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MYANMAR NIGHTMARE
CONTINUES UNABATED

WORLD 9
US CARRIES OUT AIRSTRIKES
IN SYRIA

MONEY 10
INDIA'S FOREX KITTY JUMPS BY
USD 12.8 BN TO USD 572.8 BN

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'HARDIK SIMILAR
TO DHONI AS
CAPTAIN'
11 SPORT

Rahul disqualified from LS

Cong to launch nationwide strike,
Opp rallies around Rahul, accuses
BJP of doing 'vindictive politics'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was on Friday disqualified from the Lok Sabha, nearly 24 hours after a Surat court convicted him in a 2019 criminal defamation case over his "all thieves have Modi as the common surname" remark.

The disqualification will bar the 52-year-old former Congress president, a four-time MP, from contesting elections for eight years unless a higher court stays his conviction or lowers the sentence to below two years.

Soon after Rahul's disqualification, the Congress leadership got into a huddle at the party headquarters and deliberated on the way forward.

Late on Friday evening, the Congress announced a nationwide agitation against Rahul's disqualification, alleging that the Government has acted at lightning speed to "gag" him, and called for taking forward the efforts for the Opposition unity in a systematic manner.

Announcing Rahul's disqualification, the Lok Sabha

Secretariat in a notification said following his conviction by the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Surat, Rahul, Member of the Lok Sabha representing the Wayanad constituency of Kerala stands disqualified from the membership of the House from the date of his conviction i.e. March 23, 2023.

The Congress said it will fight the matter politically and legally. Hitting out at the Government, the Congress said it is "a black day for Indian democracy" and alleged that the action was driven by "political vendetta".

Hours before the notification was issued, Rahul attended the Lok Sabha proceedings in the morning session.

Before the proceedings commenced, he also participated in a meeting of party MPs in Parliament complex. Rahul said he is fighting for the voice of India and is ready to pay any price, hours after he was disqualified from the Lok Sabha.

Later, Rahul tweeted, "I am fighting for the voice of



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi leaves Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Friday

India. I am ready to pay every price."

However, the disqualification ostensibly has come as a blessing in disguise for the ragtag unity in Opposition, including TMC, AAP, SP, BRS which have been toeing a different line. On Friday, they echoed concern over the vindictive kind of politics and alleged that the Rahul was not given 30 days appeal space.

Some of them who had quit the Congress and are now part of other outfits too expressed their solidarity with Rahul.

Rahul is the second member of the Lok Sabha, after Lakshadweep MP PP Mohammed Faisal of the NCP, to have been disqualified in the recent past following conviction.

The Kavaratti sessions court in Lakshadweep had sentenced four persons, including Mohammed Faizal, to 10 years in jail after they were found guilty in an attempt-to-murder case. Following the conviction, Faizal was disqualified.

However, the Kerala High Court later suspended his conviction and sentence. According to the MP, the Lok Sabha Secretariat is yet to issue a notification revoking his disqualification.

Lies, slander part of Rahul's politics: Nadda

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda on Friday claimed Rahul Gandhi has a habit of levelling fabricated allegations having no connection with facts while alleging the Congress leader has a "huge arrogance but little understanding".

In a series of tweets amid a political fight between the BJP and the Congress following Rahul's conviction in a defamation case, Nadda alleged that "lies, personal slander and negative politics is integral" to his politics.

People's "punishment" to him will be more severe in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls than in 2019 when he lost in Amethi and the Congress was routed nationally, the BJP leader said.

He said, "By comparing OBC communities to thieves, Rahul has shown a pathetic and casteist mindset. However, his latest tirade is not surprising. For the last many years, he has always reduced levels of political discourse."

UK's security obligations not met: Jaishankar

We want action, not assurance: EAM; UK MPs slam Khalistanis for vandalism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/LONDON

In the first high-level strong reaction by India to the attack on its High Commission in London by alleged Khalistan supporters, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said it is the responsibility of that country to provide security and "these obligations were not met".

A day after UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly condemned vandalism AT the Indian High Commission in London, the issue was raised in UK Parliament with MPs demanding action against "Khalistani hooligans". They also called for safety of India's diplomatic staff.

Taking exception to the attack on the Indian High Commission, Jaishankar when asked about the security of Indian Missions following vandalism in the UK said, "It is the obligation of the receiving country to provide security for a diplomat to do their work, to ensure embassy or High Commission's premises are respected. These obligations



were not met. We have had conversations with the British Government on this."

Jaishankar also said, "Many countries have a different view of their own security and a different view of other people's security. We will not accept this differential status." He made these observations at an event in Bengaluru.

Echoing similar views, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said here on Friday, "We hope host Governments provide full and adequate protection to our Missions and to the personnel working there..We are not interested in just assurances, I think we would like to see action."

He also said "at least in London and San Francisco, we have strongly taken up the matter of vandalism. You would have also seen the statements that we have put out in this regard. We expect that host Governments will take action to identify and prosecute all those involved and also take necessary actions to prevent the recurrence of such incidents."



CAPSULE

K'TAKA ABOLISHES 4% QUOTA FOR MINORITIES

Bengaluru: The Karnataka Government on Friday announced its decision to scrap the four per cent quota for minorities and added it to the existing quota of two dominant communities of the poll-bound State.

HC SETS ASIDE DELHI BJP MLA'S HOUSE BAN

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Friday set aside the one-year suspension of BJP MLA Vijender Gupta from the Delhi Legislative Assembly and permitted him to attend the remaining Budget Session of the Assembly while directing him to maintain the dignity of the House.

COVID RELIEF OVER, NOW SURRENDER, ORDERS SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday directed that all convicts and undertrial prisoners, who were released during the Covid-19 pandemic in a move to decongest jails, to surrender within 15 days.

TAXPAYERS WITH INCOME OVER ₹7L TO GET RELIEF

New Delhi: In a relief to taxpayers opting for new tax regime, individuals earning marginally higher income than no-tax ceiling of ₹7 lakh will pay tax only on the differential income after the Government amended the Finance Bill. The Finance Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha on Friday, has proposed a marginal relief to taxpayers under new tax regime.

Commissionerate police hold 'Reach Her'



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate police are committed for the safety of woman. Constant efforts are being made by the police to empower the working women in the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, said Commissioner of Police Saumendra Priyadarshi at a programme 'Reach Her' here on Friday.

The Commissioner, who directly interacted with the women of a private textile company at Mancheswar in-

dustrial estate, asked them to feel safe and assured to look into their grievances promptly.

Earlier, the first 'Reach Her' programme was held at a private company in the same area on February 25.

Sources said the police have launched the programme for safety of the large number of working women in the twin cities. The cops have identified the companies where a majority of the workforce are women.

Bhubaneswar DCP Prateek Singh and other senior police officials were present.

Pak hecklers shown door at Kashmir event in US



PNS/ AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/ WASHINGTON

Scores of Pakistanis tried to disrupt a discussion on Kashmir in prestigious Washington DC National Press Club and some of them were later forcibly removed from the venue. The incident took place late on Thursday. The same day India slammed Pakistan for raising the issue of Kashmir in the United Human Rights Council (UNHCR).

Six separatist loyalists were forcibly removed from the National Press Club in Washington as Pakistanis tried to heckle and repeatedly interrupt the discussion in the Press club.

The panel discussion titled "Kashmir: From Turmoil to Transformation" was held on Thursday. It was moderated by columnist Se Hoon Kim and addressed by president of the

Jammu & Kashmir Workers Party Mir Junaid, and Touseef Raina, president of the Municipal Council of Baramulla.

"The whole audience has seen your real face today. What we have seen in Kashmir, we saw in Washington today, and thank you for showing the world how cruel, and indecent these people are. You have seen it all," Junaid said as the separatist sympathisers were taken out of the room.

They tried to disrupt the discussion while Junaid was responding to a question on the reasons why the Kashmiri Hurriyat leaders were in jail.

"They (Hurriyat leaders) are in jail because of their mistakes. They misled the people of Jammu & Kashmir for their vested interests and gains. They spoiled our ecosystem of education. They were the spoilers of our economy. They were

glorifying terrorism. They are in jail for their hate speech. They are in jail for their war crimes," Junaid said.

Referring to the disruption caused by the protesters, Raina said all these years this is what the separatists sponsored by Pakistan have been doing in Jammu & Kashmir.

"What these gentlemen did, the same thing they did in Kashmir. Whosoever was speaking, right, or for the people, was silenced by the gun," he said. "I wish I get a chance to visit Pakistan. I want to meet the policymakers to stop funding terrorism," said the Baramulla Municipal Council president.

45 Defence JVs with foreign firms OK'd for faster weapons production

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of faster development and production of weapons to maintain operational readiness of the armed forces, the Government has given approval to "45 companies/joint ventures" operating in the defence sector with foreign OEMs (original equipment manufacturers).

Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt informed this to the Lok Sabha on Friday.

The Centre has taken several policy initiatives in the past few years and brought reforms to encourage indigenous design, development and manufacture of defence equipment in the country, thereby reducing dependency on imports in coming years, he said.

"These initiatives, inter

alia, include according priority to procurement of capital items from domestic sources under Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)-2020; notification of three Positive Indigenisation Lists (PILs) by the Department of Defence Production (DDP), Ministry of Defence, with a timeline beyond which they will only be procured from the domestic industry," the Minister said.

Odisha reports 17 Covid cases in 24 hours

AK SAHOO ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha on Friday reported as many as 17 new Covid-19 cases. It was after a gap of almost three to four months that the State recorded Covid positive cases in double digits.

Now, the total Covid-19 positive tally in the State stands at 73, informed Public Health Director Niranjan Mishra.

One of the patients is currently undergoing treatment at hospital. The Health Department asked people not to panic or spread fear among others as 17 positive cases were found out of test of as

many as 5,647 samples in the 24 hours.

Mishra said, "Not only Odisha but there is also a rise in Covid-19 cases across India. Especially States like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Rajasthan have reported a spike in the cases."

"We have directed all the districts to increase Covid-19 tests and spread awareness. People, who show symptoms of influenza or cold, cough and fever, should immediately get themselves tested," he said.

"Compared to other States, the overall situation in Odisha is good. We are also doing

more tests. Districts are trying to increase the number of tests. The situation is under control now."

"There is no cluster outbreak now. Things will be out of control if there is a cluster outbreak in some village or someplace in Odisha. Moreover, 17 of those who tested positive are doing fine while only one of them is currently undergoing treatment at hospital," Mishra added.

He urged people to follow the necessary Covid-19 protocols like wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, washing hands and not spitting anywhere.

Rahul disqualification rocks Assembly

- Murder of democracy: Congress
- Modi's effigy burnt in street protest

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Congress members stalled the proceedings of the Odisha Assembly on Friday over the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from membership of Parliament.

The House witnessed several adjournments before Speaker Bikram Keshari Arukha adjourning the House till Monday.

The Congress MLAs stormed into the Well of the

House and shouted slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They termed the Rahul Gandhi's disqualification as "murder of democracy".

Speaking to the media outside the Assembly, Congress Legislature Party Leader Narasingha Mishra said, "Rahul Gandhi is a victim of a pre-planned conspiracy. His disqualification has proved the murder of democracy which we have been telling so long.



Without respecting the democratic norms and practices, Rahul has been disqualified in haste. The Congress will move a higher court in this regard and the truth will prevail."

In another development, Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) members led by PCC president Sarat Patnaik held a demonstration at Master Canteen Square in the capital

city and burnt an effigy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to protest against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi.

MLAs Suresh Kumar Routray and Tara Prasad Bahinipati said that for the first time, a Prime Minister out of fear is trying to suppress the voice of the Opposition and disqualified the Parliament membership of Rahul Gandhi. But the Congress would become more powerful and defeat the anti-democratic Modi Government.

Former PCC president Niranjan Patnaik and other senior leaders were present.

In Assembly Opp attacks Govt over school transformation

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Opposition BJP and Congress on Friday attacked the State Government in the State Assembly over lack of teachers and school transformation under 5T.

Opposition Chief Whip Mohan Majhi (BJP) slammed the Government during a debate on the admissibility of an Adjournment Motion on school transformation under 5T and the future of students. Alleging that the education system has completely collapsed in the State, he said the Government is only painting the buildings in the

name of school transformation.

Majhi said that as many as 11,710 schools are in darkness; 11,665 schools do not have playgrounds; 6781 schools have no required classrooms and 27,319 schools are running with one classroom each. There is a requirement of about one and a half lakh teaching posts. In the academic year 2021-22, the dropout rate at secondary level was 27.26 per cent, which is the highest in the country, Majhi said.

Congress Legislature Party Leader Narasingha Mishra said economic and social

development would be impossible until education is not developed as poverty alleviation cannot happen without education.

Despite 23 years of a stable Government, education has not received importance as required.

The Government has recruited teachers in different categories. Dissatisfaction is rising among the teachers due to the salary structure. They are protesting on the streets without imparting education in schools, Mishra said.

Replying to the motion, School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash

targeted the Central Government. The Centre is paying Rs 1258 crore for 92,337 teachers, which is only Rs 11,000 per teacher. But the State Government is paying a minimum salary of Rs 33,000 to the teacher, he said.

At least six taskforces have been formed to monitor 5T schools in the State, the Minister said.

He said the dropout rate in the State in 2022-23 stands at 16.4 per cent, which is better compared to other States. The drop-out rate that the Opposition was talking about was from the time of Covid-19, he said.

3 girls formed WhatsApp group to expose Azex!

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

More shocking developments are coming to the fore in the DJ Azex alias Akshay Kumar Maharana death case.

As per reports, Azex was in relationship with three girls and the trio had formed a WhatsApp group to expose him. The incident came to light during a probe by cyber experts.

The three girls used the WhatsApp group to discuss as to how Azex had trapped them. While the statement of his girlfriend Jigyansa has been recorded by police, two other girls would be questioned



by cops soon, sources added.

On the other hand, Azex's mother Laxmipriya Maharana warned of immolating herself in front of police station if she doesn't get justice. "I have lost

my 28-year-old son. I know the pain. My son shouldn't be defamed after death," she said.

"The WhatsApp group creation matter is false. The truth behind the death of my son is yet to be revealed even after seven days of the incident. We have provided necessary evidence to police regarding the person for whom he died. Efforts are being made to suppress the case with misinformation," she added.

Azex was found hanging at his residence in Bhubaneswar on March 18 night. Holding his girlfriend and her male friend accountable for abetting his suicide, his mother

alleged that he had been subjected to torture and mental harassment by the duo.

As per the contents of the FIR, Azex and his girlfriend, who is an MBBS student in a private college here, were in a relationship since a year. The girl was apparently exploiting him for money and was demanding a two-wheeler. WhatsApp chats revealed that Azex 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 Azex to leave her, failing which he would leak an intimate video of them, the FIR read.

Prof Rath new BPUT VC

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government on Friday appointed Prof Amiya Kumar Rath as the new Vice-Chancellor of the Biju Patnaik University of Technology (BPUT).

Governor Prof Ganeshi Lal, who is the Chancellor of universities, appointed Prof Rath as the VC of BPUT for a period of five years with effect from the date he assumes office as such or until further orders.

Prof Rath currently serves as the Advisor of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC),



headquartered in Bangalore. With 33 years of teaching experiences in academics, Prof Rath has authored nine books and successfully guided 12 PhD and 17 PG scholars.

EV-hydrogen unit, bio bags project in Odisha



Two global Odia investors join hands

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Global Odia investors, Biswanath Patnaik and UK-based Odia entrepreneur Arun Kar, have joined hands to set up Odisha's first EV-hydrogen automotive manufacturing plant under their jointly founded private equity investment firm, FINNEST.

While the EV project would be around Rs 500 crore and will be the first EV-hydrogen locomotive factory in Odisha, they will also set up a Bio Bags project worth around Rs 100

crore in the State.

To be noted, the two UK-based Odia investors Patnaik and Kar recently got featured in Forbes.mc magazine. These two Indians made it to the cover page of the Forbes International Magazine brand, making Odias proud. FINNEST is associated with Fortune 100/Global 500 top companies for the resources in relation to technology decision makers, influencers, and key opinion leaders. FINNEST has an extensive track record of investing in some of the fastest growing companies across Europe, the UK, USA, Middle East and Asia-Pacific.

In Kendrapada

'How much PC?' written on slates flaunted by protestors

RAJESH BEHERA
KENDRAPADA

Holding a protest against corruption in the local Gram Panchayat Office, the people of Dhumat in Kendrapada district on Thursday staged a unique protest in front of Kendrapada Block Office by flaunting slates in which it was written "How much PC?"

The irate people alleged how the Dhumat GP Office has emerged as a corruption hub. Local Sarpanch Manulata Sethi being hands in glove with PEO Kapura Hembram and GRS Ananta Kumar Samal, allegedly misappropriated Government funds worth lakhs by making false bills, the agitators alleged.

Recently, a street light repair work was done at a cost Rs 2 lakh under the guidance of the Sarpanch. But, as per information obtained under



the RTI Act, false bills were raised for street light repair work by the Sarpanch in league with the PEO. The concerned Junior Engineer has not signed the bill, neither has the contractor submitted any GST bill, they said.

The agitators further complained that the Sarpanch

allegedly purchased substandard street lights by spending a huge amount of money for which within days, 98% of the street lights went defunct.

Similarly, GRS Samal too bungled funds under MGNREGS. The agitators alleged that the GRS with a

meagre salary of Rs 8,500 managed to erect a building, purchase a vehicle and have a bank balance of more than Rs 5 lakh. The agitators later met BDO, Kendrapada, Bandita Khatua, demanding to conduct an inquiry and take drastic action against the venal officials and the Sarpanch.

Atrocities on Dalits rising in State: BJP



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even though the BJD came to power in Odisha with the help of Dalit votes, it has no sincerity for the development of the community. Instead, it is cheating them, alleged BJP SC Morcha national general

secretary Sanjay Nirmal here on Friday.

The Odisha Government has failed to provide justice to the Dalits. While other States have formed SC Commissions, till now Odisha is yet to form one which is highly unfortunate. Besides, no SC

Advisory Committee meetings has been held for years, said Nirmal.

The atrocities against Dalits are increasing in the State, but police are not accepting their FIRs; and even if complaints are registered, police are not conducting investigations.

Police are not submitting charge-sheets, alleged BJP State general secretary Prithviraj Harichandan.

Among others, Morcha State president Bibhuprasad Tarai and MLAs Mukesh Mahaling, Sanatan Bijuli and Suraj Suyabanshi were present.

Odisha's first blind parasailer feted



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A complete blind by birth who created history by parasailing above 330 feet from the sea surface was felicitated by Prapajita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya here.

In a special programme, organised at the Forest Park branch of Prapajita Brahma Kumaris, Bapina Nayak, the blind parasailer, was honoured with shawl, bouquet and trophy in the presence of special guests including Rajyogini Brahma

Kumari sister Leena, social activist Santoshi Jain, member of Lokayukta Dr Debabrata Swain, secretary, Odisha Lalit Kala Academy, Panchanan Samal, sand artist Subala Maharana and blind sports coach Trilochan Beura.

Bapina briefed about his struggle of life being born blind which made the audience eyes' moist. He appealed to individual philanthropists and organisations to support the blind like him to make their dream come true.

In Malkangiri BSF seizes arms, explosives from Maoist dump

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI

Border Security Force (BSF) personnel recovered a huge cache of explosives from the Taimal forest in Swabhimana Anchal of Malkangiri district on Friday during combing operations against Maoists. The explosives had been stored at an isolated place and were recovered by a team of the 88 Battalion of the BSF.

It was suspected that the explosives were hidden in the dump by the Red rebels with the intention of targeting

security personnel in the region.

As per official reports, two guns, two empty SBML shells, 11 hand grenades and 28 detonators besides three steel tiffin boxes and other articles were recovered.

Earlier in 2002, the security forces had recovered a huge quantity of explosives during a combing operation in the same area. The explosive dump was detected by personnel of the Special Operation Group (SOG) and the District Voluntary Force (DVF).

Herd of 4 elephants triggers panic in city

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The straying of a herd of elephants into the Sikharchandi Hills area in Bhubaneswar on Friday triggered panic among locals.

The herd comprising four elephants entered the area from the nearby Bharatpur forest. The animals were spotted moving around in the Sikharchandi forest.

Forest Department officials were keeping track of the movement of the elephants as they might stray into human habitats in the capital city.

Chandaka DFO Mohammad Jamil said the elephants strayed from the Bharatpur forest. However, there was nothing to fear about as the animals would



return to the Chandaka forest before sunset.

As there are several shops and a few human settlements on the route of the elephants

to Chandaka, forest officials were keeping a watch on their movement.

"The elephants strayed into Sikharchandi at around 1:30

am at night. There is a tusker, a calf and two female elephants among them. No one is being allowed to go that area," said a forest official.

Book Review

'Work, Workmanship and Winning'

SUGYAN CHOUDHURY ■ BHUBANESWAR

"Work, Workmanship and Winning" is Satyajit Senapati's august venture providing a roadmap to apprentices as well as professionals in order to enjoy an engaging and fulfilling corporate career. The entire edifice of the book is built upon hierarchical structures offering rich mines of information to all types of learners how to navigate their career to reach their destinations. One may open any chapter of the book and unmistakably find something distinctively and strikingly original ideas useful for one's journey in the corporate world.

The author discusses in a threadbare manner how to achieve effective management with a rare foresight, far sight and insight into things ably supported by practical examples. The focus is on the scope of action for a

Practical hacks to living an engaging and fulfilling corporate life



manager or an apprentice or for a master craftsman on any given situation that can be resolved by uncommon commonsense. The author shares his experience with aspiring ones dispelling doubts and removing the stumbling blocks they confront on their ways. He hits the nail on the head when he says in page 122, "Leadership is first about leading yourself, feeling inspired and only then will this rub off others."

A fine piece of work, the book presents how to build a career in corporate environment through strategic planning and leadership up to organisation and career management and offers self-management technique that a manager needs to know in order to succeed in his mission. The book which is AMAZON's Numero Uno Bestseller covers everything one needs to know to perfect management skills and is a treasure token to be in everyone's library.

Balangir: 2,240 cough syrup bottles seized

3 arrested
PNS ■ BALANGIR

A team of the Town police seized 2,240 bottles of the banned Eskyuf cough syrup which was being transported from Cuttack to Balangir district by a bus.

The police also arrested three persons in this connection. The accused were identified as Laldhar Patel, Biswanath Mulia and Maheshwar Mohanty, said Balangir SDPO Toofan Bag at a Press meet on Friday.

Based on inputs, the police



team led by Town PS IIC Biswajit Manbodh carried out a raid and seized the consignment packed in seven cartons while it was being unloaded from a private bus 'Gopinath' near Bijakhamman . Besides the cough syrup, cash of Rs 5,440 and four mobile phones were seized from the possession of the accused. Police registered a case under the relevant Sections of the NDPS Act and were carrying out further investigations to nab the others involved in the supply chain, said the SDPO.

Seawater ingress Bhograi villagers want relief before monsoon

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ BALESWAR

The residents of Bhograi have demanded a permanent solution to the saline water ingress in their crop fields before the monsoon season. They warned of stepping up agitation if the administration remains nonchalant.

According to reports, commotion triggered among the residents after a lock gate built on the coast canal of the British era, which was erected to regulate the flow of water, broke due to the tides of the Subarnarekha river. As a result, saline water from the sea entered into the crop fields through the Subarnarekha river and coast canal.

The villagers alleged that the dilapidated gate broke due to

callous attitude of the Irrigation Department which didn't take adequate safety measures, including maintenance, to prevent the incident. They complained that sea water ingress caused immense damages to standing crops in hundreds of acres.

The department as a temporary measure prevented the saline water by stacking sandbags and closing culverts. However, they demanded a permanent relief before the monsoon season.

Notably, three lock gates, two facing the river side and one towards the coast canal, were repaired in 2020. The villagers alleged that though they have been demanding sluice gates since long yet the administration has been taking only quick-fix measures.

Rs 59-cr infra projects Officials make spot visit at B'kanika

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

The senior officials of the district administration recently conducted a field survey and identified land for carrying out different infrastructural projects in the Bhitarkanika National Park, informed Sub Collector Niranjan Behera. According to Behera, the State Government has sanctioned Rs 59 crore to develop the park and make it an attractive tourist destination.

The proposed infrastructure projects include construction of a dry dock facility at Rs 30 lakh at Gupti, Rs 3.15 crore for setting up of a plaza and parking lots at the entry point of Dangamal crocodile breeding centre, Rs 9.23 crore for construction of a jetty at Gupti, Rs 14.38 crore for an interpretation centre at Dangamal, Rs 7.79 crore for a Craft Bazaar and food court at Dangamal, Rs 6.87 crore for a jetty at Chandabali and Rs 6.66 crore for a jetty at Khola.

Notably, Tourism Minister Aswini Kumar Patra, while attending as the chief guest on closing day of the Bhitarkanika Mahotsav at Nalitapatia on March 12, had revealed about the Government's proposal for developing the park.

In Baleswar

Man gets lifer for killing wife

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Additional Sessions Judge Biswajit Das on Friday convicted a man who was tried on the charge of killing his wife and sentenced him to life imprisonment along with

a fine of Rs 6,000 and further one-year jail term in default of payment of fine.

The convict Bijay Das (42), a resident of Koilisahi under the Basta police station, was found guilty after the court examined 16 witnesses and 20

exhibits, said Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Panda.

According to sources, police took action against the accused based on an FIR filed by his sister on December 27, 2020. The complainant alleged that her sister Minati Das was

regularly tortured physically as well as mentally by the accused even after eight years of their marriage for non-fulfilment of dowry demands. The accused was tried under several Sections of IPC including 498-A, 304(B) and 302.

L&T, SLS Trust ink pact for M'bhanj skill hub

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The L&T has inked an MoU with the Odisha-based nonprofit SLS Trust for setting up a skill training hub at Badampahar in Mayurbhanj district.

The MoU was inked on March 14 at L&T's corporate office 'Landmark' in Mumbai in the presence of CEO and MD, L&T SN Subrahmanyam, president, L&T-run non-profit Prayas Trust Meena Subrahmanyam, managing trustee, SLS Trust, Itishree Murmu and trustee Subodh Kumar among other dignitaries.

L&T's CSR Head Mabel Abraham and Murmu completed the formalities. The



proposed skill training hub will impart training to youths in basic construction skills such as masonry, bar bending, plumbing, pipe-welding and scaffolding.

Training will also be imparted in computer basics, coding and digital skills. The facility will comprise classrooms, State-of-the-art simulators, yards for practical

training and residential accommodation for the trainees.

To be established in a predominantly tribal area, the hub will provide the much-needed opportunity for tribal and rural youths to equip themselves with market-ready skills, giving them a springboard to access better careers and move up in life.

In Gajapati

Pregnant woman carried on shoulders



PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

Even though the Government is announcing various welfare schemes for people, still many of them are yet to reach the remote regions in Gajapati district.

There are many villages in the district where there are no motorable roads, due to which ambulances are not able to reach the doorsteps of patients. There have many instances

when patients, including pregnant women, are carried on shoulders by their relatives and fellow villagers to hospitals.

In one such incident, in Jagersingh village under Mohana block, where one Sunita Sabar developed labour pain, the villagers called up the 108 Ambulance. But though the emergency vehicle came, it could not reach the village due to the poor road condition.

Finding no other alternative, ambulance driver Santosh Nayak, pharmacist Rabinaryan Behera and helper Surendra Sethi reached the village after trudging over two kilometers and then carried the woman on a stretcher on their shoulders to the vehicle. The woman was admitted to the Chandragiri hospital, where she gave birth to a baby girl. The duo's conditions were stated to be stable.

INBRIEF

MANJOYT PLAY SCHOOL CELEBRATES ANNUAL DAY

Bhubaneswar: The city-based Manjoyt Play School celebrated its 8th Annual Day amidst cultural extravaganza recently. The function was chaired by Principal Subhadeepa Mohanty. Joining as guests of honour Corporator of Ward-6 Pritinanda



Routray, president of Niladrivihar Youth & Cultural Association Dr Prakash Chandra Panigrahi, social activist Lilly Jenamani and senior citizen Dr Purna Chandra Mohanty urged that students should be cultured and good citizens.

COHEN LAUNCHES ODISHA'S FIRST AEROSPACE PROG

Bhubaneswar: The Cohen International School (CIS), one of the leading educational institutions of Odisha, has announced launch of Odisha's first 'Aero Space Integrated Curriculum' for its students from academic year 2023-24. The school has also established the "Cohen Aero-Space Centre of Excellence" to provide state of the art learning experience for its students in the field of aerospace.



BHAPUR SENIOR CITIZENS' ASSN POLL HELD

Bhapur: The Senior Citizens' Association held its office bearers' election here. Lasmidhar Samantaray and Hadibandhu



Das were elected as executive presidents, Padmacharan Behera as vice president and Sharat Kumar Mahapatra as treasurer among others. The newly elected office bearers took oath to work for the betterment of the union. A proposal was presented in the meeting to submit a demand letter to the Government for a makeover of the local bus-stand.

MANCH'S SBA DRIVE: BARUNI GHAT CLEANED

Baleswar: The Gopalpur Nagarik Manch cleaned the historical Baruni Ghat under Aruhabad Panchayat in Baleswar district under its 441st Swachha Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) weekly programme. A mela is held here for two days with hundreds of vendors putting up their



stalls and lakhs of people visiting the spot. The area gets polluted with littering of polythene and other garbage. Led by Manch convenor Sudarsan Mohapatra, 50 volunteers cleaned the Baruni Ghat and set fire to the wastage dumps. Kamalakanta Das, Abhiram Sahu, Maheswar Senapati, Labanya Mishra among others were in the team. ZP Member Sisir Agasti, president Debendra Panda, former Sarapanch Gananath Tripathy and Sachindra Panigrahi encouraged the volunteers.

BRAHMAPUR ARTIST SCULPTS WOODEN SPARROWS

Brahmapur: The World Sparrow Day is observed on March 20 to raise awareness about sparrow conservation and protection as their numbers are declining globally. To mark the occasion, sand artist Satya Narayan Moharana here sculpted beautiful wooden sparrows. "The day is dedicated for conservation and safety of sparrows for which now we are able to hear sweet chirping sounds of the birds in our villages," said Moharana. He also appealed to keep pots filled with water before doors, on rooftops and at other open spaces for the sparrows and other birds in the summer days.



ELI LILLY LAUNCHES COPELLOR IN INDIA

Bhubaneswar: Eli Lilly, following approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), announced the launch of Copellor (Ixekezumab) in India for the treatment of adults with moderate-to-severe plaque psoriasis who are candidates for systemic therapy or phototherapy, as well as treatment of adult patients with active psoriatic arthritis. A humanised IgG4 monoclonal antibody, Copellor (Ixekezumab) is designed to specifically target IL-17A, a protein that plays a role in triggering and maintaining inflammation in psoriasis.

SAMSUNG CSR PROGRAMME CONCLUDES

Bhubaneswar: Samsung India's flagship CSR programme Samsung Innovation Campus concluded the Coding & Programming, AI and IoT courses for its first batch of 88 students in Bhubaneswar, reiterating Samsung's commitment to




being a strong partner of India and working alongside the Government in its mission to empower the country's youths and powering Digital India.


VEDANTA OBSERVES WATER DAY IN JHARSUGUDA


Jharsuguda: The Vedanta Aluminium observed the World Water Day by undertaking water conservation and awareness initiatives in Jharsuguda. The company also undertook pond restoration and cleaning activities with active participation of employee volunteers and professional experts.



DSPL-515







ଓଡ଼ିଶା ମାନ୍ୟତା

ରାଷ୍ଟ୍ରୀୟ ଓଡ଼ିଶା-ମାନ୍ୟତା ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

ଓଡ଼ିଶା-ମାନ୍ୟତା ଅନ୍ତର୍ଗତ ପରାମର୍ଶ ସେବାଗୁଡ଼ିକ

ଚିକିତ୍ସା ଭିତରେ ଥିବା ମାନ୍ୟତା ରୋଗୀ ମାନ୍ୟତା ବିଭିନ୍ନ ସମସ୍ୟା ଅଥବା ମାନ୍ୟତା ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ ସମ୍ବନ୍ଧିତ ସମସ୍ୟା

ନିଶ୍ଚାୟକ୍ଷେତ୍ର ଓ ଏଥିରେ ଥିବା ସମସ୍ୟା ସଂକ୍ରାନ୍ତ ପରାମର୍ଶ

ପରିସ୍ଥିତି ଅନୁସାରେ ଚଳିନିପାରିବା, ବୈଦ୍ୟାତ୍ମକ ଓ ପାରିବାରିକ କାରଣରୁ ମାନ୍ୟତା ସମସ୍ୟା ସମ୍ପର୍କରେ ପରାମର୍ଶ

ଆତ୍ମହତ୍ୟା ଭଳି ବିଚାର ମନରୁ ଦୂର କରିବା ପାଇଁ ପରାମର୍ଶ

ବିଦ୍ୟାର୍ଥୀଙ୍କର ଶାରୀରିକ, ସାମାଜିକ ଓ ଶିକ୍ଷା ଜନିତ ମାନ୍ୟତା ସମସ୍ୟା ପାଇଁ ପରାମର୍ଶ

କୌଣସି ପ୍ରକାର ମାନ୍ୟତା ଆଘାତ, ବିଷାଦ ଓ ମନଦଶା ଦୂରୀକରଣ ପାଇଁ ପରାମର୍ଶ

ନିଦ୍ରାହୀନତା ଓ ତତ ସମ୍ବନ୍ଧିତ ସମସ୍ୟା ପାଇଁ ପରାମର୍ଶ

ମାନ୍ୟତା ଓ ଭାବନାତ୍ମକ ସମସ୍ୟା ଅନୁଭବ ହେବାପାଇଁ ଓଡ଼ିଶା ମାନ୍ୟତା ହେଲ୍ପ ଲାଇନ୍ ନମ୍ବର ରେ କଲ୍ କରି ନିଶ୍ଚିତ ପରାମର୍ଶ ସେବା ଲାଭ କରନ୍ତୁ (୧୪୪୧୭ ଅଥବା ୧୮୦୦-୮୯୧-୪୪୧୭)

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ଆପଣଙ୍କ ଜିଲ୍ଲା ମୁଖ୍ୟ ଚିକିତ୍ସାଳୟସ୍ଥିତ "ମାନ୍ୟତା ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ କକ୍ଷ" ଅଛି ସବୁବେଳେ ଆପଣଙ୍କ ପାଖରେ ଆପଣଙ୍କ ସାଥରେ

ମାନ୍ୟତା ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟଯତ୍ନ ଅଧିନିୟମ-୨୦୧୭
ଜାତୀୟ ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ ମିଶନ ଓଡ଼ିଶା ପକ୍ଷରୁ ଜନହିତରେ ଜାରୀ

OIPR-10036/13/0006/2223

Rahul’s case echoes in UN



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/UNITED NATIONS

A verdict sentencing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to jail for two years echoed in the United Nations (UN) and it said the international body was aware of it.

When asked whether UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres was “worried about democracy” in India, Farhan Haq, deputy spokesperson for Secretary General, said late on Thursday, “I can say we’re aware of the reports regarding

the case of Rahul Gandhi. We understand that his party does plan to appeal the decision. That’s as much as I can say on that at this stage.”

Rahul was sentenced to two years in jail on Thursday by a Surat court in a 2019 criminal defamation case over his “Modi surname” remark.

He took to Twitter to give his initial reaction by quoting Mahatma Gandhi in Hindi. “My religion is based on truth and non-violence. Truth is my God, non-violence, the means to get it. — Mahatma Gandhi,” he tweeted.

String of initiatives launched to eliminate TB by 2025 in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/VARANASI

Asserting that “it’s difficult to accomplish new outcomes with old approaches,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi on World TB Day on Friday launched a string of innovative initiatives like TB-Mukt Panchayat, official pan-India rollout of a shorter TB Preventive Treatment and Family-centric care model for TB.

He said this would help India achieve TB elimination target by 2025, five years ahead of the global stipulated time.

The Prime Minister said the new initiatives to fight against the bacterial infection is in addition to a multi-pronged approach being already followed, including measures to enhance nutrition, increase people’s participation, treatment innovation, integration of technologies and disease prevention through programmes like Fit India, Yoga and Khelo India.

“These could become the



World TB Summit Varanasi 2023

global model for ending TB...” he said.

Under ‘TB Mukta Panchayat Abhiyan’ members of the local bodies are sensitised and trained about the disease, with them aiding the government’s implementation of the programme and achieving TB free status while the nation-wide rollout of a 3-month preventive treatment for those at risk of developing TB aims to reduce the course of treatment from the previous six months and replace the daily pills with a once-a-week medicine regimen.

Stating that 80 per cent of TB medicines are made in India, Modi lauded the role

played by the pharma industry and said it is a big strength to the world’s fight against TB. “I wish that fruits of each and every endeavour of India, campaign of India, innovation of India reach to the whole world...as we are committed towards the Global Good!,” he said at an event organised by the Union Health Ministry along with the Stop TB Partnership organisation..

The Prime Minister credited people’s participation for the great work that India has done in the fight against Tuberculosis. After the government’s appeal, about 10 lakh TB patients were adopted across

the country by people, including children of 10 to 12 years of age. Financial help to a TB patient under the programme has reached up to one thousand crore rupees.

“This addresses the challenge of nutrition for TB patients along with the government’s direct benefit transfer scheme started for TB patients in 2018. Approximately Rs 2,000 crore have been directly transferred into their bank accounts for their treatment, with 75 lakh TB patients benefiting from this. “Ni-kshay Mitras have now become a new source of energy for all TB patients,” he said.

The Prime Minister also drew the world’s attention to the integration of technology in the programme, with the Ni-kshay portal that can track all those with an active infection. He also said that ICMR has developed a new method for sub-national disease surveillance that has made India, apart from the WHO, the only country to have this kind of model.

Houses adjourned again amid uproar



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The deadlock to the Parliament’s second-leg of the Budget session is unlikely to be found before the end of the second-leg of the Budget session on April 6 as both the Houses were again adjourned for the day amidst heavy uproar even while the Lok Sabha managed to pass the Finance Bill with the Opposition members trooping into the well and shouting slogans “Modi-Adani Bhai Bhai”.

The battle-lines have turned sharper as the Congress member from Waynad, Kerala, Rahul Gandhi has been disqualified from his Lok Sabha member-

ship following his conviction by a Surat court.

Slogans like “Modi-Adani Bhai Bhai” and “We want JPC” raised by the opposition when the house resumed its proceedings at 1200 after being adjourned in the morning.

The Finance Bill, 2023 ‘tabled by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha saw its passage amid heavy noise by Opposition MPs demanding a JPC inquiry into the Adani Group issue. The ruling party members too sought apology from Rahul for his comments against the Indian democracy

Delhi Police registers case in violence at Indian High Commission in London

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking note of the incidents of violence targeting the Indian High Commission in London on Sunday last, the Delhi Police has registered a case in connection with the protest.

The case was registered by the special cell under the Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act as it involves unlawful activities carried out by certain people holding Indian nationality abroad, a senior police officer said here on Friday.

It was done after the Ministry of Home Affairs directed the Delhi Police to take appropriate legal action on the receipt of a report from the Ministry of External Affairs over the incident at the Indian High Commission March 19.



Last Sunday, the tricolour flying atop the Indian High Commission in London was grabbed at by a group of protesters waving separatist Khalistani flags and chanting pro-Khalistani slogans, leading to an arrest related to the violent disorder.

Officials from the mission said “attempted but failed” attack had been foiled and that the tricolour was now flying “grander”. The Metropolitan Police said two members of security staff sustained minor

injuries which did not require hospital treatment. An investigation has been launched.

India on last Sunday night summoned the British deputy high commissioner and demanded an explanation over the complete “absence of security”. In a strongly-worded statement, the Ministry of External Affairs said India finds “unacceptable” the indifference of the UK government to the security of Indian diplomatic premises and personnel in the UK.

‘Financial help being provided to States, UTs for promotion of film tourism’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Tourism issued guidelines in 2012 for extending financial support to state governments and Union territory administrations for promotion of film tourism, and a financial assistance of up to Rs 2 lakh per film is provided under it, the government has informed a parliamentary panel.

This was mentioned in a report on ‘Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations of the Committee contained in its Three Hundred Twenty Sixth Report on the subject ‘Role of Indian Missions Globally for the growth of Tourism in India’ tabled in Lok Sabha on Friday.

The committee in its report has also said that it had observed that many of the tourist spots and places of religious importance are located near the national highways

yet the state of the last-mile connectivity from the national highways to the tourist spot “leaves much to be desired”.

“The Committee feels that good quality last-mile connectivity is important to ensure a positive experience for tourists visiting a tourist destination in the country, which in turn, helps attract more tourists through word-of-mouth publicity.

“The Committee therefore recommends that the ministry may examine the state/quality of last mile connectivity roads at all such tourist spots near the National Highways at the earliest and ensure their construction and maintenance with the concerned Ministries/agencies to make the tourist places more accessible to tourists, both domestic and international, which will invariably increase the number of tourists visiting such places,” the panel had observed.

Rahul may have to vacate bungalow unless higher court stays conviction, say experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday stood disqualified from contesting Lok Sabha and Assembly elections for eight years unless a higher court stays his conviction, an expert on electoral laws said.

Now following his disqualification as an MP, Rahul Gandhi may have to vacate his official bungalow in Lutyens’ Delhi within a month if he does not get relief from a higher court in the criminal defamation case, an official said on Friday. Rahul Gandhi was allotted the 12, Tughlaq Lane bungalow after his election as a Lok Sabha MP in 2004.

“As he has been disqualified from Lok Sabha, he is not entitled to a government accommodation. According to rules, he will have to vacate his official bungalow within a month since the date of dis-



qualification order,” an official of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had to vacate her official Lodhi Estate bungalow in July 2020 as she was no longer eligible for it after her security cover had been downgraded.

This was Rahul Gandhi’s fourth Lok Sabha term. First elected to Lok Sabha in 2004 from Amethi, he represented that constituency for two more terms. In 2019, he lost the Amethi seat to Smriti Irani but managed to win from Wayanad.

Incidentally, the Congress-led UPA government, in 2013, had attempted to circumvent a Supreme Court ruling to set aside an RP Act provision under which a person sentenced to imprisonment of two years or more shall be disqualified “from the date of such conviction” and remain disqualified for another six years after serving time. Rahul Gandhi himself had opposed the ordinance at that time and tore the ordinance in a press conference as a token of protest.

Rahul Gandhi is the second member of Lok Sabha, after Lakshadweep MP P P Mohammed Faisal of the Nationalist Congress Party, to have been disqualified in the recent past following conviction. The Kavaratti sessions court in Lakshadweep had sentenced four persons, including Mohammed Faizal to 10 years in jail after they were found guilty in an attempt-to-murder case.

Def Min signs contract with BEL for ‘Project Himshakti’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a boost to indigenous production of weapon systems, Ministry of Defence on Friday signed a contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Hyderabad for procurement of two Integrated Electronic Warfare Systems ‘Project Himshakti’ at an overall cost of approximately Rs 3,000 crore.

Giving details of the contract, officials said here the project is under the Buy (Indian – IDMM) (Indigenously Designed Developed and

Manufactured)) category comprising contemporary and niche technologies.

‘Project Himshakti’ will encourage participation of Indian electronics and associated industries, including MSMEs, which are sub vendors of the BEL. It will generate employment of approximately three lakh man-days over a period of two years. The project is a significant leap forward in developing indigenous capabilities making the country ‘Aatmanirbhar’, in consonance with the Make-in-India initiative of the government.

SC directs convicts released during Covid emergency to surrender in 15 days

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed that all convicts and undertrial prisoners, who were released during the COVID-19 pandemic in a move to decongest jails, to surrender within 15 days. A bench of Justices MR Shah and CT Ravikumar said undertrial prisoners, who were released on emergency bail during the pandemic, can move for regular bail before competent courts after their surrender.

US pick for WB, Banga, cancels India meetings after tests Covid +

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian origin US nominee for World Bank president Ajay Banga, scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman here has tested positive for Covid-19. Hence, his meetings to take place on March 23 and 24 were cancelled.

According to a Finance Ministry statement, Banga’s meeting with Nirmala Sitharaman would not happen as he is in quarantine.

“During routine testing, Ajay Banga tested positive for COVID-19 but remains asymp-



tomatic. In adherence with local guidelines, he is quarantining in isolation,” the statement said.

Besides meeting with the Union finance minister, Banga was scheduled to meet Prime Minister Modi and External Affairs Minister Jaishankar and top officials during his two-day visit.

Banga’s New Delhi visit is the final stop on his three-week

global tour that began in Africa before progressing to Europe, Latin America, and Asia to drum up support for his candidature for the World Bank’s top position.

In a statement on Wednesday, the US Treasury Department had said, “While in India, Banga will meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as the Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman and the Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar.

“These discussions will focus on India’s development priorities, the World Bank, and global economic development challenges,” it said.

Banga’s New Delhi visit was the final stop on his three-week

global tour that began in Africa before progressing to Europe, Latin America, and Asia to drum up support for his candidature for the World Bank’s top position.

India endorsed Banga’s candidacy soon after his nomination was announced in February. Since then, a diverse coalition of governments has expressed their support for Banga, including Bangladesh, Côte d’Ivoire, Colombia, Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom.

During his global listening tour, Banga met with senior government officials, stakeholders, business leaders, entre-

preneurs, and civil society.

Along the way, he built continuous momentum for his candidacy, gaining the support of advocates, academics, development experts, executives, Nobel Laureates, and former government officials.

If elected to serve, Banga will draw from his experience living and working in emerging markets and his expertise in forging public-private partnerships to mobilise investments and action to confront long standing challenges.

That includes his efforts at Mastercard to successfully bring 500 million previously unbanked people into the digital economy, as well as its support for 50 million small businesses.

NIA chargesheets gangsters, criminals linked with pro-Khalistani terror outfits

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday filed a chargesheet against notorious gangsters/criminals, Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldy Brar, along with 12 others having links with the proscribed Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and several other pro-Khalistani terrorist outfits, in the second of the three terror-gangster nexus cases it is investigating. The latest action takes the total number of accused chargesheeted by the NIA so far in these cases to 26.

The chargesheet has exposed the linkages between members of criminal syndicates and drug smugglers with BKI and pro-khalistani outfits.

Lawrence Bishnoi, in custody since 2015, has been operating his terror-crime syndicate from jails in different States, along with Canada-based Goldy Brar, who is an accused in the killing of Pradeep Kumar, a Dera Sacha Sauda follower, in Faridkot in November 2022.



The Lawrence Bishnoi terror-crime-extortion syndicate was also responsible for providing killers for the RPG attack case on Punjab State Intelligence HQs (headquarters) at Mohali, which was carried out on directions of Harwinder Singh alia Rinda, a Pakistan-based BKI terrorist, NIA investigations have revealed, the NIA alleged.

Goldy Brar was found to have direct links with Lakhbir Singh alias Landa, another BKI operative working closely with Rinda, as revealed in NIA investigations so far, it said.

Lakhbir Singh is also an accused in the Mohali RPG

attack, as well as the December 2022 RPG (rocket propelled grenade) attack on Police Station Sirhali in Tarn Taran, Punjab.

Investigations against Landa and three others are continuing. “All the 14 accused have been charged with criminal conspiracy to unleash a wave of terror and carry out targeted killings of well-known social and religious leaders, movie stars, singers and businessmen,” the NIA said in a statement.

Besides having links with conspirators in Pakistan, the accused were also in contact with pro-Khalistani elements based in Canada, Nepal and other countries, NIA investigations have further revealed.

NIA has seized a huge cache of nine illegal and sophisticated weapons, 14 magazines, 298 rounds of ammunition and 183 digital devices and other incriminating material in raids across 74 locations in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chandigarh and Delhi in the case.

ED attaches ₹252.17 cr property in PMLA case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached immovable property in the form of commercial asset Ambience Tower at Shalimar Bagh locality here worth Rs 252.17 crore belonging to Ambience Towers Pvt. Ltd, a company of Ambience Group, promoted by Raj Singh Gehlot in connection with a money laundering investigation.

The ED initiated Investigation on the basis of an FIR and subsequent chargesheet filed by Anti-Corruption Bureau, Jammu and Kashmir under the Provisions of Ranbir Penal Code and Prevention of Corruption Samvat Act.

PMLA investigation revealed that Aman Hospitality Pvt. Ltd through its promoter director Raj Singh Gehlot was sanctioned a term loan facility of Rs 810



crore by a consortium of Banks led by J&K Bank to part finance its hotel project in Shahdara, Delhi.

The loan amount later turned into a non-performing asset (NPA). “During investigation, it was revealed that Raj Singh Gehlot had diverted loan funds and layered the same through a web of bank accounts belonging to his relatives and Ambience Group companies. In addition to

diversion of funds, it was also found that Raj Singh Gehlot had diverted materials to the other project sites of Ambience Group,” the ED said in a statement.

In line with the probe findings, Gehlot was arrested on July 28, 2021. His wife, Sheela Gehlot and other directors of Ambience Group Companies, Amit Gehlot, Shamsher Singh and Pawan Singh were arraigned as accused in the Prosecution Complaints (chargesheets in police parlance) filed by the ED.

The ED has already filed Prosecution Complaints dated September 24, 2021 and November 17, 2022 in the present case before the PMLA Court, Patiala House Courts here for commission of money laundering offences.

The PMLA court took cognizance through its order dated September 27, 2021 and November 30, 2022.

Ayush Min, Def Min ink pact to integrate Ayurveda in ECHS Polyclinics



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Ministry of Ayush and Department of ex-servicemen Welfare/ECHS under Union Ministry of Defence on Friday inked a pact to integrate Ayurveda in ECHS Polyclinics as an OPD service for five years period. These will be established at 10 polyclinics based at Ambala, Mysore, Ranchi, Nagpur, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Meerut, Danapur, and Allepey (Alappuzha).

Ayurveda centres are already in place in 37 cantonment Hospitals, 12 military hospitals of AFMC and Ayurveda OPD in AH R&R,

AF Hospital Hindan and five ECHS polyclinics. The MoU was signed by Dr Manoj Nesari, Adviser (Ayurveda) on behalf of the Ayush Ministry and Maj Gen NR Indurkar, Ex-servicemen Contributory Health Scheme on behalf of the Defence Ministry.

According to this MoU, Ayush Ministry will provide technical guidance from time to time and will empanel Ayurveda doctors and pharmacists for their engagement and provide list of essential Ayurveda medicines and any other technical support as may be required while the Defence Ministry will provide logistic and locations in the respective polyclinics.

AFSPA extended in parts of Arunachal, Nagaland

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Friday extended for six months the “disturbed area” status in parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958.

According to two separate notifications, the decisions have been taken after review of the law-and-order situation in both the states. The AFSPA gives armed forces personnel, operating in disturbed areas, sweeping powers to search, arrest, and to open fire if they deem it necessary for “maintenance of public order”.

The home ministry said the central government in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the AFSPA 1958 (28 of 1958) had declared the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai and Mahadevpur police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering the state of Assam as ‘disturbed area’ on September 30, 2022.

One more police station



area has been brought under the ambit of the AFSPA through the fresh notification.

“And whereas a further review of the law and order situation in the state of Arunachal Pradesh has been undertaken. Now, therefore, Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai, Mahadevpur and Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering the state of Assam, are declared as ‘disturbed area’ under Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 for a period of six months with effect from April 1, 2023, unless withdrawn earlier,” one of the notifications said.

In the other notification, the home ministry said the central government in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the AFSPA, 1958 (28 of 1958) had declared nine districts and 16 police stations in four other districts of Nagaland as ‘disturbed area’ for a period of six months with effect from October 1, 2022. It said, now, the disturbed area status will be applicable in eight districts and 21 police stations areas falling under five other districts.

“And whereas a further review of the law and order situation in the state of Nagaland has been undertaken. Now, therefore, Dimapur, Nuland, Chumoukedima, Mon, Kiphire, Noklak, Phek and Peren districts in Nagaland and the areas in Nagaland falling within the jurisdiction of i) Khuzama, Kohima North, Kohima South, Zubza and Kezocha police stations in Kohima District; ii) Mangkolemba, Mokochung-I, Longtho, Tuli, Longchem and Anaki C’ police stations in Mokochung District... are declared as ‘disturbed area,’ the notification said.

RAHUL’S DISQUALIFICATION FROM LS Opp leaders main target in Modi’s new India: Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Days after calling Rahul Gandhi the “biggest asset” and “biggest TRP” of the BJP, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday took a turn this time slamming the Narendra Modi Government for getting the tallest Congress leader disqualified from the Lok Sabha in a defamation case.

Moments after Gandhi’s disqualification from the House, Banerjee said the Opposition leaders were the main target of in the new India led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

While Bengal Opposition parties—save the BJP—would not exhibit much of enthusiasm over Banerjee’s statement saying she was more concerned about the rising popularity of “Under PM Modi’s New India, Opposition leaders have become the prime target of BJP” Banerjee who is also the president of Trinamool Congress wrote in her Twitter post. Condemning the kind of treatment meted out to the Congress leader she said



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee speaks during a meeting, in Kolkata, on Friday PTI Photo

“Today, we have witnessed a new low for our constitutional democracy.” Attacking the BJP government for pursuing double standards she said while on one side saffron leaders with criminal records were made ministers and on the other leaders of the opposition parties were made victims of political speeches. She said, “While BJP leaders with criminal antecedents are inducted into the cabinet, Opposition leaders are disqualified for their speeches.”

Her nephew and TMC National general secretary Abhishek Banerjee wrote that “Democracy” in today’s India sounded oxymoronic. Though

he would not refer to the Rahul Gandhi issue he wrote, “Democratic India is an oxymoron now.” TMC MP Shantanu Sen called it a “black day” wondering whether BR Ambedkar would have relished such a huge drop in Indian democratic standards today.

“This is a Black day for the Indian democracy. Had the father of our Constitution BR Ambedkar been alive he would have literally cried,” Sen said wondering “how a ruling party with such a brute majority in Parliament can stoop such low to script such a dirty game.” Gandhi was disqualified from being a Member of Lok Sabha hours after he was sentenced to two years of imprisonment by a Surat court in a caste defamation case.

The Left too, hit out at BJP government for its “vindictive attitude” saying “plot to disqualify Gandhi was hatched divert attention from burning issues like corruption, unemployment” etc. Reacting sharply on issue senior counsel and CPI(M) MP Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya said.

Cambodia mountain to be home to Indian tigers

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A technical committee comprising officials from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is on the job to advise their counterparts in Cambodia to help them execute dreams of bringing Indian big cats in their land under the world’s first ambitious translational tiger programme conceived last year.

On its part, Cambodia has already identified 90 acres of forest land at its Tatai wildlife sanctuary in the Cardamom Mountain to be the home to the Indian tigers whenever they arrive.

SP Yadav, Head of the NTCA told *The Pioneer*, “We have constituted a technical support group which is advising Cambodia to achieve certain levels of standards with respect to staffing, prey base, habitat and protection. Once these are achieved, further action will be taken.”

He said hence it is too early to talk about the numbers of big cats proposed to be shifted to Cambodia. No tiger has been spotted in Cambodian forests for the last 15 years. The



last picture of a tiger was taken in the eastern highlands of Cambodia in 2007. The country is now committed to have the tigers, which is included in the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species, back to its forests.

Though Yadav was non-committal when the translocation will happen, Cambodia is pinning hopes that the tigers may arrive by the year-end, as has also been stated by Suwana Gauntlett, founder and CEO of Wildlife Alliance, as per reports.

Officials in the Union Environment Ministry said that before the Indian big cats lands on the foreign land, it is necessary that ground and field works be done to ensure they are safe and get the conducive environment to settle down properly to make the translocation successful in the long term.

4 yrs ordeal of 5 Indian sailors jailed in Iran ends

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an emotional homecoming, five Indian sailors — who had been arrested, jailed, acquitted and grounded after they were stranded in Iran in June 2019, returned home on Friday after suffering four years of ordeal.

The five sailors — Aniket S. Yenpure (31), Mandar M. Worlikar (28), both of whom are from Mumbai, Pranav A. Tiwari (23) from Patna, Naveen M. Singh (30) from New Delhi and Thamizh R. Selvan (33) from

Chennai — appeared overwhelmed as they bowed and touched the Indian soil after they arrived at the city airport from Iran by an Iran Air Tehran-Mumbai flight this afternoon.

The sailors were accorded a moving reception by their relatives and friends, who cheered vociferously, hugged and lifted them in the air and celebrated the quintet who shed tears of happiness. “We have never been so happy as we are today. Nearly 45 months of nightmare has

ended today. We underwent lots of hardships like being arrested, thrown into jails there, fighting legal battles, getting acquitted and obtaining necessary permissions to fly back to India.

Finally we are back in a country to which we belong,” Aniket Yenpure said. “For the next one month, we will rest and be with our families,” Yenpure said. Naveen (New Delhi), Tiwari (Bihar) and Selvan (Tamil Nadu) will stay with Mumbai-based Yenpure and Worlikar for the next few days,

before returning to their home cities. Aniket thanked the Indian Embassy in Tehran which arranged for the emergency travel papers and air tickets for him and his fellow sailors and also a few Iranian lawyers who fought their case for more than six months and got them released from the jail and ensured their return to India. “The authorities in Iran seized our passports and Continuous Discharge Certificate (CDC)-cum-Seafarer’s Identity document.

Probe defamation plea filed by Union Min against Raj CM, court directs Delhi Police

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday directed the Delhi Police to probe the criminal defamation complaint filed by Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat against Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot over his remarks on the alleged Sanjivani co-operative scam.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Harjeet Singh Jaspal directed the Joint Commissioner of Police concerned to “investigate the matter either himself or through an officer not below the rank of an Inspector” and file the investigation report on April 25.

“...Keeping in mind the facts and circumstances and also keeping in mind the legislative mandate...(considering the fact that the accused is residing outside the local jurisdiction of this court), this court directs an investigation into the matter, through Delhi Police. Keeping in mind the sensitivity of matter, it is directed that Joint Commissioner concerned shall monitor investigation,” the judge said. The judge further said that investigation should endeavour to find answers to three questions —whether complainant Shekhawat was



addressed as “an accused” in the Sanjivani scam by accused Gehlot, whether Gehlot stated that the allegations against Shekhawat stand proved in the Sanjivani scam and whether Shekhawat or his family members have been arrayed as “an accused” in investigation of the scam. Union Jal Shakti Minister Shekhawat had filed complaint on March 4. The complaint alleged that Gehlot, a senior Congress leader, defamed the BJP leader by alleging his role in the scam.

“There is irreparable damage caused to his (Shekhawat) reputation,” the complaint claimed. The complaint alleged that Gehlot has been making defamatory remarks, trying to tarnish Shekhawat’s image and affect his political career. In Sanjivani Credit Cooperative Society Ltd, thousands of investors allegedly lost Rs 900 crore. Rajasthan Police’s Special Operations Group (SOG) has been investigating case since August 2019.

Thieves, scamsters running freely while Rahul punished: Uddhav

TN ■ RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Friday dubbed the disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as a Lok Sabha member, as a “murder of democracy” and said that “it’s now a crime to call a thief a thief” in the country.

The Lok Sabha Secretariat’s decision to issue a notice to Gandhi disqualifying him an MP a day after he was convicted and sentenced to two years in jail in a defamation case evoked strong reaction from the MVA constituents in the state — Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena who said that the Congress leader is being punished for “exposing” the Narendra Modi government.

Maharashtra’s former chief minister and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray said Gandhi’s disqualification as an MP was nothing but a “a murder of democracy” “It’s a crime to call even a thief a thief in the country,” Uddhav said.

“The thieves and scamsters are running around freely while Rahul Gandhi has been punished for calling a thief a thief... This is a blatant murder of democracy. All institutions are



under pressure. Whatever is happening of the is beginning of end of democracy in the country. We need to take our fight against the Modi government to a new level to restore democracy in country,” Uddhav said.

Coming down heavily on Lok Sabha Secretariat’s decision over Gandhi’s disqualification, NCP chief Sharad Pawar tweeted, “The disqualification of Mr Rahul Gandhi and Mr Faizal a few months ago as MP’s of Lok Sabha are against the basic tenets of the constitution, where democratic values are being curtailed. This is condemnable and against the very principles on which the constitution is based.”

“Our Constitution guarantees right of each Individual to fair justice; liberty of thought; equality of status and opportunity and fraternity assuring dignity of each Indian,” Pawar added.

Corrupt Cong wants to make K’taka its ATM, fill coffers, alleges Shah

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the Congress is degenerating across the country, and has now set its eyes on Karnataka to make the state its ATM and fill its coffers at the national level.

Speaking in the poll-bound State, he appealed to people of Karnataka not to give a “half and incomplete government”, and to form a BJP government with full majority and thereby strengthen the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai.

“Congress party is degenerating across the country, the Congress people don’t have any state with them that can fill the Congress’ central treasury, they want an ATM.... They want Karnataka to become Congress’ ATM, and the corrupt Congress’ eyes are now set



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the foundation laying ceremony of Sahakar Samridhhi Soudha and the inauguration of various development works of the Department of Cooperation (Karnataka), in Bengaluru, on Friday PTI Photo

on Karnataka,” Shah said. Addressing a beneficiaries’ meet organised by Karnataka Cooperative department and other departments, he asked people whether they will form a BJP government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s leadership in Karnataka or a

Congress government with Rahul Gandhi at the helm. “Wherever the Congress has formed the government, their history is corruption, humiliation of Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis, and strengthening anti-national forces,” he alleged. Bommai, veteran BJP leader B

S Yediyurappa, Karnataka Co-operation Minister S T Somashekar among others were present at the event.

Highlighting that the Modi government banned Popular Font of India (PFI), Shah said, “Siddaramaiah’s Congress government (earlier), used to withdraw cases against PFI, but Narendra Modi government by banning PFI has secured the entire South India, and also the entire country.” Claiming credit for the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, he said, the Congress party was “delaying, obstructing and misleading” for 70 years, but Modi has laid the foundation for the temple and it will be ready very soon.

He also said that PM Modi, by abrogating Article 370, has put a bridle on terrorism in the entire country. “Modi’s mission is to make the entire country prosperous, take forward every state including Karnataka.”

CBI arrests Joint DGFT in bribery

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Friday arrested a Joint DGFT of Directorate General of Foreign Trade for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 5 lakh.

The Central Bureau of Investigation has arrested a Joint DGFT, Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Rajkot (Gujarat) for demanding and accepting a bribe of Rs Five Lakh from the Complainant,” the agency said in a statement.

The CBI arrested Jawri Mal Bishnoi, Joint DGFT in the corruption case, officials said. A case was registered against the officials on the allegations of demanding undue advantage to the tune of Rs 9 lakh from the complainant.

It was further alleged that complainant had submitted six files containing all required documents of periodical export of food cans to DGFT, Rajkot to issue no objection certificate (NOC) so as to release their bank guarantee of around Rs 50 lakh.

SC to hear Opp parties plea over misuse of CBI, ED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to list for hearing on April 5 a plea by 14 opposition parties, led by the Congress, alleging arbitrary use of central probe agencies against political opponents.

A bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud took note of the submissions of senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the Opposition parties, and said the plea would be taken up for hearing on April 5.

“I am asking for the guidelines for the future. This is a remarkable convergence of 14 parties against the misuse of the agencies, both CBI and ED,” Singhvi said, and claimed that 95 per cent cases of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) are against the leaders of opposition. The senior lawyer referred to the rise in the number of cases filed



by the CBI and ED after the NDA government came to power in 2014. “Second statistics, pre-2014 and post-2014. There is a humongous jump in cases. The rate of conviction is four to five per cent. We are asking for pre-arrest guidelines and post-arrest bail guidelines,” Singhvi said.

Sources close to the deliberations which led to the filing of the common plea by 14 political parties said Delhi Chief Minister and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal played an important role in persuading other opposition leaders for moving the top court jointly.

The plea alleged there is an alarming rise in the use of coercive criminal processes against opposition political leaders and other citizens exercising their fundamental right to dissent.

“Investigating agencies such as CBI and ED are being increasingly deployed in a selective and targeted manner with a view to completely crush political dissent and upend the fundamental premises of a representative democracy,” a statement issued on behalf of a petitioner alleged.

The plea filed through lawyer Shadan Farasat cited some statistics and said they demonstrated a “shocking and unconstitutional state of affairs”.

Besides the Congress, other parties who are part of the joint move are the DMK, RJD, BRS, Trinamool Congress, AAP, NCP, Shiv Sena (UBT), JMM, JD(U), CPI(M), CPI, Samajwadi Party and the J&K National Conference, the statement said.

2-day Gaj Utsav from April 9

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India’s two mega and important conservation focused projects involving tiger and elephants are completing their 50th and 30th year of existence respectively this year which the Government has plans to celebrate with much fan-fare next month.

President Droupadi Murmu will inaugurate a two-day “Gaj Utsav” on April 9 in Assam’s Kaziranga National Park to commemorate the successful completion of 30 years of Project Elephant while Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch a three-day mega event on April 7 in Mysuru in Karnataka to mark the completion of 50 years of Project



Tiger and showcase India’s tiger conservation success globally, officials said on Friday. The Prime Minister will also release the latest tiger census data, the government’s vision for tiger conservation during ‘Amrit Kaal’ and a commemorative coin, said S P Yadav, member secretary, National Tiger

Conservation Authority (NTCA). India launched Project Tiger on April 1, 1973 to promote tiger conservation. Initially, it covered nine tiger reserves spread over 18,278 sq km. At present, India has 53 tiger reserves covering more than 75,000 sq km (approximately 2.4 per cent of the country’s geographical area) of tiger habitat.

With a current population of about 3,000 tigers, India is home to more than 70 per cent of the global wild tiger population and their number is increasing at six per cent per annum. The tiger reserves are repositories for biodiversity conservation in the country. These ensure regional water security and carbon sequestration and thus contribute in

accomplishing India’s climate change mitigation targets. Similarly, ‘Gaj Utsav’ a two-day event to commemorate Project Elephant which was launched in 1991-92 as a centrally-sponsored scheme to protect elephants, their habitat and corridors, prevent human-elephant conflict and to ensure the welfare of captive elephants in India, will be inaugurated by the President at Kaziranga National Park on April 9, Minister of State for Environment Ashwani Choubey told reporters here.

Elephant is a national heritage animal protected under Schedule I of the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972. India accounts for more than 60 per cent of the global wild elephant population.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Inconsistent

ONDC is making a foray into the city transport sector but its very existence is problematic

Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC) has entered the city transport sector by tying up with a Bengaluru-based ride-hailing company. The objective is to check the market dominance of aggregators like Uber and Ola. ONDC, a Government-run protocol on the lines of UPI, is also reportedly negotiating with more companies in the sector in several other cities. While well-intended, there are fundamental flaws in the idea of ONDC. When it was launched in September last year, it was claimed that it would check the monopoly of global e-commerce giants like Amazon and Walmart. "After UPI, another game changing idea to democratise commerce - ONDC soft launch today to select consumers, sellers and logistics providers. Get ready for a world of choice, convenience and transparency," Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal tweeted the day ONDC was launched. But isn't checking monopolistic practices the duty of the Competition Commission of India (CCI)? The Competition Act, 2002, was passed by Parliament in 2002, to which the President accorded assent in January 2003. It was subsequently amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007. In accordance with the provisions of the Amendment Act, the Competition Commission of India and the Competition Appellate Tribunal were established. The CCI is now fully functional with a Chairperson and six members, according to the CCI's website. The provisions of the Competition Act relating to anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position were notified on May 20, 2009.



"It is the statutory duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade carried on by other participants, in markets in India as provided in the Preamble as well as Section 18 of the Act," says the CCI website. The commission is also mandated to give its opinion on competition issues to government or statutory authority and to undertake competition advocacy for creating awareness of competition law, it adds. Against this backdrop, the very idea of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry setting up a body for the same purpose is duplication of work. Besides, it also militates against the principle Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stated more than once: the government has no business to be in business. It is in pursuance of this principle that the Government has been privatising public sector undertakings. But, by launching ONDC, the Ministry of Commerce & Industry will be ensuring government interference in the economy — something that is not in tune with the Modi Government reformist agenda. On the face of it, ONDC's new forays may seem impressive but in reality these don't appear to be consistent with the newly emerging policy framework. Instead of zealously promoting ONDC, the Ministry of Commerce & Industry should focus on boosting manufacturing.

PICTALK



Women in traditional dresses celebrate Zangtri as part of three-day Navreh (Kashmiri New Year) festival

PTI

Are you contributing to electronic waste?

E-waste is a growing concern not only in India but also globally. With the launch of newer devices, our greed leads us to buy the latest ones

Christian Lous Lange says "technology is an effective servant but a dangerous master". There is no denying everyone is addicted to technology in some way or another. Everyone has seen the transition from a wired telephone to the first cell phones followed by the latest, lighter and better version of cell phones. However, have we ever thought that today's technology will be obsolete someday? Today, technology has affected almost every aspect from advancements in education, medicine or transport to easy access to socialization, food, healthcare and productivity. Every year, big tech companies come up with new versions of their devices. This leads to the market to shift to its updated version. As a result, many individuals replace their phones or gadgets with new ones, causing a lot of E-waste. Today, almost 10 billion people have smartphones, and in 3-4 years without access to repair these devices will add to an enormous amount of e-waste that already exists. Though buying latest gadgets keeps an individual



updated, in the long run their constant use will affect our planet's health severely. According to a research, India is the 3rd largest E-waste producer after China and the USA. E-waste or electronic waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world. It includes discarded electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, notepads, computers, radios and televisions. Computer devices account for nearly 70% of e-waste, followed by the telecom sector, medical equipment and electrical equipment.

Unfortunately, these devices end up in landfills, where they release hazardous gases into the atmosphere. The toxic components so released affect human health in terms of skin irritation, lung infections, kidney problems, nausea and others. They also contribute to soil contamination, polluting the envi-

ronment and most importantly harm and threat to wildlife. According to a recent study, E-waste has reached alarming levels with 5.3 billion phones thrown away every year. Since the last 5 years, waste has grown by 21% and is expected to reach 74.2 MT by 2030. If not recycled or disposed of properly, heavy metals in e-waste emit toxic substances causing serious environmental concern.

At the individual level, there are several solutions that can help reduce e-waste such as considering repairing a smartphone instead of buying a new one or preferring to donate old devices such as laptops, computers or notepads to schools or charitable organisations that can find a use for the product. Educating high-school students about e-waste's harmful effects has a greater impact on stopping its spread. Adopting changes in technology such as cloud computing and the internet of things can even help with dematerialization. In India, many e-waste recycling startups such as Cashify, Attero recycling, Namu E-waste, Binbag and many more have come up

with the objective of conserving resources by adopting economical and responsible disposal techniques of e-waste.

These startups are working day and night to create opportunities to transfer waste into socially and industrially beneficial raw materials such as valuable metals, plastics and glass. They are using simple, cost-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies suitable for Indian conditions. As climate change effects grow, it becomes the responsibility of its citizens to help the planet and prevent e-waste issues. Also, with the 5G revolution, it is imperative to recycle old smartphones. It is important to understand that a difference can only be made at the individual level.

E-waste is a growing concern not only in India but also globally, as the moment electronic devices get introduced, an individual's greed leads them to buy the latest one while the old ones take space in the cupboard drawers. We need a safe channel for recycling obsolete equipment.

(The writer is a teacher at a reputed school in Delhi)



SAKSHI SETHI

Myanmar nightmare continues unabated

It's been more than two years since the coup, yet the low-intensity civil war raging on in our neighbouring country is set to last for a long time



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

More than two years have passed since the coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, which prevented the elected members of the National League for Democracy, which had won 396 seats out of 476 in the Lower House of Parliament in the country's November 2020 elections, from assuming office. The junta that perpetrated the coup arrested Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD leader and iconic symbol of the country's struggle for democracy, and leaders of her party. It unleashed a vicious repression campaign.

The Government continues to face growing countrywide resistance with murderous violence. Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 6, 2023, that, overall, the military's airstrikes against civilian locations increased by 141 per cent in the second year of its takeover, and its shelling of communities, including hospitals schools and places of worship, by over 100 per cent. During the same period, incidents in which homes and neighbourhoods were set on fire rose by 380 per cent. This led to an estimated 1,200 per cent increase in the number of homes destroyed. He further stated that reports continued to be received daily, particularly from the Sagaing region, north-west of Mandalay, of ongoing incidents, with soldiers reportedly moving from village to village, looting and setting fire to homes and farms.

Türk cited his UN colleagues as saying 39,000 structures had been burned in villages and towns by the military since the coup. Overall, credible sources verified that at least 2,947 civilians, including 244 children, had been massacred by the military and its affiliates during this period. More than one third of these confirmed deaths occurred in military custody. The actual number of civilians killed is far higher. He further said that, besides those killed in military or police action, detainees across Myanmar had reported severe beatings; mock executions; suspension from ceilings without food or

water; electrocution; and acts of sexual violence as well as squalid detention conditions.

The question is, how long will Myanmar groan under the Tatmadaw's—as Myanmar's army is called—iron heel? Despite the savagery of the generals' repression, the country, to all appearances, is slipping out of their control. Ranged against them is the National Unity Government (NUG) formed by some NLD leaders, activists and representatives of several insurgent ethnic organisations and minor parties, on April 16, 2021. Its armed wing, the People's Defence Force (PDF), was established on May 5, 2021. According to a report by Richard R Paddock in *The New York Times* of 6 June, 2022, it had a total strength of 60,000. As indicated by the latest reports, it now comprises 300 battalions with over 250,000 soldiers.

A report in Mizzima (A Burmese multi-media news organization) on September 9, 2022, cites a brief by SAC-M, released on September 5, 2022, as saying that the military does not effectively control the country, and is incapable of governing it. According to



THE QUESTION IS, HOW LONG WILL MYANMAR GROAN UNDER THE TATMADAW'S — AS MYANMAR'S ARMY IS CALLED — IRON HEEL?

the report, the National Unity Government (NUG) is the legitimate government of Myanmar and is at the centre of a democratic revolution shaped by organisations opposed to Myanmar's military junta. These organisations are the de facto authorities over more of Myanmar's population and territory than the junta, which has stable control over only 72 out of the country's 330 townships, which comes to only 17 per cent of Myanmar's land area, because many are small urban townships. In an article published on September 29, 2022, in *The Interpreter*, brought out daily by the Lowy Institute, an Australia-based independent think tank, Adam Simpson cites a report by the SAC-M, saying that the NUG and ethnic resistance organisations effectively controlled over 52 per cent of Myanmar's territory. Twenty-three per cent were contested and the junta dominated 17 per cent.

The Tatmadaw suffered from low morale and desertion. The latter rate has fallen recently because of tough action to curb it. Tatmadaw's other weaknesses remain. Its weaponry is more suitable for

conventional warfare than anti-guerrilla operations; its younger generation lacks combat experience. On the other hand, the People's Defence Force lacks numerical strength besides heavy artillery, tanks, and aircraft. This is essential for winning large battles in the plains.

What seems likely in the foreseeable future is a stalemate, with the Junta controlling the capital Nay Pyi Taw and some other towns and strips of territory and the NUG and the armed forces of the ethnic minorities controlling the rest. The Junta is being attacked even in townships where the Tatmadaw is present, and may lose control over them. That it is apprehensive and struggling to hold on to these is clear from the imposition of martial law in 37 newly formed towns on February 2 and three more on February 22, bringing the total number of townships under martial law to 50 out of 330. Even these moves may not help. It is difficult to reverse the flow when the tide turns against you.

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KANGAROOS HAVE A STRONG TAIL

Sir — Australians have come through a difficult phase and defeated Team India in their own den. This is a very rare occasion as we count on home wins in series after series. Team India struggled to tackle pace in the first two outings and succumbed to spin in the decider and won the series. The writing is on the wall in the ODI world cup this year. This is the second time India has lost a bilateral ODI series against Australia. And what's in common between their 3-2 loss in 2019 and the 2-1 defeat in this series is the fact that the Men in Blue were ahead on both occasions.

They led the 2019 series 2-0 before losing three in a row. Rohit Sharma and coach Rahul Dravid have a lot of work to do as they aim to regain the trophy later this year. For now, the Aussies will relish regaining the top spot in the ODI rankings. They will also fly back home with the ODI series trophy as a consolation after losing out on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy earlier in the trip. For Australia, the tail wagged, the spin did the trick and Aussie batsmen pulled up their socks to make a match of it.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

LEAST PAINFUL DEATH PENALTY?

Sir — What is the most efficient method of death penalty enforcement? The Supreme Court sparked such a debate by asking the government to hold a discussion on the issue on Tuesday. However, this is a complicated issue because determining the method of capital punishment is considered the responsibility of the legislature rather than the judiciary. Perhaps therefore the Supreme Court has stated unequivocally that it will not issue an order addressing the method of applying the death penalty. However, this question is necessary to determine whether the current method of imposing a death sentence meets legal and constitutional requirements. The current hanging method was last upheld by the Supreme Court in 1983, but the issue must be revisited considering scientific and technological advances since then. This need is confirmed when

Blessing in disguise



Rahul Gandhi's conviction in the defamation case can prove blessings in disguise to strengthen democracy. Rahul Gandhi was convicted in a defamation case by the Surat court and sentenced to two years' punishment. Bail was also granted to appeal in the upper court. Rahul Gandhi's conviction can strengthen Indian democracy. Just a few days ago Congress spokesperson also uttered unwanted words against Modi and had to approach the supreme court for bail. With Rahul Gandhi's conviction in the 2024 Parliament elections no unhealthy

language will be used and electioneering will be pleasant without filthy language. This will automatically strengthen the democratic structure of the country.

At present, there is pandemonium in both houses of the parliament due to undesirable utterances by Rahul on foreign land. The ruling party demands an apology from Rahul. It is expected that Rahul Gandhi will learn a lesson from this conviction. This is the first time that Rahul has been convicted for the first time, but he is habitual of using undesirable and unwanted language. In the last election, his slogan "Chowkidar chor hai" became very famous and was directed at Modi. In the last Parliament elections, he had to apologise before the supreme court for misinterpretation of supreme court orders. Let us hope that Rahul Gandhi's conviction may prove a blessing in disguise to strengthen democracy in India.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

we look at the situation in other countries around the world.

Whether the current hanging process is considered the least painful or any other method after considering all aspects—the principle of dignity of death is bound to be vindicated. If another method is found to be superior, the current method will be ruled unconstitutional. The revised method can then be ratified by the legislature. In today's era, when the discussion of direct encounters with criminals appears to be gaining traction in our country for a variety of reasons, it is expected that the apex court's initiative will make us more aware of justice criteria.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

Sir — The US State Department releases its annual Human Rights Report every year. In those countries, human rights are violated indiscriminately. If the names of those countries are mentioned in this report even after evidence of human rights violations, will those countries accept those strong

allegations? They will reject outright and say that America has no right to interfere in our internal affairs. As India will now bluntly tell the US State Department. Because in the just-released report, it has been said for India that there are 'cases of human rights abuses and people from minority communities, critics of the government and journalists are targeted'.

In Monday's report, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was closely monitoring developments in India "including increasing human rights abuses in the country" in the presence of Foreign Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. There is no need to look for distant events. A day after the publication of this report, Kannada actor Chetan Kumar was arrested for a tweet criticising a Hindu nationalist ideology. Therefore, the US State Department's allegation has some substance.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

NOW THE GOVT DECIDES WHAT WE EAT

Unlike the days of yore, Govts need to incentivise crops which suit modern life



In the early human civilisations, it was geography and weather that decided what crops were to be grown in any region. The same crop was consumed by the people of that area. Exports were tough and risky. But, in modern civilisation, Governments directly or indirectly control the food consumed.

Government subsidies are offered in various ways. It can be direct transfers to farmers by cash transfer (DBT) or by providing them with subsidized electricity, water, diesel, pesticides, fertilizer etc. Subsidies have also been provided in the form of MSP (minimum selling price) for certain agricultural products. Subsidies given to small and big enterprises are to set up export-oriented units or food processing units, cold storages, warehouses, or to set up SEZs or food parks to enhance the production of a particular cereal crop, fruit, vegetable, fish, meat products or certain packed products/processed food (dairy, apiculture) etc. By giving subsidies to farmers, the government incentivizes farmers to grow a particular crop, which can become a mass consumption item as government subsidies make it really cheap to produce and reduce the price of the products, and these crops when subsidized can change the dietary habits of not only millions but billions of people. A remarkable example of such action is the USA subsidizing corn and corn-related products which have flooded not only



the American market but also the world market with products like corn flour, cornstarch, corn syrup etc. Another remarkable example is from India. Government subsidy on rice and sugarcane has made India one of the largest producers of this agricultural produce. It has also made India one of the biggest exporters of these both commodities and flooding not only the Indian market but also the world market with it. Also, the Indian government gives rice and sugar subsidised to public distribution centres.

Well, there is nothing wrong in giving incentives to farmers to produce more to get good rates for their produce, but in the case of India, the biggest problem that we are facing is, that both these crops are highly water-intensive crops and a country of 1.4 billion is already facing a lot of trouble with its groundwater and water irrigation. Exporting these crops is like exporting water from the country. Rice cultivation also produces a large amount of methane, which is a harmful greenhouse gas (GHG). Another problem is that both these crops are high in carbohydrates and combined with an unhealthy lifestyle can lead to diseases such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and other heart-related issues. Governments across the world should, before incentivising a certain crop, consider that incentivizing one crop can really impact the consumption patterns of the masses. It can have a detrimental effect on the health of millions of people.

Another remarkable example is from the industrialization period in Europe and America. Potatoes were made a mass-consumed vegetable as the labour working in the factories needed high calories and carbohydrates to function in the long shifts of the factories. This dietary habit continued even after the industrialization era ended. For the generations after that, potatoes still remained the go-to vegetable as it was a cheap vegetable and people ate it in the past, hence the generations copied the same eating habits even after changes in working and lifestyle.

Today's lifestyle requires less physical work and more mental effort, which requires crops and dietary habit changes. This change can benefit generations to come. For example, eyesight weakness and malnutrition are common problems children face these days. To curtail these problems vital vitamins like vitamin A and C-rich fruits and vegetables can be incentivized by the government. Less water-intensive cereals like Bajra, Jau, and Ragi can be incentivized to become part of the daily meal plan. The year 2023 has been declared the millet international year by the United Nations. This is "as it consumes 70% less water than rice and needs 40% less energy in processing and is climate-friendly and environmentally friendly."

(The writer is the Director of Rath Public Schools)

Empower ‘Divyangs’ with skills, inclusion

There is no dearth of opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, provided they are equipped with the right set of skills. The Govt is working in this direction



Divyangjan or persons with disabilities (PwDs) are a significant social group but are rarely provided with the right kind of opportunities, skills and platforms to showcase their talent and productive potential. It is unfortunately presumed that PwDs cannot make any meaningful contributions to our economy's growth, which is wrong. People with disabilities have immense potential to contribute significantly to the economy but they need skills that are best suited to them. It is an irony that PwDs, who account for more than 2 per cent of our total population, have not been allowed to be a part of mainstream discourse and pursuits aimed at empowerment through inclusion.

Unfortunately, the employability rate for PwDs is very low. It is estimated that only 36 per cent of India's 26 million PWDs are working. As per a report by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on PWDs, nearly 64 per cent of persons with disabilities in India don't have jobs. More disabled men than women have jobs. As per an assessment of market intelligence, Unearth Insight, only 34 lakh out of almost 3 crore PwDs are employed but 1.3 crores are employable. Most of them are employed in organised and unorganised sectors, government entities or self-employed. It is therefore necessary to ensure that most PwDs get gainful jobs but how?

In order to ensure that persons with disabilities lead a dignified life independently, they must be provided with high-quality education. This is so that they have the freedom to choose their careers and have equal employment opportunities. There are several examples where Divyang people have achieved impressive feats in many fields thanks to their indomitable courage, talent and determination. If provided with the right environment, opportunities and skills, they can excel in every field. Education, in particular skill-based education, is the key to empower-

AS PER A REPORT BY THE UNION MINISTRY OF STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION ON PwDs, NEARLY 64 PER CENT OF THEM DON'T HAVE JOBS. MORE DISABLED MEN THAN WOMEN HAVE JOBS

(The writer is a co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner with the National Skill Development Corporation)

ment for everyone, including those with disabilities.

There is no dearth of jobs for PwDs, provided they are equipped with the right soft and practical skills. Some of the most valuable soft job skills for adults with disabilities that employers look for: attention to detail; communication skills; conflict management skills; problem-solving skills; teamwork skills; time management skills; and enrichment and life skills. Similarly, some hard job skills for PwDs include accounting, engineering, technical writing, computer-related jobs, healthcare, career counseling, customer service, insurance agent, massage therapist, telemarketer, photographer in a wheelchair, desktop publisher, graphic designer, web developer, bank teller, receptionist, financial analyst, landscaper or groundskeeper.

National Education Policy 2020 also underlines the importance of enabling arrangements in providing equal opportunities for quality education for children with disabilities. The conversion of NCERT textbooks for Classes I to VI into Indian Sign Language for hearing-impaired children is complete. It is a crucial initiative to include hearing-impaired students in mainstream education. It is heartening indeed to note that the Government is taking several steps to empower Divyangjan. Inculcating self-confidence among Divyangjan is very important to empower them for which they need skills. There are talents and abilities in people with disabilities; in some cases, these are greater than those found in normal people. Inclusive growth, development and confidence must encompass PwD aspirations.

It is worth noting that the

Government enacted the Right to Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which came into effect on April 19, 2017. It provides for 4 per cent reservation in government jobs for disabilities. The Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan, Accessible India Campaign, was launched by the Central Government on December 3, 2015. It provides universal accessibility for persons with disabilities so that they can live a meaningful life with dignity. Public buildings, transport systems and information and communication technology are included in this campaign. Keeping in view the problems related to accessibility faced by the masses, a mobile app has been developed to address accessibility problems in a quick and systematic manner.

The Government has also set up the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) to promote hearing-impaired persons' empowerment and to create sign language in the country. The institute, among other things, is continuously preparing sign language dictionaries that have so far included more than 10,000 words. The Government is also implementing a Unique Disability Identity Card (UDID) project to create a National Database for Persons with Disabilities. So far, over 84 lakh UDID cards have been prepared in 713 districts of all states and Union Territories.

The Disability Sports Centre is being established at Gwalior and the National Institute of Mental Health and Rehabilitation at Sehore, both Madhya Pradesh. Divya Kala Shakti is organised to showcase Divyang youngsters and children's talent and skills. However, they need a dedicated

programme to equip them with employable or gainful skills. The process of skilling and creating job opportunities for crores of youth through Skill India Mission and Kaushal Rozgar Kendra cannot exclude PwDs. Their needs require a specific and targeted approach.

We have the Skill Council for Persons with Disability (SCPwD) as a national body to fulfill the mission of mainstreaming PwDs through skill training to enable them to earn a livelihood and lead a life of dignity in the mainstream society and in turn contribute to the growing economy of the country. Skill training is also imparted at accredited training centres through trained and certified trainers. Trainers are trained on NSQC-approved job roles aligned to a specific disability. Trainers are also certified in disability orientation and sensitisation.

As of now, we haven't been inclusive in our approach to skilling people in any way. A few sectors' artisans received some attention, while many classes of artisans such as carpenters, iron smiths, sculptors, masons and others that are an integral part of society have been adapting to the changing times to fulfil; the needs of society that were ignored.

PwDs were rarely discussed in relation to their skill set. Empowering every section of society is essential to our country's development journey. I totally agree with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's argument that they should get easy loans, skilling, technical support, digital empowerment, brand promotion, marketing and raw material. Development of traditional artisans and craftsmen while preserving their rich tradition must include PWDs.

Innovative approaches are galvanising livestock economy

A conclave in Hyderabad recently brought more than 100 startups, 50 CII members and the fast-growing livestock sector together

The livestock sector, besides contributing to the national economy, plays a key role in providing livelihood to 80 million rural households and is growing at a high and consistent rate in the country, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.93 per cent between 2014-15 to 2020-21 (at constant prices), which is much higher than the general agriculture sector.

India currently ranks third in unicorns and has a thriving startup ecosystem. It is estimated that 15 per cent of the world's agri-tech startups are based here. Modern technical breakthroughs have impacted almost every component of India's dairy and livestock value chain. This is due to Government initiatives to encourage investments, ease of



doing business and innovation.

Animal husbandry and dairying have more than 700 startups registered with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. This proves that there is more room for technology deployment and monetisation of interventions in the related sectors.

Startup conclave

A recent startup conclave in Hyderabad on February 28 included showcasing of a 100 select startups, a pitch fest, a buyer-seller meet, and a workshop for startups to train the early-stage startups operating in the animal husbandry and dairying sector in pitching, building the main business pillars, and their story of impact. Beside more than 100 startups, 50 members from the Confederation of Indian

Industry also participated in the event, searching for creative solutions to the key issues facing the livestock sector.

Startups' exhibition

Startups showcased their goods and innovations, including cosmetics made of camel milk and donkey milk (they offer a mind-boggling rate of Rs 1,200 per kg of donkey milk to the owners of donkey farms), building products and panels made of cow dung, innovations in animal feed and insect feed, platforms for online livestock trade, platforms that connect farmers with embedded digital finance options, new yoghurt flavours, breed improvement technology for cattle, intelligent dairy automation solutions, and cold chain solutions. Startups benefited greatly from the expo as

it gave them access to investors, dairy cooperatives, and government partners.

Pitch fest & shoring capacity

A special pitching event with a panel of investors, including venture capitalists and angel investors, was organised for 10 startups. With innovative products and services, the startups represent the animal husbandry and dairy industries. These products and services include artificial insemination equipment, cattle reproduction solutions, traceability, heat detection, frozen semen thawing, veterinary care, nanotechnology, polymer chemistry, vaccines, and diagnostics, among others.

A concurrent workshop was held for early-stage startups to guide them in the art of pitching and developing

primary business pillars/story of impact, problem-solving, and government-e-market-place. The speakers delved into investor psychology and expectations to help the audience understand what is required to have the highest chance of acquiring investment from a venture capital fund and PE and angel investors.

On the finer elements of pitching, term sheet preparation, legal rights, value, etc., the experts gave enlightening advice. The buyer-seller meeting was a fascinating session of the conclave that drew enthusiastic involvement from both sides. Of the prominent dairy cooperatives and enterprises participating in the event, ten start-ups delivered a sales pitch to market their products.

Technological advancements will lead to significant improvements in day-to-day operations and lower business costs. The Indian Government employs numerous cutting-edge breeding techniques in the animal husbandry industry to maximise local bovine herd production. Startups are crucial for making such a system self-sustaining.

The growth of startups has improved this ecosystem's development, organisation, and resilience, mostly to the benefit of its most significant stakeholder—the Indian farmers—who make up the agriculture sector, which includes the livestock industry and forms the backbone of the nation's economy.

Innovative approaches to

the problems of animal health, online marketplaces, improved supply chains, products with value-added, mobile apps, drones, and other investments are not only empowering producers or entrepreneurs but also improving the market, making resources more available, preventing waste, maximising profits, creating scalable businesses, and removing bottlenecks.

The support that the Government gives to startups shows the importance and impact of startups in the Indian economy. The livestock industry in India is poised to grow and will continue to be crucial in advancing our Hon'ble Prime Minister's goal of building an Aatmanirbhar (self-sufficient) India.

Russian strikes in Ukraine kill 10 civilians | N Korea tests radioactive tsunami weapon at sea

AP ■ KIVY

Russian long-range strikes killed at least 10 civilians and wounded 20 others in several areas of Ukraine on Friday, Ukraine's presidential office said, as a senior Moscow official warned that the Kremlin's forces were prepared for an expected Ukrainian counteroffensive in the coming weeks.

Five people died in Kostiantynivka, a town in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province, when a Russian missile hit an aid station. Ukrainian authorities last year established hundreds of so-called "points of invincibility", where residents hard-pressed by the war could warm up, charge their cellphones and get snacks.

Local prosecutors said the Russians attacked Kostyantynivka with S-300 anti-aircraft missiles. The civilians who died were refugees, according to Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko. As the mostly artillery war of the recent winter months stretched into its second spring, Russian forces also used air-launched missiles, exploding drones and gliding bombs in their attacks on several regions early on Friday, Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuri Ihnat said.

Two civilians were killed and nine were wounded in the Sumy province town of Bilopillya by a night-time rocket and artillery barrage and air strikes, the administration of the northeast region said. In the southern Kherson region, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited on Thursday, Russian shelling killed one person in the main city, also called Kherson, and killed another person and wounded four others in the town of Bilozerk.

On Wednesday, a Russian drone attack struck a high school and dormitories south of Kyiv, killing at least nine people. Kyiv's forces are poised to use the improved spring weather and the arrival of modern weapons supplied by



its Western allies, including tanks, to launch a counteroffensive aimed at dislodging Russian troops from occupied areas of Ukraine.

But Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's former president and now the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, said the Russian military was ready to repel a counterattack. "Our General Staff is assessing all that," Medvedev said. He also said that a Ukrainian attempt to seize Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, could trigger a nuclear response from Moscow. "An attempt to split part of the state away means an encroachment at the very existence of the state," he said.

UN decries killing of Russian POWs and Ukrainians

Kyiv (AP): UN human rights monitors have documented dozens of summary killings of Ukrainian and Russian prisoners of war, as well as the use of torture, human shields and other abuses against POWs since Russia invaded its neighbour that could amount to war crimes, according to a report released Friday.

The first full look by the U.N. human rights office's mission in Ukraine at the treatment of POWs was released along with an update of human rights violations overall from a six-month period that ran through January. The report was based on interviews with about 400 POWs, half of them Ukrainians who were released and the other half Russians held captive in Ukraine.

The team said it had no access to POWs held in Russia or Russia-occupied parts of Ukraine where it identified 48 internment sites.

N Korea tests radioactive tsunami weapon at sea

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea claimed on Friday to have tested a nuclear-capable underwater drone designed to generate a gigantic "radioactive tsunami" that would destroy naval strike groups and ports. Analysts were skeptical that the device presents a major new threat, but the test underlines the North's commitment to raising nuclear threats. The test this week came as the United States reportedly planned to deploy aircraft carrier strike groups and other advanced assets to waters off the Korean Peninsula.

Military tensions are at a high point as the pace of both North Korean weapons tests and US-South Korea joint military exercises has accelerated in the past year in a cycle of tit-for-tat responses.



This photo provided by the North Korean government, shows what it says is an underwater blast of test warhead loaded to an unmanned underwater nuclear attack craft "Haeil" during an exercise around Hongwon Bay in waters off North Korea's eastern coast Thursday, AP/PTI

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said the new weapon, which can be deployed from the coast or towed by surface ships, is built to "stealthily infiltrate into operational waters and make a super-scale radioactive tsunami through an underwater explosion" to destroy enemy naval strike groups and ports.

The report came hours before South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol pledged to make North Korea pay for its "reckless provocations" as he attended a remembrance service honouring 55 South Korean troops killed during major clashes with the North near their western sea border in past years.

The testing of the purported "nuclear underwater attack drone" was part of a three-day exercise that simulated nuclear attacks on unspecified South Korean targets, which also included cruise missile launches on Wednesday.

KCNA said the North's latest tests were aimed at alerting the United States and South Korea of a brewing "nuclear crisis" as they continue with their "intentional, persistent and provocative war drills." It said

the tests were supervised by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who vowed to make his rivals "plunge into despair." The US and South Korea completed an 11-day exercise on Thursday that included their biggest field training in years, and are preparing another round of joint naval drills that will reportedly involve a US aircraft carrier. Hours after the North Korean report, South Korea's air force released details of a five-day joint aerial drill with the United States that began Monday and concluded on Friday above waters off South Korea's western coast, which included live-fire demonstrations of air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons.

The air force said the exercise, which involved various South Korean fighter jets and at least one US A-10 attack plane, was aimed at verifying precision strike capabilities and reaffirming the credibility of Seoul's "three-axis" strategy against North Korean nuclear threats — preemptively striking sources of attacks, intercepting incoming missiles and neutralizing the North's leadership

and key military facilities.

The North Korean drone is named "Haeil," a Korean word meaning tidal waves or tsunamis. The North's Rodong Simmun newspaper published photos of Kim smiling next to a large, torpedo-shaped object at an unspecified indoor facility, but didn't identify it.

Other photos published with the same article showed sea-surface tracks supposedly caused by the drone's underwater trajectory and a pillar of water exploding up into the air, possibly caused by what state media described as an underwater detonation of a mock nuclear weapon carried by the drone. KCNA said the drone was deployed on Tuesday off the North's eastern coast, traveled underwater for nearly 60 hours, and detonated a test warhead at a target standing for an enemy port. It said the test verified the operational reliability of the drone, which it said the North has been developing since 2012 and tested more 50 times in the past two years, although the weapon was never mentioned before in state media until Friday.

Israeli AG: Netanyahu broke law on conflict of interest

Jerusalem (AP): Israel's attorney general on Friday warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he has violated the Supreme Court's conflict of interest ruling, which barred him from direct involvement in his government's divisive plans for a judicial overhaul. Netanyahu's far-right government has barrelled ahead with plans to weaken the Supreme Court and grant politicians less judicial oversight in their policymaking despite massive protests from across Israeli society — including an uproar among business leaders, top legal officials and military reservists. On Thursday, just hours after his coalition passed a law that would protect the Israeli leader from being



An Israeli activist dressed as a clown runs with border police as Israelis protest against plans by 'Netanyahu' in Tel Aviv, Israel on Thursday. AP/PTI

deemed unfit to rule because of his corruption trial and claims of a conflict of interest, Netanyahu defiantly pledged to proceed with the overhaul. Netanyahu contended that stripping the attorney general

of the power to remove him from office was necessary to clear the way for him to participate in the negotiations on the judicial overhaul in spite of her instructions, and try to "mend the rift" in the polarised nation.

Demonstrators protest Netanyahu's visit to UK

London: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak welcomed Benjamin Netanyahu at his official residence in London on Friday as protesters shouting "Shame!" in Hebrew demonstrated against the Israeli leader's right-wing policies and his plans to overhaul the country's judiciary.

Netanyahu had to pass by hundreds of protesters waving Israeli flags and waving signs calling for the defense of Israeli democracy as he arrived for talks that are expected to focus on concerns about Iran's nuclear programme.

"We are Israelis and Jews living in the UK demonstrating against Prime Minister Netanyahu, who is leading a judicial coup turning Israel into a dictatorship," one placard

read.

Netanyahu arrived in London as protesters in Israel blocked roads and clashed with police over his right-wing government's plans to overhaul the judicial system.

The proposals have ignited the biggest protests in the country's history amid rare dissent from people throughout Israeli society, including military reservists, navy veterans, high-tech businesspeople and former officials.

Netanyahu's proposals would give his government more control over judicial appointments, weaken the Supreme Court by limiting judicial review of legislation and allow Parliament to overturn court decisions with a simple majority vote. **AP**

Large asteroid coming close, but zero chance of hitting earth

Cape Canaveral: An asteroid big enough to wipe out a city will zip harmlessly between Earth and the moon's orbit this weekend, missing both celestial bodies. Saturday's close encounter will offer astronomers the chance to study a space rock from just over 100,000 miles (168,000 kilometers) away. That's less than half the distance from here to the moon, making it visible through binoculars and small telescopes.

While asteroid flybys are common, NASA said it's rare for one so big to come so close — about once a decade. Scientists estimate its size somewhere between 130 feet and 300 feet (40 meters and 90 meters).

Discovered a month ago, the asteroid known as 2023 DZ2 will pass within 320,000 miles (515,000 kilometers) of the moon on Saturday and, several hours later, buzz the Indian Ocean at about 17,500 mph (28,000 kph). **AP**

Saudi Arabia, Syria may restore ties

AP ■ BEIRUT

Saudi Arabia is in talks with Syria to reopen its embassy in the war-torn nation for the first time in a decade, state television in the kingdom reported late Thursday, the latest diplomatic reshuffling in the region. The announcement on state TV comes after Chinese-mediated talks in Beijing saw Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to reopen embassies in each others' nations after years of tensions. Syrian President Bashar Assad has maintained his grip on power in the Mediterranean nation rocked by the 2011 Arab Spring only with the help of Iran and Russia, which made a historic call earlier in the day to Oman.

Saudi Arabian state television aired a report late Thursday, quoting an anonymous official in the country's Foreign Ministry, acknowledging the talks between the kingdom and Damascus.

"A source in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs revealed to Al-Ekhabariyah that ongoing discussions have begun with the

Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commenting on what was circulated by some international media," an anchor said on air. "Discussions are underway between officials in the kingdom and their counterparts in Syria about resuming the provision of consular services." Arabic-language media had been reporting the possible detente in recent days ahead of the Saudi state TV announcement. The Wall Street Journal, quoting anonymous Saudi and Syrian officials, attributed the talks to reopen the countries' embassies to Russian mediation.

Syrian state media did not immediately acknowledge the talks. Officials in both Saudi Arabia and Syria did not immediately respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press early Friday.

Earlier Thursday, Russian President Vladimir Putin called Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, which the Kremlin called the "the first high-level bilateral contact since the establishment of diplomatic relations" between the nations.

Protests continue as Paris reels under violence

AP ■ PARIS

Protesters angry at French President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms continued with scattered actions on Friday amid slowed train traffic, rows of trucks blocking access to Marseille's commercial port and debris still littering the Paris streets following the previous day's mass demonstrations. Over 450 protesters were arrested in Paris and beyond on Thursday as some 300 demonstrations drew more than a million people nationwide to protest against unpopular pension reforms.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said Friday that some 441 police and gendarmes were injured as violence marred some marches. He added that 1,000 trash bins were set on fire in the French capital during the previous day's action. Amid a weeks-long refuse collectors strike, trash bins have become a symbol of the protest.

Polls say most French oppose Macron's bill to increase the retirement age from 62 to 64, which he says is necessary to keep the system afloat. The supply of fuel to Paris by the large Gonfreville-l'Orcher refinery in Normandy resumed on Friday after police intervened, according to Energy Transition Minister Agnès Pannier-Runacher. At the Fos-sur-mer oil terminal near Marseille, however, protesters were meeting to plan future oil refinery blockades.

Fearing disruptions in coming days as actions continue, France's Civil Aviation Authority has requested that a third of



flights be cancelled on Sunday at Paris' second airport, Orly, with 20 per cent to be cancelled on Monday. Unions have called for new protests and strikes on Tuesday, when Britain's King Charles III is scheduled to visit Bordeaux on the second day of his trip to France. The heavy wooden door of the elegant Bordeaux City Hall was destroyed by fire Thursday night by people taking part in an

unauthorised demonstration. The mayor of Bordeaux, Pierre Hurmic, said Friday he had "difficulty understanding the interest of such acts of vandalism." Hurmic said that he hopes Charles' visit to his city next week will not be cancelled. "I hope that we do not give this gift to the thugs," he said, although he acknowledged that a tram ride with the king may

British King's visit postponed

Paris (AP): Protesters angry at French President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms continued with scattered actions on Friday, as the unrest across the country led officials to postpone a planned state visit by Britain's King Charles III.

Although no major protests were planned on Friday, train traffic was slowed, rows of trucks blocked access to Marseille's commercial port and debris still littered the Paris streets following the previous day's mass demonstrations. Over 450 protesters were arrested in Paris and beyond

on Thursday as some 300 demonstrations drew more than a million people nationwide to protest against unpopular pension reforms.

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He added that 1,000 trash bins were set on fire in the French capital during the previous day's action. Amid a weeks-long refuse collectors strike, trash bins have become a symbol of the protest. Macron's office announced that a state visit by the British king was postponed.

Report on Leicester clashes warns of ethnic enclaves in UK

AP ■ LONDON

A fact-finding report into the violent clashes between groups of men on the streets of Leicester following an India-Pakistan Asia Cup cricket match in Dubai last year has warned of ethnic enclaves or ghettos of migrants in the eastern England city as a key factor behind communal tension.

The Delhi-based Centre for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights (CDPHR) think tank, which launched its report at a Committee Room in the House of Commons on Thursday, sheds light on the events that took place in August-September last year and their human rights implications. In its "Fact-finding report on Leicester Violence 2022 – The rise of territorial majoritarianism and Hinduphobia", the think tank calls for immediate action to address the underlying issues that led to the Leicester vio-

lence such as the rise of extremism and hate speech.

"There were two kinds of stories circulating around the violence that occurred, which is the motivation behind this fact-finding report," explained Rashmi Samant of the ATMAH non-profit organisation and one of the co-authors of the report. "What we found was that different religious groups in east Leicester, ground zero of the unrest, are living in ethnic enclaves – with some ethnicities clubbed up in some spaces more than others. This phenomenon is not common in the United Kingdom but we found it continues to happen in Leicester because of the spillover effect involving migrants from countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh," she said.

The report claims that the presence of these ethnic enclaves gave rise to territorial tensions and localised majoritarianism, which were

witnessed both before and during the unrest in east Leicester – the ethnic enclave of the Muslim community residing in Leicester with a minority presence of the Hindu community. Conservative Party MP Bob Blackman, chair of the India (Trade and Investment) All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), said at the launch event that "fake news" spread on social media has been identified as a major factor behind the escalation of the clashes. "Lessons must be learnt. There was a false narrative being spread to create divisions within the communities. In Leicester, people of all religions have lived alongside each other for many, many years," said Blackman.

The findings of the report say that the attackers attempted to undermine the fundamental principles of democracy and pluralism, including freedom of expression by spreading misinformation.

Jamaican cleric gets 18-year sentence in NY terrorism case

New York: A cleric arrested in his native Jamaica and extradited to New York to face state terrorism charges on accusations of recruiting support for the Islamic State group was sentenced on Thursday to 18 years in prison.

Abdullah el-Faisal was convicted in January in state Supreme Court in Manhattan on counts including soliciting or providing support for an act of terrorism. The state law he was prosecuted under was put in place after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and prosecutors said his case was the first state-level trial on terrorism charges.

El-Faisal was extradited to New York City in 2020 after being arrested in Jamaica in 2017. Beginning in 2016, authorities said an undercover officer in New York City posed as a would-be jihadist and started communicating with the cleric.

The cleric was accused of giving out information to help the officer ultimately connect with the Islamic State group, as well as trying to do things like act as a conduit for a marriage between the officer and a member of the militant group.

Prosecutors said el-Faisal had supported the Islamic State organization for several years. **AP**

Starbucks CEO to work as barista

New York: Starbucks' new Indian-origin CEO Laxman Narasimhan has said he will work as a barista once a month in stores to stay close to the company's culture, customers, challenges and opportunities.

Narasimhan, 55, officially became the Seattle-based coffee giant's chief executive on Monday, taking the reins from Howard Schultz about two weeks earlier than scheduled. He was welcomed as incoming chief executive officer of Starbucks with a coffee tasting in the place where it all began – at Seattle's Pike Place market store. In a letter to the employees on Thursday, the Indian-American business executive said he will always be a "fierce advocate" for the company's partners and its culture. "With you, I've experienced every aspect of the business to learn what it truly means to wear the green apron. You've welcomed me into our stores, trained me in how to be a barista ... all to

help me deeply understand what we do, how we do it, and the challenges and opportunities facing us," he wrote.

Barista is a person who serves in a coffee bar. "To keep us close to the culture and our customers, as well as to our challenges and opportunities, I intend to continue working in stores for a half day each month," he was quoted as saying by CNN.

"I thought it was very important for me to put myself in the shoes of the partners and really understand what they do and how they do it.

There were things I learned through experience in all of this. It taught me a lot," he said in a statement.

Pune-born Narasimhan joined Starbucks as interim CEO in October and has since spent time getting to know the company — including earning a barista certification, which requires 40 hours of training in stores. **PTI**

Bolsonaro hands undeclared jewels to authorities

AP ■ BRASILIA

A representative of Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro on Friday handed a set of diamond jewellery he had received from Saudi Arabia to a state bank, as he was ordered to do by a government watchdog.

The state bank Caixa Economica Federal received the box of precious stones at one of its branches in the capital Brasilia, the bank's press office told The Associated Press. A federal watchdog on Wednesday gave Bolsonaro five days to hand over the precious stones that he had received while president.

Authorities are investigating whether the goods were a public gift that Bolsonaro improperly tried to prevent from being incorporated into the presidency's public collection, or a private gift that Bolsonaro tried to sneak into Brazil without paying taxes.

Brazilian media started reporting on the jewels earlier this month, along with another set that was seized at the international airport in Sao Paulo. The seized set is estimated to be worth several million dollars. Neither set was declared to tax authorities.

Bolsonaro, who denies any wrongdoing with the jewellery, has been in the United States since late-December, just days before the end of his presidential term.

US carries out airstrikes in Syria

AP ■ BEIRUT

A strike on Thursday by a suspected Iranian-made drone killed a US contractor and wounded five American troops and another contractor in northeast Syria, the Pentagon said. American forces said they retaliated soon after with “precision airstrikes” in Syria targeting facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, with activist groups saying the US bombing killed at least four people. The attack and the US response threaten to upend recent efforts to deescalate tensions across the wider Middle East, whose rival powers have made steps toward détente in recent days after years of turmoil.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement that the American intelligence community had determined the drone was of Iranian origin, but offered no other immediate evidence to support the claim. “The airstrikes were conducted in response to today’s attack as well as a series of recent attacks against coalition forces in Syria” by groups affiliated with the Revolutionary Guard, Austin said. Iran relies on a network of proxy forces through the Mideast to counter the US and Israel,

its arch regional enemy.

The Pentagon said two of the wounded service members were treated on-site, while three others and the injured contractor were transported to medical facilities in Iraq.

Overnight, videos on social media purported to show explosions in Syria’s Deir el-Zour, a strategic province that borders Iraq and contains oil fields. Iran-backed militia groups and Syrian forces control the area, which also has seen suspected airstrikes by Israel in recent months allegedly targeting Iranian supply routes.

Iran and Syria did not immediately acknowledge the strikes, nor did their officials at the United Nations in New York respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press. The activist group Deir Ezzor 24 put the death toll from the American strikes at four people. Deir Ezzor 24, which covers news in Deir el-Zour province, said the strikes hit the city of Deir el-Zour as well as militiamen posts near Mayadeen and Boukamal. It said the strikes also wounded people, including Iraqis.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, reported that the American strikes killed six Iranian-backed fighters



ers at an arms depot in the Harabesh neighbourhood in the city of Deir el-Zour. The Observatory, which relies on a network of local contacts in Syria, said US bombing at a post near the town of Mayadeen killed two fighters.

A separate American strike hit a military post near the town of Boukamal along the border with Iraq, killing another three fighters, the Observatory said. The AP could not immediately independently confirm the activist reports. Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has been suspected of carrying out attacks with bomb-carrying drones across the wider Middle East.

In recent months, Russia has begun using Iranian drones in its attacks on sites across Ukraine as part of its war on Kyiv. Iran has issued a series of conflicting denials about its drones being used in the war, though Western nations and experts have tied components in the drones back to Tehran.

The exchange of strikes came as Saudi Arabia and Iran have been working toward reopening embassies in each other’s countries. The kingdom also acknowledged efforts to reopen a Saudi embassy in Syria, whose embattled President Bashar Assad has been backed by Iran in his country’s long war.

US Army Gen. Michael “Erik”

Kurilla, the head of the American military’s Central Command, warned that American forces could carry out additional strikes if needed. “We are postured for scalable options in the face of any additional Iranian attacks,” Kurilla said in a statement.

Addressing the US House Armed Services Committee on Thursday, Kurilla warned lawmakers that the “Iran of today is exponentially more militarily capable than it was even five years ago.” He pointed to Iran’s arsenal of ballistic missiles and bomb-carrying drones. Kurilla also claimed that Iran had launched some 78 attacks on US positions in Syria since January 2021. “What Iran does to hide its hand is they use Iranian proxies,” Kurilla said.

Diplomacy to deescalate the crisis appeared to begin immediately around the strikes. Qatar’s state-run news agency reported a call between its foreign minister and Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser.

Doha has been an interlocutor between Iran and the US recently amid tensions over Tehran’s nuclear programme.

Qatar’s foreign minister also spoke around the same time with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian.

Biden’s Canada agenda stacked. NORAD, migration deals likely

Ottawa (AP): President Joe Biden arrived in Canada on Thursday for talks with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on several of the world’s most difficult challenges: the war in Ukraine, climate change, trade, mass migration and an increasingly assertive China. Two important agreements appeared to be in hand before Biden even departed Washington. Canada will escalate its timeline for military upgrades to the North American Aerospace Defense Command and the two nations have reached an agreement to update rules for migrants seeking asylum, according to U.S. and Canadian officials. The officials were not authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity.

The migration deal eliminates a loophole under existing rules that will allow both countries to turn away asylum seekers at the countries’ borders.

The loophole resulted in thousands of migrants annually crossing into Canada from the U.S. at a non-official checkpoint, enabling them to stay in the country as they seek asylum instead of letting the process play out while staying in the U.S. As part of the agreement, Canada is expected to announce that 15,000 migrants from the Western Hemisphere will be given slots to apply to enter the country, according to a Canadian official.

The new policy applies to people without U.S. or Canadian citizenship who are caught within 14 days of crossing the border between the two countries. The White House declined to comment on the agreement, which is expected to be formally announced Friday. The visit comes as the Biden administration has made strengthening its relationship with Canada a priority over the past two years.

EU leaders grapple with bank risks as economy weakens

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union leaders gathered Friday to gauge the risk of a banking crisis developing from recent global financial turbulence and hitting the economy even harder than the energy crunch tied to Russia’s war in Ukraine. The deliberations by EU government heads in Brussels follow US regulators shutting down two US banks, including Silicon Valley Bank, and a Swiss-orchestrated takeover of troubled lender Credit Suisse by rival UBS. The emergency actions on both sides of the Atlantic revived memories of the 2008 global financial meltdown and the ensuing EU sovereign debt crisis, which almost broke apart the euro currency now shared by 20 European countries. “For the moment, we see no reason to be worried,” Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo told reporters on his way to the EU meeting. “But we monitor it really closely, almost on a daily basis, because no one knows what can happen.” The European economy has been



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, center, speaks with President of the Eurogroup Paschal Donohoe during a round table meeting at an EU summit in Brussels on Friday.

slowly rapidly since Russia invaded Ukraine 13 months ago to the day, leaving the EU flirting with recession. The war has fuelled inflation by prompting cuts in supplies of previously abundant Russian oil, natural gas and coal and by denting consumer and business confidence. The European Commission, the EU’s executive arm, expects economic growth in the 27-nation bloc to slow to 0.8 per cent this year

from 3.5 per cent in 2022 and 5.4 per cent in 2021. A projected rebound in growth to 1.6 per cent next year depends on a sound banking sector able to lend to businesses and consumers and protect deposits. The EU has beefed up its regulation of financial institutions since the euro debt crisis, and little sign has emerged so far of broader contagion in Europe from Credit Suisse’s dramatic rescue.

China warns of consequences over US warship’s actions

AP ■ BANGKOK

China threatened “serious consequences” Friday after the US Navy sailed a destroyer around the disputed Parcel Islands in the South China Sea for the second day in a row, in a move Beijing claimed was a violation of its sovereignty and security. The warning comes amid growing tensions between China and the United States in the region, as Washington pushes back at Beijing’s growingly assertive posture in the South China Sea, a strategic waterway it claims virtually in its entirety. On Thursday, after the U.S. sailed the USS Milius guided-missile destroyer near the Parcel Islands, China said its navy and air force had forced the American vessel away, a claim the U.S. military denied.

The U.S. on Friday sailed the ship again in the vicinity of the islands, which are occupied by China but also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam, as part of what it called a “freedom of navigation operation” challenging requirements from all three nations requiring either

advance notification or permission before a military vessel sails by.

“Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations,” said U.S. 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. j.g. Luka Bakic in an emailed statement. “The United States challenges excessive maritime claims around the world regardless of the identity of the claimant,” Bakic added. China’s Ministry of National Defense responded by accusing the U.S. of “undermining the peace and stability of the South China Sea” with its actions.

“The act of the U.S. military seriously violated China’s sovereignty and security, severely breached international laws, and is more intransigent evidence of the U.S. pursuing navigation hegemony and militarising the South China Sea,” ministry spokesman Tan Kefei said.

Philippines confronts Chinese diplomats over sea disputes

AP ■ MANILA

Filipino diplomats issued a slew of protests over China’s aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea, including targeting a Philippine coast guard ship with a military laser, when they met Chinese officials Friday, an official said. Territorial disputes in the busy waterway have long loomed as a potential flashpoint in Asia and have become a sensitive front in the regional rivalry between China and the United States.

Washington lays no claims in the contested waters but has challenged Beijing’s extensive claims including by deploying its warships and fighter jets and repeatedly warning that it would help defend the Philippines — a treaty ally — if Philippine forces, ships and aircraft are attacked. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims in the sea-way, which sits atop vast deposits of oil and gas.

A Chinese delegation led by Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong held two days of

talks starting Thursday with Philippine counterparts led by Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro and reviewed overall relations. The two sides focused on their territorial disputes Friday, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila said. The talks opened with both sides citing an agreement between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who made a state visit to China in early January, to manage the territorial conflicts amicably while enhancing economic ties and other aspects of a nearly half-century of diplomatic relations.

“We should not allow specific differences to define our bilateral relations or allow certain disputes to stand in the way of overall cooperation,” Sun said in an opening speech before journalists were asked to leave the meeting room. “We need to properly deal with these issues through friendly consultations.”

A Philippine official involved in the talks told The Associated Press that Filipino

diplomats outlined several incidents underscoring China’s assertiveness in the disputed waters in the closed-door talks. That included a February 6 incident when a Chinese coast guard ship aimed a military-grade laser that briefly blinded some crew members of a Philippine patrol vessel off a disputed shoal. China’s representatives responded mostly by reiterating Beijing’s claim of sovereignty in most of the South China Sea, where they said Philippine vessels had intruded, the official said. Some “practical cooperation agreements” were proposed to prevent a further escalation of the disputes but those still needed to be vetted by other Philippine officials, the official said without providing other details. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to publicly discuss what transpired in the meetings.

Marcos summoned the Chinese ambassador to Manila to express concern shortly after the laser-pointing incident.

‘Pak gets \$2 bn rollover deposits from China to get IMF bailout’

Islamabad (PTI): Cash-strapped Pakistan has received a rollover of USD 2 billion in deposits for a period of one year from its all-weather ally China to help Islamabad get a much-required bailout from the IMF to stabilise its economy, a media report said on Friday.

The rollover, which basically is not a loan but a financial deposit to be kept at Pakistan’s central bank for a period of one year, is one of the requirements of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in meeting its external financing needs in order to move towards inking the staff-level agreement. The News International reported. Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar confirmed the development. “Yes,” Dar was quoted as saying in a brief response when asked about getting a rollover of USD 2 billion SAFE.

Pakistan and the IMF have been negotiating the release of a USD 1.1 billion loan since February but so far without any success due to the tough conditions by the donor which Pakistan is slow to fulfil. Pakistan is scrambling to increase its forex reserves which are estimated to be at USD 4.8 billion after China refinanced USD 500 million last week. Earlier, a Chinese bank provided USD 700 million to Pakistan.

Despite a slight improvement in the reserves, the situation is still grim as the country needs to pay USD 7 billion till June this year, making further borrowing necessary. Efforts to secure a loan from the IMF have been unsuccessful so far, which is expected to open avenues for further borrowing from the international market or getting loans from friendly countries.

Court grants extension of anticipatory bail to Imran Khan in five terror cases

PTI ■ LAHORE

A top Pakistani court on Friday extended till March 27 the protective bail granted to former prime minister Imran Khan in five cases related to terrorism after he appeared before a two-member bench here.

The Lahore High Court (LHC) granted the extension of anticipatory bail to Khan after the 70-year-old chief of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) appeared before it amidst tight security. Last week, Khan was granted anticipatory bail in these five cases till March 24. Of the five cases, one is related to the alleged attack on the judicial complex in Islamabad in which the government law officer objected that Khan should secure protective bail from Islamabad

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan’s defence minister Khawaja Asif on Friday lashed out at former premier Imran Khan’s “hypocrisy” for seeking help from the United States after accusing Washington of toppling his government last year. Addressing a press conference, Asif said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief’s aide

sent a letter to the US, seeking its help, after Khan named a top US diplomat of plotting to oust him from power last year. This shows the “total sum of Imran’s journey,” Asif said.

“His political journey started with a cypher - in which he had accused the US of conspiring against the PTI government,” Asif said.

court. Khan told the LHC that last week on his appearance before a court in Islamabad police and FC (frontier constabulary) personnel fired teargas shells at

his car and a clash took place between the PTI workers and police. Besides, a plot was hatched to kill him there and that is why he returned to Lahore.



Muslim men perform during the first Friday prayer of the fasting month of Ramadan at Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia on Friday. Muslims around the world are observing Ramadan, the holiest month on the Islamic calendar, where they refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sex from dawn to dusk.

Polish coal miners protest EU methane reduction regulations

AP ■ WARSAW

Polish coal miners angered by a European Union directive aiming to reduce methane emissions protested noisily on Friday before the EU office in Warsaw saying it will deprive them of their jobs.

Some 300 miners chanted “Thieves” and used smoke flares and sirens to draw attention to their protest in the downtown area of Poland’s capital. Traffic was temporarily closed in the area.

Protesting miners from the Solidarity 80 union said recent climate recommendations for the 27-member EU that call for a significant reduction of methane, starting in 2027, would force most of the nation’s mines to close, with the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. The majority of Poland’s mines have a high presence of methane gas that gets released in the coal extraction process. That also leads to serious mining accidents as methane becomes explosive when mixed in low proportions with oxygen.

Located in the southern Silesia region, the coal mines are among Poland’s major employers, offering some 77,000 jobs in the nation of 38 million.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of our client Yes Bank Ltd. that Mr. Sanjay Dhanwan and Mrs. Anjali Dhanwan are the owners of Apartment No.PVC-15-0704 on 7th Floor, Super measuring 169.08 Sq. Mtrs., in Tower-15, at Pavilion Court, Situated at Sector-128, Jaypee Greens Wishi Town, Noida, has been/impounded Sub - Lease Deed dated 30.03.2016 Registration No. 10895 executed by M/s. Jaypee Infrastructure Ltd. and M/s. Jayprakash Associates Ltd. in their name. All persons are hereby informed not to deal or carry out any transaction with anyone on the basis of the said missing document. If anyone has already dealt or carried out transaction or is intending to do so on basis of said stated document, kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

Kumar & Associates (Advocates & Consultants)
280, 1st Floor, 23, Shivaji Marg, Mot Nager, N. Delhi-15
Ph: 011-41112827-28 kumarandassociatesadvocates@gmail.com

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
e-TENDER CREDIT NOTICE

TD/TM/GEN-235 (Vol-VII)/23/647, dtd. 24.03.2023

Name of the work: "Allotment of 03 (Three) nos. of Mechanical Iron Ore/ Iron Ore Pellet plots at IOHP." License Fees: Rs. 2,89,51,890/- Wharfage Fees Rs. 16,93,300/- Last date & time of submission of bid: 13.04.2023 up to 15:00 hrs Date and time of opening (technical bid): 13.04.2023 up to 15:00 hrs Refer our website for details https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app & http://paradiport.gov.in/

Sd/-Traffic Manager
Paradip Port Authority

PPA/PR/236/2022-23 dtd.24.03.2023

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that my client Manoj Kumar Manchanda is in process to purchase the Property No. E-4, area measuring 113 sq. yd. out of Kharsa No. 67/5, situated in the area of Village Hastal, colony known as Sarvottam Enclave, Now known as Hastal Vinar, Uttam Nagar, Delhi-110059 from Jughomhan Sharma, who acquired the said property by virtue of regd. relinquishment deed dated 11/3/20 (Document No. 4953) executed by Bula Ram Sharma & Subhash Sharma

All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date thereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vaisali, Gzb., U.P., Mob. 9810603351

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that Mr. (Vishvakti) Sharma S/o Late Mr. Surender Kumar Sharma is the owner of the Property No. 70-C-27, area measuring 40 Sq. Yds., i.e. 33,444 Sq. Mtrs., out of Kharsa No. 1077/461 Min. Situated at Old Tejpal Mill, Shola Nath Nagar, in the area of Village Chandrawala, Shikhar, Haryana, Delhi-110039 by virtue of Full/Relinquishment Deed dated 10.05.2022, regd. at Doc. No. 4395, and the same is to be financed & mortgaged with my client L. Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd. and the legal heirs of Late Mr. Surender Kumar Sharma namely Menakashi, Pooja Pathany, and Rachana S. Sharma, shall have no objection regarding marriage of aforesaid property by Mr. Vishvakti Sharma, all persons (s) have any objection(s) or claim in this property, then contact the undersigned within 7 days from the date of notice on below address, failing which, it will be assumed that there are no claims or issues in respect of the aforesaid property.

Raghav Tiwari, Advocate
Ch. 803, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi-110001 Mob.: +91-8076186326

PUBLIC NOTICE

Mr. Amit Kumar and Nitin Kumar is seeking a loan from M/S ADITYA BIRLA HOUSING FINANCE LTD. for the property bearing 3rd Floor and 2nd Floor, Plot No. WZ-39 on Plot No. 40 and 64 area measuring 66.66 sqyds part of Kharsa No. 1 situated at Village Nagli Jaib Colony Known as Krishna Pur, Gali No.15, Tilak Nagar, New Delhi. That Mr. Madan Lal Mr. Chhinda Singh and Mr. Dharam Pal Singh is the legal heirs of the Deceased Late Mr. Jai Dev Singh. That there is no other legal heirs of the said person. Now, I would like to announce to general public that any person who is having any right, title or interest against that property/share or documents may come to our Delhi Office within seven days and tender their claim with documentary valid evidence. If any, else the same would be treated as unclaimed and unrebutted and moved forth accordingly.

M/S PASS & ASSOCIATES, LLP
A-233, F.P. Shivraj, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-110017, Mob.: 9991116006

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concern that Mr. Shailendra Nareish Kulkarni S/o Sh. Nareish Sitaram Kulkarni & Mrs. Nisha Dutta W/o Shailendra Nareish Kulkarni both R/O C-148, Sector-19, Noida, (U.P.) who is the original allottee/owner of property No. Plot No C-148, Sector-19, Noida (U.P.) had sold the said property on General Power of Attorney basis to the following person(s): General Power of Attorney was executed in favour of Mr. Nareish Sitaram Kulkarni S/o Sh. Sitaram Dinkar Kulkarni R/o Flat No.6, Sapt Sarovar Apartments, Sapt Rishi Road, Sapt Rishi Ashram, Haridwar, Uttarakhand 249410 which is registered on Dt. 09/03/2023 in Haridwar and the Agreement to Sell was not registered or not executed. Because the Agreement to Sell is not registered or no Agreement to sell executed, so it is informed to all concern that the said Property No. Plot No C-148, Sector-19, Noida (U.P.) is going to be transferred in favour of Mr. Shailendra Nareish Kulkarni S/o Sh. Nareish Sitaram Kulkarni & Mrs. Nisha Dutta W/o Shailendra Nareish Kulkarni both R/O C-148, Sector-19, Noida (U.P.) if anyone has/have any objection he/she may file his/her objection alongwith the sufficient documentary evidence at the following person(s) of the Noida Authority within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Nareish Sitaram Kulkarni

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of our client Yes Bank Ltd. that Mrs. Vandana Gupta is the owner of Property bearing No. 0-6, measuring 310 sq. yds., in the lower area of the Railway Board employees CHS Ltd. colony known as Anand Vihar, Delhi, the said property, by virtue of Sale Deed dated 22.08.2008, Registration No. 11501 executed by Mr. Anil Modi, Mrs. Swati Modi. The owner has relinquished the deed i.e. Sale deed dated 22.08.2008 and wants to sell the third floor of the said property to borrower of Yes Bank Ltd. who is taking loan from said bank for purchase of said property. All persons are hereby informed not to deal or carry out any transaction with anyone on the basis of the said missing document. If anyone has already dealt or carried out transaction or is intending to do so on basis of said stated document, kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address, within 7 days of the present, failing which no claims, demands, objections etc. shall be entertained thereafter and the said Property shall be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kumar & Associates (Advocates & Consultants)
280, 1st Floor, 23, Shivaji Marg, Mot Nager, N. Delhi-15
Ph: 011-41112827-28 kumarandassociatesadvocates@gmail.com

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all concerned that Sh. Mukesh Kumar S/o Late Sh. Mohinder Lal R/o 907, Skytel Magadh Apartment, Sector-3, Vaisali, Ghaziabad, U.P.-201010, hereby evict his son Inshum Arora from his entire property and belongings citing personal reasons. He has no concern with his son Inshum Arora and he is not liable to pay him any amount.

NEERAJ KUMAR (Advocate)
ENRL No. 3739/2014
Chamber No. F-203, Lawyers Block, Karkardooma Courts, Delhi-110032
Mobile No. 9999060802
Dated: 23.03.2023

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Sachin & Raja Bati Rathore are in process to purchase the House No. 912, (New Municipal No-258-A) area measuring 115.55 sq. yds., out of Kharsa No. 226, situated in the colony Known as Kalash Nagar in the area of Village Kela Pargana, Loni Tehsil & District Ghaziabad UP by availing H/L with the Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited from Rakesh Kumar Agarwal, who inherited the said property by virtue of regd. will dated 25/2/1981 (Document No. 3010) executed by his mother Dhanvanti

All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date thereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vaisali, Gzb., U.P., Mob. 9810603351

Sensex, Nifty fall 1% amid weak global equities trend

Sensex declined 398.18 points, Nifty fell 131.85 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure for the second straight session to settle nearly 1 per cent lower on Friday as investors pared exposure to the metal, energy and realty stocks amid a bearish trend in Asian and European markets.

Besides, a depreciating rupee against the US dollar and fresh foreign fund outflows also hit investor sentiments, traders said. In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 398.18 points or 0.69 per cent to finish at 57,527.10. During the day, it went lower by 502.3 points or 0.86 per cent to 57,422.98.

The broader NSE Nifty fell 131.85 points or 0.77 per cent to end at 16,945.05.

Bajaj Finserv was the biggest loser among the Sensex constituents, sliding 3.81 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance, Tata Steel, Reliance Industries, HCL



Tech, SBI, Larsen & Toubro and Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank and Titan.

On the other hand, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Asian Paints and Wipro were the gainers.

In Asia markets, stock exchanges in Seoul, Japan, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were also quoting in the red in the after-

noon trade. The US markets ended higher on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the rupee declined 25 paise to close at 82.45 against the US dollar.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 1.73 per cent to USD 74.60 per barrel.

Foreign Portfolio Investors offloaded equities worth Rs 995.01 crore on Thursday after a day's breather, according to exchange data.

AMC stocks under pressure; UTI AMC falls nearly 5%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of asset management firms declined on Friday amid amendments to the Finance Bill changing tax treatment for debt mutual funds.

The stock of UTI Asset Management Company tanked 4.73 per cent, Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC declined 4.44 per cent, HDFC Asset Management Company fell 4.21 per cent, Shriram Asset Management Company dropped 3.21 per cent and Nippon Life India Asset Management dipped 1.29 per cent on the BSE.

The broader market also faced selling pressure as the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 398.18 points or 0.69 per cent to finish at 57,527.10.

The Lok Sabha on Friday approved The Finance Bill 2023 with 64 official amendments, including providing tax relief to some taxpayers opting for new tax regime, and removing long-term tax benefit for debt mutual funds to bring them at par with other interest earning instruments.

"The asset management industry was hit hard by tax



changes and the elimination of the indexation benefit of debt mutual funds," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

Asset managers termed amendments to the Finance Bill changing tax treatment for debt mutual funds as a "surprise", which will be detrimental to the agenda of corporate bond market development.

Late on Thursday evening, the industry came to know about the changes the government proposed, wherein tax benefits for over three year investments in debt mutual fund investments will not be available

and all such bets will attract short-term capital gains tax.

The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on Friday.

A Balasubramanian, chairman of MF industry lobby grouping Amfi, who also heads Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC, called the amendments as "surprising" and added that the industry will have to be ready for the changes that set in from April 1.

Consultancy firm Dhruva Advisors' partner Punit Shah said the amendment to treat gains on debt mutual funds as short-term gains will substantially diminish the attractiveness of

such products.

"The amendment in the finance bill will have significant structural changes to the way we invest. For mutual funds to get investor interest, it'll now have to purely be on their ability to add extra "risk adjusted returns" and not because of any tax arbitrage," Srikanth Subramanian, CEO of wealth management firm Kotak Cherry, said.

Financial advisor firm Fintoo's founder Manish P Hingar explained that mutual funds may no longer receive indexation benefits and will be taxed at marginal rates, and added the move will also impact gold funds and international funds.

"This move may have a negative impact on all debt funds, particularly in the retail category, as ultra-high net worth and high net worth individuals may choose to invest in safe havens like bank fixed deposits.

"We may see a shift from long-term debt funds to equity funds, and money may be directed towards sovereign gold bonds, bank fixed deposits, and non-convertible debentures in the debt category," Hingar said.



RBI's MPC to meet 6 times next fiscal; first on April 3-6

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will meet six times in the next financial year.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) rate setting panel will be holding its first meeting of the next fiscal from April 3-6, the central bank said in a statement.

The RBI Governor announces the bi-monthly monetary policy after MPC's deliberations on the prevailing domestic and economic situations. The meetings are held over three days.

According to the schedule released by the RBI on Friday, the first bi-monthly monetary policy of FY2023-24 is scheduled for April 3, 5 and 6; and next will be held during June 6-8.

The third, fourth and fifth meetings have been scheduled for August 8-10, October 4-6, and December 6-8.

The sixth bi-monthly meeting of the MPC is scheduled to be held on February 6-8, 2024.

Headed by the Governor, the committee has two representatives from the central bank and three external members.

The central government has tasked the RBI to ensure that inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on the either side.

Govt to set up panel headed by finance secretary to improve NPS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday announced that a committee under the finance secretary will be set up to improve the New Pension System (NPS) with a view to take care of the concerns of employees while maintaining fiscal prudence.

While moving the Finance Bill 2023 for consideration and passage in the Lok Sabha, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the new approach to the NPS will be designed for adoption by both central and state governments.

"I propose to set up a committee under the finance secretary to look into the issue of pensions and evolve an approach which addresses the

needs of employees while maintaining fiscal prudence to protect common citizens," she said.

"The approach will be designed for adoption by both the central government and state governments," she said.

The decision comes in the backdrop of several non-BJP states deciding to revert to the DA-linked Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and also employee organisations in some other states raising demand for the same.

The state governments of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have informed the Centre about their decision to revert to the Old Pension Scheme and have requested a refund of corpus accumulated under the NPS.



Earlier this month, the central government informed Parliament that it is not considering any proposal to restore the OPS in respect of the central government employees recruited after January 1, 2004.

Under the OPS, retired government employees received 50 per cent of their last drawn salary as monthly pensions. The amount keeps increasing with hike in the DA rates. OPS is not fiscally sustainable as it is not con-

tributory in nature and the burden on exchequer keeps on mounting.

The total assets under management under the National Pension System and Atal Pension Yojana stood at Rs 8.81 lakh crore as on March 4, 2023. NPS has been implemented for all government employees except those in armed forces joining central government on or after 1st of January 2004. Most of the state/ Union Territory governments have also notified the NPS for their new employees.

According to the PFRDA (Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority), 26 state governments, with the exception of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, have notified and implemented NPS for their employees. NPS has been made avail-

able to every Indian citizen from May 1, 2009 on a voluntary basis.

Further, on June 1, 2015, the Atal Pension Yojana has been launched which has given the much required impetus to the social security schemes.

To regulate and develop the pension market, the government created PFRDA in 2003. It was initially designed for government employees exclusively, but its services were subsequently expanded to include all Indian nationals and NRIs, including self-employed persons.

PFRDA promotes, develops and regulates organised pension funds; namely National Pension System (NPS) to serve the old age income needs of people on a sustainable basis.



Further delay in e-commerce policy rollout may accentuate issues in digital mkt: Par panel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Any further delay in formulating and notifying a dedicated e-commerce policy may further accentuate the prevailing issues in India's digital market, according to a Parliamentary panel report.

The report tabled on Friday urged the Centre to finalise the draft National E-Commerce Policy at the earliest.

The department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce in its report on the 'Promotion and Regulation of E-Commerce in India' observed that the absence of a dedicated e-commerce policy has resulted in a 'strategy vacuum' for the sector and 'ineffective regulation'.

Notably, the Committee said as the current regulatory framework is restricted to prevention and identification of sellers who have violated rules regarding Intellectual Property Rights, there exist gaps in enforcement mechanisms with regard to provision for imposing ex-post penalty on sellers who have violated the relevant rules.

It recommended the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade to "develop appropriate mechanisms for enforcement of rules related to Intellectual Property Rights in e-commerce space in consultation with the relevant Ministries/Departments".

It also asserted that the online sale of medicines has not been regulated despite objections and concerns raised by stakeholders, and opined and reiterated its recommendation to

the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to notify E-Pharmacy Rules and formulate comprehensive guidelines with regard to e-pharmacy/e-health platforms.

Noting that the Draft National E-Commerce Policy is at the stage of inter-ministerial consultations and could not be finalised till date, the panel said "any further delay in formulating and notifying a dedicated policy may further accentuate the prevailing issues in the fast paced digital market".

The Committee also observed that delay in finalisation and passage of the Competition Amendment Bill might have 'far reaching adverse and irreversible implications for competition in digital markets in India'.

It recommended the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to take concerted efforts to finalise and get the bill enacted at the earliest. The panel said necessary provisions should be incorporated in the amendment bill to empower and enable the Competition Commission of India as well as the Digital and Markets and Data Unit to effectively regulate the fast paced digital market taking into account the present day realities.

The Competition (Amendment) Bill, which seeks structural changes in the governing structure of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), was introduced in the Lok Sabha in August last year.

The CCI has in recent times ordered probes as well as passed various orders with respect to alleged unfair business practices in the growing digital market.

Pvt hospitals to clock 10-11% revenue growth in FY22-23, FY23-24: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Revenue of private hospitals will grow 10-11 per cent in financial year 2022-23 and 2023-24, supported by increasing domestic demand and pick-up in medical tourism, says a report. According to the Crisil Ratings report, revenue of private hospitals will grow on the back of healthy bed occupancy and sustenance of high average revenue per occupied bed (ARPOB).

In FY22, private hospitals had reported an all-time high operating profitability of 19 per cent due to a surge in treatment during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which also pushed up occupancy levels, and, later, pent-up demand for elective surgeries, it said.

"Growing health awareness, especially after Covid-19, leading to increase in domestic demand together with recovery



in medical tourism, will ensure bed occupancy being maintained at almost similar levels of 60 per cent (past five fiscals average) even as bed addition continues," Crisil Ratings Senior Director Anuj Sethi said.

Sethi further noted that occupancy dipped only once during this period to 53 per cent due to lockdown enforced during the first phase of the pandemic.

Healthy cash generation,

leading to limited reliance on external borrowing to fund higher capex (both greenfield and brownfield) will in turn help private hospitals maintain adequate debt protection metrics and keep credit risk profiles stable, Crisil Ratings added.

Further, rising insurance coverage will make quality treatment more accessible, and support demand as well, he said adding that ARPOB which grew 20 per cent in FY22, will contin-

ue to register modest growth, supporting revenues.

The report further said private hospitals are seeing a gradual return of medical tourism - accounting for 10-12 per cent of revenue pre-pandemic - that got affected considerably during the pandemic, amid travel restrictions.

Lower cost of treatments, modern facilities with well-trained personnel, and increasing air-connectivity are expected to restore revenue from medical tourism to pre-pandemic levels. This will further support occupancy levels despite aggressive bed additions, Crisil Ratings noted.

However, the report noted any resurgence of Covid-19 or intense viral cases that triggers lockdown and restricts travel, or any regulatory intervention that impedes the performance of private hospitals, will bear watching in the road ahead.

RBI Central board discusses global, domestic eco situation

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank of India's central board on Friday reviewed the global and domestic economic situation as well as the associated challenges.

The 601st meeting of the Central Board of Directors of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was held at Hyderabad under the chairmanship of Governor Shaktikanta Das.

"The board in its meeting reviewed the global and domestic economic situation and associated challenges, including the impact of current global geopolitical developments," RBI said in a statement.

Further, it said, the board discussed RBI's activities during the current accounting year 2022-23. The board also approved the budget for the accounting year 2023-24.

The meeting took place in the backdrop of global concerns over failure of banks in the US

amid aggressive monetary tightening. The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday hiked interest rates by 25 basis points to tame high inflation despite the banking crisis.

Both, Bank of England and European Central Bank (ECB) have also raised their benchmark interest rates. Meanwhile, policy makers and experts have said that the Indian banking system is in good shape.

At the meeting on Friday, directors of RBI's central board — Satish K Marathe, Sachin Chaturvedi, Pankaj Ramanbhai Patel and Ravindra H Dholakia — were present.

RBI Deputy Governors — Mahesh Kumar Jain, Michael Debabrata Patra, M Rajeshwar Rao, and T Rabi Sankar — were also present.

Besides, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Sethi, and Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi participated in the meeting.

CCI approves GMR Airports Infra-Aeroports de Paris SA deal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fair-trade regulator CCI on Friday said it has approved the proposed deal of GMR Airports Infrastructure and Aeroports de Paris SA (ADP) under the green channel route.

The proposed combination involves ADP's proposed acquisition of and subscription to foreign currency convertible bonds (FCCB) issued by GMR Airports Infrastructure Ltd, according to a CCI notice.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has cleared the deal. It has also given nod to the proposed intra-group merger of GMR Airports Ltd and GMR Infra Developers Ltd (GIDL) with and into GMR Airports Infrastructure Ltd.

Also, the regulator has given its nod to the proposed acquisition by ADP (and its group entities) of equity shares and optionally convertible redeem-

ing to a CCI notice.

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Also, the regulator has given its nod to the proposed acquisition by ADP (and its group entities) of equity shares and optionally convertible redeem-



able preference shares of GMR Airports Infrastructure post-merger, CCI said.

On March 19, GMR Airports Infrastructure Ltd (GIL) announced the merger of GMR

Airports Ltd with GIL.

ADP is an international airport operator owned by the French Government, while GMR Airports Infrastructure is a listed-entity and global infrastructure conglomerate with expertise in operating airports. It primarily operates through its subsidiary GMR Airports Ltd (GAL).

GIDL is a wholly-owned subsidiary of GMR Airports Infrastructure.

Individual taxpayers with income marginally over ₹7 lakh to get relief under new tax regime

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to taxpayers opting for new tax regime, individuals earning marginally higher income than no-tax ceiling of Rs 7 lakh will pay tax only on the differential income after the government amended the Finance Bill. The Finance Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha on Friday, has proposed a mar-



ginal relief to taxpayers under new tax regime.

Explaining the provision, the finance ministry said under

the new tax regime with effect from April 1, if a taxpayer has annual income of Rs 7 lakh s/he pays no tax. But if s/he has income of Rs 7,00,100 s/he pays tax of 25,010. Thus an additional income of Rs 100 leads to a tax of Rs 25,010.

Hence, marginal relief is proposed to that so that the tax what one pays should not be more than the income that

exceeds Rs 7 lakh (Rs 100 in this case), the ministry said.

Nangia Andersen LLP Partner Sandeep Jhunjhunwala said the amendment to Finance Bill seeks to provide a marginal relief to individual taxpayers having borderline income by proposing a deduction of income tax payable in excess of the differential income above Rs 7 Lakh.

BRIEF POWERGRID WINS 6 PROJECTS THROUGH TARIFF-BASED COMPETITIVE BIDDING



Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a Maharatna CPSU under Ministry of Power, has acquired six project Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) for various transmission system projects after competing with various private sector players and emerging as a successful bidder in the Tariff Based Competitive Bidding process conducted by REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), as per the guidelines notified by Government of India.

These Project SPVs include Khavda RE Transmission Limited, KPS2 Transmission Limited, KPS3 Transmission Limited, Khavda II-B Transmission Limited, Khavda II-C Transmission Limited, ERWR Transmission Limited.

WPL GAME EQUALISER: BARCLAY

There is no reason for men and women’s game to be viewed as different, says ICC chairman

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Women's cricket has distinguished itself with the introduction of the WPL and it should not be viewed differently from the men's game anymore, says ICC chairman Greg Barclay.

He said the league will help uplift the women's game, thanks to the professionalism and money involved.

The first edition of the tournament will conclude here on Sunday.

"... As I say, I think it will be a great uplift for the women's game and I am looking forward to see how this tournament plays out," Barclay told the BCCI.

"Now, there is no reason for the two parts of the game, men and women, to be viewed as different. This is people playing cricket and they should be treated equally.

"Secondly, the professionalism and the remuneration that is afforded the players I think that's something that's going to be really important, again, for the women's game," he added.



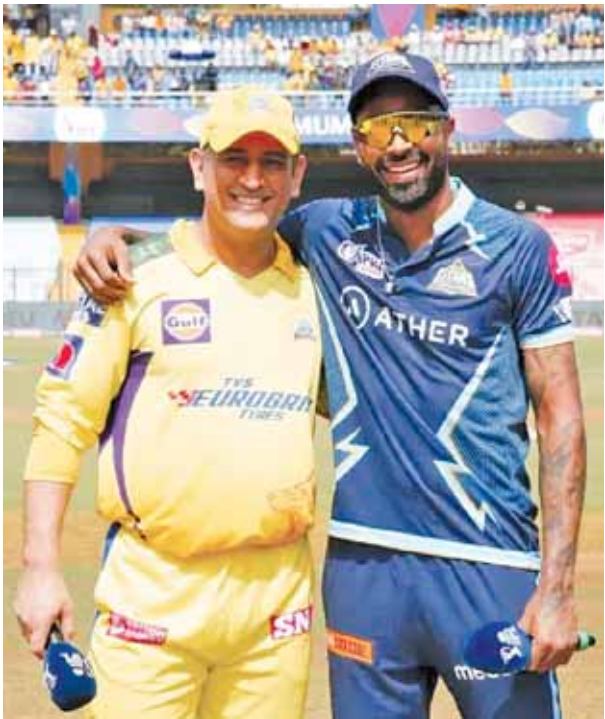
The Women's Premier League, which was a long time coming, finally began on March 4 this year amid much fanfare.

"I think if you recognise the powerhouse that India is in terms of cricket, it's appropriate that they have launched the Women's Premier League. I know that Jay Shah (BCCI president) and his board and his team are really committed to making this one one of the biggest and best tournaments that it can possibly be.

"I am sure that they will be successful in that respect. I am really pleased and very appreciate that this has happened," Barclay said.

"I take my hat off to Jay and his team at the BCCI for the way they have approached this. That is exactly what I would have expected out of an Indian run competition, it's absolutely amazing. "Jay and his team are doing a wonderful job in leading the way in terms of getting the women's game to where it needs to be," he signed off.

Barclay is serving his second term as the chair of the game's apex body.



‘Hardik similar to Dhoni as captain’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Having watched both of them from close quarters, Gujarat Titans spinner R Sai Kishore feels that his franchise skipper Hardik Pandya is very similar to legendary MS Dhoni in terms of leadership traits.

Sai Kishore, before joining Gujarat Titans, was with CSK for a couple of years.

"Hardik and Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni) are pretty similar in the way they handle things, they both are pretty calm," Sai Kishore told the media during a virtual interaction session on Friday.

"One thing that I really admire about Hardik is his ability to handle success and failure equally – that is something very unique about him. He is a level-headed guy and that works (for him)," he added.

The 28-year-old said Gujarat Titans, who won the IPL last year in their debut season, will have to replicate their performances from last season in order to be successful.

"The tag of being defending champions is up to us whether to take it or not. We played well last year and that is why we won. I think if we can do that (then) the tag won't matter much," he said. Sai Kishore said the new rule of having an 'Impact Player' in IPL will make it more manageable than what it was in domestic circuit.

"It is more like the super-sub rule where we can either use a

bowler or a batsman. It is basically like playing with 12 people. We have already played with this (rule) in domestic (cricket). The only change is that we can use it till the 20th over, in domestic it was restricted to the 14th over. In 20 overs, it should be a lot easier to handle," he said.

The Tamil Nadu left-arm spinner said he is eyeing a place in the Indian side via strong performances in the IPL.

"Yes, there are a lot of left-arm spinners in India and this (IPL) is a very good opportunity but I would like to be here now in the present and play well for Gujarat. In the last five years, my skill-set has gone up and I want to keep improving. If it happens that I do very well in the IPL, I am going to play for India," he said.

However, Sai Kishore admitted that he has to improve his batting to come into national reckoning.

"It is a work in progress. I have done well in domestic (cricket) also. I know the areas where I am good at and areas where I need to work on. I am trying to put in hours into my batting and fielding," he said.

"In the IPL and higher you go, you want to bat at the top. In Tamil Nadu, I have had the luxury of batting at the top in a few games. The death overs batting needs more work and attention. Finding a pattern or formula to score quick runs is what I am working on," Sai Kishore concluded.



David Warner will have point to prove in IPL, says Watson

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former Australia all-rounder and assistant coach of Delhi Capitals Shane Watson says the team's new captain David Warner will have a "point to prove" in the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League, starting on March 31.

Warner, who joined Delhi Capitals ahead of the 2022 season, has been named captain for IPL 2023 due to Rishabh Pant being ruled out following a horrific car accident in December last year.

Warner has captained Delhi franchise in the past, the then Delhi Daredevils, and has had a successful run as a skipper in IPL with the Sunrisers Hyderabad, leading them to their only title win in the 2016 edition.

Warner had an overall successful stint with SRH, but his poor form with the bat and his subsequent fallout with the team management was followed by an unignifed exit in the 2021 season.

The leading run-scorer among all overseas players with 5,881 runs, Warner was removed as captain and was also benched permanently by the franchise and eventually released ahead of the 2022 mega auction.

He also endured a poor tour of India recently, failing with the bat in the two Tests at Nagpur and Delhi and scoring 23 in the only ODI he played post recovery from a hairline fracture to his left elbow.

"David Warner for me is just at the top of the order. He's going to continue to have a point to prove and everyone's going to be like riding off the back of him. He's always scored so many runs in the IPL. And to be an opening batter, and set the platform like he does is going to be very important," Watson told Star Sports.

The former Australia vice-captain Watson backed Mitchell Marsh to continue with his devastating form with the bat that he displayed in the ODI series win for Australia against India.

"(For) Mitchell Marsh, this is going to be another really big season for him. He's got incredible skill with the bat alone and how he's batting and takes the game on is going to play a really big part," Watson said.

Watson picked South Africa's Rilee Rossouw as the trump card for Delhi Capitals in IPL 2023.

"Well, one in particular is Rilee Rossouw, he's someone you know, I've played with him in the Pakistan Super League for Quetta Gladiators. And to see

how he has come back into international cricket and he's a world class hitter of the ball.

"He can take down any bowler at any stage, in any conditions. So if he gets on a roll, he can just take the game away from the opposition," he explained.

The Delhi Capitals assistant coach said his side has got all-round cover for the upcoming season.

"There's a lot of very talented players. We've got some youngsters with the ball, fast bowlers, we've got (Kamlesh) Nagarkoti and Chetan Sakariya. And then we've got our spinners as well, like Axar (Patel) and Kuldeep Yadav.

"Those two guys, to be able to have world class spinners bowling especially through the middle, to be able to try and get wickets and also keep the runs down, that's so critically important," he said.

Watson backed the pair of Patel and Kuldeep to take advantage of a spin-friendly pitch in their homeground.

"For sure, Delhi's normally, conventionally a lower, turning sort of wicket and we've got the bowlers to exploit that with our spinners alone. With Axar and also Kuldeep Yadav, but also with the batters that we've got, can really make the most of those conditions. It's a smaller ground as well," he said.

Watson admitted the absence of Pant will be a huge miss for the side.

"The biggest challenge for Delhi is just to be able to consistently put good performances together. You know, the Delhi Capitals have got a really, really skilful squad, and we do again this year.

"Obviously Rishabh Pant not being a part of, not playing this tournament is going to be a huge, huge miss," Watson expressed.

CSK's 2018 triumph tells you about leadership: Gavaskar praises Dhoni

New Delhi, Mar 24 (PTI) Recalling an ageing Chennai Super Kings' remarkable triumph after returning to IPL from a two-year ban, batting great Sunil Gavaskar praised talisman Mahendra Singh Dhoni and said his ability to get the best out of his players makes him stand out.

The upcoming edition of the IPL starts on March 31.

Speaking on Star Sports Network, Gavaskar recalled the highlights of the illustrious IPL career of 'Captain Cool' and how he has brought out the best in his team mates.

13 suspicious cricket matches were played across globe last year: Sportradar report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There were 13 competitive cricket matches that came under the cloud of suspicion in 2022, according to a review report published by Sportradar Integrity Services.

Sportradar Integrity Services unit is an international team of qualified integrity experts who deliver analysis on irregular betting, match-fixing and other forms of corruption in sports.

The 28-page report titled 'Betting, Corruption and Match-Fixing' states that in calendar year 2022, an unprecedented '1212 suspicious matches' were detected across 12 sporting disciplines in 92 countries.

The company uses an application Universal Fraud Detection System (UFDS) to detect suspicious activity during matches.

While football accounted for 775 matches, which possibly could have been corrupted, basketball is second in the list with 220 such games, and lawn tennis is third with 75 questionable games.

Interestingly, among 12 sports, cricket only has 13 allegedly corrupt games and is sixth in the list. The report claims that 13 corrupt games could still be the highest for the sport in a single year.

"Although a number of sports contin-



ue to display relatively low numbers of suspicious matches, 13 suspicious cricket matches is still the highest annual figure recorded by Sportradar Integrity Services, and handball and futsal also recorded their highest ever number of suspicious matches," the report stated.

The PTI had sent a questionnaire to Sportradar to understand which format has been corrupted the most and whether it is international games or matches in the T20

leagues. However, a look at the report states that the company is not referring to any matches played in India as per the graphics depicted in the report.

Therefore, one could ascertain that none of the 13 corrupt matches mentioned in the report has been played in India.

Sportradar, in fact, had partnered with the BCCI's anti-corruption unit in 2020 to detect betting irregularities during IPL matches.

Myanmar face stiff challenge against Kyrgyz in Tri-Nation football trophy

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Myanmar will square off against the Kyrgyz Republic in their second match of the Tri-Nation International Football Tournament at the Khuman Lampak Stadium here on Saturday.

The tournament sees international football being featured in the football-crazy state for the first time, as India play host to Myanmar and Kyrgyz Republic.

The two outstation teams have already been in Imphal over the past week, where they have been training in preparation for the tournament. Myanmar had faced India in the opening match, which the hosts won 1-0.

Myanmar head coach Michael Feichtenbeiner looked to ease the pressure off from his players' shoulders, as he chose to



focus on performance, rather than results.

"Our target is to improve our performance first, and then to improve as a team. Only then can we reach something in terms of results. Of course, we want to get better results, that's the main target overall," said Feichtenbeiner in a release.

Feichtenbeiner showed a lot of respect for the opposition team when asked about the Kyrgyz Republic.

"They have a strong line-up that will come to their advantage tomorrow. The last few matches were not as successful for us, but we want to change that and try our best," he said.

Kimmich praises Nagelsmann amid reports Bayern coach out



AP ■ FRANKFURT

Bayern Munich midfielder Joshua Kimmich praised Julian Nagelsmann as an "outstanding" coach Friday amid reports that the 35-year-old manager is set to be fired and replaced by Thomas Tuchel.

Both Kicker magazine and German tabloid Bild reported Thursday that Bayern was ending Nagelsmann's spell in charge following the team's 2-1 loss at Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga on Sunday.

"I can only say that Julian Nagelsmann is an outstanding coach. Really, I've had a lot of coaches and a lot of top coaches and despite that

I'd say he's easily in the top three of my best coaches," Kimmich told reporters Friday as he prepares to captain Germany in a friendly against Peru on Saturday.

"As things stand at the moment, you can surely understand that I can't say anything" about the reports, he added.

Germany coach Hansi Flick, who was Nagelsmann's predecessor at Bayern, said he was "very surprised" to see reports saying Nagelsmann would be removed.

Bayern's defeat to Leverkusen dropped Bayern to second place in the Bundesliga, one point behind Borussia Dortmund before the teams clash in Munich in the 'Klassiker' on April 1.

The Associated Press has asked Bayern for comment but the club has yet to make a statement about the situation.

Kicker reported that Bayern is in touch with Tuchel and that the German coach is expected to join Friday or Saturday. Tuchel led Chelsea to the Champions League title in 2021 and previously coached Paris Saint-Germain — losing the 2020 Champions League final to Bayern — and Dortmund.

Bayern faces Manchester City in the Champions League quarterfinals on April 11.

Sharath Kamal pulls out of Nationals due to back spasms

PTI ■ JAMMU

Back and calf issues have forced defending champion Achantha Sharath Kamal to pull out of the men's singles event of the 84th UTT Inter-State Senior National Table Tennis Championships beginning here on Saturday.

The last-minute pullout because of the recurring back and calf spasms that Sharath has suffered in the past two months have dealt a blow to the organisers and the local spectators.

But his absence would help former national champion G. Sathiyam's cause as he eyes his second title. Sharath, a 10-time national champion, said he has to be cautious and continue the rehab programmes devised before the World Championships in Durban in May.

"The Worlds in May last

week is my focus, and I want to prepare well for the big event. Most importantly, I don't want to aggravate the situation. I am going straight to rehab and concentrate just on the Durban Worlds," he said in a release.

The PSPB paddler indulged in extra stretching before the quarters and semi-finals of the team championships to keep fit. He was in discomfort, but his commitment to the team's cause kept him going as he competed and won the matches without letting the cat out of the bag.

As for the matches on the fifth day of the championships, the top 16 seeded players in the men's section and eight in the women's category will get into action from Saturday when the second stage draw, the knockout, begins. The women will play three rounds, while the men will play two. With the group topper



emerging as the qualifier for the knockout round, there will be a tough fight among the players in 78 groups (women) and 96 in men's singles, respectively.

Meanwhile, the 16 men and eight women players will have a good day's rest before the battle for the title and the prize purse of Rs. 16 lakh gets hot.

The top-ranked players in both sections are:

Men: G. Sathiyam, Manush Shah, Harmmeet Desai, Manav Thakkar, Sanil Shetty, Anirban Ghosh, Sudhanshu Grover, Jeet Chandra, SFR Snehit, Soumyajit Ghosh, Anthony Amalraj, Ronit Bhanja, Payas Jain, Deepit R. Patil, Yashansh Malik and Subh Goel.

Women: Manika Batra, Sreeja Akula, Reeth Rishya, Diya Chitale, Sutirtha Mukherjee, Anusha Kutumbale, Swastika Ghosh and Pra

Sindhu exits, Satwik-Chirag duo enters quarters of Swiss Open



PTI ■ BASEL

Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu failed to defend her Swiss Open Super 300 badminton title as she was shocked by unseeded Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia in a thrilling three-game women's singles second round match here.

World No.9 Sindhu, seeded fourth here, was stunned 15-21 21-12 18-21 by the 38th ranked Wardani in their first-ever face-off at the international level on

Thursday night.

But second-seeded men's pairing of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty kept India's flag flying by entering the quarterfinals with a hard-fought 12-21 21-17 28-26 win over Taiwanese pair of Fang-Chih Lee and Fang-Jen Lee.

The world No. 6 Indian duo will next face Danish pair of Jeppe Bay and Lasse Molhede later on Friday.

Earlier on Thursday, world No. 9 and fifth seed H S Prannoy

made a shock second-round exit after losing in straight games against unseeded Christo Popov of France.

Prannoy, favourite coming into the contest, looked a pale shadow of himself in front of world No. 40 Popov as he failed to give any fight, losing 8-21 8-21 to bow out of the men's singles event.

But it was Kidambi Srikanth, who was the first to crash out on Thursday, losing to Hong Kong's Cheuk Yiu Lee.

Going by rankings, there was hardly anything to separate the two as Srikanth is placed 20th in the world as against his rival's 19th position.

It was a hard-fought match, but Lee kept his composure to emerge 22-20 21-17 winner in the singles pre-quarterfinal contest.

National champion Mithun Manjunath also bowed out in the second round, losing 19-21 20-21 to Chia Hao Lee of Chinese Taipei.

Aman Raj stays at third, Aryan Roopa Anand is 7th at Challenge Tour event

PTI ■ BENGALURU

India's Aman Raj shot a solid four-under 68 to lie tied third after the second round of the Duncan Taylor Black Bull Challenge golf here on Friday.

At 9-under for 36 holes, Aman was two shots behind the leader, Manuel Elvira of Spain (63-70), who is 11-under and two shots ahead of the field.

Sweden's Rikard Karlberg (68-66), who has two wins in India, was lying second at 10-under, while Aman shared the third place alongside three others — Oliver Farr (64-71), Ashley Chesters (67-68) and Stefano Mazzoli (67-68), who were all at 9-under.

Just one shot behind them in tied seventh was local lad, Aryan Roopa Anand, a rookie pro. Aryan (68-68) is now 8-under and shares the seventh place with five others.

Two more Indians, Om Prakash Chouhan (70-67) and Mari Muthu (68-69) were tied 13th at 7-under. Chouhan made a fine move up by 30 places as he added 67 to his first 70.

The tournament has so far looked good for Indians, who are getting to play a European Challenge Tour event in India after a gap of 10 years. A win here could open the doors to the Challenge Tour, from where they can aspire for the main DP World Tour.

As many as 14 Indians made the cut, which fell at 3-under with 69 players making it through to the weekend, including amateurs Arron Edwards-Hill and Robert Moran who received invitations through Sir Nick Faldo's Elite Tour.

Aman, who is on a come-



back trail following a fine win on the domestic Tata Steel PGTI Tour, had a fine start with birdies on second and fourth, but back-to-back bogeys on sixth and seventh meant he was back to even par.

The 27-year-old Patna golfer, fought back superbly around the turn with four birdies in a span of five holes. He birdied ninth, 10th, 11th and 13th and then closed with five pars to stay at tied third, where he began the second day.

Aman will go out in the lead group with Elvira and Karlberg at 9:30am. Aryan, starting from the back nine, birdied 10th and 11th and dropped a shot on 12th. He got back that shot with a birdie on 17th and turned in 2-under. On the front nine of the KGA Course, Aryan birdied four times on first, second, fifth and eighth but also dropped a double bogey on Par-3 fourth for a second straight 68.

Chouhan had six birdies against one bogey in his 67 and Muthu had five birdies and a double in his 69.



Chikka tied sixth in Hong Kong as debutant Kho takes lead

PTI ■ HONG KONG

India's S Chikkarangappa carded a fine one-under 69 but slipped from tied fourth place to tied sixth place at the halfway stage of the USD 1 million World City Championship here on Friday.

As many as eight of the nine Indians made the cut.

Chikka, who had a Top-10 finish last week at the DGC open, shot a second straight under par round at the par-70 Hong Kong Golf Club to move to 5-under for 36 holes.

Overnight leader Miguel Tabuena, winner in India last week, shot three-under 67 to get to 10-under, but he was overtaken by Hong Kong's debutant Taichi Kho, who is playing on his home course.

Kho took the second round lead with 64 and he is now 12-under and two shots ahead.

Among other Indians, veteran Jeev Milkha Singh (71-66) and SSP Chawrasia (70-67) were both three-under and tied 23rd. Shiv Kapur (71-67) was two-under and tied 36th, as were Veer Ahlawat (71-67) and Honey Baisoya (69-69).

Karandeep Kochhar (69-70) was 1-under and tied 48th, as Gaganjeet Bhullar (73-67) made the cut on the line.

Viraj Madappa (73-71) was the lone Indian to miss the cut.

Kho, 22, fired his second-successive six-under-par 64 to lead by two from Tabuena, the first-round leader. New Zealand's Michael Hendry is in third place, four behind Kho, after returning a 64. Kho, a member of the HKGC since January who was unveiled this week as their ambassador, is 12-under and now has an outstanding opportunity to become the first player from Hong Kong to win on the Asian Tour.

This is the first international golf tournament in Hong Kong, China for 38 months.

Tabuena, who led with a 63 on Thursday, impressively recovered from a double bogey on his opening hole.

Korean Uyoeseo Seo returned a 64 and is solo fourth, five back from Kho. Thailand's Jazz Janewattanond (67) and Suradit Yongcharoenchai (68) are a further stroke back along with Zimbabwe's Kieran Vincent (67).

Rudrankksh wins bronze as China extend golden run

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Reigning world champion Rudranksh Patil won bronze in the men's 10m air rifle, his second of the tournament, even as China extended their golden run at the ISSF World Cup by winning both gold medals on offer for the second consecutive day here.

Tokyo Olympics silver medallist Sheng Lihao of China won gold in the men's 10m air rifle while compatriot Huang Yuting, a double gold medallist at the Cairo World Championships last year, won the women's event.

China maintained their top position on the medal tally at the end of competition day three with five gold, one silver and two bronze in their kitty. India lay second with three bronze medals to go with a gold and silver each.

Playing back-to-back matches can never be easy, especially in a home World Cup, but the champion shooter that he is, Rudranksh delivered yet again, clinching bronze from what at one point seemed a lost cause.

He shot a solid 631.0 in qualification to finish fourth after leading in the ini-



tial stages. In the 25-shot top eight ranking round, he was well outside the medal positions till the third five-shot series, before a fantastic fourth series, where he shot the highest score of 53.5, brought him back into contention.

Meanwhile the three Chinese qualifiers — Sheng (who led throughout the ranking round), silver medallist Du Linshu and Yu Haonan -- were on course to make it a Chinese 1-2-3 till the

20th shot. Rudranksh went into the fifth series 0.8 behind Yu. He then shot a strong 52.6 in the series as Yu faltered, posting 51.5 to finish fourth, as the Indian confirmed his second medal in two days and his fourth ISSF World Cup podium overall.

He finished with a score of 262.3 as Sheng and Du moved into the gold medal match with scores of 264.2 and 263.3 respectively.

The all-China gold medal contest was also a close one with Sheng prevailing 17-13 in the end.

RAMITA FINISHES FOURTH

India had only one top eight finisher in Ramita in the women's 10m air rifle as she shot 632.3 to finish second among the medal contenders in the 52-strong field. The top eight had two Chinese, two Americans and one shooter each from Romania, Israel and Kazakhstan, besides hosts India.

China's Huang Yuting was in ominous form, topping the qualifications with a score of 632.8, while Tokyo Olympics silver medallist in the mixed team air rifle, Mary Tucker of the USA, also made it through in seventh place.

In the top eights, Huang was a cut above the rest, finishing on top again with a score of 265.7 as Mary shot 261.2 for a shot at gold.

Kazakhstan's Alexandra Le pipped India's Ramita to bronze, shooting 261.2 to the Indian's 260.5. Huang then maintained her form on the day to defeat Mary 16-4 for China's fifth gold of the competition.

MATCHDAY: Spain hosts Norway; Wales at Croatia in qualifiers



AP ■ WASHINGTON

A look at what's happening in European Championship qualifying on Saturday: **GROUP A**

Luis de la Fuente takes charge of his first game as Spain coach in a potentially tricky match against Norway but he won't have to worry about Erling Haaland. The record-breaking Manchester City striker is out of the Norwegian squad after feeling pain from a groin injury.

Scotland plays Cyprus in the other game in the group after extending coach Steve Clarke's contract through to the 2026 World Cup. **GROUP D**

With long-time star Gareth Bale having recently retired, Wales will start a new era in its match at Croatia. Bale was Wales' most-capped men's player with 111 appearances and carried the team in recent years, including to the nation's first

appearance at a World Cup in 64 years. However, Croatia star Luka Modric is still going. The 37-year-old Modric has said he will continue playing for his national team at least until the Nations League finals in June so should add to his record 162 appearances for Croatia against Wales in Split. Turkey visits Armenia in the other game.

GROUP I Switzerland's previous game was a 6-1 loss to Portugal in front of a crowd of 83,000 at the World Cup in Qatar. The Swiss return in an empty stadium facing Belarus in neutral Serbia.

Though Russia was kicked out of Euro 2024 by UEFA, its military ally Belarus was allowed to keep playing on condition of hosting its games in neutral countries with no fans allowed. Belarus chose Novi Sad in Serbia, which won't be an option when it "hosts" Kosovo in June. Kosovo starts at Israel on

NCA has shared workload monitoring report of India players: Delhi Capitals CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI and the Indian team management are keeping a tab on workload management of national team players but there has been no specific directive for the IPL franchises as yet, said Delhi Capitals CEO Dheeraj Malhotra on Friday.

Malhotra, who has worked as a general manager with the BCCI, said that the National Cricket Academy (NCA) has shared a detailed workload monitoring report of all the Indian players associated with respective franchises, which obviously helps the IPL team's medical unit to work in cohesion with the parent body.

Asked if there is a specific directive on workload management of World Cup prospects, Malhotra told PTI: "Not yet. What NCA has done is, it sent a report on all the contracted players."

"We have Axar, Kuldeep and Prithvi. They have given us what they have been doing and what their workload has been. But we still have not been given a directive on what they want from us and what the workload should be for players."

In fact, it is learnt that no franchise will get any directive on India players unless someone is carrying an injury.

"Tell me one thing. In absence of Jassi (Jasprit Bumrah), Mohammed Shami is your pace spearhead going into



World Cup. Now if GT again plays finals, then he might have to bowl a maximum of 64 overs (16 games).

Suppose NCA tells that Shami should be used for 40 overs at the max, what is the guarantee that he won't pull a hammy (hamstring)? Can you give it in writing?", a franchise coach, not wanting to be named, counter questioned.

For a World Cup scheduled in October-November, one cannot ask a private franchise that is paying crores to the players to put in percentage effort. Skipper Rohit Sharma had recently said it will depend on an individual if he wants a break or not.

"They (players) are all adults. So they have to look after their body and just if they feel that it's getting a little too much, they can always talk about it and have a break in one or two games. I doubt (if) that will happen but...." Rohit had said after the third ODI against Australia.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, BHUBANESWAR (R&B) DIVISION
NO.V, BHUBANESWAR

Mail i.d eernb5bbsr@gmail.com
INVITATION OF BIDS

E-procurement Tender Call Notice No.26 of 2022-23

No. 2594 Bhubaneswar the 22 March-2023

The Superintending Engineer, Bhubaneswar (R&B) Division No.V, Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids for two number Composite Building works to be received in online bidding, single cover system for construction work as detailed in : <https://tendersorissa.gov.in>. The details of bid documents will be available in the above website from 5:00 P.M of 28.03.2023 to 5.00 P.M of 10.04.2023. The bidders must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate of Class II or III. Bids received online shall be opened at 11.30 A.M. of 11.04.2023 in the Office of the Superintending Engineer, Bhubaneswar (R&B) Division No.V, Bhubaneswar.

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal www.tendersorissa.gov.in. Addendum / Corrigendum, if required, will be available only in the Website.

Sd/-Er.P.C.Dalal
Superintending Engineer
Bhubaneswar (R&B) Division No.V, Bhubaneswar

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Admission Notice No.71 /2023

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