Government over the 5T issue and questioned how the 5T secre-

tary became the CMO (Chief Minister's Office).

On the other hand, the BJD protested against the Centre's deduction of 5 kg of rice which was provided by it to counter the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. BJD MLAs stood at their seats holding banners and posters.

The BJD accused the BJP of not allowing a discussion on topics that involve common people's interest. The

Army begins work
on hydrogen-based
micro-grid along LAC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Army has put in motion the process for installation of a green hydrogen based micro grid power plant project in the forward areas along the Northern borders facing China not connected by the national or State grid.

Giving details here on Tuesday, officials said a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed here between the Indian Army and National Thermal Power Corporation Renewable Energy Limited (NTPC REL).

The Army is providing requisite land on lease for 25 years with a commitment to purchase generated power through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). The proposed projects — part of the National Green Hydrogen mission — will be installed by NTPC on Build, Own and Operate (BOO) Models at a jointly identified location in Eastern Ladakh.

The project entails setting up a Solar Power Plant for



hydrolysis of water to produce Hydrogen, which, during non-solar hours will provide power through fuel cells. This will set the stage for similar projects in the future and contribute towards reducing dependence on fossil fuel-based generator sets with concomitant abatement of green-house gas emissions.

With this MoU, the Indian Army has become the first Government organisation to enter into an agreement with the National Thermal Power Corporation Renewable Energy Limited with firm plans to roll out similar projects in the future.

Mamata on 3-day visit to Odisha

To meet Naveen
on March 23

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee arrived here on Tuesday evening as part of her three-day visit to Odisha.

Banerjee, accompanied by West Bengal Youth Services and Youth Affairs Minister Arup Biswas, went to Puri and made a night halt at the Nirman Nivas there. She is scheduled to visit the Jagannath Temple to offer



Mamata Banerjee arrives in Puri on Tuesday: Ranjan Ganguly

her prayers to the deities on Wednesday.

She said, "The Odisha CM is our senior leader and I will (also) meet him."

Banerjee is scheduled to meet Naveen Patnaik on Thursday. Even though the agenda of the meeting was still unclear, sources said the two leaders could discuss issues concerning the States as well as the upcoming 2024 elections.

Banerjee had recently met Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav in Kolkata. Both announced that they would maintain equal distance from the BJP and the Congress.

Will unveil truth behind Naba murder: CM

Says Opp telling
lies for narrow
political gains

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday said his Government would ensure that the truth behind the murder of Health Minister Naba Kisore Das is unveiled.

Replying to the allegations by the Opposition, Patnaik told the State

Assembly that the investigation into the case is still in progress and the charge-sheet would be filed within the timeframe of law.

"My Government has al-



ways stood for justice. In this particular case, we have two objectives -- unveil the truth behind this murder and to ensure conviction of those involved," he said.

With the Opposition alleging that the Government is

trying to show that the accused person Gopal Das is mad, the CM said the Opposition is telling lies for narrow political gains.

"Where did Opposition find this point about the Government saying that the accused person is mad or Government trying to show that the accused person is mad? The Opposition is lying for narrow political gains. My Government has always stood for justice," he said.

Even then, the Opposition is accusing the government of hiding something in the investigation. This is deplorable and smacks of political opportunism, he said.

"I assure the people of my State that in all the sensational cases alleged by the Opposition, justice will be done and the culprits will be convicted; and when that happens, people will judge the narrow political mindset of the Opposition," Patnaik said.

He said the investigators have been following all scientific procedures involving professional agencies, including those from other States and Central Government. The entire investigation is being monitored by a retired High Court judge appointed by the High Court itself.

Maoist-related cases nosedived in State in 2022

7 LWE cadres killed in encounter
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The overall Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) scenario in the State remained well under control during 2022 and only 27 Maoist-related incidents were reported in the State during last year, said a Home Department

Whitepaper tabled in the Assembly on Monday. In the year 2022, seven LWE cadres were killed during encounters by security forces while 12 Maoists were arrested. Moreover, three Maoists surrendered before the police, it said. As many as eight civilians were killed during 12 exchanges of fire incidents and three security personnel

attained martyrdom. The police opened fire 14 times. However, the details of the firing incidents have not been mentioned in the paper. Besides, a total 1,78,190 cognizable cases including 1,379 murder, 626 dacoity, 2,998 robbery, 5,467 burglary, 14,893 theft, 5,352 swindling, 2,248 rioting, 3,184 rape, 11,663 motor vehicle accident and

1,30,380 miscellaneous cases were reported in the State during 2022. Out of the 1,78,190 cognizable offence cases, 1,69,735 cases were based on true incidents and chargesheets were framed against 1,18,547 cases, it said. Similarly, the State police, till December last, filed chargesheets in 640 murder cases, 329 dacoity, 1,336 loot, 1,800 burglary, 5,859 theft,

1,360 swindling, 1,361 rioting, 2,237 rape and 7,151 MV cases. Out of 19 economic offence cases filed during 2022, chargesheets were filed in seven cases. Similarly, the police registered 1,983 cybercrime cases in the year of which chargesheets were filed in 272 cases and 441 accused were arrested. The State lodged 263 dowry cases during the year while chargesheets were filed in only

119 cases. Of 106 dowry related suicide cases, chargesheets were framed in 89 cases. No terrorist activity was noticed in the State during 2022 and based on intelligence inputs, the terrorist activities were contained effectively. However, advisories and alert messages were issued to all SPs from time to time on possible terrorist activities in the State, it added.

‘Rlys’ spending negligible in Odisha’



Consumers body holds meet
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The issue of neglect of Indian Railways towards the development of Odisha was discussed in a meeting organised by the Railway Consumers Association held here on March 18. It was discussed that although the Railways collects Rs 20,000 crore annually from Odisha, the amount it sanctions for the development of the State is very negligible. Besides, only 40% of the sanctioned amount is spent and the rest is sent back as unspent fund.

The MPs and MLAs who are supposed to raise their voices are silent on the matter, they said. Further, it was also discussed how passengers are facing difficulties from regular hikes in fares and lack of infrastructure, like no shed for protection from rain and sun, lack of safety and short height platform, etc in the railway stations. Arjuna Charan Samantray presided, while Natabar Khuntia, Kahnu Charan Behura, Malaya Ghose, Indumati Sahu, Swoumya Pradhan, Nilamani Mishra, Satya Narayan Samantasinghar, among others were present.

Thunderstorms to continue in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Several parts of the State including Cuttack city on Tuesday experienced thunderstorm and hailstone showers. Heavy rainfall in the afternoon led to water-logging in several low-lying areas in the city. Capital city Bhubaneswar was also lashed by thundershowers in the afternoon. The Regional Office of India Meteorological Department (IMD) here said light to moderate rainfall or thunderstorm is likely to continue in several parts of the State. An Orange warning for thunderstorm with lightning and hailstorm has also been

issued for several districts for the next 24 hours. Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching up to 30 to 40 kmph and hailstorm are very likely to occur at one or two places in the districts of Sambalpur, Deogarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Angul, Dhenkanal, Nayagarh, Jajpur, Cuttack, Bhadrak, Baleswar and Kendrapada. Thunderstorm with lightning is very likely to prevail at one or two places in the districts of Kandhamal, Puri, Ganjam, Khordha, Bargarh, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Kalahandi, Jagatsinghpur, Subarnapur, Boudh, Balangir and Nuapada, the IMD said, issuing a Yellow Warning.

DJ Azex died due to asphyxiation: Postmortem



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The postmortem of deceased DJ Azex alias Akshay Kumar Maharana has revealed that he died due to asphyxiation, sources said. The body also bore some ligature marks, the autopsy report said. Akshay died by suicide and it is ante-mortem in nature. No suspicion is arising from his viscera. However, a sample has been sent for further examination, said an official of the Capital Hospital here. The Commissionerate police have registered an ‘abetment of suicide’ case against Akshay’s girlfriend and her male friend. The case has been registered under Sections 306 and 34 of IPC. The girl and her friend would

be summoned and questioned soon, police sources said. Akshay was found hanging at his residence in Bhubaneswar on Saturday night. Holding his girlfriend and her male friend accountable for abetting his suicide, his mother alleged that he was being subjected to torture and mental harassment by the duo. As per the contents of the FIR, Akshay and his girlfriend, who is an MBBS student in a private college here, were in a relationship since a year. She was apparently exploiting him for money and was demanding a two-wheeler. WhatsApp chats revealed that Akshay had even transferred Rs 15,000 to her account through PhonePe. The girl, however, ditched him and got involved with another male friend who started threatening Akshay to leave her, failing which he would leak an intimate video of them, the FIR read.

Belpahar-Lakhanpur residents upset with DRM gesture

Had met officer over reviving pre-Covid rail stoppages
PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA
The residents of Belpahar in Jharsuguda are outraged and upset over the behaviour of the Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of Bilaspur as they were told that rail stoppages were a national issue and not personal to anyone. According to sources, the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (DCM) from Bilaspur had called the agitating delegation for talks, and the representatives from

the Belpahar - Lakhanpur Railway Users Forum had reached Bilaspur for the meeting on Friday. However, the delegation was taken aback by the gesture and behavior of the DRM of Bilaspur. The residents of Belpahar have been demanding that the rail stoppages, which were stopped many months ago due to the Covid-19 pandemic, be started again. They also threatened to hold a rail roko on March 23 to press for the demand. The delegation expressed disappointment with the DRM’s behavior and urged the railway authorities to find a solution to the problem.

State’s first RD Univ has E-Reading Corner for the blind

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Mo College Abhijan Chairperson Akash Dasnayak inaugurated an E-Reading room for visually-challenged girl students titled ‘Binodini Mohapatra reading corner’, on Tuesday at the Rama Devi Women’s University here. Addressing the students, Dasnayak said, ‘‘I welcome all present over here along with We 4 You personnel. The Mo College Abhijan is dedicated to making every college and university across the State progress holistically. In fact, the Mo College ignites the enthusiasm in the life of every student. I personally thank Registrar Shyamali Mohapatra who has donated a handsome amount for the construction of the E-Reading corner on behalf of her mother Binodini Mohapatra. This will assist the



students to get an excellent education.” VC Prof Chowdhury said, “Our university has computer literacy for each student and for these visually challenged students we are also planning

to update all our facilities at the E-learning centre where special software will be added and special training for the students will be available.” Registrar Mohapatra said said, “My mother Binodini

Mohapatra has always encouraged me and my siblings to progress in life like a flowing river. I am glad that today as an alumnus of this university, I donated to the E-Reading corner.”

Dhwani: A special film fest on disabilities



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Chief Secretary Pradeep Jena inaugurated the ninth edition Dhwani-FLO Disability Film Fest here at the Guru Kelu Charam Odissi Research Centre on Tuesday. Film Fest chairperson Jeetendra Biswal spoke about the special festival and about March 21 which is celebrated worldwide as the Down

Syndrome Day. FICCI FLO chairperson Namrita Chahal commented, ‘‘It is our duty to work towards an inclusive India. The greatest disability is the lack of ability to appreciate each other for their strengths. Each individual is an empowered soul and it is our responsibility to respect and celebrate the differences and uniqueness in one another.”

Actress Dolly Jena said art is a creative space for several minorities to be heard and understood. The same goes for films about people with disabilities. OTDC Chairman Lenin Mohanty said the festival aims to change the picture of disability through film. Noted theatre personality Anant Mahapatra said films with accurate and interesting

representations of disability shown at this festival counter the negative stereotypes promoted by movies with demeaning, discriminatory and false portrayals of disability and people who have disabilities. The first day ended with screening of 25 films of 1 minute, 5 minute and 30-minute categories. The festival will conclude on Wednesday with award giving ceremony.

In city Chain snatching caught on camera

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Even though the Commissionerate police have taken several measures to curb street crimes, chain snatchers continue to be on the prowl in the capital city. In a latest incident, a gold chain was snatched from a woman in Oscar City under the Laxmisagar police station in the city. The youth looted a gold chain from the victim while she was plucking flowers. The incident has been captured on a CCTV camera installed in the area. Though the woman ran to escape from the spot, she fell down. Taking advantage of it,

the miscreant snatcher her chain and escaped from the spot with his aide by a motorcycle. On the basis of a complaint lodged by the woman, the Laxmisagar police have started an investigation into the incident. Efforts were on to trace and apprehend the looter. In another incident on Monday evening, three youths attacked the staffs of a petrol pump with sharp weapons at Kalpana Square following an argument. Three to four staffs were injured in the brawl. But the three attackers were overpowered and handed over to police.

AMOFI founder’s autobiography released

Annihilate caste system for social justice: CST Voltaire
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
On his 79th birthday, an autobiography of atheist social reformer B Ramchandra CST Voltaire was released on March 17 here by eminent writers and columnists Dr Bhagaban Prakash, Prof Biswaranjan, Prof Jitendra Narayan Dash, Dr Bidhuprava Rath and Bandana Mishra. AMOFI president Manas Jena chaired

the function. Voltaire said that for lack of free thought in India, more so in Odisha, caste has remained as an obstacle for ensuring social justice. Dr Bhagan Prakash, an ex-Advisor to the Chief Election Commissioner of India, regretted that caste, Gotra, Rasi, Naxatra and other such particulars are being highlighted in matrimonial advices. Prof Biswaranjan and Prof Jitendra Dash pleaded that humanistic casteless education, if properly spread



out among the students all over India and if there is total social freedom for love marriages of youths, then within a few years the caste system would get crumbled.

Others who spoke included Dr Bidhuprava Rath, author of political novel ‘‘Bhagat Singh’’, writer Bandana Mishra, historian Dr Hemanta Kumar Parija and Marxist leader

Banshidhar Parida Manas Jena expressed his deep anguish that educated Indians who are going to the USA for better jobs are also acting according to their caste

prejudices and conducting marriages of their children in the old-fashioned way even in a far of land. HE argued that ‘‘atheistic humanism’’ being emphasised upon by AMOFI founder Voltaire, must be popularised in India and abroad. AMOFI cofounder Swapna Bijayini offered a vote of thanks. Among others, poet Banamali Barik, social worker Pratima Sahoo and Freethought Party of India vice-president Harish Chandra Kar attended the function.

In Baleswar Inter-State flesh trade racket busted; 13 held

6 women
including 2
Bangladeshis
rescued

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The Baleswar police have busted a major sex racket by arresting 13 persons, including traffickers and pimps, involved in the crime during raids in the district and in West Bengal. The cops also rescued six women, including two Bangladeshis, during the raids.

Baleswar SP Sagarika Nath on Tuesday said the accused persons were booked under

Sections 366B, 368, 370, 34 of IPC and 5 and 6 of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act.

She said police unearthed the racket after they initiated an investigation based on information from a West Bengal-based NGO which alleged that women from the 24 Parganas were trafficked to Odisha for immoral purposes.

"After getting information, police teams were formed and they initially zeroed in on a house at Basta. Police apprehended a couple who were residing in the house under fictitious names. During the couple's

interrogation, the involvement of others was ascertained. Further raids were conducted in Singla and Khordha. Out of the six rescued victims, two prima facie appeared to be Bangladeshis. The victims were lured to the flesh trade with the promise of better-quality life," Nath said.

Two separate cases were registered under the Basta and the Singla police stations. Further, the accused instrumental in preparing fake identity proofs for the victims would be booked under the Foreigners Act, 1946 and Aadhaar Act, 2016, added the SP.

Amarendra holds huge get-together again

Supporters
claim BJD
ticket for him in
2024 polls

KAHNU NANDA
■ JAGATSINGHPUR

Mar 19. Former Odisha Cashew Development Corporation Chairman and former BJD Jagatsinghpur district president Amarendra Das' supporters organised a massive get-together at Alipingala under Jagatsinghpur block on Sunday.

This was the third such get-together of Das in the district in three months. The success of the get-togethers has sparked speculations about Das being a top contender for BJD ticket for the Jagatsinghpur Assembly constituency in the 2024 elections.



At the Sunday meeting, Das was accompanied by BJD leaders like former ZP President Debidatta Mohanty, ex-Jagatinghpur block Chairman Prasanna Swain, Vice-Chairman Laxmidhar Swain, Sarpanches and Samiti Members, former PRI

members, student leaders, educationists and social workers from several gram panchayats and mainly BJD supporters disgruntled with incumbent MLA Prasanta Muduli.

Das was taken to the meeting spot in a vast

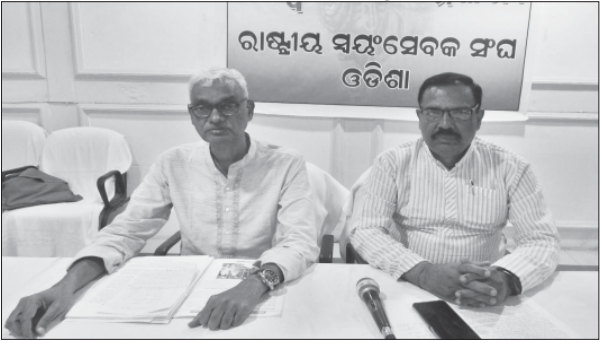
procession. Some Congress leaders from Sabhamula and Alipingala GPs joined the BJD expressing their confidence in Das' leadership.

Das spoke about Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's success stories of governance. His supporters urged the

BJD higher-ups to give party ticket to him for the 2024 Assembly polls.

Political observers feel that if the BJD replaces present MLA Prasanta Muduli from Jagatsinghpur in the coming polls, Das is the best choice for the party.

RSS's aim is to awaken 'Swa' in country



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even though the country's social, economic, cultural and religious systems were damaged due to foreign invasions for thousands of years, the saints and great persons were able to maintain the 'Swa' in the country. 'Swa' means Swadharma, Swadeshi and Swaraj. Now in the light of the 'whole world is one family' (Vasudheiva Kutumbakam), India is moving in the path of world peace, friendship and human welfare calling for re-establishment of 'Swa' and also to remember the freedom fighters and saints.

This was stated by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Pranta Sanghachalak, Odisha Purba Samir Kumar Mohanty in a Press conference held by the RSS Odisha here on Wednesday.

Mohanty said, "We have to establish a society free from the colonial mindset and establishment of eternal (Sanatan) values and development of Swadeshi economy." The meeting decided to focus more on five issues to transform the society. They are social harmony, family reformation, environmental protection, indigenous (Swadeshi) attitude and civic consciousness.

Preparations in full swing for Thakurani Jatra

Rituals in run-
up to fest in
B'pur held

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■
BRAHMAMUR

The biannual Maa Thakurani Jatra at Brahmapur will be held from April 4 to May 1, said hereditary head of the Dera community, P Durgaprasad Desibehera here.

According to information available, the Desibehera family has already started necessary preparations in full swing for the famous mass festival which is being celebrated once in every two years.

After the sacred 'lagna' (muhurta) was finalised by the traditional Sidhanti (known as Kula Purhoita) of Desibehera family, the dengura badak (drum beater) informed the public in the Desibehera street and its adjoining areas on Friday morning about the time for preparatory meeting by



the local public and finalisation of date and time for installation of "Subhakhunti" (most auspicious pillar) for the upcoming yatra.

Accordingly, a public meeting at the local level was

held on Friday night at 10 pm presided over by the chief manager of the fest P Durgaprasad Desibehera in which the Kula Purohita (Sidhanti) declared the yatra date and lagna of this year. In addition to the local public, a

large number of devotees, intellectuals and local gentries were present.

Soon after the meeting, the Desibehera family along with Gejaman, the residents of Desibehera Street, and a large number of devotees in an impressive procession went to the Maa Thakurani Temple along with the Subha Khunti (the most sacred pillar) made up of bamboo, and observed Puja in the temple. Desibehera also conveyed the date fixed by the Sidhanti to Maa Thakurani and invited the Goddess for the purpose.

Only after the Goddess accorded permission for the fest, the devotees and the public came back to Desibehera Street in a procession. The 'Subha Khunti' was installed in Desibehera Street-the parental adobe of the Maa Thakurani amidst chanting Mantras and Hulahuli in the presence of Sidhanti.

B'pur minor girl abducted, raped, then rescued

Accused held

PNS ■ BRAHMAMUR

A minor girl was allegedly abducted by a youth from Brahmapur and raped after being drugged at a lodge in Simanchalam area of neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

Police arrested the accused, identified as P Saroj Kumar Pradhan (35) of Sanadumula under Digapahandi Police limits, and rescued the victim on Saturday.

According to Badabazar police station IIC Prashant Bhupati, the family of the minor girl had lodged a complaint with police that the victim was missing since March 16 from 3rd Lane of Sriram Nagar, Brahmapur.

"Giving priority to the

case, we registered a case under IPC Section 363 and started a search operation. Later, the incident came to the fore after the girl escaped from the Madhuri Kalyan Mandap lodge on Friday and informed her brother about the incident. A Bada Bazar Police team along with family members reached there and rescued the minor. The statement of the victim has been recorded," Bhupati said.

The preliminary investigation revealed that the accused had drugged her food and drink. A glass and some clothes seized from the lodge have been sent to a forensic scientific laboratory for test. The victim and the accused were also medically examined by the police.

Women Agniveer' PoP in Navy on Mar 28

PNS ■ INS CHILIKA

The passing out parade of Agniveer (men and women) Batch at INS Chilika is scheduled for March 28.

The momentous event will mark culmination of rigorous training in the life of Agniveers which shall be witnessed by renowned sports women personalities like Sakshi Malik, Geeta Phogat, Mary Kom, PT Usha and

veteran sailors, who have made a mark for themselves.

Admiral R Hari Kumar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC, Chief of the Naval Staff would be the chief guest and the reviewing officer of the passing out parade. These women underwent 16 weeks of ab-initio training at the training establishment of Indian Navy, INS Chilka based on core values of duty, honour and courage.

Arrestees
include wife of
deceased

SANGRAM MISHRA
■ ATHMALLIK

A mysterious death case of Jayant Pradhan of Bayeja village of Kishore Nagar police station in Angul district has been cracked. The police arrested the murderers after seven days under pressure after the villagers launched an agitation. Jayant's wife along with three accomplices was arrested and forwarded to court. Jayant was rescued by Fire personnel from Sapna Sahi

road of Pipala Bahal- Bayeja road on March 10 in a serious condition and later, was shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment but he was declared dead during treatment.

On March 14, the Bayeja villagers had besieged the police station, alleging that Jayant's murder was premeditated. Later, the police changed the direction of the investigation.

According to police, Jayant had married Rajashree Rani Dehury of Sahaj Bahali village as per Vedic rituals four years ago and both them have a son. Rajashree was staying at her father's house for the last eight

months due to misunderstanding between them.

Although her father-in-law tried to make a compromise between both of them repeatedly, but it was all in vain due to Rajashree's unyielding nature. Vikas Bhoi was a very close friend of Rajashree's brother Shakti Ranjan who often visited Shakti's house and in the meantime a love affair developed between Vikash and Rajashree. But Jayant was an impediment on their way.

On March 10, around 9 pm, Jayant was returning from work when he was attacked

with a baseball bat by Jayant and his friends. They later threw the baseball bat over a railway track in an isolated area. Finally, Vikas (23) of Saisihri Bihar under Ainthapali police station, Rohan Pradhan (22) of Puniapada and Vikas Kumbhar (23) of Anugulia Basti were arrested on charges of murder. The police also seized the baseball bat from the railway line. As per direction of the Angul SP, the Angul DSP Akshay Kumar Panda and Kishore Nagar IIC Laba Boda arrested Jayant's wife Rajashree and the three accused and forwarded them to court.

Theatre fest CANFEST kicks off at Paradip



10-day event to
continue till
Mar 28

PNS ■ PARADIP

The 20th National Theatre Festival CANFEST-2023 kick started here on Sunday in a grand manner.

In the inaugural ceremony, Paradip Port Authority (PPA) Chairman PL Haranadh was present as the chief guest and declared the festival open.

Among others, the inauguration was attended by Chairman, Paradip Municipality Basant Biswal, Deputy Chairman, PPA Asish Kumar Bose, eminent theatre director and academician, University of Hyderabad Prof Satyabrata Rout, Executive Director and head of IOCL Paradip Refinery Mukesh Mohan, Unit Head, IFFCO, Paradip KJ Patel and president, CANMASS Atulya Kumar Mohapatra were

present as guests. The function was coordinated by secretary, CANMASS Sriman Narayan Mishra.

In the inaugural evening, Hindi play 'Bhagawad Jukeyam' was performed by Nipa Rang Mandalali of Lucknow.

This year, the festival was dedicated to founder president of CANMASS Manoj Kumar Pradhan. The festival will run for ten days till March 28.

'Scribes' role in India's growth paramount

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Inaugurating the Indian Journalists National Council meet, Governor of Gujarat Acharya Devabrata emphasised the role of media in creating a healthy social order while defending democracy.

He expressed his happiness that India is marching ahead as a super power in the world and the contribution of the journalists in this regard is of paramount importance.

President of IJU and senior journalist of the country KV Pandit came down heavily upon the Central Government and the State Governments for not allowing Majithia Wage Board and for stifling the Press directly or indirectly.

He criticised the newspaper owners for hatching a conspiracy by creating "contractual employment"



which amounts to gagging of the Press freedom.

In the afternoon session IJU secretary general, Murugesh B Siva Puji presided over and secretary IJU, Sugyan Choudhury delivered a speech highlighting the problems and predicaments confronting the working journalists of the

country. Journalists from all over the country had assembled and the points of consensus were submitted to the Central and State Governments for preserving and protecting the rights of the journalists community while urging the Government to create better working

conditions for the scribes. A few scribes were felicitated on the occasion.

Murugesh B Siva Puji, Ganapati Pandiya and Soukhat Bhai Mirza were felicitated. IJU secretary and president of Odisha Union of Working Journalists Sugyan Choudhury was specially felicitated for his

meritorious contributions in the field of journalism as a columnist. Besides five other NEC members from Odisha like Paramananda Mishra, Asutosh Rath, Pabitra Kumar Patra, Pramod Parida, Prasanta Kara and an invitee Prasanta Mohanty were also awarded on the occasion.

Opp hits out at BJP over Choksi's removal from Interpol database

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties on Tuesday hit out at the BJP-led government over fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi's removal from the Interpol database of Red Notices, saying while the Opposition was being targeted by the Enforcement Directorate and CBI, its "friend" was being let off.

While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said talk of patriotism by those giving "protection" to such people is a "joke", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee alleged that businessmen Gautam Adani and fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi are the "best friends" of the BJP-led government at the Centre and saffron party was working only for these people. The Aam Aadmi Party accused the Centre of trying to save fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi after his name was removed from the Interpol database of Red Notices.



In a tweet, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said, "'Vipaksh ko ED, CBI, Mittr ko rihaa' (ED, CBI for the Opposition, let off for friend)."' "Modani' model matlab pehle looto, phir bin sazaa ke chooto' (Modani model means first loot and then go scott-free without punishment)," he said.

"They are doing things to divert attention from real issues. Our embassies are being attacked. People who have run away with money from banks, Mehul Choksi, those giving protection to

such people talk about patriotism, it is a joke." Kharge told reporters outside the Parliament.

Hitting out at the BJP government, the TMC supremo said that banks have no money and people are not getting their payments even after working for the 100 days' work scheme. "... The country is run by only a few people. Banks are totally penniless and the Centre is not giving money for the 100 days' work scheme (MGNREGA). But these people (Adani and Choksi) have collected lots of

funds," Mamata claimed.

Choksi is wanted in a Rs 13,000 crore bank fraud in Punjab National Bank and is holed in Antigua and Barbuda after fleeing from India in 2018.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP and spokesperson Raghav Chadha claimed that Choksi's name was removed from the Interpol's Red Notices as Indian probe agencies failed to provide "concrete evidence" of the charges slapped on him. Choksi had managed to obtain citizenship of Antigua as the BJP-led Centre issued a no objection certificate for this, Chadha alleged.

"While the government of India had issued a no objection certificate to Mehul Choksi to enable him to become citizen of Antigua earlier, the Enforcement Directorate and the Central Bureau of Investigation failed to provide concrete evidence against him resulting which his name has been removed from the Red Notices list," the AAP leader alleged.

SC to mull if pleas challenging electoral bond scheme can be shifted to Constitutional Bench

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it will consider whether the pleas challenging the validity of the electoral bond scheme for political funding of parties can be referred to a Constitutional Bench for an "authoritative pronouncement".

The top court's observations to decide whether the pleas can be referred to a Constitutional Bench assume significance in the wake of the claim of an NGO, a PIL petitioner on the issue, that so far Rs 12,000 crore has been paid to political parties through electoral bond and the two-third of the amount has gone to one major political party and hence, the matter needed to be decided expeditiously prior to the upcoming Karnataka assembly polls.

"We will see whether the petitions can be referred to a constitution bench on April 11," said the bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice PS Narasimha.



Lawyer Shadan Farasat, appearing for one of the PIL petitioners, said that the pleas be referred to a constitution bench due to the impact of the electoral bond scheme on the democratic polity and funding of political parties. Farasat said the issue needed an "authoritative pronouncement" by a larger bench. Senior advocate Dushyant Dave, appearing for NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), also supported the submission with regard to referring the batch of PILs to a constitution

bench.

Dave said the matter be taken up for in April itself prior to the upcoming Karnataka assembly polls. Advocate Prashant Bhushan sought urgent hearing, pointing out that petitions are pending for the past five years. He said that the apex court must issue direction to the Centre not to open any further window for the sale of electoral bonds during the pendency of a case pertaining to funding of political parties and alleged lack of transparency in their bank accounts.

The Government notified the Electoral Bond Scheme on January 2, 2018. According to the provisions of the scheme, electoral bonds may be purchased by a person who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.

An individual can buy electoral bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals. According to the notification, electoral bonds shall be encashed by an eligible political party only through an account with an authorised bank.

'Def manufacturers should also focus on indigenous design, development'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the need for self-reliance in defence production, IAF Chief V R Chaudhari on Tuesday said here manufacturers should also focus on indigenous design and development and not confine themselves only to production.

Stressing upon this point, he also said called for building offensive and defensive space capabilities to safeguard assets, and developing directed energy weapons that have significant advantages over traditional weapons. Chaudhari also said stakeholder collaboration was imperative to achieve self-reliance, and without it, "we will wallow in the dark."

Pointing out that future wars will be across the entire spectrum including land, sea, air, cyber and space, the IAF chief said "the key to faster development is to identify core areas of development, clearly articulate requirements, and closely interact with the industry to design and develop the technology."

Addressing the Def Tech 2023 on "India's Aerospace Capabilities And Technology Requirements", the IAF chief said "the weapons of India @100 would look very different from weapons of India @75". He went into flashback to demonstrate the capability difference due to technological enhancements over a gap of 25 years, from 1998 to now.

"Directed-energy weapons and hypersonic weapons have already been tested and employed. DEWs, particularly lasers, provide significant advantages over traditional weapons such as precision engagement, low cost per shot, logistical benefits and low detectability," he said.

Highlighting the need for all round synergy, Chaudhari said "well established defence manufacturing public sector enterprises must hand-hold and get the developed tech-



nology into the market for mass production. Unless all stake holders come together, I am afraid, we will continue to wallow in the dark and not see tangible progress."

The race to weaponise space has already started and the day is not far when the next war will be fought across land, sea, air, cyber and space, he said. "We need to capitalise on our initial successes in space

and prepare ourselves for the future. The Indian aerospace industry along with other players like Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Defence Space Agency (DSA) need to collaborate and chalk out the path for the future," Chaudhari said. He also said the focus of IAF was on strengthening indigenous capabilities and upgrading its older equipment.

2nd edition of AFINDEX commences in Pune



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PUNE

The second edition of Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX- 2023) between India and 23 nations of the African continent commenced on Tuesday at Foreign Training Node, Aundh, Pune. It will culminate on March 30.

Nearly 100 participants from Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, Sudan, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, are attending this unique field

training exercise. The participants were addressed by Lt General Rakesh Kapoor, Corps Commander, Desert Corps, officials said on Tuesday.

The joint exercise is in keeping with India's outreach to Africa, which commenced in 2008 through the India-Africa Summit and has been thereafter held in 2015 and 2019.

The theme of the exercise is focused on Humanitarian Mine Action and Peace Keeping Operations. The Military cooperation and engagement between the participating member nations are vital for refining the interoperability and operational preparedness for UN peace keeping operations.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday filed its first Chargesheet against 12 accused, found to have links with pro-Khalistani outfits and Pak-based conspirators, in one of the three terror-gangster nexus cases it is investigating.

The agency said 10 other suspects are still under investigation for their role in the terror conspiracy, which included plans to eliminate certain leaders, singers and businessmen to terrorise people, extort money from them and create a sensation.

The NIA investigations have revealed linkages of the chargesheeted accused with Khalistan Tiger Force, a banned organisation, and its operative Arshdeep Singh Gill alias Arsh Dala, a listed 'Individual Terrorist'.

Besides being in contact with Pakistan-based conspirators, the accused were also in touch with pro-Khalistanis elements based in Canada and abroad, the NIA said.

The chargesheet filed on Tuesday in Delhi related to dismantling of the gangster-terror network, along with their funding and support infrastructure.

These gangs were conspiring to carry out targeted killings and were also raising funds to carry out these and other terror activities, as part of a deep-rooted conspiracy amongst terrorists, gangsters, drug smugglers and their networks, operating from both within and outside the country.

The 12 accused chargesheeted in the case are Arsh Dala, Gaurav Patyal, Sukhpreet Buddha, Kaushal Choudhary, Amit Dagar, Naveen Bali, Chhotu Bhat, Asif



Khan, Jagga Takhatmal, Tillu Tajpuria, Bhupi Rana and Sandeep Bandar.

"The Chargesheet against them followed six months of extensive searches and examination of around 100 members of different Organised Crime Support networks by the NIA at 91 locations in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, across 25 districts, i.e. Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Mohali, Muktsar, Moga, Ferozepur, Bhatinda, Sangrur, Patiala in Punjab; Gurugram, Sirsa, Yamunanagar, Jhajjar, Rohtak, Rewari in Haryana; Outer North, North, Rohini, Dwarka, North-west, North-East in Delhi; and Baghpat, Bulandshahar, Pilibhit, Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh," it said.

The searches led to seizure of large amounts of incriminating materials. The NIA has also unearthed centres created for harbouring the gang members and stocking weapons for them in various places across Haryana and Punjab.

Around 20 weapons, 527 rounds of ammunition, 195 digital devices and 281 documents among others were seized in these raids and searches.

Seven look out circulars (LOCs) and 10 non-bailable

warrants (NBWs) have so far been issued as part of the investigations. Three immovable properties and three mov-

Made first arrest in NGO terror funding case in J&K, says NIA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday said it has made the first arrest in the NGO terror funding case of Jammu and Kashmir.

Following comprehensive investigations into the NGO Terror funding case registered in October 2020, the NIA arrested Irfan Mehraj from Srinagar late on Monday.

Mehraj was a close associate of Khurram Parvez and was working with his organization, Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Societies (JKCCS), the agency said in a statement.

"Investigation revealed that the JKCCS was funding terror activities in the Valley and had also been in the propagation of a secessionist agenda in the Valley under the garb of protection of human rights," it said.

Involvement of some Valley-based NGOs, Trusts and Societies in funding of terror related activities is being probed in this case.

Some NGOs, both registered as well as unregistered, have come to notice for collecting funds domestically and abroad under the cover of doing charity and various welfare activities, including public health and education.

But some of these organisations have developed links with proscribed terrorist organizations, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) among others.

In a separate case, the NIA has filed the first supplementary chargesheet against one overground worker of proscribed terrorist organization Hizb-ul-Mujahideen Md. Rafi Najar under various sections of the Indian Penal Code

(IPC) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the Jammu and Kashmir Terrorism Conspiracy Case.

The case relates to the conspiracy hatched by the proscribed terrorist organisations, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), along with their frontal organisations, such as TRF and PAFF, and their Over Ground Workers operating in Jammu and Kashmir to undertake violent militant action in Kashmir valley and in other major cities of India, including Delhi.

"Investigations in the case had earlier established the connections of Commanders of these proscribed organisations based in Pakistan with their operatives in Kashmir valley to recruit and train the youth in handling of arms and explosives," the agency said.

Millet-based diet chart must be included in PM-POSHAN: Panel

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Millet or Shree Anna (coarse grains) can be the best bet for India's fight against malnutrition and thereby tuberculosis (TB) in children, a Parliamentary panel has noted as it suggested a millet-based diet chart should be included in the central flagship PM-POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman) Scheme.

The Committee headed by Rajya Sabha MP Bhubaneswar Kalita noted that the twin problems of malnutrition and tuberculosis pose challenges to Health orders in considerable magnitude in certain States in the country. "These two problems tend to interact with each other as nutritional status is significantly lower in patients suffering from tuberculosis. Similarly, malnutrition can lead to immunodeficiency which increases the person's susceptibility to infection. In this light, the Government's push for 'Shree Anna' (coarse grains) or millets as announced in



Budget 2023-24 can play a key role in addressing the challenge of malnutrition particularly in children in India," said the panel in its report submitted to Parliament recently.

It recommended the ICMR to undertake a research project in coordination with Indian Institute of Millet Research and develop a diet chart constituting different types of Shree Anna including Raagi, Bajra, Jowar, Ramdana, etc.

"The Committee is hopeful that this diet chart, if

included in the PM-POSHAN Scheme, can go a long way in improving the nutritional status of children and thereby reducing the TB case load in the country," said the report.

The panel's observations come in the backdrop of various researches showcasing that these "smart foods" can boost growth in children and adolescents by 26 - 39% when they replace rice in standard meals. The results suggested that millets can significantly contribute to overcoming malnutrition.

Indian origin journalist assaulted by Khalistan supporters in British Columbia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/TORONTO

An Indian-origin journalist was assaulted by alleged Khalistan supporters in British Columbia while he was covering an event to welcome Indian envoy to Canada Sanjay Kumar Verma there. The program was cancelled due to protests. Some of them were reportedly wielding swords and blocked the entry of the venue.

The event was organised on Sunday at the Taj Park Convention Centre Surrey to welcome High Commissioner of India, Sanjay Kumar Verma's first visit to the west coast. He was scheduled to attend a reception organized by the Friends of India and Canada Foundation in Surrey, British Columbia.

The event was ultimately cancelled for security reasons, Global News, the news and current affairs division of the

Canadian Global Television Network, reported.

Indian-origin journalist Sameer Kaushal, who was at the venue to cover the protest, was also assaulted by protesters. Kaushal, a journalist and news director with AM600 Sher E Punjab Radio, said when he arrived at the venue, he found a large protest and said demonstrators would not allow him to access the event.

When he identified himself as a journalist and asked the protesters if he could interview their organisers about their concerns, things quickly went sour, he told Global News late Monday.

"They tried to instigate the whole crowd. Approximately 50 to 60 youngsters, they came around me, they made a circle, they had covered their faces with clothes, and they were just pushing me and threatening me and abusing me in my mother tongue," he said.

India will 'unitedly' tackle terrorism, internal security challenges in future: Army Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GURUGRAM

India will continue to face the scourge of terrorism and internal security challenges in the future, Army Chief General Manoj Pande said here on Tuesday and assured that the security forces of the country will "unitedly" tackle them.

He made these observations after inaugurating the All India Police Commando Competition organised by the National Security Guard (NSG) at its garrison in Manesar here.

Pande said the new-age technology has enabled the enemy to perpetrate its activities using drones, internet, cyberspace and social media.

"You all know that terrorism and internal security situation is affecting our country in different ways. We are facing these challenges unitedly. Due to this, the (security) situation is improving in various states.

"These challenges will continue in the future too. Some of these challenges will be there for a long time, some will be present indirectly while some will remain secretly", he said.

Pande said the "possibility" of terrorist



attacks taking place in the country cannot be ignored as he praised intelligence and security forces for foiling and thwarting a number of such designs and networks.

He praised the NSG, a federal counter-terrorist force, for developing special skills in bomb detection and disposal, sniping, countering drones as well as effectively coordinating with other security agencies.

A total of 24 teams from various Central Armed Police Forces and state police organisations are participating in the competition that ends on March 31.

Mamata to stage sit-in against Centre

CM says Bengal has not got farthing towards payment of MNREGA wages, PMAY funds

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With her Government's so-called "integrity TRP" taking a hit as never before in the wake of multi-departmental recruitment scams (the school level appointment scandal to begin with) exploding in the face of the ruling Trinamool Congress packing a number of her senior ministerial and party colleagues off to jail, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has decided to launch a movement against the BJP Government alleging deprivation.

Moments before leaving for Puri where she would offer prayers at the Jagannath Temple, Banerjee on Tuesday said she would soon start a two-day dharna against central deprivation. While in Odisha Banerjee is also likely to meet Chief Minister Naveen Pattanaik apparently to discuss the possibilities of an anti-BJP, anti-Congress Front ahead of the 2024 general elections.

"We are an ideal case of central deprivation ... Bengal has been subjected to a lot of deprivation and torment ... they (read the BJP Government) have not been paying our legitimate dues ... Why are they not clearing the funds for 100-days' work scheme and even the housing scheme ... what is the reason," Banerjee asked adding she would hold a sit-in demon-



stration at the statue of Baba Saheb Ambedkar in Kolkata.

"In protest against central deprivation and torture I will personally sit in a dharna for two days on March 29 and 30 ... the people must be told the kind of treatment we are getting ... Bengal is the only state that has not received a farthing from the Centre (towards the payment of MNREGA wages and PMAY funds) ... They did not earmark anything even in this year's Budget," Banerjee said.

Experts called it a desperate attempt to turn the popular attention from the SSC and other scams and rising discontent inside the party that has unnerved the top leadership to an extent that even senior ministers have been asked not to speak out of turn.

"The Centre on the one

hand has blocked the funds and on the other they are sending inspection teams and agencies" to brow-beat the State, Banerjee said reminding how the "agencies are being used for political reasons only."

Her dharna resolution notwithstanding, the sharp sting in her speech seemed missing on Tuesday, said experts wondering whether she was unwilling to provoke Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

This, particularly at a time when the Enforcement Directorate has told the designated courts that while in the course of investigation into the SSC scam case it has hit goldmines — in the shape of mobile call data records that could put top-most TMC leadership in trouble.

ED grills BRS' Kavitha for 9 hours in 3rd session

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday grilled Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) leader K Kavitha for over nine hours after she appeared at the agency headquarters for the third round of questioning in the money laundering case linked to the Delhi excise policy case.

Till now, the ED had subjected her to questioning for 27-28 hours during her three appearances on March 11, March 20 and Tuesday (March 21). In the first chargesheet filed by the agency, it alleged that she was using two mobile phones whose IMEI changed 10 times. Before her appearance at agency's office, the MLC daughter of Telangana Chief Minister KC Rao shot off a letter to ED stating, "These phones are submitted without prejudice to my right and contentions and larger contentions whether a woman's phone can be intruded, in the teeth of her right to privacy".

Flashing some mobile phones wrapped in a transparent sheet, the BRS leader said she was going to submit them to the ED. Referring to the charge of changing IMEI numbers 10 times, she said, "It is baffling to note as to how, why and under what circumstances the agency made such allegations when I was not even summoned or asked any questions." Accusing the agency of making insinuations the leader said she was submitting the phones to dispel any notion or "adverse impression" that the agency is trying to create.

'Amid standoff Indian troops at high level of preparedness in Ladakh'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Amid ongoing standoff between India and China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, the Northern Army Commander Lieutenant-General Upendra Dwivedi on Tuesday said while the talks are going on at different levels all our formations remain at a high level of operational preparedness in the cold desert region. The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GoC) of Udhampur-based Northern Army Command also maintained the situation is under control in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the efforts are on to stop terror incidents completely. Lt-Gen Dwivedi made these observations while addressing a mega 'Veterans Sampark' rally which was attended by over 800 veterans and 'Veer Naris' at a



unit of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles at Digiana.

"The status quo is maintained with China on the LAC. Talks are going on at different levels and all our formations are at a high level of operational preparedness," Lt-Gen Dwivedi said. Referring to the prevailing security situation in the region Lt-Gen Dwivedi said even though the ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) with

Pakistan is holding on, there have been some infiltration attempts which have been successfully foiled by the Indian Army.

"The situation in the hinterland is largely under control. Our counter-insurgency/counter terrorism grid is fully working with civil administration and efforts are on to stop terror incidents completely," he added.

Min Gadkari's security beefed up after threat

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Security was increased at Union Minister Nitin Gadkari's home and office in Nagpur on Tuesday after a man made three calls threatening to harm the senior BJP leader if Rs 10 crore was not paid to him, a police official said.

The caller identified himself as one Jayesh Pujari, alias Jayesh Kantha, the same person whose name had been used to make similar calls to the Minister's office in January, he said.

Rahul Madane, Deputy Commissioner of Police (zone II), said three calls, two in the morning and one around 12 noon, were made to Gadkari's public relations office, opposite Orange City Hospital in Nagpur.

The person demanded Rs 10 crore and threatened to harm the minister, who holds the portfolio of road transport and highways, if the money was not paid, he said.

After being alerted by Gadkari's staff, the city police have started an investigation, he

said. Security has been beefed up at the minister's home and office, said the DCP.

On January 14, a man identifying himself as Pujari had made threat calls to Gadkari's public relations office, demanding Rs 100 crore. The caller claimed that he was a member of the Dawood Ibrahim gang.

Pujari, who is lodged in Hindalga jail in Karnataka's Belagavi after being sentenced to death in a murder case, had denied his involvement in the calls.

BJP schemes come from babus, Cong's from people: Rahul



PTI ■ WAYANAD (KER)

is not there.

"If you look at the Congress party schemes, like MNREGA, and you compare them to BJP schemes, you will find that the Congress party schemes emerged from the people, from the panchayats, and the BJP schemes emerged from the bureaucracy," the Wayanad MP claimed.

Gandhi then went on to elaborate about the launch of the MNREGA scheme, telling people how the idea emerged from a district in Maharashtra and how it was later conceptualised as a national scheme and expanded to the remaining parts of the country.

"MGNREGA emerged from the people of India. People demanded work, and the government responded to that idea. And it took many years for the scheme to be developed after talking to many, many different stakeholders. It was the scheme that emerged from the people of India. It was the wisdom of the people of India that created MGNREGA," Gandhi said.

He alleged that Modi had ridiculed MGNREGA, but was forced to expand the scheme himself when the country faced the COVID-19 crisis.

"When COVID came, this same Prime Minister, who was ridiculing MNREGA, was forced to expand MNREGA....

"When the Prime Minister came up with the idea of demonetisation, it came from his mind. He did not consult the people of India. He did not even consult the banking system," the Congress leader said.

During his interaction with the office bearers of local bodies, Gandhi also discussed developmental issues on the ground and matters related to the buffer zone for forests, human-animal conflict, waste management issues, and concerns regarding MNREGA.

K'taka BJP leader who played role in Kharge's 2019 poll defeat to join Cong

PTI ■ BENGALURU

BJP leader Baburao Chinchansur, believed to be one of those who played a key role in defeating AICC president M Mallikarjun Kharge, in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, appears set to join the Congress in Karnataka.

Chinchansur, a prominent leader of the Koli-Kabbaliga community in the Kalyana Karnataka region, resigned from his post of Member of the Legislative Council on Monday.

He had represented Gurmitkal assembly constituency in Kalaburagi district from 2008 to 2018, and was a Minister in the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government earlier. However, he quit the Congress in 2018 after his defeat in the assembly election and joined the BJP.

As a BJP member, he is



viewed as one of the main leaders who played a key role in defeating Kharge in Gulbarga (Kalaburagi) Lok Sabha constituency. BJP candidate Umesh Jadhav, who too had resigned from the Congress and joined the BJP, won that election.

Congress sources said Chinchansur is expected to join the party in the coming days.

Earlier this month, another BJP MLC Puttanna resigned from the Legislative Council and

joined the Congress.

When reporters sought a reaction from Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, he said Chinchansur had come from the Congress and was going back to the same party. He added that the BJP was strong in Gurmitkal and Chinchansur quitting the party would not have any effect on the party's prospects there.

Assembly elections in Karnataka are due by May.

BJP stalwart and former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa refused to discuss the issue of Chinchansur's switching of loyalties, as he had already quit.

"Just a few days ago, the husband and wife (Chinchansur and his wife) fell at my feet and vowed that they will not go anywhere," Yediyurappa said. "They might have succumbed to various pressures," he added, saying, "We are ready for anything."

Centre warns Govt employees against joining OPS strike

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday cautioned Government employees and staffers of face consequences if they participate in any kind of protest or strike. The instructions issued by the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) to Secretaries of all Central Government departments prohibited government servants from participating in any form of strike, including mass casual leave, go-slow, sit-down etc.

The directives came in the wake of district-level rallies planned to be organised across the country on Tuesday by the National Joint Council of Action (NJCA) under the banner of 'Joint Forum for Restoration of old pension scheme (OPS)'

"There is no statutory pro-



vision empowering the employees to go on strike. The Supreme Court has also agreed in several judgments that going on a strike is a grave misconduct under the conduct rules and that misconduct by the government employees is required to be dealt with in accordance with the law," the order said.

Any employee going on strike in any form, including

protest, would face the consequences which, besides deduction of wages, may also include appropriate disciplinary action, it said. "The central government employees under your ministry/departments may, therefore, be suitably informed of the aforesaid instructions under the conduct rules issued by this department and other regulations upheld by the Supreme court. This may be dissuaded from resorting to strike in any form including protest," it asked all the central government departments.

Instructions may be issued not to sanction Casual Leave or other kind of leave to employees if applied for, during the period of the proposed protest/strike and ensure that the willing employees are allowed hindrance free entry into the office premises, the order said.



People buy leaves and flowers on the eve of Ugadi festival, at a wholesale market in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

PTI

Vaishno Devi to welcome pilgrims from today

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The cave Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi, illuminated with colorful lights and adorned with multi-hued flowers, is all set to welcome the pilgrims from different parts of India during the nine day long Navratri festival beginning from Wednesday.

The Shrine Board authorities have made elaborate security and other necessary arrangements to ensure smooth flow of pilgrims along the 13 km long serpentine hilly track connecting the base camp of Katra with the cave shrine nestled in Trikuta hills.

Each pilgrim is provided with RFID cards for effective crowd management along the yatra track. In addition 24x7 vigil is maintained with the help of a dedicated CCTV network of over 700 cameras along the yatra route.

An estimated number of over 3 lakh pilgrims are expected to pay obeisance inside the sanctum sanctorum during the festival. To accommodate the rush of pilgrims in the shrine area a quake resistant five storey building with a capacity to accommodate 3000 pilgrims has been constructed.

Anshul Garg, Chief Executive Officer, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board reviewed the arrangements for pilgrims on the track and other locations which include water and power supply along the track leading to the shrine, sanitation, medicare and availability of special "fast-related" food at shrine catering outlets.

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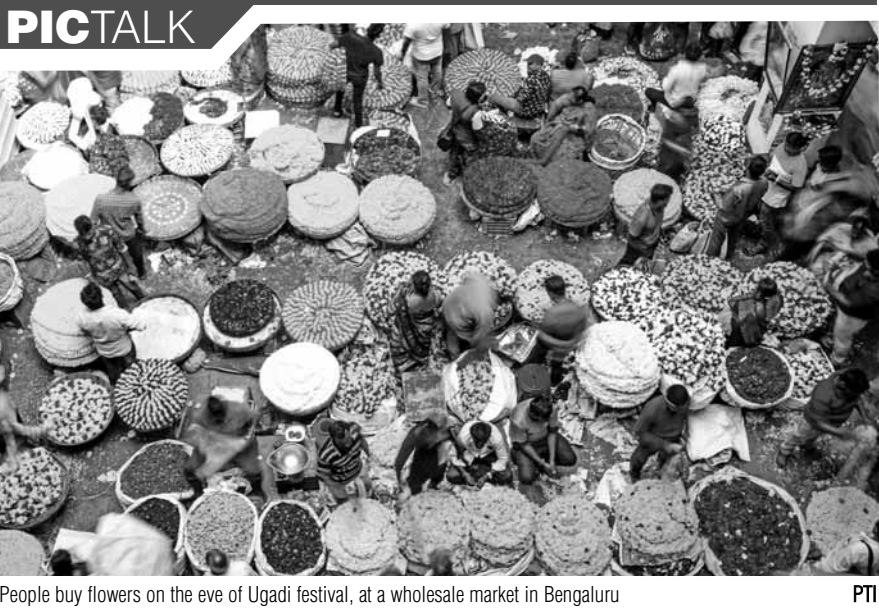
Elusive fugitive

Khalistani leader Amritpal Singh dodges 80,000 Punjab cops, and yet Kejriwal lauds CM Mann

Politics, Niccolo Machiavelli said, has no relation to morals. Often, it also has no relation to facts, commonsense, and decency. Nothing else explains Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal’s praise for his Punjab counterpart and party colleague Bhagwant Mann for the latter’s handling of the situation arising out of Khalistani leader Amritpal Singh’s inflammatory remarks and violent activities. Amritpal has the temerity to take on the entire official machinery of Punjab. The Central Government believes that Amritpal is a Pakistani agent. He openly supports Khalistan, makes anti-national statements, and disregards the Indian Constitution; his followers, protesting against the arrest of one of Amritpal’s supporters, attack a police station, leaving many cops injured. The result? The cops meekly endure the assaults; and his follower is released the next day. When an attempt is made to arrest Amritpal, he dodges the police. Even after a number of days, in which many of his supporters were arrested and many arms recovered from them, police are unable to find him. And yet, Kejriwal has the cheek to say, “I want to congratulate Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann for maintaining the law and order situation in a patient and mature way.” Congratulate for what? Letting a non-entity emerge as a great rebel? Restraining the police to act against an anti-national character so that he grows bigger, becomes Bhindranwale 2.0? Letting violent Khalistanis attack a police station — and getting away with it? Party camaraderie and partisanship are important but more important is national interest.



Instead of lauding his party leader and Punjab CM, Kejriwal should pay heed to what the Punjab and Haryana High Court said on Tuesday. Blasting the Punjab police for their inability to arrest Amritpal who heads an outfit called Waris Punjab De, the court said, “You have 80,000 cops. What were they doing? How did Amritpal Singh escape?” The Punjab Police informed the high court that, in a major crackdown against Amritpal Singh and his outfit, they arrested 120 of his supporters, but that didn’t impress the court. And rightly so. He should have been under watch — very strict watch. After all, he not only promotes secession but also assassination. Former Punjab CM Beant Singh was blown up by Dilawar Singh, who acted as a human bomb. Amritpal Singh says that many Dilawars are ready in Punjab. But the Mann Government did not do that. Bharatiya Janata Party national executive member Sunil Jakhar correctly said, “The operation that could have been carried out without any force and show-off is now today being done in front of the whole country.” It looks like the Aam Aadmi Party, which rules Punjab, is weighing political gains and losses before doing anything against Amritpal Singh. AAP leaders became successful by making all manner of statements and distributing freebies. But you need more than fiscal profligacy to tackle separatism.



People buy flowers on the eve of Ugadi festival, at a wholesale market in Bengaluru

Missing the chorus chirping

It is far better to hear the chirping, rather than the numb silence. The sparrows have disappeared so quietly that no one noticed them go

*A little bird, with plumage brown,
Beside my window flutters down,
A moment chirps its little strain,
Ten taps upon my window-pane,
And chirps again, and hops along.
To call my notice to its song;
But I work on, nor heed its lay,
Till, in neglect, it flies away.*

In my childhood, I remember the above lines from the first African American poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906). Giving these spunky naughty birds broken rice grains to feed on, watching them wait impatiently for their food. This was as grandma and mother would clean grain in the open veranda – the sparrows were a part of our lives back in the hills. Ever since this friendly companion of ours is missing from the metropolitan cities, the poem seems to hold more relevance as the poet observes that this “Bird of peace and hope and love” has left us, since, “We in traffic’s rush and din/Too deep engaged to let them in/With deadened heart and sense plod on/Nor know our loss till they are gone”.

The sparrows have disappeared so quietly that no one has noticed them go. Either that or in the din of city life,



people have been too busy to even notice their choral chirping, let alone miss their presence. The house sparrow (Passer domesticus) is no longer what it used to be – our ‘common’ friend. According to scientists, sparrows thrived around human beings and where grain was abundant. Lack of nesting sites in modern concrete buildings, disappearing kitchen gardens and a general apathy of humans towards this small but attractive bird have deprived them of their general habitat.

We remembered this ‘common’ household member on “World Sparrow Day” on March 20 – a result of a vigorous campaign by scientist-conservationist Mohammad Dilawar, founder of “Natura Forever”. But we also need to be serious as this little bird is gradually edging towards

extinction and is listed in the Red List of endangered species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as well as of the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB), United Kingdom.

There is a sharp decline in many places in India such as Punjab, Haryana, West Bengal, Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan, etc. However, a ray of hope has emerged with the “State of India’s Birds 2000” report, which suggests that the population of House Sparrows has been fairly stable for the past 25 years. The report is based on 10 million observations contributed by over 15,500 birdwatchers since 2000, to an online portal called eBird. It suggests that the population of House Sparrows has been fairly stable for the past 25 years.

The history of the house sparrow is also fascinating. It was the ancient Romans who introduced the house sparrow to Europe from North Africa and Eurasia. Scientific studies also point to the astonishing fact that wherever there is a human population, sparrows follow them there. Fossil evidence from a cave in



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Bethlehem dating back 4,00,000 years suggests that the house sparrow shared its space with early humans. Conservationists attribute the decline in the population of house sparrows to the unfriendly architecture of our homes. This is because of chemical fertilisers in our crops, noise pollution that disturbs the acoustic environment and noxious exhaust fumes from vehicles. A report further attributed the depleting population of sparrows to the increased use of packed food, insecticides in farming, and changing lifestyles. This resulted in inadequate food supplies for the birds. They also feel that unlike pigeons that can make nests on ledges, sparrows need cavities to build their nests. Since the newly constructed defective architectural matchbox style buildings don’t have cavities, sparrows are left homeless.

Ornithologists suggest that people should provide some places in their homes for shelter, where sparrows can easily make their own nests and lay their eggs.

(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti)

Fake diagnosis, fake prescription

Peddlers of the vehicles-pollute-Delhi narrative are silent over the most comprehensive study which blames biomass burning for the mess

If there is anything more polluted than Delhi’s air, it is the discourse on the environment. For years, we were told that vehicular emissions were the root cause of dirty air in the national capital. Now, the most authoritative study on the subject has pointed out that the real reason is something else: biomass burning. The proponents of the vehicles-pollute-Delhi narrative are conspicuous by their silence on the matter.

According to the US Energy Information Administration, “Biomass is a renewable organic material that comes from plants and animals.” It includes wood and wood processing wastes, agricultural crops and waste materials, biogenic materials in municipal solid waste, and animal manure and human sewage.

The study, led by the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, had contributions from 19 scholars and experts from the Physical Research Laboratory, IIT Delhi, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Paul Scherrer Institute (PSI), Switzerland, and University of Helsinki, Finland. Researcher Suneeti Mishra and Prof Sachchida Nand Tripathi, both from the Department of Civil Engineering, IIT Kanpur, co-authored the paper.

In the study, published in the prestigious Nature Geoscience journal, the scholars “observed intense and frequent nocturnal particle growth events during haze development in Delhi from measurements of aerosols and gases during January-February at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi... We estimate that this process is responsible for 70 per cent of the total particle-number concentration during haze.”

It went on to say “that the condensation of primary organic vapours from biomass burning is the leading cause of the observed growth.” It further said, “As uncontrolled biomass burning for residential heating and cooking is rife in the Indo-Gangetic plain, we expect this growth mechanism to be a source of ultrafine particles, affecting the health of 5 per cent of the world’s population and impacting the regional climate.”



In other words, the health of almost 40 crore people is adversely affected by biomass burning.

Switzerland-based IQAir’s recent World Air Quality Report confirmed this. It ranked Delhi and Rajasthan’s Bhiwadi fourth on the list of 50 most polluted cities in the world in 2022. In addition, six Indian cities figure in the top 10 most polluted cities, 14 in the top 20, 39 in the top 50, and 65 in the top 100. In 2021, there were 61 in the top 100.

No one disputes that the quality of air is extremely poor in not just the national capital but also in entire northern India. It is a diagnosis that is not just wrong but also dangerously misleading. In addition, there has been a persistent effort on the part of doctrinaire environmentalists to distract attention from the real cause.

It is not that a non-vehicular source of pollution was never suspected or detected. In July 2021, for instance, a study by IIT Kanpur’s Tripathi found that in summer, 52 per cent of Delhi’s PM 2.5 concentration was because of dust.

Yet, the entire debate about the cause of air pollution revolved around vehicles, especially cars. This was the reason that the Delhi Government

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FEW ARE INTERESTED IN THE REAL ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION. THE FLOURISHING TRIBE OF ACTIVISTS IS CERTAINLY NOT INTERESTED IN ANYTHING THAT HURTS THEIR SHIBBOLETHS. BESIDES, IT IS EASIER TO BLAME EVERYTHING ON CAR OWNERS

under Arvind Kejriwal opted for the odd-even scheme to curb it.

Nothing could be further from the truth. According to the latest National Family Health Survey-5, just about 8 per cent of Indian households own cars. In Delhi, one in five households owns a car. In comparison, in Helsinki, the third cleanest city in the world, there are more than two cars for every individual. In general, Western nations have more cars per household than in India, and yet the air there is much cleaner than in our country.

At the heart of the problem of air pollution in India is not automobile density (which is low anyway) but illegal urbanisation; slums and unauthorised localities are destroying our cities. The consequences are rampant encroachments, unregulated and dangerous construction, solid waste dumping, contamination and death of water bodies, drying of aquifers, and countless more. Unsurprisingly, many areas become dust bowls—and are shrouded in a haze caused by biomass burning.

Addressing these issues presupposes a fundamental change in governance and politics. This certainly involves actions that would be disliked



RAVI SHANKER KAPOOR

by the beneficiaries of chaotic urbanisation: the residents, the local authorities, the local politicians, the bleeding-heart activists, even certain sections of the media. Anybody determined to clean up the mess runs the risk of being branded as ‘anti-poor,’ heartless, etc.

It begins with a win-win situation. The original landowners get much higher prices than they would have got had they sold it as farmland; those with meager resources get a house of their own; the officials concerned get bribes; local politicians provide protection from legal action and get votes in return; and all manner of employers get a cheap workforce.

Few are interested in the real analysis of the situation, for that would mean challenging the dogmas of received wisdom.

The flourishing tribe of activists is certainly not interested in anything that hurts their shibboleths. Besides, it is easier to blame everything on those who are better off, like car owners. So, fake analysis continues, with horrifying consequences, as underlined by the IQAir report.

(The writer is Resident Editor, The Pioneer, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE VALUE OF HAPPINESS

Sir — It is strange that when we can experience bliss everyday, a day is earmarked by the U.N. General Assembly to create awareness about the value of happiness in one’s life. It passed a resolution to the effect on 12 July 2012 and proclaimed 20 March as the International Day of Happiness. While it is astonishing that mankind has devised a benchmark for calculating the happiness index, the true nature of happiness cannot be ascertained. It is relative and differs from person to person. For some, money, muscle power, well paid jobs, and material achievement constitute happiness. On the other hand, others hark back on name, fame, social status, family life to be happy. Still others equate happiness to leading a luxurious life.

We tend to let our desire to achieve something fade away at some point in our lives. Our sorrow originates from these reasons, and leading a content life helps us balance it. Studies have also demonstrated that work-life balance is a necessary prerequisite for harmonious living. However, there is consensus that happiness is a state of mind. Still, more often than not people fail to remain satisfied based on their past experiences. This is because they forget the fact that true happiness cannot be found in the past or worrying about the future. Instead, it can be found in concentrating our body, mind and soul in the present state of affairs or living fully in the present.

It does not come from getting what you want but emanates from wanting what you have.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

GRAVE SITUATION FOR ADIVASIS

Sir — Adivasis are suppressed and still remain backward in our society and are treated shabbily despite decades having rolled by since India’s independence. It is common at major festivals to see Adivasis depicted as ‘noble savages,’ dancing in feathers and grass skirts. This is for an uninformed public to gawk at like creatures in a zoo. Even as there were celebrations at Droupadi Murmu becoming the first

Open letter to the BJP president



ir your speech after virtually inaugurating the National Youth Parliament of BJP Yuva Marcha rightly asserted that those who do not believe in democracy cannot participate. Rahul Gandhi was definitely in mind when you said the above words. According to Rahul Gandhi, democracy is under threat under BJP’S rule. Is it not true Naddaji?. You said that Rahul Gandhi has crossed all bounds of democracy and instigated foreign powers like US and European countries to interfere in India’s internal affairs. But will you show any one of the videos of the UK, in which Rahul Gandhi said foreign countries interfere in India? No you cannot. In Fact there are numerous videos circulating in YouTube of the PM. Narendra Modi insulting India in foreign countries. You have for-

Adivasi and the youngest to become president of the country, how many people in this country really know about the lives of different Adivasi tribes? The average Indian citizen has little to no knowledge about Adivasis, their varied cultures, religions and beliefs. The Adivasi communities, constituting about 40 percent of the displaced, therefore earnestly look forward to president Murmu to immediately look into their grave situations and reduce the pain of their displacement through her good offices.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

OPPOSITION SOLIDARITY

Sir — It is obvious that if the opposition does not come together, then the BJP’s majority in the upcoming 2024 elections is certain. Uniting the opposition is extremely difficult. There are the following reasons

gotten that the PM also humiliates the citizens by saying nothing was done in 60 years and insulting India by claiming that the people lamented what sin they committed to have been in this country. You are asking Rahul Gandhi to apologize for his comments. Will you dare to ask the PM to apologize for his comments? No you don’t. If it is wrong to Peter it is also definitely wrong to Paul also.

You claimed that Rahul Gandhi has become a permanent feature of the “anti-nationalist tool kit”. What proof do you have of it Nadda Ji?. You’ve forgotten that Rahul Gandhi comes from a patriotic family, his grandparents and father have sacrificed their lives for this country. The great grandfather of his father distributed all his wealth to this country and joined the freedom struggle. Finally, what is your contribution for this country? In eight years of rule instead of giving two crores of jobs to youth as you and your party promised, how many jobs were given to youth? Instead in this eight years of your rule your party has made the youth hate mongers among two communities. So please kindly introspect, Naddaji.

Zeeshan I Kazipet

for this. In Bihar, RJD and JDU together are creating an atmosphere to make Nitish Kumar as the prime minister of India. On the other hand, in the last election, the coordination of BSP and SP with Congress did not prove successful.

Turning to other parties, there is a direct contest between TMC and Congress in some political areas. And the Aam Aadmi Party, which has recently emerged as a national party, is in the process of replacing the Congress and becoming the opposition itself. Although not impossible. For a better position the opposition will have to focus more on ground issues like inflation, employment, education and poverty.

Rohit Pandey | New Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

NEP AND THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

It is a visionary document that takes school education to the next level



RADHIKA ZAHEDI

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 lays out an educational vision with a lot of promise for the future of education in India. One of the things it suggests is a revised structure for school education in India, known as the 5+3+3+4 model. This proposed structure proposes that we replace the existing 10+2 structure that has been in place for several decades. This is in order to provide a more flexible and holistic approach to education. Let's take a closer look at the 5+3+3+4 model, how it differs from the previous structure, and why it might be better for education in India in the future.

The 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 Model

The 5+3+3+4 model is the latest structure for school education in India that is proposed in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The "5" in the model refers to the foundational stage, which includes the first five years of schooling, from ages 3 to 8. The focus at this stage is on play and activity-based learning, with an emphasis on the development of cognitive and social-emotional skills. The first "3" in the model refers to the preparatory stage, which encompasses the next three years of schooling, from ages 8 to 11. The focus at this stage is on introduction to language, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts, with an emphasis on learning through inquiry and discovery. The next "3" in the model relates to the middle stage, which includes the next three years of schooling, from ages 11 to 14. The focus during this stage is on deepening the students' understanding of core subjects. In addition, they are encouraged to expand their learning to include additional languages, the arts, and other elective subjects. The "4" in the model refers to the secondary stage, which includes the final four years of schooling, from ages 14 to 18. The focus during this stage is on providing students with a broad-based education that prepares them for higher education, as well as for vocational or technical education, if they choose to pursue that path.



Starting with holistic and moving to specialisation

One of the main advantages of this structure is that it suggests that the educational journey starts with a more holistic or trans-disciplinary approach to learning when students are younger, and then over the years progresses to a more specialised or disciplinary approach.

A holistic/trans-disciplinary approach to early education allows for a holistic and comprehensive understanding of a subject, as it integrates multiple disciplines and perspectives. This approach is especially beneficial for young children as it helps them to make connections between different areas of knowledge and develop critical thinking skills.

Starting with Strong Foundations and moving to Better Choice

Strong foundational learning leads to a more equitable education, where all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential regardless of their background. The revised model places more emphasis on key foundational skills like literacy and numeracy. Educational research has shown us that gaps in literacy in early childhood can result in an educational 'Matthew Effect' of sorts. This is i.e., the high achievers get better, and the low achievers get worse over time. The NEP also emphasises the role of play and activity-based learning during the early years of schooling. Research has shown that play and activity-based learning can have a positive impact on the development of cognitive and social-emotional skills in young children. One of the main differences between the 5+3+3+4 model and the previous 10+2 structure is that the revised model focuses on providing a more flexible and holistic approach to education. The traditional 10+2 model of education often results in students being forced to make early decisions about their future careers, which can limit their options later on. The revised education policy aims to address this issue by providing more flexibility in the structure of school education. This will enable students to explore different options before making final decisions.

(The writer is School Director, The Green Acres Academy)

Trust Prachanda to build relations with Nepal



ASHOK K MEHTA

With Prachanda at the helm in Kathmandu, New Delhi can start with a clean slate. A fresh approach can put Indo-Nepal relations back on track



On Monday, Nepalese Prime Minister Prachanda won the confidence vote to start his third term. India has had far better relations with Maoist leader Prachanda than with former PM KP Oli of CPN (UML). Nepal's pro-China policy took a visible turn during Oli's term. He politically exploited India's apparent rejection of the Constitution, then Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar's virtual diktat to alter and not promulgate it and the 53-day-long and painful border blockade. Oli signed agreements with China on trade and infrastructure, thus replacing India as the country of last resort.

India's inept handling of the Kalapani border dispute allowed Oli to unilaterally incorporate the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiadora areas in Nepal with an unprecedented 100 per cent parliamentary vote. Zealous and overconfident, he accused India of cheating Nepal and hurled insults at us. The war of words abated only after New Delhi launched its charm offensive by sending R&AW chief Goyal, former Chief of Army Staff Gen Naravane, and former foreign secretary Shringla.

This helped mend relations. The visits paid off and it was business as usual, as Oli realised that no Nepal government could tread on India's toes and survive. Oli's transformation, rather than his taming by New Delhi, was a lesson in diplomacy.

Oli's survival as Prime Minister was aided by President Bidya Debi Bhandari (UML). She violated norms and even the Constitution by ensuring Oli's longevity as leader of the House till the Supreme Court intervened, not once but twice. The new pro-China Left alliance collapsed much to



HE IS PRO-NEPAL AND KNOWS THAT NEPAL CAN BENEFIT FROM TWO FAST-GROWING ECONOMIES

(The writer, a retired Lt Gen, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, & founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff; views expressed are personal)

the dismay of Beijing which had invested considerable resources in its survival.

Third time Prime Minister Prachanda has played the long game. He was compelled by the former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who served five terms, to jump ship to support Oli as Deuba vacillated offering prime-ministership to Prachanda. For Prachanda's party, the Maoists, had won only 32 seats in the elections.

Still Prachanda claimed he commanded the support of 64 seats. When Deuba hesitated, without blinking, he joined the perennial foe Oli. But Prachanda was never comfortable with his decision to join Oli and had sought to return to Deuba. The opportunity was provided by President Paudel. Prachanda argued that when Oli became Prime Minister, the top three positions — of the PM, the President and the Speaker — would be from the same party, leading to authoritarian rule.

Prachanda is no longer a big fan of China. During the Civil War era, Maoists fancied Mao and other communist leaders but saw communist states on the decline. He is pro-Nepal and knows that Nepal can benefit from two fast-growing economies.

Unfortunately for him, India-China relations have plummeted after the Chinese aggression in Ladakh. When he first became prime minister in 2008, his first visit was to China for the Olympics.

But his first political visit was to India, for which he has a soft corner. Nine out of ten years he directed the Maoist insurgency, mostly from Noida, UP. Maoists used to say nasty things about India and the US during those days, but acknowledged India's role in ending the conflict and paving the path for peace and democracy.

Prachanda will shortly expand his cabinet to accommodate the 11 parties that support him. As he replaces his foreign minister, the parliamentary foreign affairs committee will be responsible for making a decision on the Agnipath Scheme, which has been pending for nine months now. The feedback from Nepal is not encouraging, as the ruling party will be constrained by UML and other communists from supporting the four-year recruitment scheme with no post-retirement outlets.

Communists in Nepal have always criticised Gorkhas joining foreign armies, especially the Indian Army. In addition, the Prachanda Government's support for the scheme drew criticism from UML for being pro-India.

Agnipath is discriminatory on indicators like effective classroom transactions, infrastructure and students' entitlements, school safety, etc, found that "education remains the most powerful tool to curb child marriages." For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the districts with comparatively higher percentage of women having 10 or more years of schooling like Lucknow (51.9 per cent), Gautam Buddha Nagar (51.9 per cent), Varanasi (55 per cent), and Allahabad (47.6 per cent) had significantly lower percentages of child marriage cases—9.9 per cent, 13.5 per cent, 10.4 per cent,

and 13.8 per cent, respectively. While districts like Badaun (21.6 per cent), Lakhimpur-Kheri (28.7 per cent), and Kaushambi (31.9 per cent) with lower percentage of women having 10 or more years of schooling, had higher percentage of child marriage at 22.9 per cent, 19.7 per cent, and 17.6 per cent, respectively. Over 10 million girls have been married as a result of the pandemic, according to UNICEF's report last year. As an antidote, it urged nations to "invest more in girls' education, secondary education, in particular." In addition, it was found that "better educated women tend to participate more in the formal labor market, earn higher incomes, and thus, lift their families out of poverty.."

With Prachanda at the helm, New Delhi can start with a clean slate. Just as Jaishankar has won over Sri Lanka with economic sustenance, he can begin the recovery programme in Nepal. With Deuba as leader of a single largest party and a prime minister, India has a winning hand to play the game. The ball is in Jaishankar's court

Schooling and underage marriages

There Should be more efforts to create an enabling framework for improving girls' enrollment in schools, instead of penal actions

Assam is on a vigorous drive through penal actions under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA). Over 4,000 cases have been registered and more than 3,000 people arrested, including many fathers, brothers and Muslim and Hindu priests, as 'facilitators'. The Assam Chief Minister vowed to eliminate the menace of child marriages in the state by 2026.

Amid massive public outrage, the Gauhati High Court criticised such large-scale arrests with non-bailable charges, and insisted on 'society-driven change'. The Opposition claimed it was for 'political gains'.

Many legal experts vouch



ARCHANA DATTA

(The author of a former Director General of Doordarshan and All India radio)

for the law as a means to set new norms and practices. India had the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, subsequently replaced by the existing PCMA, 2006, raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for women and 21 years for men.

Now, a move is afoot to make it gender-neutral at 21. It was claimed by the votaries of the amendment Bill that the move would enhance girls' agency, their reproductive autonomy, and reduce gender inequality. However, opponents contended that "it is not a sufficient condition to bring in changes in the mindsets of people," as it fails to address the underlying socio-economic and cultural factors that push many resource-poor families, who are also the worst victims

of emergencies, such as internal conflicts, natural disasters or the pandemic, into underage marriage of girls, either to avoid higher dowry or as a way to 'protect' the girls.

A national network of adolescents from rural and semi-urban areas suggested to the task force set up for the purpose that focus should be more on "the disadvantaged rural contexts through adequate resourcing for quality education, employment, safety, mobility, and the freedom to choose when, and who to marry, as child marriages are closely tied to low levels of education and poverty"

While, as per the NCRB data, an abysmally low number of cases booked under the PCMA, only 785 in 2020, and a study by the Partners for Law

in Development found that 65 per cent of them are filed by disapproving parents against eloping daughters, and male partners of their choice have been punished as criminals. Child rights activists fear the proposed legislation would further increase the misuse of the law, criminalising all adolescent sexuality.

However, in today's society, the existing PCMA has undoubtedly created some awareness, encouraging many girls to stop or delay their marriages. The successive NFHS data also registered a declining trend in the proportion of girls marrying below 18 years from 47 per cent in NFHS-3 (2005-06) to 27 per cent in NFHS-4 (2015-16), and, now, to 23 per cent in NFHS-5 (2020-21).

Studies also ruled out that

early marriage is linked to high fertility. In most of the states, including states with relatively high prevalence rates of child marriages, fertility rates have been dropping.

The NFHS-5 data corroborated that mother and child health indicators like MMR, have decreased by 80 per cent (113 per lakh live births in 2016-18 from 556 in 1990), and, the IMR by 69 per cent (35 per 1,000 births in 2019-21, from 114 in 1990). A parliamentary question in 2021, confirmed that there is no credible data to suggest that child marriage is the major reason for affecting the IMR and MMR. Instead, factors like health, nutrition, and lack of medical facilities adversely impact them.

Moreover, a correlation

study in 109 districts of 19 states by the CRY, analysing NFHS-5 data and Education Ministry's Performance Grading Index scores of Districts (PGI-D) (2019-20) on indicators like effective classroom transactions, infrastructure and students' entitlements, school safety, etc, found that "education remains the most powerful tool to curb child marriages." For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the districts with comparatively higher percentage of women having 10 or more years of schooling like Lucknow (51.9 per cent), Gautam Buddha Nagar (51.9 per cent), Varanasi (55 per cent), and Allahabad (47.6 per cent) had significantly lower percentages of child marriage cases—9.9 per cent, 13.5 per cent, 10.4 per cent,

and 13.8 per cent, respectively. While districts like Badaun (21.6 per cent), Lakhimpur-Kheri (28.7 per cent), and Kaushambi (31.9 per cent) with lower percentage of women having 10 or more years of schooling, had higher percentage of child marriage at 22.9 per cent, 19.7 per cent, and 17.6 per cent, respectively. Over 10 million girls have been married as a result of the pandemic, according to UNICEF's report last year. As an antidote, it urged nations to "invest more in girls' education, secondary education, in particular." In addition, it was found that "better educated women tend to participate more in the formal labor market, earn higher incomes, and thus, lift their families out of poverty.."

Indian diaspora meet counters flag attack at London mission

PTI ■ LONDON

Several Indian diaspora groups on Tuesday gathered for a festive demonstration outside the India House here to show solidarity with the Indian mission following vandalism at its premises by Khalistan extremists over the weekend. Indian flags could be seen waved about as around 200 people of Indian origin chanted slogans such as “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” and danced to popular Indian tunes ‘Jai Ho’ and ‘Rang De Basanti’ at “We Stand By High Commission of India” demonstration.

The colours of the Tiranga and “I love my India” tunes formed the backdrop as men, women and children joined in a spirit of festivity, as bemused Metropolitan Police officers looked on and tried to curtail some of the over-enthusiastic crowd from spilling over into the busy traffic. “This is a crowd gathered in support of India, chanting patriotic slogans and songs and the public is in a festive mood because they have come out in support of the High Commission of India,” said Kuldeep Shekhawat, president of the Overseas Friends



of BJP (OFBJP), among the diaspora groups represented. “It’s very unfortunate that a few days ago Khalistanis under the guise of a peaceful protest came here and tried to desecrate the flag,” said Rashmi Samant, an Indian student activist at the demonstration. “We have since come out with a bigger flag showing the bharatiya spirit, that we won’t take insults lying down and we will fight back. One person has been arrested but we need more arrests and more concrete actions, such as permanent security presence at our High Commission to prevent such incidents from happening,” she said. Earlier, Indian High Commissioner in London tweet-ed following the diaspora briefing. The Metropolitan Police said its “enquiries continue” and one person arrested on suspicion of violent disorder has

since been bailed to appear in court in mid-June. Friends of India Society International (FISI) UK, one of the organisations behind Tuesday’s solidarity meet, said the Indian diaspora is deeply shocked by the “disgraceful and abominable act” of desecration of the Indian flag by extremist forces. “We are equally shocked to see the failure of the UK government to take preventive measures to prohibit such shameful incidents that endanger the Indian diplomatic officials,” said FISI UK. “In this particular incident, an Indian High Commission official braved the hooligans and restored the pride of India by taking the flag away from them. The Indian official had to act due to lack of appropriate security present at the premises,” it said. The National Indian Students and Alumni Union (NISAU) UK was among several groups to voice their condemnation of the vandalism. “We call for swift and firm action being taken to bring the perpetrators of this hooliganism to justice. Measures should be urgently put in place to prevent the recurrence of such incidents,” it said.

paper said that the delegation, comprising 10 members from the Taliban’s intelligence, visited Islamabad last week. The delegation was also assisted by GDI official Muhammad Wardak, the source said, adding that the delegation was mandated to deliver a message from Kabul that the concerns of Pakistan would be addressed. Both sides stayed mum on the visit. The sources in Islamabad said that given the sensitivity of the issue, both sides decided to discuss such matters away from the media glare. The source in Kabul revealed that both sides made progress on various issues, but he was not authorised to make public statements. The TTP has become a thorny issue between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan expected the Afghan Taliban to address its concerns regarding the TTP after its return to power in August 2021. But contrary to the expectations, the TTP attacks only went up. The Afghan Taliban’s reluctance to take on the TTP stemmed from its fears that the group’s fighters might join Daesh (Islamic State). Second, the Afghan Taliban and the TTP share the same ideology as they fought alongside the US-led foreign forces. Nevertheless, the two sides have been trying to find a way out of the TTP problem as it has threatened to undermine their future cooperation, according to the paper.

Sunak urged to act over English test scandal

PTI ■ LONDON

A group of international students, including many from India, have delivered a petition to British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urging him to act against the “unjust” revocation of their visas following an English test scandal. The issue dates back to 2014 when a BBC “Panorama” investigation showed some cheating had occurred at two of the UK’s testing centres for a compulsory language test required for visas. The UK government responded by a widespread crackdown on such centres, which had the fallout of the revocation of tens of thousands of students’ visas linked with those centres. The Migrant Voice voluntary group has been supporting the students impacted and coordinated the latest petition delivered at 10 Downing Street on Monday. “This is one of the biggest scandals in contemporary British history. The initial government reaction was unjust and has been allowed to drag on for years,” said Nazek Ramadan, director of Migrant Voice. “It could have been resolved by a simple solution, such as allowing the tests to be retaken. The



students came here to get a world-class education and best student experience in the world, but instead their lives have been wrecked. It is time for the government to step in and end this nightmare. All it takes to bring this to an end is leadership,” she said. With no right to stay, work or in a few cases to appeal, most of the accused students returned home. Those who stayed to clear their names have struggled with homelessness, huge legal fees, stress-induced illnesses and have missed family weddings, births and deaths, the petition appeals. Parliamentary and watchdog reports over the years have highlighted some flaws in the Home Office evidence used in the case in the past. Although some students won their legal challenges, scores of other students – many of them Indian –

are still in limbo. Migrant Voice is now underlining the importance of Sunak “addressing the injustice at a time when numbers of students and migrant workers form part of UK-India trade negotiations”. The group has been running the #MyFutureBack campaign for the affected students for over nine years now and urging the UK government to allow these students the chance to clear their names of alleged cheating. Sarjeet is a 46-year-old Indian student who has been separated from her children for 13 years, as she feels she cannot return home to India with the allegations hanging over her. Sanjoy, another Indian student impacted, is being sued by the company that sponsored him and has also been denied the ability to go to the US because his visa withdrawal prevents him from resuming his studies in another country. The BBC programme had revealed cheating on a compulsory language test, known as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), at two London test centres by some international students.

Months after Pak floods, millions lack safe water

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The United Nations children’s agency on Tuesday warned that after last summer’s devastating floods, 10 million people in Pakistan, including children, still live in flood-affected areas without access to safe drinking water. The statement from UNICEF underscored the dire situation in impoverished Pakistan, a country with a population of 220 million that months later is still struggling with the consequences of the flooding, as well as a spiraling economic crisis. The floods, which experts attribute in part to climate change, killed 1,739 people, including 647 children and 353 women. So far, less than half of UNICEF’s funding appeal for Pakistan — 45 per cent of USD 173.5 million — has been met. According to the agency, before the floods struck last June, water from only 36 per cent of Pakistan’s water system was considered safe for human consumption. The floods damaged most of the water pipelines systems in affected areas, forcing more than 5.4 million people, including 2.5 million children, to rely solely on contaminated water from ponds and wells, UNICEF said. “Safe drinking water is not a privilege, it is a basic human right,” said Abdullah Fadil, the UNICEF representative in Pakistan. “Yet, every day, millions of girls and boys in Pakistan are fighting a losing battle against preventable water-borne diseases and the consequential malnutrition.” “We need the continued support of our donors to provide safe water, build toilets and deliver vital sanitation services to these children and families who need them the most,” Fadil added. Amid the crisis, Pakistan faces uncertainty about a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. Analysts say the revival of the USD 6 IMF bailout, which was signed in 2019, would help Pakistan. If the global lender released a key installment of the package, it would encourage other international financial institutions to help the country, they say.

Thailand polls on May 14

Bangkok (AP): Thailand’s general election will take place on May 14, the country’s election regulator said Tuesday, one day after the dissolution of Parliament initiated by Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who is seeking a fresh term. The Election Commission said registration of candidates would begin April 3. The election will pit the popular opposition Pheu Thai party, backed by billionaire populist Thaksin Shinawatra, against parties representing the conservative establishment and closely linked to the military, which has staged two coups in the last two decades. Other parties are likely to win enough seats to be wooed to join a coalition government. Prayuth dissolved Parliament just ahead of the end of the four-year term of the House of Representatives.

Early dissolution allows candidates for the lower house to switch party affiliations just 30 days before the election, instead of the usual 90 days. Parties led and backed by Thaksin have won the most seats in every election since 2001, but been fiercely opposed by the conservatives, who have undermined several governments headed by Thaksin and his allies by utilising legal rulings by the judiciary and military coups in 2006 and 2014. Pheu Thai’s top candidate for the prime minister’s post is his 36-year-old daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, whom polls show to be the most popular choice by a large margin.

‘Af Taliban delegation quietly visits Pak to discuss TTP issue’

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

An Afghan Taliban delegation, comprising intelligence and security officials, quietly visited Islamabad recently to discuss a way forward towards addressing Pakistan’s concerns regarding the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), according to a media report on Tuesday. Taliban ranks in Kabul also confirmed that a mid-level delegation led by Abdullah Ghazanavi, the head of the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), travelled to Islamabad for discussion on the TTP and threats to Pakistan, the Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing sources. The visit was a follow-up of last month’s trip to Kabul by a high-powered delegation led by Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, which received a briefing on the steps taken by the Afghan government to deal with the TTP. The Pakistani delegation, however, deemed those steps unsatisfactory and sought concerted actions. Pakistan also confronted the Afghan Taliban leadership with proofs about the whereabouts of the TTP leadership. According to the paper, during its stay in Islamabad, the Afghan delegation met with the relevant authorities to discuss the security situation and the fate of the TTP and its affiliates. Citing a source in Kabul with knowledge of the matter, the

paper said that the delegation, comprising 10 members from the Taliban’s intelligence, visited Islamabad last week. The delegation was also assisted by GDI official Muhammad Wardak, the source said, adding that the delegation was mandated to deliver a message from Kabul that the concerns of Pakistan would be addressed. Both sides stayed mum on the visit. The sources in Islamabad said that given the sensitivity of the issue, both sides decided to discuss such matters away from the media glare. The source in Kabul revealed that both sides made progress on various issues, but he was not authorised to make public statements. The TTP has become a thorny issue between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan expected the Afghan Taliban to address its concerns regarding the TTP after its return to power in August 2021. But contrary to the expectations, the TTP attacks only went up. The Afghan Taliban’s reluctance to take on the TTP stemmed from its fears that the group’s fighters might join Daesh (Islamic State). Second, the Afghan Taliban and the TTP share the same ideology as they fought alongside the US-led foreign forces. Nevertheless, the two sides have been trying to find a way out of the TTP problem as it has threatened to undermine their future cooperation, according to the paper.

Protective bail for Imran in 2 terror cases

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan’s ousted premier Imran Khan on Tuesday secured protective bail from the Lahore High Court in three cases, including two related to terrorism, registered against him over the violence that took place outside the judicial complex in Islamabad last week. A two-judge bench comprising Justice Shehbaz Rizvi and Justice Farooq Haider granted protective bail to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief in the terrorism cases till March 27. The former premier also appeared before the Lahore High Court’s (LHC) Justice Baqir Naqvi in the NAB investigation in Toshakhana case. The court granted him protective bail till next Tuesday. “Mr Khan told the court today that he came to the court ‘secretly’ as

a heavy contingent of police was deployed near to his house to stop him from reaching the court,” a court official told PTI after the hearing. Khan, 70, said he has no issue to appear in any case but during his appearance in court the government should make sure no chaos is created. The number of cases registered against the PTI chief in the last 11 months of the PMLN-led government has swelled to around 100. Unlike his recent appearances in courts, Khan on Tuesday was not accompanied by party workers to the LHC from his Zaman Park residence here. The PTI appears to have changed its strategy on Tuesday regarding sending a huge number of its workers along with the party chairman to the LHC apparently after the law enforcement agencies intensified crack-



down on them. The Punjab and Islamabad police have arrested over 500 PTI workers from different parts of the province. Police said the arrested PTI workers were wanted in the recent incidents of violence in Lahore and Islamabad. Khan appeared before the LHC in two terrorism cases registered against him by the Islamabad police after intense

clashes erupted outside the Islamabad Judicial Complex on Saturday when he arrived in the capital from Lahore to attend the hearing in the Toshakhana case. The PTI chief also appeared before LHC’s Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh in a petition seeking details of all the cases registered against him in Punjab province. Khan informed Justice Sheikh that the Punjab government violated his (judge) order and “attacked my house in Lahore as my wife was alone who got frightened during the police attack”. Khan requested the court to order the police on his plea to register a case against Punjab caretaker chief minister Mohsin Naqvi and the Inspector General Police for violating the LHC’s order restraining police action at his Zaman Park residence.

B’desh careful about Chinese loans: Hasina

Dhaka (PTI): Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Tuesday that her government was “very much careful” about issues of development partnership with China and Dhaka was not dependent on any particular country for overseas assistance, amid global concerns over mounting debt to Beijing by smaller countries. The 99-year lease of Hambantota port to China by Sri Lanka has raised red flags about the downside of China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative and Beijing’s push for major infrastructure projects costing billions of dollars in small countries. “We’re very much careful about taking loans - mostly we take loans from institutions like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. From China, our loan is very low. It is not like Sri Lanka or anybody,” she said in an interview with CNN. “We’re not depending on anybody,” Hasina, who is also the President of the ruling Awami League, said. When asked why the US thought Dhaka was get-

ting closer to China and what she would like to say about the notion, the prime minister replied Bangladesh was close to every country which supports its development efforts. “We’re close to everybody, China, USA or India. Those who are supporting our development, we’re with them,” the 75-year-old prime minister said. Hasina described China as one of Bangladesh’s major development partners as they were investing and engaged in some major construction works in the South Asian country. “That’s all,” she said. Hasina added that her government did not take any unnecessary loan from anyone, saying “we consider from which project we can get a return and we will be the beneficiary”. Numerous questions regarding Ukraine and the Rohingya crisis featured in her interview with CNN when she said intensified global steps were needed to stop the Ukraine war. “I feel that the world should come forward to stop

the war as the common people are suffering,” she said. Hasina said any conflict could be solved through dialogue and “we (Bangladesh) never support any kind of invasion or any conflict”. “Friendship to all, malice to none,” she said. “We’re following that, so, when we see any human rights violation or invasion, we definitely oppose it.” She, however, said no war could be one-sided alone as it needs the involvement of both sides. “(but) I believe each country has its own rights to live in their own territory (with freedom) and protect their own territory.” Asked what Bangladesh needs from the international community to deal with the Rohingya crisis, Hasina said, “we have called upon the international community that they should pressure Myanmar to bring their citizens back to their country”, “Not only that, but we have also started a dialogue with Myanmar. (But) unfortunately, they are not responding properly,” she said.



NORTHERN RAILWAY

Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement system

Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-

| S. No. | Tender No. | Brief Description | Qty. | Closing Date |
|--------|------------|---------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| 01 | 07220235A | HEX. HEAD BOLT M 20X100(H.T) | 113351 NOS | 14-04-23 |
| 02 | 07220103 | WALL PROTECTOR FOR LAVATORY PAN | 8039 NOS | 14-04-23 |
| 03 | 02232202 | SELF PRIMING MONOBLOCK PUMP | 2566 NOS | 19-04-23 |
| 04 | 01230032 | STAINLESS STEEL WIRE ROPE | 2418 NOS | 01-05-23 |



NOTE - 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.



2. No Manual offer will be entertained.



Tender Notice No. 95/2022-2023 Dated : 21.03.2023



867/2023

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all that late Shri Ramesh Chander Sharma had passed away intestate on 14.10.2022 leaving behind my client Smt. Rachna Mittal, Wife of Shri Anil Mittal, Resident of D-1456, 1 "Avenue, Gaur City 1, Greater Noida West 201 009, Gautambudh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh and her sister Ms. Reshma Sharma as his only surviving legal heirs. At the time of his death, he owned and possessed property bearing No T-144, Upper Ground Floor, Parampuri, Shukra Bazar, Uttam Nagar West, New Delhi - 110 059. In view of my client being one of the legal heirs, any third party who deals with the aforesaid property or enters into any transaction with respect to the same with my client's above-named sister alone without my client's personal involvement in the same, will do so at his own peril and risk.



NITIN GUPTA (Advocate)

302, Lawyers' Chambers Block-I, Delhi High Court, New Delhi-110003.

Yellen: Bank situation 'stabilising', system sound

Washington (AP): Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is trying project calm after regional bank failures, saying the U.S. banking system is “sound” but additional rescue arrangements “could be warranted” if any new failures at smaller institutions pose a risk to financial stability. Yellen, in an excerpt of remarks prepared for delivery to the American Bankers Association on Tuesday, says that overall “the situation is stabilising.” “And the U.S. banking system remains sound,” Yellen says. Yellen’s remarks come after a series of troubling bank developments this month. Silicon Valley Bank, based in Santa Clara, California, failed on March 10 after depositors rushed to withdraw money amid anxiety over the bank’s health. It was the second-largest bank collapse in U.S. history. Regulators convened over the following weekend and announced that New York-based Signature Bank also had failed.

IMF approves \$3 billion in financial assistance for debt-ridden Sri Lanka

PTI ■ COLOMBO/ WASHINGTON

The IMF has approved a USD 3 billion bailout programme to help debt-ridden Sri Lanka overcome its economic crisis and catalyse financial support from other development partners, a move welcomed by Colombo on Tuesday as a “historic milestone” in the critical period. International Monetary Fund’s Executive Board approved on Monday a 48-month extended arrangement under its Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with an amount of SDR 2.286 billion (about USD 3 billion), according to a statement. Special Drawing Rights (SDR) are supplementary foreign exchange reserve assets defined and maintained by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Sri Lanka has been hit hard by a catastrophic economic and humanitarian crisis. The economy is facing significant challenges stemming from pre-existing vulnerabilities and policy missteps in the lead-up to the crisis, further aggravated by a series of external shocks, the IMF said. The EFF-supported programme aims to

People arrive for their daily work in the central market area in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Tuesday. PTI

restore Sri Lanka’s macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability, mitigate the economic impact on the poor and vulnerable, safeguard financial sector stability, and strengthen governance and growth potential, said the statement. The Executive Board’s decision will enable an immediate disbursement equivalent to SDR 254

million (about USD 333 million) and catalyse financial support from other development partners, it said. Sri Lanka in April declared its first-ever debt default in its history as the worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948 triggered by forex shortages sparked public protests. Months-long street protests

led to the ouster of the then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa in mid-July. Rajapaksa had started the IMF negotiations after refusing to tap the global lender for support. Sri Lanka has introduced painful economic measures such as tax hikes and utility rate hikes to unlock the programme. Trade unions and opposition groups have organised protests against such measures. President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Tuesday welcomed the decision announced by the IMF. The programme will allow Sri Lanka to access financing of up to USD 7 billion from the IMF, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and multi-lateral organisations, a statement said. “This is a historic milestone for the country as the government seeks to restore macroeconomic stability and achieve debt sustainability. Earlier this month, Sri Lanka received IMF-compatible financing assurances from its official creditors, including Paris Club members, India and China, allowing the IMF to convene an Executive Board and consider Sri Lanka’s request for a loan,” the statement said.

‘Unlike global economy, India would not slow down’

We remain optimistic about India, whatever odds: RBI article

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Unlike the global economy, India would not slow down and maintain the pace of expansion achieved in 2022-23, an RBI article said on Tuesday.

“We remain optimistic about India, whatever the odds,” said the article on the state of the economy published in the March edition of the Reserve Bank bulletin.

The NSO’s end-February data release indicates that the Indian economy is intrinsically better positioned than many parts of the world to head into



a challenging year ahead, mainly because of its demonstrated resilience and its reliance on domestic drivers, it said.

Even as global growth is set to slow down or even enter a recession in 2023 as global financial markets wager, India has emerged from the pandemic years stronger than initially thought, with a steady gathering

of momentum since the second quarter of the current financial year, it said.

“Year-on-year growth rates do not reflect this pick-up of pace because by construction they are saddled with statistical base effects, and instead suggest a sequential slowing down through successive quarters of 2022-23 to an unsuspecting

reader,” said the article.

The article has been authored by a team led by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra. The authors further said India’s real GDP can go up from Rs 159.7 lakh crore in 2022-23 to Rs 170.9 lakh crore against the current projection of Rs 169.7 lakh crore in 2023-24.

“This is simple arithmetic; hardly a hurray at half-time. Also, unlike the global economy, India would not slow down — it would maintain the pace of expansion achieved in 2022-23. We remain optimistic about India, whatever the odds,” the article said.

Currently available forecasts of India’s real GDP growth for 2023-24, including those of the RBI, settle between 6 and 6.5 per cent.

The central bank said that views expressed in the article are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank of India.

Sensex, Nifty rebound nearly 1% on firm global trends

Buying in Reliance

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex and Nifty rebounded nearly 1 per cent on Tuesday amid firm trends in global equities and buying in index major Reliance Industries and banking stocks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 445.73 points or 0.77 per cent to settle at 58,074.68. During the day, it rallied 504.38 points or 0.87 per cent to 58,133.33.

The broader NSE Nifty advanced 119.10 points or 0.70 per cent to settle at 17,107.50.

“Global markets recovery ushered in gains in domestic equity indices as both the benchmarks ended above the psychological levels on the back of strong gains in financials. However, the optimism may face hurdles as the recent turmoil in large banks in the US and Europe has shaken investors’ sentiment,” Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities Ltd. Said.

The US FOMC meeting on Wednesday on interest rate decision would be keenly eyed as any hike surpassing street expectations could unsettle investors, he said,



adding that falling crude oil prices at a faster pace is raising concerns over the weakening global economic health.

Among the Sensex stocks, Reliance Industries climbed the most by 3.11 per cent, ending its eight-day slide.

Bajaj Finance, Titan, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro, HDFC Bank, HDFC and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the other major winners.

Power Grid, Hindustan Unilever, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys and Asian Paints were among the biggest laggards.

In the broader market, BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.66 per cent and smallcap index gained 0.50 per cent.

Among indices, consumer durables jumped 1.57 per cent, energy zoomed 0.99 per cent, power rallied 0.74 per cent, commodities jumped 0.71 per cent and telecommunication (0.63 per cent).

FMCG, IT, realty and tech were the laggards.

“Gaining buoyancy from a slew of measures to shield the banking sector, global markets witnessed recovery ahead of the US Fed policy announcement on Wednesday. The momentum was passed onto domestic equities, which were led by large-cap banks,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

However, the gains were capped by IT stocks on caution over muted deal wins from the BFSI segment in the western markets.

In Asia, Seoul, Hong Kong and Shanghai markets ended higher.

European markets were trading in the green during afternoon trade. The US markets ended in positive territory on Monday.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.65 per cent to USD 74.27 per barrel.

Housing sector seeing biggest boom in last 15 years: Roongta

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s housing sector is witnessing probably the “biggest boom” in the last one and half decade driven by various factors such as affordability and customers aspiration to own homes, HDFC Capital Advisors Managing Director and CEO Vipul Roongta said on Tuesday.

Addressing a real estate summit organised by FICCI, he noted that the residential real estate segment has revived strongly after going through a lot of pain due to new realty law RERA and demonetisation.

“In the last one and half decade, I think this is probably the biggest boom I am personally seeing as an organisation on the residential segment, whether it is affordable mid-income and premium housing properties,” said Roongta, who is also Co-Chairman, FICCI Real Estate

Committee.

He said the real estate developers have been made accountable under the RERA for completion of projects and they would be behind bars in case of default.

Post-Covid pandemic, Roongta said the customers are upgrading their homes, in terms of quality as well as size.

He said the housing demand is mainly centred around affordable and mid-income in the country.

When asked about the reasons for the boom, Roongta said, on the sidelines of the event, the demand is driven by “aspiration and affordability” besides demand-supply mismatch.

He said this is the right time to develop housing projects in affordable and mid-income categories.

Roongta said the demand is buoyant despite an increase in



the mortgage rate in the last one year. HDFC Capital Advisors has launched USD 3.2 billion real estate fund for affordable

housing, Roongta said, adding that 85 per cent of the capital has already been committed.

Addressing the event,

Kuldip Narayan, Joint Secretary, Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, said the size of the urban sector will double in the

next 25 years.

He said the requirements for facilities, residential spaces, commercial spaces, and urban infrastructure would double, adding, “we have a lot of catching up to do in infrastructure”.

“With increasing urbanisation from 12 to 30 per cent, the next 20 years could see more development than in the last 50 years,” Narayan said.

Narayan also alluded to changes in construction technologies, highlighting the government’s “consistent stand on reducing carbon emissions and improving energy efficiency” and encouraging the industry to “adopt better and resource-efficient construction technology”.

He asked the developers to adopt new construction technologies for faster completion of projects.

Raj Menda, Joint Chairman at FICCI Real Estate Committee

and Corporate Chairman at RMZ Corp, said, “after consecutive years of slowdown in the sector, last year witnessed unprecedented growth by reaching a new historical height in the commercial office segment”.

He added the extraordinary demand of flex space from medium and large enterprises further propelled the sector growth.

Arun Chawla, Director General at FICCI, said, “with an increase in urbanisation and household incomes, the demand for residential real estate has seen an unprecedented surge. As a result, India is now among the top 10 price-appreciating housing markets internationally”.

According to property consultant Anarock, housing sales hit an all-time high last year to nearly 3.65 lakh units across seven major cities, beating the previous high of 2014.



Rupee falls 10 paise to 82.66 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated by 10 paise to 82.66 against the US dollar on Tuesday amid a rise in crude oil prices and unabated foreign fund outflows from the domestic equity market.

Positive sentiments in the equity markets across the globe failed to address the concerns of investors who are awaiting the interest rate decision by the US Federal Reserve due on Wednesday.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened strong at 82.54 against the dollar. During the day, it went as high as 82.53 and hit the lowest level of 82.70. It finally settled at 82.66 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a fall of 10 paise against its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee settled at 82.56 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent higher at 103.30.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures rose by 0.98 per cent to USD 74.51 per barrel.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed 445.73 points or 0.77 per cent higher at 58,074.68 points while the broader NSE Nifty jumped 119.10 points or 0.70 per cent to reclaim the 17,100-level and ended at 17,107.50 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained net sellers in the domestic capital market on Monday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,545.87 crore, according to exchange data.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

J&K LG LAYS FOUNDATION FOR FIRST MALL OF SRINAGAR
Srinagar: J&K Lieutenant Governor laid foundation stone for Kashmir’s first international mall, to be operational by 2026. The initiative will generate nearly 13,500 jobs. TATA Sons, TATA Consulting, Lulu International, Apparel Group, Titan Company, EaseMyTrip, Reliance Retail and PVR Group have signed MOUs with Emaar for Mall of Srinagar.

FHRAI ELECTS SUDESH PODDAR IT’S PRESIDENT
New Delhi: The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India elected the new Executive Committee; a twenty-four member team. The Executive Committee elected Sudesh Poddar as the new President of FHRAI.

INSTINCT 3.0 LAUNCHED
New Delhi: Ministry of Power and New & Renewable Energy K Singh on Monday launched INSTINCT 3.0 through a curtain raiser at the plenary session of the National Dialogue on “Smart-Metered India for a Digitalised & People-centric Power Sector”, jointly organised by IntelliSmart and the Council on Energy, Environment and Water. IntelliSmart Infrastructure is India’s leading smart metering and digital solutions company that unveiled the third edition of its flagship innovation challenge and hackathon INSTINCT.

WORLD DOWN-SYNDROME DAY ORGANISED
New Delhi: Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), New Delhi, celebrated the World Down-Syndrome Day by organising a free Webinar for about 1.5 hours, open for all, in association with Down-Syndrome Federation of India.

PACT INKED FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS
New Delhi: NGEL, a wholly owned subsidiary of NTPC Limited, signed a Joint Venture Agreement on 20th March, 2023 with IOCL for setting up of renewable energy projects to meet Round the Clock power requirement of IOCL Refineries.

500+ STUDENTS ATTEND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
New Delhi: Lloyd Group of Institutions, Greater Noida organised an International Conference for its Management and Pharmaceutical students on 18th March 2023 (Saturday) at the campus in Greater Noida 2. A total of more than 500+ students attended the International Conference from various colleges of Delhi and NCR.

CFA INSTITUTE EXPANDS ACCESSIBILITY FOR STUDENTSE
New Delhi: CFA Institute, the professional body for excellence and thought leadership in finance, has opened registrations for November 2023 CFA exams. With the rising demand for CFA Programme, the organisation has added seven new test centres in Coimbatore, Nagpur, Noida, Raipur, Ranchi, Surat and Visakhapatnam to improve accessibility and convenience for candidates.

DRONE BASED TRANSMISSION LINE PATROLLING
Gurugram: Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a Maharatna CPSE of Ministry of Power and India’s largest electric power transmission utility is at the forefront of deploying state of the art cutting edge technologies. POWERGRID has initiated use of drones for EHV (Extra High Voltage) transmission line patrolling to identify defects using high resolution cameras.

GOLD PLUNGES ₹470; SILVER DECLINES ₹420
New Delhi: Gold price plunged by Rs 470 to Rs 59,480 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid weak global trends, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at Rs 59,950 per 10 grams. Silver also declined Rs 420 to Rs 68,550 per kilogram. “Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at Rs 59,480 per 10 grams, down Rs 470 per 10 grams,” Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst — Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In overseas market, gold and silver were trading lower at USD 1,967 per ounce and USD 22.39 per ounce, respectively. Comex gold prices traded lower in Asian trading hours on Tuesday. Gold prices have corrected almost 2 per cent after prices hit a fresh 52-week high of USD 2,010 per ounce on Monday.

Reliance Jio’s True 5G now available in 406 cities

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Jio on Tuesday said that its True 5G services have gone live in 406 cities, thus becoming the first and only telecom operator to reach such a wide network in a short span of time. The company announced the launch of its True 5G services in 41 new cities in 16 states/union territories — Adoni, Badvel, Chilakaluripet, Guduvada, Kadiri, Narsapur, Rayachoti, Srikalahasti, Tadepalligudem (Andhra Pradesh), Margao (Goa), Fatehabad, Gohana, Hansi, Narnaul, Palwal (Haryana), Paonta Sahib (Himachal Pradesh), Rajouri (Jammu & Kashmir) Dumka (Jharkhand), Robertsonpet (Karnataka).

Other cities include — Kanhangad, Nedumangad, Tali-paramba, Thalassery, Thiruvalla (Kerala), Betul, Dewas, Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh) Bhandara, Wardha (Maharashtra), Lunglei (Mizoram), Byasanagar, Rayagada (Odisha), Hoshiarpur (Punjab), Tonk (Rajasthan), Karaikudi, Krishnagiri, Ranipet,



Theni Allinagaram, Udhagamandalam, Vaniyambadi (Tamil Nadu) and Kumarghat (Tirupura).

“Jio is expanding its True-5G reach at a rapid pace and has already rolled out a large portion of the planned True-5G network in this country. Covering majority of the nation is a matter of immense pride for us,” a company spokesperson said. Starting Tuesday, Jio users in these 41 cities will be invited to try the Jio Welcome Offer, to experience unlimited data at up to 1 Gbps+ speeds, at no additional cost.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd, Akash Ambani, has said that Reliance Jio is on the path to achieving the declared goal to increase the Jio 5G footprint to cover every town, taluka and tehsil across the country by December this year.

‘Office space leasing may fall 25-30% this yr in top 6 cities on slow demand’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leasing of office space across six major cities may fall by 25-30 per cent this calendar year to 35-38 million square feet on subdued demand, according to Colliers India and FICCI.

Property consultant Colliers India and industry body FICCI released a report ‘Emerging Trends and Opportunities in Office Sector — 2023’.

Gross office space leasing rose to 50.3 million square feet in 2022 across six cities from 32.9 million square feet in the previous year on better demand.

These six cities are Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Pune.

The report said that in an optimistic scenario, India’s office sector is likely to see about 35-38 million square feet of gross leasing in 2023.

The consultant expects that the economic headwinds would ease and not cause a significant dent to overall occupiers’ confidence.

It expects a significant



increase in leasing in the latter half of this year with corporates likely to close leasing decisions that were put on hold temporarily.

On the contrary, the Colliers-FICCI report pointed out that in a pessimistic scenario, the impact of economic headwinds would be prolonged, delaying a recovery in demand.

In the optimistic scenario, Colliers expects 2023 leasing to 30-33 million square feet at a gross level.

The report suggested that while the office market in 2023 looks uncertain currently, it

might bounce back with relative ease despite the global headwinds and other externalities.

Leasing activity is likely to pick up in the second half of the year, led by global capability centres, BFSI companies and startups with sound business models, the report said.

“The growth in traditional and flex spaces has been robust in 2022 as occupiers were more upbeat about leasing space and expanding their footprint. In 2023, despite the office market being riddled with uncertainty, the office sector is poised for growth, provided the economic environment remains bright,” Push Jain, Managing Director (Office Services) at Colliers India, said.

“We do not expect the leasing numbers to fall below the peak-pandemic levels of leasing even in a pessimistic scenario,” Jain said.

The key fundamentals of the office market will follow the trajectory of demand and supply to maintain a balance in the market, he added.

India misses RE capacity target due to low solar rooftop: Par panel

PTI N NEW DELHI

Parliamentary panel has attributed low installation of solar roof-top and wind energy projects as key reasons for the shortfall in achieving India’s renewable energy capacity target of 175 GW by 2022.

India set an ambitious target of installing 175 GW of renewable energy capacity by the year 2022, which included 100 GW from solar, 60 GW from wind, 10 GW from bio-power and 5 GW from small hydro-power.

However, a renewable energy capacity of 120.90 GW has been installed in the country as of 31st December 2022 which is about 69 per cent of the overall target, the Standing Committee on Energy said in a report.

“Keeping in view the fact



that renewable energy installed capacity has increased by more than 236 per cent since 2014, this is indeed a commendable achievement. However, it should also be mentioned that whatever shortfall has occurred in achievement of the target that is because of low installation of solar roof-tops and wind energy projects,” the committee said.

Keeping in view India’s

commitment to increase our non-fossil fuel based energy capacity to 500 GW by the year 2030, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy must ramp up its pace for timely achievement of targets, it suggested.

A strict timeline should be imposed for approvals/rejection of applications, installation of net-meter, inspection of the system, etc. By the discoms and reasons should mandatorily be provided by them in case of rejection of application on the national portal, the committee said.

Discoms may be incentivized so that their apprehensions regarding losing their high-paying consumers because of the installation of solar rooftops are addressed and they positively participate in the programme.

6,199 Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process started, 611 successful: Govt



FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Since the provisions relating to Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) came into force on December 1, 2016, a total of 6,199 CIRPs have started, as on the end of December 2022, the Parliament was informed on Tuesday.

As of December 2022, 611 CIRPs have

resulted in resolution, where the creditors have recovered 30.40 per cent of their admitted claims, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs, Rao Inderjit Singh told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply to a question seeking to know the number of companies which have utilized the provisions of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016 since it came into force.

On a question whether there is a delay in the completion of the process within stipulated time, he said that the average time taken (after excluding the time excluded by the Adjudicating Authority) for resolution of the 611 resolved cases is 482 days. Insolvency resolution process under the IBC is a market driven process and the outcome depends on market forces. Further, the time taken for resolution depends on several factors, including the nature of business, business cycles, market sentiments, litigations and marketing effort, he added.

To the question on the list of defaulters who have availed ‘haircuts’ above Rs 10 crore, the Minister said: “As of December, 2022, out of the 611 resolved CIRPs, in 477 cases there is a difference of more than Rs 10 crore in realisation amount of creditors against their admitted claim.”

NIKHAT & 3 OTHERS MOVE TO QUARTERFINALS



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

"fatigued" Nikhat Zareen continued her winning run to enter the quarterfinals along with three other pugilists, including Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaismine Lamboria, at the Women's World Championships here on Tuesday.

Competing in her first international tournament in 50kg weight class, Nikhat saw off Mexico's Patricia Alvarez Herrera 5-0 to notch up her third win of the tournament.

Commonwealth Games champion Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) won her bout with a first round RSC against Sumaiya Qosimova of Tajikistan, while last year's bronze medallist Manisha Moun (57kg) got the better of Nur Elif Turhan of Turkey when the referee ruled in her favour in the third round. Jaismine (60kg) came from a round down to overpower Mijgona Samadova of Tajikistan.

Shashi Chopra (63kg) and Manju

Bamboriya (66kg), however, bowed out of the tournament.

While Shashi lost 0-4 to Mai Kito of Japan, Manju was literally out-punched by Navbakhor Khamidova of Uzbekistan.

Nikhath took a few seconds to decipher her opponent's game plan before attacking. She used her nimble feet to duck away from Herrera's counter attacks.

Both the boxers have moved down from the 52kg weight division. Well aware of the Mexican's aggressive style of play, Nikhat used her speed to land accurate jabs and hooks.

Herrera, whom she had beaten in the last edition, tried her best to shift the momentum in her favour but Nikhat's relentless attacks proved too strong.

Nikhath, who has already played three bouts, including one against the top seed, and is still three bouts away from the gold, said she is feeling fatigued.

"I am happy that I have defeated the person that has got seeding number one," the unseeded Nikhat, who had several cuts

on her lip, said after her bout.

"I still have some fatigue from my last round as it was against the top seed. It was tough and her punches landed pretty well so my neck was a little tight and my body a little slow compared to my last bout. But I am happy that I won unanimously this time.

"In my boxing career, this is the first competition that I'll play six bouts because I didn't get a seeding, but I am not focussing on that."

Eight Indian pugilists -- Nitu, Nikhat, Sakshi Choudhary (52kg), Manisha, Jaismine, Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), Saweety Boora (81kg) and Nupur Sheoran (+81kg) will compete in the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Earlier in the opening session of the day, Nitu registered her second RSC win in as many bouts in the tournament.

Both Nitu and Qosimova tried to figure out each other's game, but then the Indian connected four straight jabs which forced the referee to give the opponent her first standing count.

Nitu continued her onslaught as she cornered the Tajikistan pugilist and pummelled her with straight jabs.

The referee gave Qosimova her second standing count before calling the contest in the Indian's favour much to the disappointment of her opponent, who kept showing the thumbs down gesture when the result was called.

The experienced Manisha used a straight jab followed by a combination of punches to assert her authority.

Considerably taller than the Turkish boxer, Manisha used that to her advantage as she unleashed a right and left hook followed by a straight jab. Turhan looked to attack in the second round after receiving two standing counts in the first three minutes but Manisha continued landing hooks and jabs quite seamlessly.

She kept moving around to dodge her opponent's punches. A flurry of jabs and hooks by Manisha led the referee to stop the contest in favour of the home boxer with only few seconds left for the final bell.

Former India's National champion Satinder quits DoJ job to join Australia boxing team support staff

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

She was MC Mary Kom's contemporary but the trajectory of Satinder Kaur's life-path was entirely different from the iconic six-time World Champion.

While 'Magnificent Mary' scaled new heights post giving birth to her twins, marriage took 2004 National champion Kaur to far away in New South Wales in Australia, where boxing was illegal for women even decade and half back.

And when it became legal, Satinder was pregnant with her first born, a son. She tried to pursue the sport once again but had to quit as she had two small children to tend to.

Satinder had completed her BA degree and a diploma in boxing from NIS Patiala before getting married and moving to Australia in 2007.

In 2020, after years of staying away from the boxing ring, Satinder, gave up her cushy job in the New South Wales' Department of Justice (DOJ) to follow her passion once again. She was appointed as the assistant coach for New South Wales, which she is enjoying thoroughly.

She is also the Australian national team's assistant coach. However, it is a voluntary appointment without any monetary perks.

And thanks to her association to Boxing Australia, Satinder is back to India but in Australian colours, albeit as manager of the Australian women's team that is taking part in the World Championship.

"Woh bolte hai na aapke andar aag jalti rehti hai woh kam ho jaati hai par abhi bhi sulgh rahi hai (the intensity of the fire in my belly to box went down but it was still there)," Satinder, who is town for the Women's World Championships as the Australian team's manager, told PTI.

to play for Chandigarh," said Satinder who competed in the lightweight category (63kg).

"First the coach refused to train me because he didn't train girls. The first two weeks I would go and just sit and look at every one. He didn't make me do anything.

"But I was determined that I have to do boxing. Seeing my hard work and dedication, sir decided to train me and in three months of training I got a silver in the 2003 nationals."

Since no women trained under Singh, Satinder had no option but to spar with men which motivated her to improve her fitness. And the silver medal was followed by a gold in 2004 Nationals a year later.

In the national camp she trained alongside the likes of the legendary MC Mary Kom and World Champions L Sarita Devi and Jenny RL and returning to the Indra Gandhi Indoor Stadium is like a blast from the past filled with nostalgia.

"I feel so coming back here. I met some of the boxers who were with me in the camp after 19 years."

PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST

The 40-year-old Satinder is hopeful that her work with Australian team would be appreciated and she would have a more permanent role in the set-up.

"I am grateful to Boxing Australia and Boxing Federation of India for this opportunity," said Satinder, who hopes her good work would earn her a permanent gig with Boxing Australia.

"When I am coaching those 1-2 hours my thoughts are 100 per cent on coaching. I am not thinking about anything else. That gives me a lot of satisfaction. Psychological it works for me."

DOTING MOM

Despite being away for over half a month, Satinder - the mother and wife has made sure her children and husband are cared for.

"I cook everything before I go somewhere. Right now I am away for 20 days so I have cooked curries for every day and stored it in the fridge before coming."

Haaland to miss Euro qualifiers

AP ■ OSLO

Norway's star striker Erling Haaland will miss the country's next two Euro qualifiers against Spain and Georgia due to a groin injury, the Norwegian FA said on Tuesday.

Haaland, who recently scored five goals for his club Manchester City against Leipzig in the Champions League and a hat-trick against Burnley in the FA Cup, complained about groin pain following the Burnley game over the weekend.

The Norwegian Football Federation said Haaland had left



the national team's training camp in Marbella, Spain, to undergo a medical follow-up with his Premier League club.

"We hoped it was just a discomfort that would pass by Saturday, but after tests and examinations yesterday it is clear that he will not be ready for the games against Spain and Georgia," team doctor Ola Sand was quoted as saying in a statement.

Norway will play two away games in their Euro 2024 qualifying group A debut, first against Spain in Malaga on Saturday and Georgia in Batumi on Tuesday.



Italy lose Chiesa, Dimarco for Euro openers

AP ■ ROME

Federico Chiesa and Federico Dimarco have withdrawn from the Italy squad for their opening Euro 2024 qualifiers, the national football federation announced on Monday.

Juventus winger Chiesa limped off after coming on as a substitute as Juventus beat Inter Milan in a Serie A. Examinations on his knee showed no injury, but the club said he needs to rest. Inter left back Dimarco went off earlier the same game. West Ham defender Emerson Palmieri has been called up for Dimarco but no replacement was named for Chiesa.

Chiesa was a starter on the team that beat England on penalties in the last final in 2021.

Ivan Provedel of Lazio, one of four goalkeepers called up by coach Roberto Mancini, also withdrew and was replaced by Cremonese's Marco Carnesecchi. Italy begin the defence of their title with a rematch of the Euro 2020 final against England in Naples on Thursday, before travelling to Malta on Sunday.



Mbappe to become new France captain

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe will take over as captain of France after Hugo Lloris stepped down following the World Cup final defeat to Argentina, a source close to the team said.

Paris Saint-Germain forward Mbappe, 24, accepted the role after discussions with coach Didier Deschamps.

His first game as captain will be Friday's Euro 2024 qualifier against the Netherlands at the Stade de France, Les Bleus' first match since their World Cup final disappointment in Doha on December 18.

Tottenham goalkeeper Lloris, 36, brought an end to his international career in January, in the weeks after Lionel Messi's Argentina side beat the French in a penalty shootout following

a thrilling match that ended 3-3 in extra-time.

Lloris had been skipper for more than a decade.

Atletico Madrid attacker Antoine Griezmann was named vice-captain after Manchester United centre-back Raphael Varane also hung up his boots following the defeat to Argentina in December.

Mbappe, who scored a hat-trick in the World Cup final defeat, had been heavily linked with the captain's role for weeks.

Michel Platini, who captained France to victory in the 1984 European Championship, said the decision was "a very good idea".

"In giving him the responsibility of the captaincy, it allows Kylian, when necessary, to go still further, higher, stronger," Platini, the ex-head of European

football's governing body UEFA, said in a statement.

Mbappe helped Les Bleus to World Cup glory as a teenager in 2018 and has established himself as arguably the leading forward on the global stage.

The Paris-born former Monaco player is vice-captain at PSG behind Brazilian defender Marquinhos and led the side in the defender's absence during Sunday's loss to Rennes.

Mbappe has scored 19 goals in 24 Ligue 1 matches this season and contributed seven goals in PSG's run to the last 16 of the Champions League, where they were knocked out by Bayern Munich.

France are grouped with the Dutch, the Republic of Ireland, Greece and Gibraltar in their qualifying group for Euro 2024, to be held in Germany.

Sen slumps to world No 25 in BWF rankings



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commonwealth Games champion Lakshya Sen slipped six places to move out of the world top 20 in the latest men's singles rankings issued by BWF on Tuesday.

Following his second round exit from the All England Championship, Sen slumped to the 25th spot.

The 21-year-old, who had reached a career-best world no. 6 in November last year, hasn't been in the best of form, having made early exits from Malaysia Open, India Open and German Open.

Last year, Sen had a rampaging run in the European circuit early in the season, winning the

India Open and reaching the finals at Germany and All England.

HS Prannoy continued to remain steady at number ninth spot, while Kidambi Srikanth regained his top 20 spot after climbing two positions.

In women's singles, PV Sindhu stayed at the ninth spot, while Saina Nehwal, who had skipped the All England Championships, slipped five places to 32nd spot.

Men's pairing of Satwik-sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty continued at the sixth spot, while women's combination of Treena Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand lost a rung to be at the 18th position, despite a semifinal finish last week.

Hodgson returns as Crystal Palace manager

AP ■ LONDON

Crystal Palace have reappointed former England boss Roy Hodgson as their manager until the end of the season, with a mission to save the Premier League strugglers from relegation. The 75-year-old, who replaces the sacked Patrick Vieira, said the "sole objective" was to ensure survival in the English top flight.

Hodgson, who was in charge at Selhurst Park between 2017 and 2021, takes over with Palace lying 12th in the Premier League, three points above the relegation zone after a 12-match winless run.

"It is a privilege to be asked



Lewington returning as first-team coach.

Palace chairman Steve Parish welcomed the former Liverpool and Inter Milan manager back to his boyhood club, saying his experience would be crucial in the battle to avoid the drop. Hodgson has a difficult job on his hands turning around the form of a club that have not won a match in 2023.

The bottom nine teams in the Premier League are separated by just four points, cranking up the pressure as the season enters its final months.

Hodgson's first match in charge will be a home game against fellow strugglers Leicester on April 1.

Ratcliffe will not pay 'stupid price' for Man Utd

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Prospective Manchester United owner Jim Ratcliffe says he will not pay a "stupid" price for the Premier League giants, with more bidders expected to enter the race to take over at Old Trafford.

The British billionaire is one of two interested parties to have publicly announced their bids to Raine, the merchant bank brought in to assist the club in assessing offers. Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al Thani is the other.

United's unpopular owners, the Glazer family, announced in November they were conducting a strategic review, with the sale of the club one option being considered.

The Americans' asking price is believed to be \$6 billion.

Ratcliffe held talks with the club on Friday during a visit to Old Trafford and the Carrington training complex, a day after Sheikh Jassim's representatives visited United.

But in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, the 70-year-old Ratcliffe said he would not pay over the odds for the 20-time English champions.

"How do you decide the price of a painting?" he said. "How do you decide the price of a house? It's not related to how much it cost to build or how much it cost to paint."

"What you don't want to do is pay stupid prices for things because then you regret it subsequently."

SEVILLA SACK SAMPAOLI



AP ■ SEVILLE

Argentinian Jorge Sampaoli was sacked as coach of struggling Sevilla on Tuesday, with the club just off the relegation zone.

"Sevilla FC have today relieved Jorge Sampaoli of his duties," the club said in a statement.

"Following the defeat at Getafe, which leaves the side just above the relegation zone, the club have decided to part ways with the Argentine

coach ahead of the international break."

"Sevilla FC would like to thank Jorge Sampaoli for his dedication and commitment at the club and wish him the best of luck in his future."

The former Chile and Argentina coach joined Sevilla in October, but the club has failed to shake off its disappointing mid-table form. Sampaoli's second stint at the club saw him oversee 13 wins, six draws and 12 defeats in 31 matches.

Sevilla sit 13th in La Liga on 28 points, two off Getafe — to whom they lost 2-0 on Sunday — and Almeria, who currently occupy two of the three relegation spots.

Sevilla will face Manchester United in next month's quarter-finals of the Europa League, a competition the club has won a record six times.

"It's time to say goodbye to a club I love," said Sampaoli, 62.

"I go with my head held high. Football doesn't always make you happy. It can even give you insomnia."

"But there's no doubt it was worth my while. It seemed like a good idea at the time," said the fiery coach who was under contract until the end of next season."

INDIA EYE SERIES WIN AGAINST OZ

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The prima donnas of Indian batting will have to put their best foot forward while tackling the lethal in-dippers from Mitchell Starc when they face Australia in the series-deciding third ODI here on Wednesday.

If Starc is giving sleepless nights to the batters, the other 'Mitchell — Mitchell Marsh — has sent the Indian bowlers on a leather hunt by hitting nearly a dozen sixes (11) across two games. Tackling 'Mitchell The Menace' will be topmost on the Indian team's agenda.

The series is locked at 1-1 and the starry quartet of Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill and Suryakumar Yadav will have to bat out of their skins to stop the left-arm pacer, who is gearing up to once again bring the ball back viciously into the right-handers while taking a few away.

A sea change on the technical aspect, as well mental make-up, will be the need of the hour, and Starc has exposed their frailties pretty badly.

The white ball games in India are mostly played on flat decks, where one can get away by hitting through the line, where one doesn't need too much of feet movement. A batter can plonk the front-foot and hit deliveries across the line with a fair degree of success.

But Starc, blessed with better skill sets, changed the questionnaire with deliveries that would either straighten in the off-middle line or cut back sharply towards leg-middle after a fair amount of deviation in the air.

The Indians have known what Starc has done for the longest time but they failed to factor in that conditions in Mumbai and Visakhapatnam would assist his bowling a bit more. In Mumbai, there was

help off the surface but in the coastal city of Visakhapatnam, the ball did more in the air than off the surface.

The refurbished Chepauk, with all its stands being open for public viewing, will be hosting an international game after quite some time and the re-laid pitch will attract a lot of attention.

Normally, Chepauk produces a track that is effective for slow bowlers and run-scoring in the middle overs might be difficult.

However, an interesting aspect of this year's pitch preparation will be keeping Chennai Super Kings' strength in mind and one might see some initial nip off the surface for the fast bowlers.

SURYA'S PROBLEMS

Suryakumar Yadav in T20s can do no wrong with his aggressive shuffling inside the crease but that exaggerated movement across the crease has led to a couple of identical first-ball dismissals for him in both ODIs.

To play swing and seam, one needs to maintain perfect balance and play the ball as late as possible. Surya always tries to play late in T20s and hence it is a bit surprising that he is trying to meet the ball early in this format. With no Shreyas Iyer for sometime, this is actually Surya's best time to grab the opportunity and seal an ODI World Cup berth, but he has been far from convincing so far.

"Of course, we have seen and he knows that he needs to do well in the slightly-longer format of the game as well. Things are there in his mind as well. Guys with potential will have enough run so that they don't feel like 'okay I wasn't given enough chances in that particular slot,' skipper Rohit had said after the last game.

"Surya got out in the last two games and in the series before



that as well. He needs that consistent run, like back-to-back games, 7, 8 and 10 games like that. So that he feels more comfortable," the skipper had assured.

The next run of ODIs will only be in June-July and there is a possibility that Iyer could be fit by then to reclaim his place and Surya might find it difficult to get his share of chances.

BOWLING ATTACK

The Indian bowling attack needs to take its workload management seriously but, truth be told, the bowlers haven't had much work to do as they have bowled a total of 47 overs (36 and 11) across the two games. That is not even half of the 100 allocated overs.

Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj wouldn't mind making first use of the Chepauk surface if Rohit happens to win the toss.

The key question is if Shardul Thakur, or Jaydev Unadkat for his left-arm variation, will be used as third specialist seamer, or both spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel will get another game alongside Ravindra Jadeja.

TEAMS

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, KL Rahul (wk), Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur, Washington Sundar, Ishan Kishan, Jaydev Unadkat, Yuzvendra Chahal, Umran Malik.

Australia: Steve Smith (captain), Mitchell Marsh, Travis Head, Marcus Stoinis, Glenn Maxwell, Marbnus Labuschagne, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Mitchell Starc, Sean Abbott, Adam Zampa, Ashton Agar, David Warner, Alex Carey, Jos Iglis.

Want to try out various combinations so that we aren't surprised during WC: Dravid

PTI ■ CHENNAI

He is more than happy with the takeaways from the nine home ODIs that Indian team has played and has already narrowed his World Cup core team to 17-18 players, head coach Rahul Dravid said on the eve of the series decider against Australia.

India are going into the decider having already played eight home games — three versus Sri Lanka, three versus New Zealand and three against Australia finishing on Wednesday.

Did he achieve what he had set out to in nine home ODIs, keeping World Cup in mind? "We have to a large extent. We have got a lot more clarity at the end of these nine games irrespective of what happens tomorrow. We need to keep building on that clarity.

"For us it is now the different playing XI combinations and just ensuring that we play different combinations at times just to ensure that we are able to do that in the World Cup and we are not surprised by anything in the World Cup," Dravid told mediapersons here on Tuesday.

The head coach rued the absence of an injured Shreyas Iyer, who had been earmarked to bat at No. 4 in the World Cup. The coach at the same time was sympathetic towards Suryakumar Yadav, who hasn't yet set the ODI stage on fore unlike T20 format.

"Obviously. It is unfortunate for Shreyas to get injured. He is probably one of those guys who would bat at No.4 and given a lot of time at that position. If you notice we have stuck to the people in positions. For two years leading into this run, there is a lot of T20 cricket played and we did not have a lot of one-day cricket and if there are injuries and all that, we do have options."

But does Surya's first-ball ducks isn't really worrying Dravid. "Not really concerned about Surya. He got two very good balls. One of things about Surya is that he is learning the 50-overs game. The T20 is slightly different. In T20, he has played 10 years of IPL.

"He (Surya) has played a lot of T20 cricket. He has played a lot of high pressure T20 games. Even though he has played a lot of T20 cricket I think he has not played a lot of one-day cricket. We need to give him some time and be patient with it. We certainly see the upside of him doing well."



Have narrowed choice

This leg of home ODIs were very important as the players will now get into IPL and after that there is the big WTC final, followed by a tour of West Indies and a possible Asia Cup in Dubai. "Probably not going to get too many more games in our conditions. We had the opportunity to play in these conditions which is great. Yeah, coming out of the IPL to a large extent we are pretty clear about the kind of squad and the players we want. We have narrowed it down to 17-18 players."

Injuries to Jasprit Bumrah, Iyer, Prasodh Krishna, Deepak Chahar does remain a concern but Dravid insisted that the team is in a good head space.

"We have some guys who are recovering from injuries and will come into the frame based on their recovery. All in all, we are pretty much in good space. We are able to give those who we have zeroed in on as many playing opportunities."

"There are a couple of different combinations that we would like to try. It is a big tournament, a long tournament in India, we want to have that flexibility in our squad. Some times four fast bowlers, sometimes three spinners. Within the squad we will like to keep the options. Just to ensure that we have covered all our bases for all conditions."

KULDEEP WILL GET LONGER RUN

Consistency in selection has always been key for Dravid and right now, if there is one wrist spinner, who will get a long rope, it will be Kuldeep Yadav and not Yuzvendra Chahal. "We are always presuming that the wickets will spin in India. We just actually presume. I don't think the last 2 spun at all. We never know what we are going to get in the World Cup," Dravid said.

"In the league phase, nine cities, it is in October, the wickets won't be as tired as they probably are in the IPL and (that too) at the back-end of our summer. You just have to get all your bases covered."

Kerr powers MI to four-wicket win over RCB



PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians on Tuesday reclaimed the top spot in the points table with a four-wicket victory against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Women's Premier League, riding on Amelia Kerr's allround heroics.

Chasing a modest 126 to win here at the DY Patil Stadium, Mumbai Indians stuttered post a fiery start and also failed to knock off the target in 11.3 overs — a condition that would have helped them improve net run rate over Delhi Capitals.

Mumbai Indians eventually finished at 129 for 6 in 16.3 overs.

RCB, however, signed off from the competition with their

sixth loss in eight league matches.

All-rounder Kerr was at top of her game with figures of 4-0-22-3 and an unbeaten 31 from 27 balls (4x4s) to take Mumbai Indians over the line.

Kerr added 47 runs for the fifth wicket with Pooja Vastrakar (19) to revive Mumbai Indians who were rocked twice in quick succession.

Sobhana Asha halted Nat Sciver-Brunt's charge by dismissing her for 13, while captain Harmanpreet Kaur (2) fell for her first single-digit score in the competition.

Kanika Ahuja claimed two wickets in one over to finish as the pick among the bowlers for RCB.

At the start, the opening pair

of Hayley Matthews (24 from 17 balls, 2x4s, 1x6s) and Yastika Bhatia (30 off 26 balls, 6x4s) laid the foundation with a 53-run stand.

Delhi Capitals will face UP Warriorz in the final league game later in the day at the Brabourne Stadium, post which the WPL points table would be finalised.

While the team finishing at the top will get a direct entry into Sunday's final, the second and third-placed teams will battle in the eliminator on Friday to fill up the second slot of the summit clash.

Earlier, Kerr snapped three wickets as Mumbai Indians produced a disciplined effort to restrict RCB to 125 for nine.

Kerr (3/22) validated MI

captain Harmanpreet Kaur's decision to bowl first, taking full advantage of a spin-friendly track, while Matthews (4-0-18-0) and Saika Ishaque (1/30) were also on the money.

Both Kerr and Ishaque joined Sophie Ecclestone of the UP Warriorz for most wickets (13) in WPL.

Mumbai made an early breakthrough when a horrible mixup between Devine (0) and Smriti Mandhana culminated in the former being run out.

Mandhana continued to drive herself back into form, hitting a few exciting shots to make 24 from 25 balls with three fours and a six, before her innings was ended by Kerr off a mistimed stroke.

Ellyse Perry (29 from 28 balls, 3x4s) took time to settle down and opened up only in the 10th over, hitting Ishaque for consecutive fours. At the halfway stage, RCB were 56 for 2.

Heather Knight perished for 12 in the 11th over with Kerr bagging her second wicket and the slide continued for RCB with the Kiwi spinner striking again, getting Kanika Ahuja (12) stumped by Yastika Bhatia.

Nat Sciver-Brunt returned for her final over to finish at 4-0-24-2, dismissing Perry and Shreyanka Patil (4) to mark yet another poor show for RCB with the bat. Isabelle Wong (2/26) also chipped in, removing Richa Ghosh and Disha Kasat in the last over.

Ghosh cracked three fours and two sixes to make 29 off 13 balls, with her innings helping RCB move past the 100-run mark.

Cherish being able to rub shoulders with Starc: Ellis

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Being able to pick Mitchell Starc's brain, have him as a "calming influence" during ups and downs are some of the perks of being an Australian cricketer that young Nathan Ellis is enjoying a lot.

Ellis, who got Virat Kohli in the second game spoke extensively as to how Starc's influence on him has grown over time.

"Starcy (nickname) has been huge for me. For me personally, he is someone I looked up to him a lot of time. He presented me my first Australia cap too. He is a big part of my Australia journey. Even the other day, speaking to him pre-game and post-game," Ellis told mediapersons ahead of third ODI against India. "He (Starc) is a calming influence. He is also someone who has been there and done almost everything the game has to offer, whether it is the ups or down. Being able to rub shoulders with Starc and sort of bounce ideas off and de-brief games... It is something that I have cherished. It is invaluable," Ellis

Starc has already taken eight wickets in two games and Ellis termed his performance as "amazing". "Starcy (Mitchell Starc) the other night was nothing short of amazing. It was great to watch. It was great to be a part of. Hopefully, he can repeat those tomorrow (Wednesday)," he added.

I ADJUST MY LINE

Ellis believes is being flexible and his tactics change as per conditions of the track.

If the track offers bounce then he has a different ace up his sleeve.

"For me, I am not necessarily a bouncy bowler as it is. As I said before, it is a matter of assessing the wicket on the day and adapting my sets of skills to the wicket. Whether it is adjusting my line, being a bit straighter.

"If it is not as bouncy, slower balls if needed and changing my lengths. Tomorrow is about not going with any pre-conceived ideas," he added.

As for the pitch at Chepauk, he said, "I am not sure with the team selection or what the team will look like. Obviously, it is going to spin here. For me, the slower balls might come into play. I think it will be a matter of assessing the wicket if we are bowling first.

"We get a bit more information for the batters who will come out in the second innings and vice versa for batting first..."

Delhi Capitals qualify for WPL final

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Alice Capsey produced a fabulous all-round display, snaring three wickets and smashing a 31-ball 34 as Delhi Capitals thrashed UP Warriorz by five wickets to directly qualify for the final of the Women's Premier League here on Tuesday.

Chasing 139-run target, built around Tahila McGrath's 32-ball unbeaten 58, DC romped home scoring 142 for five in 17.5 overs to finish at the top of the table, toppling Mumbai Indians on the basis of better net run rate.

With Delhi grabbing a direct spot in the final, Mumbai Indians and UP Warriorz will now face off in the eliminator for the other final spot.

MI had defeated Royal Challengers Bangalore by four



wickets earlier in the day, leaving DC with the task of not only winning against UPW but also maintaining a better run-rate to directly book their final spot.

Meg Lanning and Co did just that as they restricted UPW to a modest 138 for six after winning the toss and opting to

bowl.

Chasing, the opening pair of Lanning and Shafali Verma then went on a boundary hitting spree as they knocked off 56 runs off 29 balls.

If Lanning set the ball rolling with three fours and a six in a 20-run first over off

Shabnim Ismail, Shafali had four hits to the fence in her 16-ball 21-run cameo.

Once Shafali was holed out to Soppadhani Yashasri off Sophie Ecclestone's bowling, Ismail returned to trap Jemimah Rodrigues and then removed Lanning, who was caught by Simran Shaikh in the deep, as suddenly DC slumped to 70 for three.

UPW tried to tighten the screws but Capsey produced three boundaries in four balls off Ecclestone to keep DC in the hunt. Marizanne Kapp (34 not out off 31) smashed another maximum as DC reached 130 for three in 16 overs.

Ecclestone managed to sent back Capsey after two balls, while a mix-up cost Jess Jonassen's wicket but Kapp kept her cool to hit the winning runs.