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WALKING A TIGHTROPE
IN MYANMAR

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KIM'S SISTER WARNS N KOREA
READY TO ACT AGAINST US, SOUTH

MONEY 10

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF BUDGET INITIATIVES
AND INVEST: PM TO INDIA INC

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ISIS threatens to hit BJP, military, sell women, kids

Hate-filled article in Khurasan aims to bolster sagging morale of its terror followers in India

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The outlawed international Islamist terror group ISIS has threatened the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian police establishment and the military with a bloody revenge for their actions against its mujahidin (terrorists).

In its latest propaganda magazine Khurasan, the ISIS asserted that Islamists in South India have taken up arms to wage a war against kufr (unbelievers in Islam) and its people.

It claimed that the threat against the BJP, the police, and the military has been due to the "transgressions crossing all limits." Also, the hatred of Islam and its adherents has been shown in words and deeds, the propaganda article claims.

The terror outfit has also opposed the imprisonment of



its mujahidin and the imposition of curfew in Kashmir.

Islamists all over the world, and especially in south India, have taken up arms in line with the command to wage war against kufr, the article said. "We have not forgotten Kashmir, Babri Masjid, Bano Qudusia, Gujarat riots and your oppression and war against the truth."

Threatening the BJP, the police and the military, it goes on to assert a "bloody revenge" in return for the alleged atrocities against the mujahidin.

Apparently directed at boosting the morale of its fol-

lowers in India, the ISIS pledges to turn order into chaos, security into fear, and happiness into sorrow. There will be no security or peace for anyone who doesn't believe in Islam.

The hate-filled article also talks of turning streets into "pools of blood" where even dreaming of peace and security will be unthinkable.

The article claims to have plans to slaughter men and sell women and children as slaves in the market as revenge for the killing of mujahidin.

The outfit said that the spark of war has already been lit and attacks in Coimbatore

(Tamil Nadu) and Bangalore (Karnataka) were acts in revenge for the honour of their faith. They were aimed at terrorising Kufr and its followers.

Addressing the mujahidin all over the world, especially those in south India, the ISIS exhorted its cadres not to soften and let laziness overpower them.

The article has advised the cadre to be stern and harsh towards unbelievers and seek revenge for the killing of mujahidin. Targeting the gullible youths, it also claimed that the worldly life is nothing but delusion, and that there is a heaven for the "righteous slaves" (that is, Muslim terrorists in common parlance). In that heaven, they will have wives with beautiful, wide eyes.

Counter terrorism experts said the propaganda piece is aimed at broadening the recruitment base in Jammu & Kashmir and strengthening the terror network in South India to further their agenda in the country. The hatred in the article is meant to further radicalise the gullible youngsters and bring them into the terror fold.

CBI grills Lalu in land-for-jobs case



CBI officials at the residence of RJD MP Misa Bharti for the questioning of her father and party chief Lalu Prasad in land-for-jobs case, in New Delhi on Tuesday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after questioning his wife Rabri Devi, the CBI on Tuesday questioned former Railway Minister and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad for nearly five hours in two sessions in the land-for-jobs case.

The case relates to job aspirants allegedly getting employment in the Railways in lieu of land parcels gifted or sold at cheap rates to the Lalu family and its associates, officials said.

A team of five CBI officials arrived in two cars around 10.40 am at the residence of Misa Bharti at Pandara Park near India Gate where Lalu is currently residing, and left around 12.55 pm for lunch. The questioning resumed at

2.15 pm which continued till 5.15 pm, they said.

During the exercise, which was being videographed, the former Bihar CM was confronted with some documents in a room where he is quarantined post his kidney transplant surgery, they said. Last year, Lalu underwent a kidney transplant surgery in Singapore and returned to India a month back. His Singapore-based daughter Rohini Acharya took to Twitter to express her anguish over Lalu's interrogation by the CBI.

"These people are harassing papa. If the harassment leads to any problem, we will rock the seat of power in Delhi. Patience is running out," she tweeted.

Continued on Page 2

Shaliza becomes 1st woman to command combat unit in IAF



Group Captain Shaliza Dharmi, who has been selected by the Indian Air Force to take over command of a frontline combat unit in the Western sector
PTI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has for the first time selected a woman officer to command a frontline combat unit in the Western sector facing Pakistan. Group Captain Shaliza Dharmi is an experienced helicopter pilot.

Giving details here on Tuesday, IAF officials said Group Captain Dharmi was commissioned in the year 2003 as a helicopter pilot and has over 2,800 hours of flying experience. A qualified flying instructor, she has served as flight commander of a helicopter unit in the Western sector.

Group captain in the IAF is an equivalent of a colonel in the Indian Army.

Having been commended by the air officer commanding-in-chief on two occasions, the officer is presently posted in the operations branch of a frontline command headquarters.

Earlier this month, the Army began assigning women officers to command roles for the first time, outside the medical stream. Around 50 of them will head units in operational areas, including forward. This will happen in both the Northern and Eastern Commands.

The selection of Group Captain Dharmi for this position highlights the Indian armed forces' ongoing efforts to provide women with more opportunities and expand their role in combat and command appointments.



Delhi University students celebrate the festival of colour on the eve of Holi in national Capital on Tuesday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Rajan's Hindu rate of growth remark 'biased', 'ill-conceived', says SBI report

New Delhi: An SBI research report on Tuesday dismissed former Reserve Bank Governor Raghuram Rajan's arguments that India is dangerously close to Hindu rate of growth, saying such statements are "ill-conceived, biased and premature" in the wake of the recent GDP numbers and the available data on savings and investments.

"Interpretations of GDP growth based on noisy quarterly numbers is a game of smoke and mirror," said the SBI report "Ecowrap".

Rajan said that India is "dangerously close" to the Hindu rate of growth in view of subdued private sector investment, high interest rates and slowing global growth.

Detailed report on P10

Good governance will continue in N-E: PM



Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the Conrad Sangma Government in Shillong on Tuesday
PTI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday attended the swearing-in ceremonies of Meghalaya and Nagaland chief ministers and extended his best wishes to them.

"Joined the oath taking ceremony of Shri Neiphiu Rio Ji and his Council of Ministers. I am confident that this team, which is a blend of youth and experience, will continue the good governance trajectory of Nagaland and fulfil people's aspirations. My best wishes to them," he tweeted.

He earlier attended the

oath taking ceremony of Conrad Sangma in Meghalaya.

Modi said, "Attended the oath taking ceremony of Shri Conrad Sangma Ji and his ministerial team. Congratulations to those who took oath. Best wishes to them in their pursuit of taking Meghalaya to new heights of growth."

The BJP is a junior partner to regional parties in both the states.

The prime minister is expected to attend the swearing-in of Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday.

Defence Min inks ₹10,000 cr deals for desi training ships, aircraft

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, the Defence Ministry on Tuesday sealed two deals worth nearly ₹10,000 crore. They included a contract with the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to procure 70 HTT-40 basic trainer aircraft at a cost of over ₹6,800 crore for the Indian Air Force.

The Ministry also finalised a contract with the Larsen and Toubro Ltd for acquisition of three cadet training ships worth over ₹3,100 crore. Both the procurement proposals were cleared by the Prime Minister-led Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on March 1.

While the HAL will provide 70 HTT-40 aircraft over a period of six years, the delivery of ships is scheduled to commence from 2026.

"The Ministry of Defence on March 7 signed contracts with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Larsen & Toubro Limited for procurement of 70 HTT-40 basic trainer aircraft and three cadet training ships respectively in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh," the Ministry said.

Detailed report on P4

THE PIONEER
WISHES ITS READERS A
Happy Holi
As the offices of The Pioneer will remain closed on March 8, the next issue of the paper will appear on March 10, 2023.

CAPSULE

17 KILLED, 100 HURT IN DHAKA EXPLOSION
Dhaka: At least 17 people, including two women, were killed and over 100 others injured on Tuesday in a powerful "earthquake-like" explosion at a seven-storey building here in Bangladesh's capital city.
P9

SLOWDOWN IN GROWTH TEMPORARY: MOODY'S
New Delhi: Moody's Analytics on Tuesday said India's domestic economy, rather than trade, is its primary engine of growth and the slowdown in economic activity late last year will only be temporary.
P10

15 PAK HINDU STUDENTS ATTACKED ON HOLI
Karachi: 15 Hindu students celebrating Holi at the University of Karachi were injured when they were attacked by some members of a radical Islamic student body, second incident in Pakistan in two days.
P9

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LIC/P1/2022-23/23/Eng

K'taka CM to be decided after polls: BSY

Feathers ruffled as Lingayat leader says most sitting BJP MLAs will be given tickets

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

Back in the driver's seat, former Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa's suggestion on Tuesday that most of the sitting BJP MLAs would be given tickets and the next Chief Minister would be decided after the election has ruffled many a feathers in the State BJP and may have "unsettled" existing caste equations in the party.

The 80-year-old leader has been brought into prominence again by the BJP after making him pave way for Basavraj Bommai as Chief Minister in July 2021.

The saffron party is keen to use Yediyurappa's influence

on the dominant Lingayat votes in the State. Yediyurappa who has "retired" from active politics and is not to contest the Assembly polls may be appointed the chairman of the BJP's election campaign committee, sources said.

Senior BJP leaders Murgesh Nirani and Basangouda Patil Yatnal, Arvind Bellad (Lingayat) and critic of Yediyurappa and a part of the supporters of Bommai are also uncomfortable with the veteran given a major say in the decision making.

Nirani and Yatnal belongs to Panchamsali sub-sect of Lingayats which is not the same as that of Yediyurappa's sub-caste. There has been a demand from the Panchamsali



Lingayat community that one of their leaders should be in the CM's seat. Bommai is also a non-Panchamsali Lingayat. The other caste leaders like Vokalgas in the BJP have also been upset by the exces-

sive leverage given to the Lingayat leader. According to reports, BJP's Karnataka-in-charge Arun Singh and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan have spoken to state leaders to defuse the issues.

State BJP leaders are also wary of former Chief Minister's sons Raghavendra and Y Vijayendra who have been accused of interference in the past in governance when Yediyurappa was the state CM. BJP's state Vice-President Vijayendra has said if allotted ticket he would like to contest assembly elections.

On Monday in Kalaburagai Yediyurappa said barring four to six, all sitting MLAs are likely to get tickets to contest the Assembly polls.

He also said the BJP would decide on who the next Chief Minister would be at the legislature party meeting after the elections.

"There are more chances that most of the sitting MLAs, other than four or six of them, will be given the tickets," the former Chief Minister said in response to a question whether all the sitting legislators will get the tickets.

Asked whether BJP is planning to get leaders from other parties and induct them into the BJP ahead of polls, he said, "Welcome to anyone who wants to join, and those who want to quit, can go out happily....Many are willing to join the party, we will welcome them."

Kerala HC takes cognisance of toxic haze engulfing Kochi

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Tuesday took suo motu cognizance of toxic haze and smog that has engulfed Kochi, the Queen of Arabian Sea, that boasts of a clean and placid environment. A Division Bench of justices K Vinod Chandran and C Jayachandran would hear a suo motu writ petition listed by the court as a follow up to the letter sent by Justice Devan Ramachandran to Chief Justice Manikumar on Monday drawing the attention of the court to the alarming situation in Kochi as a result of the unabated smog and poisonous gas that has engulfed the metro because of the fire mishap in a plastic solid



waste dumping ground measuring 70 acres in the city suburbs.

Both the Government of Kerala and the Local Body (the Corporation of Kochi) came under severe criticism of the Court for the callous attitude of the officials towards the incident. Meanwhile the Opposition Congress have come out with an allegation

that the fire and smog were the fall outs of massive corruption involving the daughter and son-in-law of a top CPI-M leader. This was announced by V D Satheeshan, leader of the Opposition. The allegation was in the air for quite some time now and the recent fire at the Brahmapuram Solid Waste Treatment Plant has brought it back to the public domain. "The repeated incidents of fire at the yard remains a cause of concern for local residents, and as per reports, plastic waste piled up at Kochi Corporation's swtp has gone up in smoke without fail every year since 2019. Despite repeated episodes the authorities have not been able to take concrete action to check such mishaps," said the petition.

ED flies Mondal to Delhi in cattle smuggling case

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

After prolonged legal battles fought at various levels and months after he was arrested on charges of running multi-core cattle smuggling racket, Trinamool Congress strongman and its national executive member Anubrata Mondal was on Tuesday flown off to Delhi by the Enforcement Directorate.

Mondal who according to the federal investigating agencies was not cooperating in investigation is likely to be produced at the Rouse Avenue Court on Wednesday subsequent to which fresh sessions of his interrogation away from his familiar environment might start ED sources said.

In Delhi he could be made to "sir opposite and confront" his one time personal secretary officer Saigal Hussein presently lodged in Tihar Jail on same charges. Earlier on Tuesday following a special CBI Court



order --- and after the Delhi and Calcutta High Courts refused to grant him any relief --- Mondal who was parked in Asansol Jail was taken for medical checkup at a central government run ESI hospital before being taken to Netaji Subhas Airport.

The Rouse Avenue Court had last week asked the ED as to why he was not being produced despite a production warrant being issued as back as December last year.

Mondal was avoiding his Delhi sojourn on health and

other grounds and had filled petitions both in Delhi and Calcutta High Courts which were however rejected by the said Courts.

On whether newer truths would come out after Mondal's interrogation in Delhi, senior TMC minister Firhad Hakim said that "the BJP's agency Raj will one day be defeated by the democratic raj."

BJP's Samik Bhattacharya said that intense interrogation of Mondal would now bring to the fore names of TMC's top leadership.

ICG, ATS net Iranian boat with 61 kg heroin in joint op



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) of Gujarat in a joint operation has apprehended an Iranian boat in Indian waters and recovered 61 kgs of heroin worth Rs 425 crores. The boat had a crew of five.

Giving details of the seizure, the Coast Guard said here on Tuesday, the ICG, based on an intelligence input by the ATS Gujarat, caught the boat on Monday.

On a specific intelligence input by ATS, ICG strategically deployed its two Fast Patrol class of ships, ICGS Meera Behn and ICGS Abheek for patrolling in Arabian Sea. During dark hours, a boat was observed moving suspiciously in Indian waters approx. 340 Kms (190 miles) off Okha coast.

On being challenged by ICG Ships, the boat started evasive manoeuvring. The boat was then chased and forced to stop by ICG ships. The boat was found to be an Iranian boat with five crew of Iranian

nationality.

During investigation by ICG boarding team, the crew was found to be behaving suspiciously. After extensive rummaging, approximately 61 Kgs of narcotics worth Rs 425 crores was found in the boat.

The boat along with crew has been apprehended and is being brought to Okha for further investigation.

In last eighteen months, ICG in coordination with ATS has apprehended eight foreign vessels and seized 407 Kgs narcotics worth Rs. 2355.00 Crores.

NPDRR hosts dialogue on disaster risk management

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), together with UNICEF and partners under the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR), are finding a mechanism on 'Strengthening Social Protection Systems for Climate and Disaster Risk Management'.



The dialogue focused on building resilience of people and communities at risk of disasters by investing in social protection programs to reduce their exposure to shocks and stresses.

G20
INDONESIA 2023

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Bid Security :-	Rs. 141800.00
Date & time of submission of tender :-	28.03.2023, 12.00 Hrs.
Opening of tender :-	28.03.2023, 12.00 Hrs.
Website & notice board :-	www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
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TN CM Stalin reaches out to migrant workers

PTI ■ TIRUNELVELI

Reaching out to the migrant workers community in Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister M K Stalin on Tuesday interacted with a group of labourers at a latex unit here.

The Chief Minister's move comes in the wake of apprehensions among the migrant workforce over alleged fake videos of attacks on some of them in the state, which had even prompted the Bihar gov-



ernment to depute an official delegation to take stock of the situation. Stalin visited Kanam Latex, involved in making hand gloves, in the district and interacted with the migrant workers, enquiring about their well-being, an official release said. He discussed with them matters like how long they were staying in Tamil Nadu, if the local people treated them well and whether they had to face any issues.

The workers told him they had a good work atmosphere, some were staying for more than five years in TN, many with their families and that the local people were treating them with brotherhood, the release added. The workers told him they did not have any fears and that they felt safe like staying in their native places, while acknowledging the help extended by the state government, it said.

"The CM asked them not to fall for rumours and that the state government was providing workers from all states a safe work environment," the release said.

1 dead, 6 injured as massive landslide hits Jammu-Srinagar national highway

PTI ■ BANIHAL/JAMMU

One person was killed and six others, including two women, were injured when a massive landslide struck the strategic Jammu-Srinagar national highway in Ramban on Tuesday, officials said.

The landslide hit the 270-km highway at Seri village near Ramban town around 2.30 pm, leaving hundreds of vehicles stranded on both sides, they said.

Deputy Commissioner, Ramban, Mussarat Islam said the road clearance operation by agencies concerned is in full swing for early restoration of traffic on the highway - the only all weather road linking Kashmir with rest of the country.



"Two landslides hit the highway at the same spot within an hour, resulting in the death of a crane driver working at the site, while six members of a family, travelling in a private car, were injured when their vehicle plunged into a gorge after being hit by a rolling boulder," Islam told

PTI. Islam, who supervised the rescue operation, said all the six were rescued in an injured condition and shifted to district hospital Ramban.

Five of them were later referred to the Government Medical College (GMC) hospital Jammu for specialized treatment, he said.

Pediatricians vital in identifying early signs of cancer

New Delhi: Childhood cancer can be cured with highly positive outcomes however for that awareness amongst general physicians and pediatricians is vital to suspect red flags early,

said Dr Gauri Kapoor, Organising Chairperson of RGCON 2023, the annual conference of Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute & Research Centre, Delhi. It is important to cure

childhood cancer since the number of life years saved are very high, added Dr Kapoor, Director of Pediatric Hematology, Oncology & BMT at RGCIRC. PNS

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

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Arnav Tandon/ LBBNG00005829057/ LBBNG00005864325	Schedule 'A' Property (Description of The Entire Property) All That Piece And Parcel of The Converted Land Bearing Sy. No.48/4 Measuring 10 Guntas, Sy. No. 55/1 Measuring 8¼ Guntas And Sy. No. 39/10 Measuring ¾ Guntas In All Measuring 19 Guntas Situated At Kengeri Village, Presently Comes Under BBMP Limits Bearing Katha No. 4961, 39/10/48/4 55/1, Kengeri Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, Duly Converted Into Non-agriculture Purpose, Vide Orm No.aln/s[Kam]r-78/2009-10 Dated 3-8-2010, Issued By Special Dc, Bangalore District, Bangalore, And Bounded On The: East By: Road West By: Passage North By: Sri. P. Shivakumar's Land; And South By: Sri Beerappa, Ramakrishnappa And Others Land Schedule 'B' Property (description of Undivided Land Share Hereby Conveyed) 310 Sft., of Undivided Share, Right, Title, Interest And Ownership In Schedule-A Property Schedule 'C' Property (Description of Apartment Hereby Conveyed) All That Property Being Two Bedrooms, Hall, Kitchen Residential Apartment Bearing No.001 In Ground Floor of The Development Known As "Dream Delight" And Presently Bearing BBMP Katha No. 4961/39/ 10/48/4/55/1 GF-001 With 1150 Sft., of Super Built Up Area Along With One Car Parking Slot No.01, In Stilt Floor. The Apartment Is Having Vitrified Tiles Flooring And Jungle Wood Windows./ Date of Symbolic Possession On/ 03/03/2023.	14.11.2022 Rs. 6033802.00/-	Bangalore

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Date : March 08, 2023
Place : Gurgaon

Authorized Officer
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Illegal sand mining in Hry hits Yamuna's water level

Extreme summer temp may worsen situation in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi is battling a crisis with the water level in the Yamuna at Wazirabad dropping almost three feet below the desired level due to unbridled illegal sand mining in Haryana and the situation may worsen amid a prediction of extreme heat this year.

Delhi Jal Board Vice-Chairman Saurabh Bhardwaj inspected the Wazirabad Water Treatment Plant (WTP) on Tuesday as the water level in the Yamuna River continues to fall. The condition of Yamuna today is usually seen in the months of April and May in



Delhi.

Bhardwaj alleged that the key reason for the water level decrease in Yamuna is not rising temperatures but the

rampant illegal sand mining being done indiscriminately in the Yamuna river in the state of Haryana. The AAP MLA, who will soon take an oath as

Delhi Cabinet minister, disclosed that the sand mafia had stopped the Yamuna water released for Delhi in an area of about 7-8 km from Yamuna

Nagar that lies in Haryana, where the sand mafia is indiscriminately mining sand in the Yamuna River.

"The sand mafia has made temporary bridges in the middle of the Yamuna River for illegal mining and the movement of trucks. It has also dug illegal big pits in the river bed by digging out the sand in huge quantities, due to which the Yamuna water is not reaching Delhi in sufficient quantity. Bhardwaj said that as per the court's order, mining in Yamuna is completely illegal," he said.

Targeting the Haryana Government, Bhardwaj asked why the Haryana Government is not looking at the illegal business which is happening there indiscriminately and why the Haryana Government is ignoring the illegal sand mining in Yamuna.

Bhardwaj informed that this time the water level of Yamuna near Wazirabad Barrage has suddenly gone down to 671.7 feet in the month of February itself. He said that the normal level of Yamuna River at Wazirabad Barrage should be 674.5 feet. He further informed that the depth of Yamuna here should be 3.5 feet, but presently it's even less than 1 foot.

The water level and depth of the Yamuna are measured from the sea level. Bhardwaj said that out of the present water level of 671.7 feet, Yamuna is silted up to 671 feet at Wazirabad Barrage, which means that the water depth is mere 0.7 feet.

He also said the depth of Yamuna should be at least 3.5 feet which allows the offtake of raw water from Yamuna for the Water Treatment Plant. He said

that the visible water of Yamuna at the barrage is also not actually water from the Yamuna but actually the industrial waste released by Haryana that cannot be treated.

The water level in the Yamuna is 671.7 feet at present as compared to the desired level of 674.5 feet, he said. The DJB chairman said the water crisis is not only going to affect the public, but also Parliament, Rashtrapati Bhavan, LG House, CM Office and central and state government departments.

Delhi Water Minister Kailash Gahlot on Tuesday presided over a meeting with the officials of Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and the Water Department to review the preparedness for the uninterrupted water supply ahead of the summer season in Delhi.

"Had a meeting with officials of the Delhi Jal Board to

discuss the preparedness for constant water supply during the upcoming summer season in Delhi," Gahlot said in a statement.

The DJB supplies 990 MGD of water, which includes 864 surface water and 126 MGD of groundwater. The present demand for the 21.5 million population in Delhi is 1290 MGD.

The DJB now operates 9 Water Treatment Plants (WTP), 16 Ranney Wells and 4681 Tube Wells. The 9 WTPs are at Sonia Vihar, Bhagirathi, Chandrawal, Wazirabad, Haiderpur, Nangloi, Okhla, Bawana and Dwarka. The number of the primary ground reservoir and booster pumping stations is 117, whereas the waterline network is 15300 km. In the water deficit areas in Delhi, DJB supplies water through 1200 tankers.

NIA attaches properties of three gangs in Delhi, Hry



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing with its crackdown against terrorist-criminal networks, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday attached five more properties in Haryana and Delhi belonging to members of organised syndicates in northern states.

On Saturday also, the agency attached five properties following searches across Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi which led to the arrest of 27 "gangster-leaders" and recovery of a huge quantity of arms and ammunition.

"Following investigations in cases against three major organised crime syndicates/gangs being operated by Pakistan-based Harvinder Rinda, Lawrence Bishnoi and Bambiha group, the NIA has attached another four properties in Haryana and one in Delhi," the agency said in statement.

The attached properties were owned by members of organised crime syndicates operating in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, and Delhi, the agency said.

The attached properties were acquired with funds generated from carrying out different types of terrorist activities and extortion, and were thus "proceeds of terrorism" as they were being used for hatching terror conspiracies and execution of crimes, it said.

The properties attached include a house of Chhotu Ram alias 'Bhat' at Chautala in Sirsa district, a house of Jagseer Singh alias 'Jagga Sarpanch' alias 'Jagsi' at Takhatmal, a house of Virender Singh alias 'Kala Rana' in Yamuna Nagar and land of Raju alias 'Mota' of Basadi in Sonipat district of Haryana, and a land of Satyawar Sehrawat alias 'Sonu' at Dariyapur in Delhi.

The action has hit the weapons supply chain of this network, the agency said."Virender, Ram and Singh used to provide weapons and arrange logistics, including safe sanctuaries, to the gang members. Satyawar had also harboured gangsters," the NIA said, adding they had a major role to play in the generation of funds to support the operations of terror-crime syndicates.

Raju used to launder money by investing in real estate business and other businesses, including liquor, it said.

The latest attachment follows similar attachments of five properties -- four in Haryana and one in Delhi -- on March 4. Earlier, the NIA had carried out over 230 raids across Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi-NCR, and arrested 27 gangster-leaders, recovered around 38 weapons, and frozen 87 bank accounts.

CM to hold puja for country, asks people to keep Sisodia in prayers; Opp calls it gimmick

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concern over the "state of the country", Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said he will perform puja the entire day on Holi for the country's betterment and issued a public appeal asking the people of the country to keep former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and former AAP minister Satyendar Jain in their prayers. This comes a day after Sisodia was sent to judicial custody. He also hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the arrests of two of his top ministers, Sisodia and Jain.

Meanwhile, the Opposition and political experts have termed his move to perform puja on Holi, as 'political gimmick', ahead of the Karnataka assembly polls to woo majoritarian votes or to dent BJP vote bank.

Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that this means he won't celebrate holi on Wednesday. Last year, Kejriwal asked for Indian cur-



rency notes to feature images of Hindu Gods Ganesha and Laxmi along with that of Mahatma Gandhi in a bid to stem the slide of rupee against dollar ahead of the Gujarat assembly polls, triggering a political storm.

Addressing a digital press conference, he said he was worried about the state of affairs in the country. "Everyone knows that government schools and hospitals are in a bad shape... But two people -- Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain -- who improved these government schools and hospitals are in

jail," he said. "A nation whose Prime Minister puts those providing good education and medical treatment to the people behind bars and supports those who loot the country, the situation of that country is very worrying," Kejriwal said.

"They are very brave. They can die for the country. No one can break their resolve. I am worried about the state of the country. There is no one to work for common man or listen to the common man," he said.

After 75 years, there is a person who has given the poorest the kind of education that was available only to the rich. That person is Manish Sisodia. Government hospitals across the country are in bad shape. After 75 years of independence, a person changed the face of health facilities and provided a new health model with mohalla clinics. That person is Satyendar Jain. But they are thrown in jail on false charges," he said.

"I have decided that I will pray and perform pooja the

entire day on Holi for better of the country. If you also think that the Prime Minister's actions are not correct, if you are too worried about the condition of the country, then I have an appeal -- After celebrating Holi, please take out some time to join me performing pooja for (betterment of) the country," he added.

In a related development, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) Tuesday questioned and recorded the statement of Sisodia as part of its money laundering probe into alleged irregularities in the excise policy matter. The ED investigators reached the Tihar Jail to record the statement of Sisodia under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

As the AAP stepped up its attack on the BJP and also maintained that the CBI had no grounds to seek Sisodia's further interrogation, the Congress sought to clear the air over its stand on his arrest, asserting that the allegations in the Delhi excise policy case are serious and must be probed.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday shared a letter of Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for raising his voice against alleged misuse of central probe agencies against non-BJP leaders and the arrest of former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia by the CBI.

Sharing Vijayan's letter, Kejriwal, who is the AAP's national convenor, tweeted, "Thank you Hon'ble CM Kerala Shri @pinarayivijayan ji for raising voice against illegal arrests of leaders across India." The CBI had arrested Sisodia on February 26 in connection with the alleged scam in framing of the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Later, in a tweet, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should not talk about fighting corruption as a BJP MLA in Karnataka was not arrested despite a huge amount of cash was found at



his home. However, Manish Sisodia was arrested although nothing was found during raids at the AAP leader's residence, Kejriwal said.

"Mr Prime Minister, there was nothing found in raids at Manish Sisodia's residence. He was arrested by applying all sections of the law by CBI, ED. A huge amount of cash was found with your party MLA. He was not arrested? "You should henceforth not talk about fighting corruption. It doesn't suit you," the AAP national convenor said in a tweet in Hindi.

Earlier Vijayan on Tuesday shot off a letter to Modi over the arrest of Sisodia urging him to dispel the perception that the AAP leader was being targeted for political reasons. Vijayan's letter comes two days

after leaders of eight opposition parties, including Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, wrote a joint letter to the Prime minister alleging "blatant misuse of central agencies" against members of the opposition.

In his letter, Vijayan also sought to draw the prime minister's attention to "voices of protest" raised by leaders of several opposition parties, including some chief ministers, on Sisodia's arrest. He was referring to a recent joint letter shot off to the prime minister by nine opposition leaders.

Vijayan, in his letter, said the arrest of Sisodia has "lent further force to the argument" about certain actions of the central investigation agencies. The Chief Minister said there was no incriminating evidence like cash seizure in case of Sisodia.

Vijayan said the AAP leader is an elected representative of the people and has been appearing before the investigating agencies in response to their summons.

Prez clears appointment of Saurabh, Atishi as Mins

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday cleared the appointments of AAP MLAs Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi to the Delhi cabinet, and also accepted the resignations of jailed former ministers Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain. According to sources, Atishi and Bharadwaj will take oath on Thursday. Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena will administer the oath to two ministers.

The development came after the President accepted the resignation of AAP ministers Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain on Tuesday. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had forwarded the names to the Lieutenant Governor for their appointment to the Cabinet.

Both Sisodia and Jain are currently in Tihar jail in the alleged corruption and money laundering cases respectively. "The President is pleased to accept, on the advice of the Chief Minister of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the resignation of Shri Manish Sisodia, a Minister in the



National Capital Territory of Delhi, with immediate effect," an official notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs said.

A similar notification was issued with regards to Jain. The Delhi council of ministers now has a strength of five, including CM Arvind Kejriwal, who doesn't hold any portfolios.

Till Atishi and Bharadwaj are inducted into the cabinet, ministers Raaj Kumar Anand and Kailash Gahlot will take care of the portfolios that have fallen vacant following Sisodia's resignation.

While Gahlot has been given the additional charge of finance, PWD along with some departments, Anand, who is also the social welfare minister, will take care of education, health and other departments.

Meanwhile, Delhi Congress had urged the Lieutenant Governor not to

appoint Bharadwaj and Atishi in the ministers as both of them were also in the ambit of the liquor scam probe Bharadwaj has been an MLA of the AAP since 2013 and is currently the vice-chairman of the Delhi Jal Board. He was a minister of the short-lived first Kejriwal government in 2013. He is the MLA from Greater Kailash.

Atishi is an MLA of the AAP since 2020 and has been associated with the party since its inception. Atishi represents the Kalkaji constituency and has been a key member of Manish Sisodia's education team. She had also contested the 2019 Lok Sabha polls from the East Delhi constituency and lost to BJP's Gautam Gambhir.

Sisodia was arrested by the CBI on February 26 in connection with alleged corruption in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped Delhi liquor or excise policy for 2021-22. He is currently in judicial custody, till March 20.

Jain, who is also in judicial custody, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a case of alleged money laundering on May 30, 2022.

ED grills Sisodia for five hours

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Tuesday questioned former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia for about five hours and recorded his statement as part of its money laundering probe linked to the excise policy scam.

The questioning is likely to continue over the next few days. Sisodia is currently undergoing judicial custody in Tihar jail following his arrest by the CBI on February 26 in connection with its probe into the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

The ED questioned him at the Tihar jail after obtaining due permission from the connected court. At any point of the questioning, the ED may consider invoking section 19 of the PMLA that allows it to arrest people involved or accused in a case if the investigation officer has "reasons to believe" that the person is "guilty" of the offence of money laundering and is being "evasive" in replies.

The ED also made a fresh arrest in this case as it took into custody Hyderabad-based liquor businessman Arun Ramchandra Pillai on Monday



evening, officials said. Pillai is a partner in a company called Robin Distilleries LLP whom the ED had said represented the 'south group' alleged liquor cartel linked to Telangana CM K Chandrasekhar Rao's MLC daughter K Kavitha and others. He is also linked to arrested liquor businessman Sameer Mahandru, his wife Getika Mahandru and their company Indospirit Group.

The ED's investigators reached the Tihar Jail to question and record the statement of Sisodia under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Sisodia's questioning

ended after about five hours and the agency is expected to interrogate him again on Wednesday or Thursday.

He is in judicial custody till March 20. The ED obtained the court's permission to question the 51-year-old Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader, who till recently was the deputy CM of Delhi.

The ED questioning revolved around the alleged change and destruction of cell-phones that were in his possession, the policy decisions and the timeline followed by him as the excise minister of Delhi.

CBI questions Sisodia's PA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Tuesday questioned former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's personal assistant Devender Sharma in connection with alleged corruption in formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Sharma alias Rinku was summoned to the CBI headquarters here where he was questioned by officials of the anti-corruption branch, officials said.

The agency had arrested Sisodia on February 26 and he was sent to judicial custody by a special CBI court here till March 20. The Enforcement Directorate also questioned Sisodia at the Tihar jail here on Tuesday.

The CBI alleged that wholesale dealers were given undue profit margins under the influence of a 'south lobby', a coterie of Hyderabad-based businessmen and politicians, in the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22.

Delhi Police urges people to celebrate Holi responsibly

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As posts on Holi flooded Twitter on Tuesday, Delhi Police's witty response to a tweet by food aggregator Zomato reminding people not to drive under the influence of intoxicants like bhang left many amused.

Bhang, mixed in drinks and sweets, is consumed on Holi, which will be celebrated on Wednesday. Bhang was exempted from the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act's classification as a "drug" in 1985 for cultural and social purposes. It



all began with Zomato joking about a customer asking it to deliver bhang. "Someone please tell shubham from gurgaon we don't deliver bhaang ki goli. He has asked us 14 times,"

the food aggregator tweeted at 10:35 am. The tweet, which has over 87,000 views, also caught the attention of Delhi Police, which used it to remind people to celebrate Holi responsibly.

bly. Responding to Zomato's post at 11:06 am, Delhi Police tweeted, "If anyone meets Shubham.... Tell him not to drive if he consumes Bhaang." Delhi Police's tweet, which had garnered over 64,000 views by 3:50 pm, left netizens in splits, with many appreciating the wit in the comments. "Epic reply," wrote a Twitter user. "Noted," joked another person with the same name as mentioned in the tweets. "Don't worry, we'll make sure to leaf him a note," posted another.

Another user posted, "Someone tell Zomato, deliver free gujiya this time instead of

high delivery charges so many times". Another user wrote, "He must have tweeted after drinking cannabis. Since when did Zomato start giving cannabis? Meanwhile, officials said special teams of Delhi Traffic Police along with PCR will be stationed at various city roads to check drunken driving and traffic rule violations on Holi.

Elaborate arrangements have been made to ensure the safety of motorists and pedestrians in Delhi, smooth traffic flow and prevent rash driving or stunts on two-wheelers, the police officials said.

Swiggy removes egg ad

New Delhi: Swiggy's egg ad billboard for Holi has been taken down after a section of people expressed "outrage" on social media. The advertisement said, "Omelette - Sunny side up - Kisi ke sarr par. #BuraMatKhelo. Get Holi essentials on Instamart."

Though there is no official statement from Swiggy on the matter. The billboard ads were only in Delhi-NCR and have been taken down now." Soon after the ad was put up, sever-

al people tweeted with the hashtag 'HinduphobicSwiggy', urging people to boycott the food and grocery delivery service provider. All India Sadhu Samaj member and former president of the Kutch Sant Samaj wrote, "Hey @swiggy, it's not okay to give selective gyan on Hindu festivals. Your Holi reel and Billboard is creating a wrong perception about Holi. You must apologize and take steps to promote cultural inclusivity."

Defence Min inks 2 pacts to buy trainer planes, ships for ₹10K cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to self-reliance in Defence manufacturing, the Ministry of Defence on Tuesday sealed two deals worth nearly ₹10,000 crores. They included a contract with the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to procure 70 HTT-40 basic trainer aircraft at a cost of over ₹6,800 crore for the Indian Air Force.

The ministry also finalised a contract with the Larsen & Toubro Ltd (L&T) for acquisition of three cadet training ships worth over ₹3,100 crore. Both the procurement proposals were cleared by the prime minister-led Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on March 1.

While the HAL will provide 70 HTT-40 aircraft over a period of six years, the delivery of ships is scheduled to commence from 2026. "The ministry of defence on March 7 signed contracts with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Larsen & Toubro Limited (L&T) for procurement of 70 HTT-40 basic trainer aircraft and three cadet training ships respectively in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh," the



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during the signing of a contract between THE Ministry of Defence and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for procurement of 70 HTT-40 Basic Trainer Aircraft, in New Delhi, on Tuesday

ministry said. Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane, along with other senior civil and military officials of the ministry, and representatives of the HAL and L&T were present at the contract signing ceremony. The HTT-40 is a turbo prop aircraft possessing good low speed handling qualities and provides better training effectiveness, according to the ministry. The HTT-40 contains approximately 56 per cent indigenous content which will progressively increase to over 60 per cent through indigenisation of major components and subsystems, officials said.

"The aircraft will meet the shortage of basic trainer aircraft of Indian Air Force for training of newly-inducted pilots. The procurement will include associated equipment and training aids including simulators," the ministry said.

"Being an indigenous solution, the aircraft is configurable for upgrades to incorporate the futuristic requirements of the Indian Armed Forces. The aircraft will be supplied over a period of six years," it said. It said the HAL would engage the domestic private industry, including MSMEs, in its supply chain.

"The procurement has the potential to provide direct and indirect employment to thousands of people spread over more than 100 MSMEs," the ministry said.

On the cadet training ships, the ministry said they will cater to the training of officer cadets, including women, at sea after their basic training to meet the future requirements of the Indian Navy.

"The ships would also provide training to cadets from friendly countries with the aim to strengthen diplomatic relations," it said. "The ships can also be deployed for evacuation of people from distress areas, Search and Rescue and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.

The delivery of ships is scheduled to commence from 2026," the ministry said. The ships will be indigenously designed, developed and constructed at L&T shipyard in Kattupalli, Chennai.

"The project will generate an employment of 22.5 lakh man-days over a period of four-and-half years.

This will encourage active participation of Indian shipbuilding and associated industries, including MSMEs," the ministry said.

US announces processing of work authorisation for STEM students

Move may help Indians studying there

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Indian students studying subjects in science and technology in the US are likely to benefit from Washington's announcement of expansion of premium processing of work authorisation for certain categories of international students. Students including those from India who came to study in the US STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) are likely to benefit from it. The announcement was made by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services late Monday.

In its statement, the department said "US Citizenship and Immigration Services(USCIS) announced today the expansion of premium processing for certain F-1 students seeking Optional Practical Training (OPT) and F-1 students seeking science, technology, engineering, and

mathematics (STEM) OPT extensions who have a pending Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, and wish to request a premium processing upgrade," the statement read. As per the official statement, the premium processing begins on March 6 and for some other categories, it would start on April 3.

The online filing of Form I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service, is now also available to F-1 students in these categories. USCIS continues to accept the latest paper version of this form by mail.

"The availability of premium processing for certain F-1 students, in addition to the ease of online filing, will streamline the immigration experience for a great many international students," said USCIS Director Ur M Jaddou.

"The ongoing expansion of online filing is a priority for USCIS as we continue to create operational efficiencies and increase access to the immigration system for stakeholders, applicants, petitioners, requestors, and those we serve," he added.

Premium processing expansion for certain F-1 students will occur in phases, and students requesting pre-



mium processing should not file before these dates. "USCIS immigration requests throughout the adjudication process. There is no cost to set up a USCIS online account, which offers a variety of features, including the ability to communicate with USCIS through a secure inbox and respond to Requests for Evidence online," the statement read.

"Applicants who previously filed a paper Form I-765 and wish to file Form I-907 online to request premium processing should reference the USCIS Account Access Notice they received for the Online Access Code and details on how to link their paper-filed cases to their online account, or there will

not be able to file Form I-907 online and will need file a paper Form I-907 with the Chicago lockbox," the statement read.

"As previously announced, the expansion of premium processing is part of USCIS efforts to increase efficiency and reduce burdens to the overall immigration system, and is being implemented in a phased approach," the statement added.

The addition of online filing for Form I-907 brings the total number of forms available for online filing to 16. The Forms Available to File Online page has links to file all of these forms. USCIS continues to accept the latest paper versions of all forms by mail.

‘BJP peddling fake news against Cong’

Rahul is actually being a flag-bearer of values that our nation is built on, says Shrinat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Tuesday alleged the BJP has mastered the art of creating fake news to sensationalise the non issues over the real issues, the country is faced with during the tenure of Modi regime. The Opposition party also asked whether any of the investigative agencies that are "quick to investigate Prime

Minister Narendra Modi's political opponents" will look into "opaque transactions" of the Adani Group.

Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinat said Rahul Gandhi is a leading member of India's politics, as a member of India's Party in power earlier, the Congress Party and as a leading member of the opposition, he has consistently stood for and espoused the cause of the common man.

"He is a four-time elected MP and when he speaks in Cambridge about a world that is strife ridden with diversions, that is strife ridden with tension and what an important role India can play in that world, he is actually lauding the Indian democracy; he is actually, being a flag bearer of the values that our nation is built on, when he talks about Mahatma Gandhi and the values of our constitution and the foundation of our country, he is actually bringing India, a lot of pride and that is a matter of great pride for India," Shrinat said. "I don't understand, where it stems from, but, the BJP's oppositions is either ignorance or completely contrived poli-

tics, both of which have no place in a democracy. The ruling party at the Centre believes that they are eternal which is not the case in a vibrant democracy like India. They are peddling fake news and spreading false propaganda against the Opposition parties and the Congress in particular," Shrinat said.

The grand old party alleged that it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has gone ahead and spoken much words, washed dirty linen in India and abroad, made useless, baseless allegations against India's political echo system, against political opposition, when he was traveling overseas.

"To the extent that in 2015, while in Shanghai, while on the Chinese soil, he had said that the people in this country curse their destiny, why they were born in India and so that charge did not hold true," she added.

Congress also raised questions over what it said were Adani Group's "shenanigans" in the power sector, alleging that it was powering the BJP's electoral fortunes at the expense of Indian consumers.

Rejection has made Cong leader desperate and frustrated: Prasad

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Demanding to know whether Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Sonia Gandhi agree with the views of Rahul Gandhi as expressed by him, the BJP on Tuesday hit-out at Rahul for allegedly criticizing Indian democracy and claimed that the latter was in the grip of "Maoist thought process through his minions".

Addressing a press conference here, former Union Minister and BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad said the declining electoral fortunes and rejection by Indian people has made the Congress leader desperate and frustrated.

He said people of India neither listen nor understand him and supporting him is a distant thing. Therefore, Gandhi goes abroad and laments that India's democracy is in danger. This is a matter of great shame, Prasad added.

Prasad expressed his party's disapproval of Rahul "misusing the forum of British parliament" to spread shameful lies and unfounded claims, and said there needed to be a "proper rebuttal". He accused the Congress leader of shaming India's democracy, polity, Parliament, judicial system and strategic security from a foreign land. Rahul told British parliamentarians in London on Monday that functioning microphones in the Lok Sabha are often silenced against the

Opposition. During an event organised by veteran Indian-origin Opposition Labour Party MP Virendra Sharma within the House of Commons complex, he said opposition parties in India are often not allowed to debate issues in Parliament. Prasad said the congress leader has forgotten all parliamentary norms, political propriety and "democratic shame" by criticising Indians from abroad.

"Rahul Gandhi has insulted everything, including India's democracy, parliament, people, political system, judicial system and strategic security," the former Union Minister said.

The BJP leader also accused Gandhi of seeking the intervention of Europe and the US in India and said he had gone against the consensus in India against any interference in its internal affairs by foreign powers.

"Rahul Gandhi has tried to embarrass the country by saying that Europe and America should interfere in the internal affairs of India," he said.

Prasad sought reactions from Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and his predecessor Sonia Gandhi on Rahul's "utterly irresponsible" statements and whether the opposition party disowns them or not. The BJP leader also slammed Rahul Gandhi for his condemnation of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), claiming that Hindutva organisation has been serving society and the nation.

Rare Disease Policy 2021 good but more needs to be done: Experts

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The new Rare Disease Policy 2021 is a positive step, but more needs to be done, experts and patients in the sector have asserted. "Implementation through multi-stakeholder planning and equity consideration and strengthening sensitization/ awareness efforts, new-borne screening tests in every hospital to ensure early detection and treatment, insurance coverage, research, drug development and sustainable financing is the need of the hour," they emphasized.

"Despite diagnostic technological advancements, awareness of these conditions at the grassroots level is still required for timely referral, which can facilitate early diagnosis and timely initiation of therapy which is available for a few but evolving very rapidly," co-founder and Executive



Director of Organization for Rare Diseases India (ORDI) Prasanna Kumar Shirol said here. For its part, the ORDI in collaboration with AIIMS Delhi will hold an event 'Racefor7' comprising seven-kilometre walk and cycling on March 12 in the national capital to raise awareness about the need of the sector.

Samir Sethi - Chairman - ORDI Advocacy Committee and President Indian Rett Syndrome Foundation asserted that the need of the hour is indigenous drug development for the rare diseases.

"The National Rare Disease Policy, 2021 states that pharmaceutical industries would be encouraged to develop drugs for rare diseases. The Pharmaceuticals Department will be roped in to create a conducive policy framework for domestic pharmaceutical companies to focus on the research development and manufacturing of indigenous drugs for curing rare diseases," he said.

While appreciating setting up of the eight centres of excellence (CoEs) to look after rare diseases, Dr Neeraj Gupta additional professor, division of genetics, department of pediatrics, AIIMS, lamented that "patients still don't know where to go...they always first come to OPD and from there, they are directed to go fobut there still exist gaps. For instance, patients still don't know where to go...they always first come to OPD and from there, they are

directed to go for the nearest centre of excellence.

"The current financial benefit is solving the problem, but not for all. Majority of the patients are on supportive management for rare diseases and the costs of the drugs are quite high as they need to be procured from abroad," she added.

Take the case of Ayushmaan (24) and Abhimanu (22) who suffer from Cystic Fibrosis, a life-limiting genetic condition where mucus clogs up the airways. They shared that their families are doling out huge money for their drugs and medications that keep them alive.

"There are no insurance policies neither we are covered under PWD Act that can ensure jobs for us," they said underlining that they too can lead a better life if given necessitated support. Sarika Modi,

Director, Spread Home Products flagged concern about 18% GST and the 100% Custom Duties levied on life saving food and medicines which are unnecessarily adding to the woes of the affected families of patients with IEMs (Inborn Errors Of Metabolism), yet another kind of rare disease.

According to experts, worldwide, there are around 7,000 rare genetic disorders and 30 crore people are suspected to have these rare disorders.

Rare diseases like beta thalassemia, spinal muscular atrophy, Duchenne muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, inborn errors of metabolism and paediatric neurological disorders are commonly reported in India which is home to around 5-10 crore patients with rare diseases. But many die in want of timely diagnosis and treatment.

Sea change in India, US and Israel relationship since 2014: Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Growing ties between India and US and Israel, described as "sea change" by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, were discussed in a meeting between him and a delegation of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) here on Tuesday.

The AJC delegation, led by its Chief Executive Officer Ted Deutch, is currently on a visit to India. "Glad to meet the American Jewish Committee delegation on their visit to India.

Discussed about the sea change in India-US and India-Israel relationships since 2014," Jaishankar said on Twitter. The minister appreciated the sentiments and support of the AJC, as also their working with Indian community organisations in the US.

The AJC describes itself as a global advocacy organisation for the Jewish people. Through its global network of offices, institutes, and international partnerships, the AJC engages with leaders at highest levels of government and civil society to counter antisemitism, open new doors for Israel, and advance democratic values, the website of the AJC said.

Photojournalist Das bags Lifetime Achievement Award



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran photojournalist Supra Das was on Tuesday conferred with the Lifetime Achievement Award at National Photography Awards given by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Minister of State L Murugan also conferred Professional Photographer of the Year Award on Sasi Kumar Ramachandran. Arun Saha won Amateur Photographer of Year Award.

The themes for the awards in Professional and Amateur category were 'Life and Water', and 'Cultural Heritage of India' respectively. Speaking on the occasion, Murugan said the winners come from diverse professional backgrounds but what binds them is their passion for photography.

‘Electric fields can be used to destroy Covid spikes’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The spike proteins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus become trapped when they come in contact with silicon, gold and copper, according to a study which also found that electric fields can be used to destroy these proteins, likely killing the virus. The study is published in the journal Chemical Science.

The spike protein is used by the SARS-CoV-2 virus to enter and infect the human cells. The study found that the

spike proteins of coronaviruses attached and became stuck to certain types of surfaces.

"Coronaviruses have spike proteins on their periphery that allow them to penetrate host cells and cause infection and we have found these proteins becomes stuck to the surface of silicon, gold and copper through a reaction that forms a strong chemical bond," said study lead researcher Nadim Darwish, from Curtin University in Australia.

"We believe these materials can be used to capture coronaviruses by being used in air filters, as a coating for benches, tables and walls or in

the fabric of wipe cloths and face masks," Darwish said. Capturing coronavirus in this way would prevent it from reaching and infecting more people, the researchers said. The study also found the coronavirus could be detected and destroyed using electrical pulses.

"We discovered that electric current can pass through the spike protein and because of this, the protein can be electrically detected," said study co-author Essam Dief, a PHD candidate at Curtin University.

"In the future, this finding can be translated to involve applying a solution to a mouth or nose swab and testing it in a tiny electronic device able to electrically detect the proteins of the virus. This would provide instant, more sensitive and accurate COVID testing," Dief said.

By applying electrical pulses, the researchers found the spike protein's structure is changed and at a certain magnitude of the pulses, the protein is destroyed, thereby potentially deactivating coronaviruses.

CBI arrests Director of Pearls Group

New Delhi: The CBI has arrested Harchand Singh Gill, a director of the Pearls Group, who was deported from Fiji in connection with a multi-crore ponzi scam allegedly orchestrated by his company.

Gill was brought from Fiji late Monday night after being deported from the archipelago under 'Operation Trishul' which was launched by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to bring back fugitives living abroad, officials said. The CBI claims that around 30

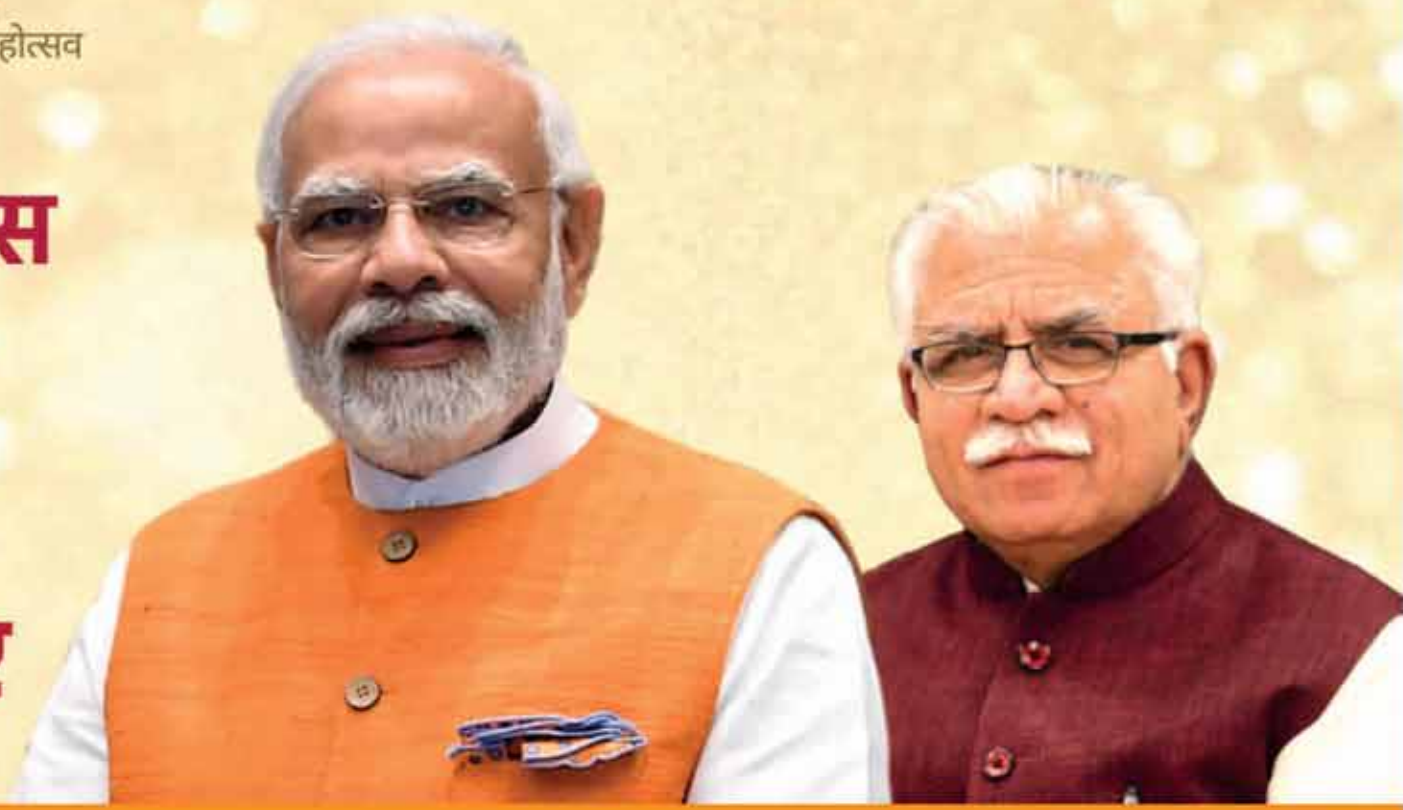
fugitives were successfully brought to India under the operation since its launch last year. The operation aims to geo-locate proceeds of crimes and fugitives with the help of Interpol and bring them back.

The agency launched the investigation against the Pearls Group and its founder Nirmal Singh Bhargoo on February 19, 2014 on the allegations of cheating crores of gullible investors by offering them land in return of their investments.

PNS



अन्तरराष्ट्रीय महिला दिवस और होली महापर्व की हार्दिक शुभकामनाएं



हरियाणा की बेटियों ने प्रशासनिक सेवा, खेल, स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा, राजनीति, अंतरिक्ष विज्ञान, पुलिस सेवा, पर्वतारोहण, सौंदर्य प्रतियोगिता, सेना तथा जन सेवा से जुड़े क्षेत्र इत्यादि में लहराया परचम



हरियाणा सरकार महिलाओं के उत्थान के लिए कटिबद्ध

- पंचायती राज संस्थानों में महिलाओं को 50 प्रतिशत आरक्षण।
- प्रदेश में लिंगानुपात सुधरकर 871 से 917 हुआ।
- महिलाओं की सुरक्षा व हर समय उनकी मदद के लिए महिला हेल्पलाइन नम्बर 1091 शुरू।
- दुर्गा शक्ति ऐप, दुर्गा शक्ति वाहिनी, दुर्गा शक्ति रैपिड एक्शन फोर्स की स्थापना।
- महिलाओं के विरुद्ध अपराधों के मामलों में तेजी से सुनवाई के लिए 16 फास्ट ट्रैक कोर्ट स्थापित।
- छात्राओं के लिए रोडवेज की बसों में मुफ्त यात्रा सुविधा।
- 33 प्रतिशत राशन डिपो महिलाओं को।

राज्य स्तरीय महिला सम्मान एवं पुरस्कार समारोह

मुख्य अतिथि

श्री मनोहर लाल, मुख्यमंत्री हरियाणा
द्वारा दिए जाएंगे पुरस्कार

दिनांक: 10 मार्च, 2023 | समय: प्रातः 11:30 बजे
स्थान: अनाज मण्डी, करनाल

श्रीमती सुषमा
स्वराज पुरस्कार

इन्दिरा गांधी महिला
शक्ति पुरस्कार

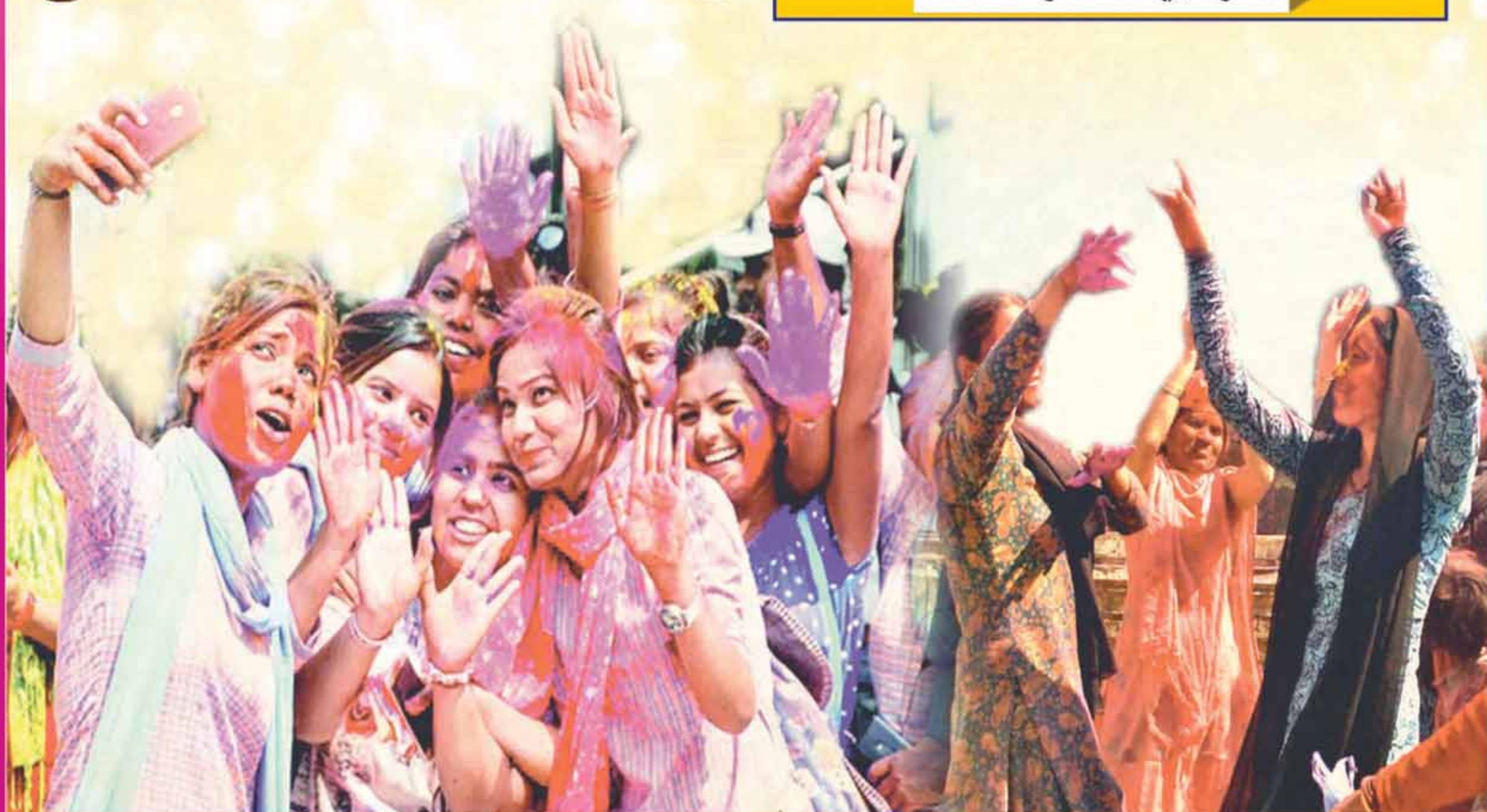
कल्पना चावला
शौर्य पुरस्कार

लाइफटाइम
अचीवमेंट पुरस्कार

युमन आउटस्टैंडिंग
अचीवर्स पुरस्कार

घटते लिंगानुपात में
सुधार प्रोत्साहन पुरस्कार

पोषण स्तर पर सुधार के लिए न्यूट्रिशन पुरस्कार



Proactive move

Prime Minister Modi chairs a high-level meeting to review the preparedness for an unforgiving summer

The summer season set in early this year; in fact, February was warmer than usual. This has occasioned some concern all over the country—including in the quarters that matter. So Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a high-level meeting on Monday to review the preparedness for hot weather in the upcoming summer at his residence. Senior officials, including Cabinet Secretary, from various ministries and departments participated in the meeting. The India Meteorological Department informed him about the weather forecast for the next few months and the likelihood of a normal monsoon. He was also briefed about the impact of weather on Rabi crops, expected yields of major crops, and the efforts undertaken to monitor irrigation water supply, fodder and drinking water. Also reviewed at the meeting were the preparedness of states, hospital infrastructure in the event of emergencies, and other measures to tackle the situation arising because of high temperatures. The Prime Minister, according to an official press release, said that separate awareness material should be prepared for different stakeholders including citizens, medical professionals, municipal and panchayat authorities, disaster response teams like firefighters, etc. He also emphasized upon the protocols and dos and don'ts for hot weather and use of mass media to spread awareness about the measures to be taken. The Prime

Minister has directed the IMD to issue daily weather forecasts in a manner which can be easily interpreted and disseminated. He also stressed on the need for detailed fire audits of all hospitals and mock fire drills in all hospitals by firefighters.

What makes the meeting a bit unusual, if not unheard of, is the fact that the authorities at all levels in our country are reactive rather than proactive. Worse, they are often not effectively reactive. Normally, there are no standards regulating public activities; often disasters spur our political masters to come up with norms for public life. It was a fire in a Delhi cinema hall over a quarter of a century ago which woke up the officials concerned to come up with the norms stipulating exits and exit lights, public announcement system, emergency lights, foot lights, etc. The human cost was very high: 59 died and over a hundred people died. A road accident around the same time reminded the bureaucrats in the national capital that buses carrying school children should adhere to certain rules. In recent times, there was failure at all levels of governance to come up with measures to mitigate the devastation caused by the second wave of Covid-19. In April and May 2021, there was an acute shortage of oxygen, hospital beds, medicines, etc. Against this backdrop, the review meeting by the Prime Minister is welcome; it will send the message down the line that various departments will have to remain alert and active—indeed proactive. Hopefully, this will help people who are bracing for summer.



Women devotees perform rituals during the Attukal Pongala festival, in Thiruvananthapuram

Enabling women farmers

Self-help groups can bring about radical change in the life of women farmers by providing credit, inputs and market insights

Women farmers have been significant in the agricultural industry. However, the disparities in land ownership, access to financial resources, and income enhancement services among others have caused women to have lower economic benefits and social status. Collaborative efforts like public-private partnerships are integral to addressing systemic inequities and creating pathways for women's elevation in agriculture. Land ownership is a crucial factor that determines the productivity and profitability of farmers. Unfortunately, women farmers often face obstacles to accessing land, including discriminatory inheritance laws and cultural practices that limit women's land ownership. On the one hand, it is estimated that women perform 80% of all farming work, on the other, they own just 14% of the land. Often women engage in carrying out farming on land that belongs to their families or husbands. As the land is not in their names, they are not even acknowledged as farmers, but as farm workers.



Further, at 0.90 hectares, the average size of landholdings held by women is smaller than the average 1.1 hectares held by men. While policy-level interventions and reforms in inheritance laws are necessary to ensure that women have the access to operational landholdings, CSR initiatives can help solve for immediate issues to enhance women farmers' incomes. Promoting agri-allied activities can prove to be an alternate source of livelihood for women farmers. For example, Godrej & Boyce supported backyard poultry units for individual households as a means of income enhancement. After conducting a need assess-

ment in villages, it was found that only a small number of women farmers were trained in agricultural allied activities. Women farmers often have limited access to credit, and market linkages. Due to discriminatory lending practices and limited collateral and market information, women farmers cannot access these crucial services. To counter the challenges, self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as a popular approach to enhance the involvement of women in agricultural activities and unlock their access to finances. Several development agencies use SHGs as an entry point to reach women farmers and inform them about relevant financial schemes, good agricultural practices, and gender-specific agricultural equipment. They can also effectively increase market access, and bargaining power, and reduce transaction costs for women farmers. As SHGs, women farmers can conveniently form linkages with large buyers, such as supermarkets, restaurants, and hotels. The collection agency can also enable

women farmers to secure long-term contracts and higher prices. An example of a CSR project that has enabled women to boost their earnings is the Krushi Jivala Women Farmer Group, a self-help group formed by women in Palashi village, Shirwal, Maharashtra. The group operates a shade-net floriculture business, which has allowed the members to generate more income. Today, the SHG generates an annual income of Rs.1.25 – 1.5 lakh. Addressing women farmers' challenges requires a multi-sectoral approach involving governments, development agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. By implementing policies and programs that provide women farmers with access to land, credit, extension services, markets, and the creation of collectives, CSR initiatives can create an enabling environment that empowers women farmers and promotes inclusive and sustainable agricultural development. (The writer is head of CSR & Sustainability Reporting at Godrej & Boyce Mfg.)



ASHWINI DEODESHMUKH

Walking a tightrope in Myanmar

India must choose who to take sides with in Myanmar, it cannot afford to go wrong as it did in Nepal

India has made much of its 'strategic independence' when it comes to diplomacy in recent times, especially with its recent position in Ukraine. India clarifies that it will not be taking binary choices amongst conflicting 'blocs' anymore, but one which weighs the situation on every matter and then decides the best for India's interest. The external Affairs minister insisted, "Indian foreign policy is there to serve the Indian people; we will do whatever it takes to discharge that responsibility". While the verdict on the same is still out there in terms of its efficacy vis-à-vis relationship with its most important neighbours i.e., China, Pakistan, and Nepal — it is now the equation with restive Myanmar, with whom it shares a 1643 kilometers long border that is confounding.

India's schizophrenic relationship with Myanmar has historically been conflicted and yo-yo-ing for three reasons. Firstly, India's natural preference is to bat for democracy as opposed to Junta or Tatmadaw ('Grand Army' as the Military of Myanmar is called). Secondly, the perennial threat of the Chinese making strategic inroads and overtures, irrespective of the dispensation in power at Naypyidaw. Thirdly, the presence of various India-facing militant camps across the long Indo-Myanmar border. With the longish Military rule in Myanmar from 1962 to 2011 and then with the return of the Junta in the 2021 coup d'état, Delhi has been forced to nuance its idealism for democracy with the practicality of dealing with the Junta-led Myanmar. Additionally, the brief civilian rein from 2011 to 2021 of the Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) was also not as overtly 'pro-India' as was initially imagined, given Delhi's historic support to democracy in Myanmar and owing to the sanctuary offered to Aung San Suu Kyi personally, when in exile. Like Junta leadership earlier, Aung San Suu Kyi too made several dashes to Beijing and strove to push the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), to Delhi's discomfiture. Factually, it was Tatmadaw's



behind-the-scenes facilitation that had enabled Indian troops to conduct 'Operation Hot Pursuit' against insurgent camps in Myanmar. Practically, there wasn't much difference between Military rule or Civilian rule, as far as India was concerned — fears of an ensnaring China always loomed, irrespective of the government.

When the internal power struggle led to the return of Tatmadaw in 2021, Delhi instinctively raised all the moral concerns about the imminent loss of democracy et al, but Beijing had remained decidedly silent and virtually supported the Junta. Huge local protests and a rapidly growing popular resistance movement (with various Ethnic Armed Organisations) notwithstanding, it has been over two years since the Junta take over, and the Junta is not in the mood to secede any space for democracy, anytime soon.

Delhi soon recalibrated its purported stance and was seen to be unusually accommodative of the Junta reality — prospects of a default Chinese takeover with the 'Dragon' singularly championing the Junta perspective by vetoing damaging resolutions in the United Nations and other disablenents was too alarming for India. Already civilians fleeing the Chin State of

DELHI SEEMS TO HAVE FINALLY PUNTED ON NORMALISING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE JUNTA WITH A DEGREE OF UNPRECEDENTED OPENNESS

Myanmar into camps in Mizoram have led to complicated dynamics not only within India but also with Delhi's equation with Junta.

Walking a tightrope, Delhi seems to have finally punted on normalising engagement with the Junta with a degree of unprecedented openness. Portents of its diplomatic 'strategic independence' have led to actions that run contrary to 'Free World' sensibilities and public sanctioning — but more pertinently, it also makes India look much like China in the wary eyes of even the majority Bamar civilians, from whom all previous regimes drew legitimacy.

Engagement with Junta will come with the loss of public goodwill and already the foreign minister of the parallel National Unity Government (NUG) acknowledged that India is not supporting the pro-democracy movement, as it was expected to.

While Delhi is caught between the devil and the deep sea in terms of either supporting the pro-democracy movement or legitimizing the Junta, it all depends on reading who Delhi believes will hold sway at Naypyidaw, ultimately. It simply cannot afford to go wrong in reading the proverbial tea leaves, as it did in Nepal. Despite increasing violence in the ensuing civil war, the exodus of foreign

investments and popular unrest brewing, Delhi seems to have taken an unusual position under its muscular 'strategic independence' template and awaits to see how it plays out.

Perhaps previous 'strategic ambiguity' may have been more prudent by continuing to make all the politically correct noises about democracy, whilst engaging with Junta at a practical and under-the-radar level, as could have been acceptable to the desperate Junta, who unlike democratic governments crave no international legitimacy, beyond a point. Junta also presumably has unstated alignment with Delhi on its hard stance on the Rohingya issue, which along with its selfish quest to have quiet borders along India (to curb gunrunning of insurgent groups) may have played well along the option of 'strategic ambiguity'.

However, Delhi has chosen to be more brazen and explicit in punting on the Junta as the force that will prevail in the long-term in Myanmar, the current civil war, exodus and flight of capital, notwithstanding. Will Delhi get it right or will the dice roll the way they did in Nepal, only time will tell? (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JUSTICE FOR DISABLED

Sir — Being a disability activist, I would like to share my experience. The present government has been in office for over eight years and I hope the Prime Minister is getting regular reports of complaints of the common masses. The Disabilities Act was passed by Parliament in 1996 and the second Disabilities Act was passed in 2016 but sadly even after 26 years the Act remains only on paper and is not implemented meticulously. I also request the media to highlight the genuine problems of Disabled.

I would also like to draw attention to the very poor service of PG-PORTAL. It appears that this Department is engaged in showing quantitative figures and not qualitative performance. Any grievance dealt by the Grievances Redressal Department is a headache. Will the government take some steps to rectify it?

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

MUSK TO STEP DOWN

Sir — By the way, Elon Musk has said that he will step down from the post of CEO of Twitter by the end of this year. Last December itself, he conducted a poll among his fans, in which more than 57 percent people asked him to leave the top post of Twitter. He has even said that he may step down as CEO of Twitter, after stabilizing the company and making it more financially viable. Under Mr. Musk's leadership, hatred is rampant, trolls are rampant, harassment is rampant. Features designed to protect users from trolling and harassment are proving difficult to maintain. Will this ever improve the work of Twitter? Twitter which was known as the beautiful intersection of the social media city, is it now on the verge of closure?

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

MOCKING RAHUL GANDHI

Sir — Perhaps the critics of Rahul Gandhi are not aware of the saying "people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones". Else they wouldn't have accused that

International Women's Day



Every year, March 8 is celebrated as International Women's Day. This year, the goal is to create a gender-equal world. It is about celebrating a woman's success and raising awareness against bias. So we all should choose to 'challenge' to bring the change. Several missions have been created to do the same. We should celebrate tech women and their innovations, applaud equality for women in sport, educate women on health choice decisions, build inclusive thriving workplaces, increase the visibility of creative women and forge their empowerment worldwide. International Women's Day has been

observed since the early 1900s. That was the time of great expansion and turbulence in the industrialized world that witnessed booming population growth and the rise of radical ideologies. It was during 1908 that there was an ongoing critical debate amongst women regarding their oppression and inequality. The campaign for change started to become more vocal when 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay as well as voting rights. In 1909, the first Women's Day was observed across the United States. In 1910, an international conference of working women was held in Copenhagen. That's where the idea was proposed by Clara Zetkin, a leader of the Women's Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany. In 1911, International Women's Day was honoured for the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on 19 March. The day belongs to women everywhere. Let us identify, celebrate and increase the visibility of women's achievements! Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Rahul has "showcased India's partisan politics in a foreign land".

So before accusing Rahul of engaging in "partisan politics in a foreign land"; the "nationalist" critics should look inwards and find out exactly which person regularly comes up with dialogues of "Nothing Happened prior to 2014" in foreign lands! Who has often boasted abroad that before he took over the reins of the country; India was nothing but "Scam India" with citizens feeling ashamed to call themselves "Indian" and that "India was begging earlier and would not beg more"! Even the whole Gandhi family (including the "son-in-law") have been repeatedly character-assassinated on foreign tours! Instead of mocking Rahul, all people should congratulate him for laying stress on India's political identity being a "Union of states". The very first point of Article 1, Draft Constitution, 1948 specifically mentions "India shall be a Union of States"! So it is getting proved that

either the critics are unaware of the basic Idea of India itself or intentionally assault the inherent spirit and foundation of the Constitution! And of course, Rahul has committed a "great sin" of sorts by stressing paramount importance of divergent identities and the need to negotiate a rainbow coalition. Whether Rahul Gandhi's rarefied views have few takers or billion takers is inconsequential; rather it must be seen whether Rahul is uttering the truth or not and, in this parameter, he has passed with flying colours. Only a true Hindu with a national vision can declare, "There is absolutely nothing Hindu about wanting to murder people and beat people up"! All true Hindus and Indians feel utmost pride for having the humanitarian Rahul Gandhi in their midst.


Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

NEW INCOME TAX SCHEME & SAVINGS

The new income tax scheme will not impact savings adversely




S KALYANASUNDARAM

The union budget presented for the next financial year has provided the necessary incentive for taxpayers to switch over to the new income tax scheme. Individual taxpayers are free to choose the old scheme or the new scheme at his/her convenience. It is also possible for one to change from one scheme to another in the coming years any number of times. Hence all our freedom has been given to the individual taxpayers and there is no restrictive clause on this.

However as one can claim various deductions only if he opts for the old scheme, there are criticisms in the public domain and most of these are unsubstantiated. One such criticism is that as there is a higher basic exemption limit under the new scheme, people will opt for the new scheme only and the new scheme discourages savings of people and hence there will be a reduction in savings .

Types of deductions under the old scheme

Under the old scheme, deductions are allowed under various categories. We can broadly classify them under the following: Deductions for savings (investments), Deductions for some expenses and Deductions for repayment of the loan. Deductions for savings are allowed for investments like Public Provident Fund, Employees PF, Equity Linked Savings Scheme, National Savings Certificate, Life Insurance premium, Senior Citizen Savings Scheme etc. Deductions for some expenses like Tuition fees, Medical Insurance premiums, Interest on Housing loans etc. are allowed.



Effect of the new scheme on savings

When people switch over to a new scheme, as they cannot claim any deductions, naturally there is no compulsion for them to save and invest in permissible instruments. But they will continue with the loan repayments and also continue with the payment of tuition fees etc. as these are their obligations. Let us see how different savings schemes will be impacted.

Life Insurance

Ideally, life insurance schemes should be for coverage of risk. However, for many decades, LIC of India was selling insurance as a savings product by selling more endowment policies. Life insurance companies have not popularized term insurance policies which are pure insurance products. Now when people switch over to the new income tax scheme, the insurance companies will be hit.

Equity Linked Savings Scheme

This is another popular saving product under income tax exemption. The average Asset Under Management (AUM) of this scheme for Jan 2023 is Rs.6065.05 crores whereas the total mutual fund AAM for Jan 2023 is Rs.333387.72 crores. This is hardly 1.81 per cent of AUM. So the impact on the Mutual Fund industry may be negligible. Even now, as the scheme is with a lock-in period of 3 years, people rotate investments by redemption of old investments and making a new investment, without actually pumping in the new outflow.

Public Provident Fund

This is another popular long-term scheme used for tax-saving purposes by individuals. Here again, people try to rotate investments, as partial withdrawal and loan facilities are available. For the year 2021-22, this scheme has net addition of only Rs.12846 crores


Other Small Savings Schemes

Sukanya Smridhhi Yojana, National Savings Certificate and Senior Citizen Savings Scheme are some of the other schemes under the Small Savings Scheme which provide deductions under Income Tax. As per a report by the Bank of Baroda released last year, in February 2022 Small Saving Deposits stood at Rs.9.9 trillion, which is only a small fraction of Scheduled Commercial Banks deposits that totalled Rs.170.2 trillion.

The new tax scheme is based on the principle of fewer exemptions and lower rates. The new scheme allows a larger sum of money into the hands of taxpayers and permits them to decide the investment best suitable for them.


(The author is a retired banker)

The inequities of gender bias in India



ANUPMA MEHTA

Women need healthcare the most but often they are the ones who do not have adequate access to it



As we celebrate another International Women's Day, it is time to yet again take stock of the progress in gender equity across various parameters of human development. And while there may be some reason to celebrate women making inroads into numerous male-dominated ecosystems, the healthcare space remains an issue of persistent concern.

The fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), released in May last year, posited that as many as 60 per cent of the women in India are unable to access medical care due to inadequacy of infrastructure and health personnel. Decomposition of the data reveals that 31 per cent of the women were apprehensive about seeking care due to the non-availability of female health providers in the primary health centres they visited, and only 10 per cent could take independent decisions about their health as compared to 33 per cent of men. It is obvious that not much has changed since the last round of the NFHS in 2014-15 when 66.5 per cent of the women interviewed had reported facing at least one problem in accessing medical care. And even more alarmingly, the situation has actually deteriorated between the two rounds of the survey as far as another critical health indicator is concerned. NFHS-5 found that the prevalence of anaemia among women has increased since the previous survey, from 53.1 per cent in 2016 to 57 per cent in 2021.

So, what ails the public health system in the country, preventing it from ensuring gender equity across geographies and societies? According to Dr Prashanth N. Srinivas, Assistant Director, Research, at the Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru,

"Women's limited access to healthcare is a complex problem, and social determinants like lack of financial autonomy and power imbalance at home hinder women from seeking medical care." This gender bias is also reflected in the significantly lower healthcare expenditure (HCE) incurred by women versus men.

The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) shows that despite higher short-term and major morbidity among females than males, the average HCE is significantly lower among women across all socio-economic categories. The IHDS is a longitudinal multi-topic survey of 41,554 households across India, jointly conducted by researchers from the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), New Delhi, and the University of Maryland, USA, in two rounds, in 2004-05 and 2011-12. Using IHDS data from both rounds, researchers Saikia, Moradhvaj, and Bora conclude that the male-female gap in major morbidity-related expenditure increased from Rs. 1298 to Rs. 4172 between the two rounds of IHDS.

Moreover, they highlight rampant gender discrimination in nutrition, immunisation, and treatment-seeking behaviour for both young and elderly populations. A deeper analysis strengthens the discrimination argument further, suggesting that if boys are hospitalised, Indian parents are more likely to borrow or sell assets to finance the hospitalisation whereas girls are often kept at home even when hospitalisation becomes imperative.

The NFHS and IHDS are not the only surveys to red-flag gender inequities in health care. A study published in The Lancet Oncology in November 2022, which examined data pertaining to 11,000 paediatric patients from two cancer-based registries in Delhi and Chennai, respectively, came to the fore as World Cancer Day was being marked on February 4.

The study noted that in Delhi, for every two male children being diagnosed with cancer, only one female child was receiving a concomitant diagnosis, and the respective ratio was 1: 1.44 for girls versus boys in Chennai.

Although these figures may indicate a higher incidence of childhood cancer among boys, the gender skew clearly emerges from the fact that among the 22,000 children with cancer registered in the institutions selected for the study, more boys than girls sought treatment.

Social activists contend that the inherent bias of girls being left to suffer illness while boys are given ready access to any level of treatment has been a grim reality for years in India.

CanKids, for instance, has set up a 'girl brigade' or peer support group of cancer survivors who counsel other young women to seek medical care, identify funding options for treatment, and fight both the social stigma and gender discrimination.

It is small steps like this, in tandem with conducive policies, that could go a long way towards overcoming the gender-based malaise afflicting health care in the country.

(Writer is Editor at National Council of Applied Economic Research. The views expressed are personal)

Empowering girls at the school level

Girls from across the country are benefitting from residential schooling under Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas initiative, says Archana Awasthi & Mukta Agarwal

Sukmilla Marak from West Garo Hills district in Meghalaya flashes a confident smile as she dons her uniform to work at the Police Department at Baghmara. She comes from a very poor family and has scripted her success through many challenges. Then there is Sowjanya Patarlapalli from Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh who was the first literate in her family. She went on to become an engineer and works as Associate Software Engineer at WIPRO, Hyderabad.

From Rajasthan, Anita Sapera belongs to the Kalbeliya community where any girl rarely studied after primary school. She is a district-level Judo Champion, and Uzma Jan from an economically backward family in a remote

village in the foothills of Peerpanjal mountains in district Kulgam of J&K is aspiring to become a doctor after securing 9.8 GP in class 10th.

All of them have one thing in common. They are KGBVians. The most recent KGBVian in news is Archana Devi, who was part of India's ICC under-19 Women's World Cup winning team. Coming from an extremely disadvantaged background, she was admitted to KGBV which provided her with the support and exposure to achieve this remarkable feat.

The primary aim of KGBVs is to provide access and quality education to girls from disadvantaged groups by addressing the challenge of gender and social category gaps at different levels of school education in educationally backward blocks.

It is said that women are half of society. It is a fact that when women thrive, the family thrives, society benefits and nations progress. Thus promotion of education of girl children is one of the thrust areas of the New Education Policy, 2020 (NEP).

It is seen that among the girls, those belonging to socially & economically backward groups are relatively in a poorer situation in terms of education and subsequently claiming their legal rights. Thus KGBVs work to support the girls predominantly from SC, ST, OBC, minority communities and BPL families in difficult areas. This scheme is being implemented in 30 States and has an establishment of

level improve the overall Gross Enrolment ratio (GER). As per 2021-22 UDISE data, at the elementary level, 101.1% of girls are enrolled against 99.3% of boys while at the secondary level, 79.4% of girls are enrolled against 79.7% of boys. In higher secondary, 58.2% of girls are enrolled against 56.9% of boys. It is heartening to see that the GER at all levels for girls is matching or even surpassed that of boys.

It is often seen that sending a girl to school poses many practical difficulties for a financially challenged family. In such circumstances, KGBVs offer a complete solution for girls and make provision for education and boarding in a safe and secure environment. These Vidyalayas have provisions for well-

equipped residential premises, all meals, medical support, uniform, textbooks, sports facilities, remedial teaching, labs, libraries, self-defence training etc.

Besides the basic academic knowledge, there is a constant effort to provide an all-round development of girls through a holistic approach. For this purpose, Self-Defence training and vocational training are also provided to the girls of KGBVs. The KGBVs are aligned with Samagra Shiksha guidelines, which contain all components to meet 21st-century education needs. The focus is now on practical application-based learning. As envisaged in NEP, vocational education is being brought into mainstream academic education. In order to enable

children to make a choice in accordance with their aptitude, competence and aspirations, vocational education is being integrated with academic education.

Most of the girls enrolled in KGBVs belong to Educationally Backward Blocks, where household chores are considered a priority for girls. To overcome and create a balance, girls of KGBVs are also trained in works related to sewing, embroidery, cutting and tailoring, painting, yoga, & basket making etc. under Specific Skill Training which connects them with their routine life schedules. It is time to look beyond gender stereotyping. Keeping this objective in mind, it is being endeavoured to equip all schools with ICT labs. Smart classrooms and the

establishment of digital infrastructure are other priorities in schools. It will enable the girls to acquire digital literacy.

KGBV is a unique response to the need for girls' education with a focus on educationally backward areas. The New Education Policy 2020 has acknowledged its importance and given special attention by offering the upgradation of KGBVs from class 6 to class 12. Such a transformative and forward-looking programme enhances the efficiency of the state's performance towards quality education for all.

(Archana Awasthi is Joint Secretary, School Education, Ministry of Education; Mukta Agarwal, is Director (School Education) Ministry of Education)

President Xi accuses US of leading western nations to suppress China

KJM VARMA ■ BEIJING

President Xi Jinping has accused the United States of leading Western nations to suppress China's development which, he said, brought unprecedented challenges to the country's development.

"Western countries, led by the US, have implemented all-round containment and suppression of China, which has brought unprecedented severe challenges to the country's development," Xi said, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported quoting official media. Besides the continuing trade war, the US has stepped up its crackdown against Chinese tech giants like Huawei. In its latest action, the US, besides the European Union, have banned the Chinese social media app TikTok from the

phones used by officials to protect data of their phones.

Speaking at a panel discussion on the sidelines of the annual parliamentary session on Monday, Xi said that the external environment for the country's development had changed rapidly, and there was a significant rise in uncertainty and unpredictable factors.

He said in the future "the risks and challenges we face will only increase and become more severe". "In the face of profound and complex changes in the international and domestic environment, we must remain calm, maintain concentration, strive for progress while maintaining stability, take action, be united and dare to struggle," Xi said.

A key agenda for the legislative session is to provide a strategy to cut reliance on the US. As part of that plan, the central gov-



ernment proposed on Sunday to raise R&D spending by 2 per cent in 2023 to 328 billion yuan (USD 47 billion), the Post reported.

In a separate panel discussion on the sidelines of the NPC on Sunday, Xi reiterated the need to achieve "technological self-reliance and advancement".

"In the face of fierce international competition, we must carve out new tracks for development, create new momentum and develop new strengths ... All these rely on technology, fundamentally," Xi said.

"We must deepen scientific and technological reform, cultivate an innovative culture, improve the evaluation system and incentive mechanism and create a good environment for talent to stand out and expand capability," he said.



UK says plan to stop Channel migrants pushes bounds of law

JILL LAWLESS ■ LONDON

The UK government said Tuesday that it was ready for legal challenges to a tough new law intended to stop tens of thousands of migrants a year reaching the country in small boats across the English Channel.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman said the government had "pushed the boundaries of international law" with a bill that will bar asylum claims by anyone who reaches the UK by unauthorised means, and will compel the government to detain and then deport them "to their home country or a safe third country." They would be barred from ever reentering the country.

"If you come here illegally, it must be that you cannot stay," Braverman wrote in the Daily Telegraph.

The government says its "Illegal Migration Bill," due to be introduced in Parliament on Tuesday, will deter migrants and hobble smuggling gangs who send desperate people on hazardous journeys across one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the law would "take back control" of UK borders - a central pledge of the successful but divisive campaign to take Britain out of the European Union.

Critics say the plan is unethical and unworkable, since people fleeing war and persecution can't be sent home, and is likely to be the latest in a series of unfulfilled immigration pledges by successive UK governments.

"The bill will not stop small boats crossing the Channel. It

will only add to the trauma of the people in these boats, while further damaging Britain's global reputation for fairness and compassion," said Laura Kyrke-Smith, executive director of humanitarian group the International Rescue Committee.

Britain receives fewer asylum-seekers than some European nations such as Italy, Germany or France. But thousands of migrants from around the world travel to northern France each year in hopes of reaching the UK, drawn by family ties, the English language or the perceived ease of getting a job.

Most attempt the journey in dinghies and other small craft now that authorities have clamped down on other routes such as stowing away on buses or trucks.

More than 45,000 people arrived in Britain by boat in 2022, up from 28,000 in 2021 and 8,500 in 2020. Most went on to claim asylum, but a backlog of more than 160,000 cases has led to many languishing in overcrowded processing centres or hotels, without the right to work.

The British government says many of those making the journey are economic migrants rather than refugees, and points to an upswing last year in arrivals from Albania, a European country that the UK considers safe.

Refugee groups say most of the channel arrivals are fleeing war, persecution or famine in countries including Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. A majority of those whose claims have been processed were granted asylum in the UK.

Kim's sister warns N Korea ready to act against US, South



AP ■ SEOUL

The influential sister of North Korea's leader warned on Tuesday that her country is ready to take "quick, overwhelming action" against the United States and South Korea, a day after the US flew a nuclear-capable B-52 bomber in a demonstration of strength against the North.

The US-South Korean training on Monday involving the B-52 bomber over the Korean Peninsula was the latest in a series of drills between the allies in recent months. Their militaries are also preparing to

revive their largest field exercises later this month.

Kim Yo Jong didn't describe any planned actions in her statement, but North Korea has often test-launched missiles in response to US-South Korean military drills because it views them as an invasion rehearsal.

"We keep our eye on the restless military moves by the US forces and the South Korean puppet military and are always on standby to take appropriate, quick and overwhelming action at any time according to our judgment," Kim Yo Jong said in the statement carried by state media.

"The demonstrative military moves and all sorts of rhetoric by the US and South Korea, which go so extremely frantic as not to be overlooked, undoubtedly provide (North Korea) with conditions for being forced to do something to cope with them," she said.

Hours after Kim's statement, the General Staff of North Korea's Korean People's Army said it put its front-line artillery units on alert and heightened surveillance activities after it detected a live-fire artillery drill

by "the enemy" in the South Korean border town of Paju on Tuesday morning.

The General Staff said about 30 rounds were fired during the South Korean exercise, which it described as a "very serious act of armed provocation" that aggravated tensions, and urged its rival to immediately stop such activities near the border.

South Korea's Defence Ministry didn't immediately respond to the North Korean statement or confirm an artillery exercise in Paju.

Biden to host South Korean leader Yoon for 2nd state visit

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden will host South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for the second state visit of his administration, the White House announced on Tuesday.

Yoon will be joined by first lady Kim Keon Hee. A state dinner will be held on April 26.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the event would celebrate the 70th anniversary of the alliance between the United States and South Korea, which she called "critical to advancing peace, stability, and prosperity for our two countries, the Indo-



Pacific, and around the world."

The U.S. Has been trying to strengthen its relationships in Asia as a counterbalance to China's rising influence. Biden visited South Korea and Japan last year, and he's prodded the two countries — both critical U.S. Allies — to mend their own relationship with each other.

Beijing asks US to respect China's claims over Taiwan

KJM VARMA ■ BEIJING

Signalling far closer ties with Russia amid the deepening Ukraine war, China on Tuesday said that the US which calls for respecting the sovereignty of Ukraine should also recognise its claims over Taiwan.

China views Taiwan as a breakaway province which will one day unite with it. Beijing has not ruled out the possible use of force to reunify the self-ruled island with the mainland.

"The Taiwan question is at the very core of China's core interests, the bedrock of the political foundation of China-US relations, and the first red line that must not be crossed in

China-US relations," Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said while addressing his first annual press conference on the sidelines of the Parliament session.

The US speaks of the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, why not honour China's sovereignty, he said asserting that Taiwan is an integral part of China. Questioning Washington's repeated calls to Beijing not to supply weapons to Russia, Qin said 'why does the US talk at length about respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine while disrespecting China's sovereignty and territorial integrity on the Taiwan question?'

Flaunting the Chinese



Constitution, claiming that the self-governing island Taiwan is part of it, Qin asked 'why does the US ask China not to provide weapons for Russia while it keeps selling arms to Taiwan? Why does the US keep on professing the maintenance of regional peace and stability while covertly formulating a plan for the 'destruction of Taiwan?'

Last week, the US approved more arms sales to Taiwan, including USD 619 million worth of munitions for F-16 fighter jets. The US is Taiwan's main supplier of military equipment, and China has objected to past sales with sanctions and other punitive actions.

On China's approach to reunifying Taiwan with the mainland, Qin, who was appointed China's foreign minister in December last year, said "we will work with the greatest sincerity and exert utmost efforts to achieve peaceful reunification, but will reserve the option of taking all necessary measures," without directly mentioning the military option.

In January, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken cautioned China against changing the status quo in Taiwan. He said that, over the last few years, China has been trying to build military and economic pressure on Taiwan which is vital to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Russian activist gets prison sentence for Ukraine posts

DASHA LITVINOVA ■ TALLINN

A court in Moscow sentenced a student activist to 8 1/2 years in prison for social media posts criticising Russia's war in Ukraine, the latest step in a sweeping crackdown on dissent unleashed by the Kremlin.

Dmitry Ivanov, 23, was convicted of spreading false information about the Russian army, which was made a criminal offence under a new law that Russian lawmakers rubber-stamped a week after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine.

The legislation has been used to prosecute individuals who deviate from the government's official narrative of the conflict that the Kremlin insists on calling "a special military operation."

Prominent opposition politicians, such as Ilya Yashin, who is serving an 8 1/2 prison term, and Vladimir Kara-Murza, who is in jail awaiting trial, also were charged with spreading false information about the military.

Ivanov was charged over a number of social media posts in his Telegram channel that called Russia's campaign in Ukraine a

"war" and talked about Russian forces attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, committing war crimes in the Kyiv suburbs of Bucha and Irpin, and targeting the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Most were reposts from other sources.

At the time of his April 2022 arrest, Ivanov was a student at Lomonosov Moscow State University, one of Russia's top universities also known as the MSU.

He ran a popular Telegram channel called Protest MSU, which was launched in 2018 to cover student protests against the construction next to the university's main building of a fan zone for the Russia-hosted World Cup soccer tournament.

Ivanov initially was jailed for 10 days on the charge of organising an unauthorised rally. Authorities jailed him again on the same charge for 25 days, and then he was arrested over the social media posts.

While in custody, the student missed his final exams and failed to submit his final dissertation. He was expelled from the university.

Syrian state media: Israeli strikes hit Aleppo airport

AP ■ DAMASCUS

An Israeli airstrike hit the international airport in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo early on Tuesday, putting it out of service, Syria state media said. All flights were rerouted to two other airports in the war-torn country, according to the report.

State news agency SANA, citing an unnamed military official, said Israeli warplanes fired missiles that hit Aleppo International Airport while flying over the Mediterranean Sea. It said the strike "caused material damage to the airport and put it out of service."

There was no comment from Israeli officials and it was not immediately clear if there were any casualties.

Syria's Ministry of Transportation said all flights that were supposed to head to Aleppo will land in the capital, Damascus, or the international airport in the coastal province of Latakia.

Since the February 6 earthquake that hit Türkiye and Syria killing more than 50,000 people, including 6,000 in Syria, scores of flights carrying aid from different countries have landed at the Aleppo airport.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled parts of Syria in recent years, includ-



ing attacks on the Damascus and Aleppo airports, but it rarely acknowledges or discusses the operations.

Israel has targeted airports and sea ports in the government-held parts of Syria in an apparent attempt to prevent arms shipments from Iran to militant groups backed by Tehran, including Lebanon's Hezbollah. Thousands of Iran-backed fighters from around the region joined Syria's 12-year conflict helping tip the balance in favour of President Bashar Assad's forces.

Aleppo, which suffered widespread destruction in Syria's civil war, was again heavily damaged in the deadly 7.8-magni-

tude earthquake that hit Türkiye and Syria last month.

On February 19, Israeli airstrikes targeted residential areas in Damascus, killing at least five people and wounding 15, according to Syrian state media. On January 2, the Syrian army said Israel's military fired missiles toward Damascus' international airport, putting it out of service and killing two soldiers. That attack came amid Israeli fears the airport was being used to funnel Iranian weaponry into the country.

In September, Israeli airstrikes also hit the Aleppo airport, putting it out of service for days.

Teachers protest over suspected Iran schoolgirl poisonings

AP ■ DUBAI

Iranian teachers held protests in several cities on Tuesday over suspected poisonings targeting hundreds of schoolgirls. Security forces broke up several of the demonstrations using water cannons and tear gas, activists said. Meanwhile, prosecutors started filing criminal charges against journalists, activists and others over their comments on the still-unsolved incidents that began in November and escalated in recent days, with dozens of schools reporting suspected cases. The alleged poisonings come as Iran has faced months of protests over the September death of Mahsa Amini after her arrest by the country's morality police, one of the most-serious

challenges to Iran's theocracy since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. These new incidents threaten to again stoke public anger as parents fear for their children's safety. It remains unclear who may be behind the suspected attacks and what chemicals - if any - have been used.

At least 127 schools have reported suspected poisoning cases so far, according to figures compiled by the Tehran-based reformist newspaper Etemad, with dozens reported on one recent day alone. Nearly every school reporting an incident has been a girls' school.

Activists and Iranian media reports previously said over 1,000 students complained of falling ill with at least 400 of them hospitalized. Iran has given no exact figures.

17 killed, 100 hurt as blast rocks Dhaka building



ANISUR RAHMAN ■ DHAKA

At least 17 people were killed and over 100 others injured on Tuesday in a powerful explosion at a seven-storey building here in Bangladesh's capital, police said. Eleven firefighting units have been mobilised at the spot after the blast, which occurred around 4:50 pm (local time) at Old Dhaka's crowded Gulistan area, the fire service control room said. "Fourteen bodies have been found (so far) but the toll could rise as the rescue operation is underway," a fire service official told reporters. The cause of the explosion could not be known immediately, but local residents suspected chemicals illegally stored inside

the building, mostly used as an office and business complex, might have sparked the blast. "At first, I thought it was an earthquake. The entire Siddik Bazar area was shaken by the blast," eyewitness Safayet Hossain, a local shopkeeper, told The Daily Star newspaper. "I saw 20-25 people lying in the road in front of a damaged building. They were seriously injured and bleeding. They were crying out for help. Some people were running around in panic," he said. He added that the locals were carrying the injured in vans and rickshaws to the hospital. Alamgir, who was close to the blast site, said, "After the loud noise, people quickly came out of the building. There was panic on everyone's faces. The glass of

the building's windows shattered and fell onto the street. Many pedestrians on the street were injured." The Rapid Action Battalion's bomb disposal unit was rushed to the spot to inspect the buildings. Dozens of injured were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said DMCH police outpost j-spector Bacchu Miah. He added that all of them were receiving treatment at the hospital's emergency unit. The building has several stores for sanitary products on the bottom floor and a branch of BRAC Bank was located in the building adjacent to it. The blast shattered the glass walls of the bank and also damaged a bus standing on the opposite side of the road, reports said.

NBW against Imran suspended till March 13 in Toshakhana case

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ■ ISLAMABAD

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday suspended till March 13 the non-bailable arrest warrant against Pakistan's ousted prime minister Imran Khan for his failure to appear before a sessions court here for the fourth time in the Toshakhana case. The IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq, announcing the verdict that he reserved earlier in the day, directed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief to appear before the district and sessions court on March 13, rejecting a plea by Khan's lawyer to give four weeks for appearance before the court in the case. Khan, 70, has been in the crosshairs for buying gifts, including an expensive Graff wristwatch he had received as the premier at a discounted price from the state depository called Toshakhana, and selling them for profit. Khan on Tuesday for the

fourth time skipped a hearing at the sessions court, citing health and security reasons. The former premier's counsel Sher Afzal Marwat, who appeared before the court, said Khan was unwell and "disabled" after being injured in the Wazirabad attack. Marwat said a "global spectacle" was created regarding the PTI chief, whose party on Monday challenged in the IHC the arrest warrant issued against him for not appearing before the court. Requesting the court to give a date next week for hearing the matter, Marwat maintained that he would provide the power of attorney within "a day or two". Taking to Twitter on Tuesday, Khan slammed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government and said it was behind a total of 76 legal cases - so far - raised against him. "This is what happens when a bunch of criminals is imposed on a nation by those who are



devoid of intelligence, morality, and ethics," he tweeted. The PTI chief on Monday moved the IHC against the non-bailable arrest warrant ordered by the Islamabad sessions court in the Toshakhana case. His lawyer Ali Bukhari in the petition before the IHC requested a cancellation of the warrant, arguing that it was "illegal" to issue a non-bailable warrant. The IHC then gave

Khan another opportunity to choose a date to appear before the courts in the Toshakhana (gift depository) reference. The court also remarked that the warrants were not issued for arrests but to frame charges against Khan. "You appear in court for the framing of charges and then request for an exemption," Justice Farooq said. "The law is the same for everyone. What can

the court do? "The court has to adopt a legal procedure," he added, maintaining that Khan had to appear in the sessions court today (Monday) but he did not. "You tell, when will he appear?" the judge asked. "Imran Khan has to appear before me as well. He can come on March 9 and appear before the sessions court too." Here, the PTI lawyer said that Khan had severe security threats to which the judge replied that the court's judges received threats "every day" and asked if he should shut down the IHC because of it. Khan's lawyer stated that he would consult with the PTI chief and get "instructions" on what to do next "within half an hour". The counsel announced that he would speak to Khan over video-link due to "security concerns". Khan has earlier thrice skipped indictment hearings in the Islamabad sessions court in the case.

15 playing Holi in Karachi University injured in attack by Islamic radicals

PTI ■ KARACHI

At least 15 students from the Aminority Hindu community celebrating Holi at the University of Karachi were injured when they were attacked by some members of a radical Islamic student organisation, the second such incident in Pakistan in two days. A University of Karachi official confirmed there had been an incident in the Sindhi department where Hindus and

other students were celebrating Holi and throwing colours at each other when some students attacked and injured them. "We are looking into the incident which is totally against our policies," he said. An unnamed Hindu girl student, wearing a mask along with other students, later released a video on Twitter outlining the entire incident. "The Islami Jamiat Tulba (IJT) activists came and attacked students celebrating Holi in the

hall. They beat some of us," she said. "They also harassed female students and we had to leave the place. We had assembled to celebrate the Holi festival. I want the government and varsity to take action against those responsible," she said. The attack on Hindu students in Karachi was the second such incident in Pakistan since Monday. At the Punjab University campus, 15 students were injured when IJT activists

allegedly stopped them from celebrating Holi at the premises here. Holi, a festival of colours, is celebrated to mark the onset of spring. The incident took place at the Law College of Punjab University on Monday, when around 30 Hindu students gathered to celebrate Holi. When contacted by PTI, IJT (Punjab University) spokesperson Ibrahim Shahid denied the involvement of its students in the incident.

Life terms to 3 for orchestrating blast outside Hafiz Saeed's house

M ZULQERNAIN ■ LAHORE

An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan on Tuesday handed life terms to three persons for their role in orchestrating a powerful bomb blast outside Mumbai attack mastermind and JuD chief Hafiz Saeed's residence here in June 2021 that killed three people. Three people were killed and over 20 others injured in the blast outside Saeed's Johar town residence here on June 23, 2021, which also damaged a number of houses, shops and vehicles in the area. Last year, the anti-terrorism court in Lahore handed down death sentences to four other persons in this case. "On Tuesday, the ATC-I Lahore sentenced to death Samiul Haq, Uzair Akbar and Naveed Akhtar in the Johar Town bomb blast after the prosecution presented evidence against them," a court official told PTI. The official said the suspects were convicted under various sections of the Pakistan Penal Code. "The convicts will have to undergo life imprisonment and 10 years of rigorous imprisonment that will run concurrently," he said. Judge Abher Gul Khan pronounced the verdict during the in-camera trial proceedings at the high-security Kot Lakhpat Jail here. The official said the three convicts were facilitators of the prime suspects. In January 2022 the ATC Lahore sentenced to death Eid Gul of the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Peter Paul David, Sajjad Shah and Ziaullah on nine counts in this case. Another suspect Ayesha Bibi was handed down five years imprisonment. According to the CTD, Eid Gul had installed explosives in the car used in the blast. The car belonged to Peter Paul David and the other three - Sajjad Shah, Ziaullah and Ayesha - were facilitators. The Punjab government claimed to have unearthed the network of all the 'ten suspects' involved in the blast. Saeed, 72, an UN-designated terrorist on whom the US has placed a USD 10 million bounty, was arrested in July 2019 in the terror financing cases. Saeed-led JuD is the front organisation for the Lashkar-e-

Nepal's 8-party alliance meets ahead of Prez poll



SHIRISH B PRADHAN ■ KATHMANDU

A meeting of the representatives from Nepal's eight-party alliance met here on Tuesday to discuss the preparations for the Presidential elections on March 9 and also deliberate on a raft of key political issues. The task force chaired by Nepali Congress vice-president Purna Bahadur Khadka has representatives from CPN (Maoist Center), CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal, Loktantrik Samajbadi Party Nepal, Nagarik Unmukti Party, Janamat Party and Rastriya Jana Morcha. The meeting was held at the Nepali Congress parliamentary party office here and discussions centred on contemporary political issues, including preparations for the Presidential election scheduled on March 9, Nepali Congress sources said. The upcoming Presidential election is a face-off between two former speakers of the House of Representatives — Ram Chandra Paudel — a candidate backed by the eight-party

alliance and CPN-UML's Subas Nembang. Paudel, 78 and Nembang, 69, filed their nominations last month. Last week, former prime minister KP Sharma-led CPN-UML, Nepal's second largest party in Parliament, withdrew its support to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda"-led government following a rift over backing Paudel for the presidential poll. With the support from eight political parties, Paudel's victory in the presidential election is almost certain. The tenure of the current president, Bidya Devi Bhandari, will end on March 12. The total number of voters for the election of the President is 882, consisting of 332 members of the federal parliament and 550 members of the provincial assemblies of the seven provinces. The vote weightage of a federal MP is 79 whereas that of the provincial assembly member is 48. The term of office of the President shall be five years from the date of election and an individual can be elected for the post of the President only for two terms.

US Def Secy on surprise visit to Baghdad

AP ■ BAGHDAD

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin made an unannounced visit Tuesday to the Iraqi capital where he vowed to continue the fight against the Islamic State group until the extremists are defeated. Austin, whose visit came just days before the 20th anniversary of the US-led invasion that ousted Saddam Hussein, said in statement later that he held talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and Defence Minister Thabet Muhammad Al-Abbasi. Austin was greeted on touchdown in Baghdad by Maj. Gen. Matthew McFarlane, the

US commander in Iraq, which is home to hundreds of American troops helping in the fight against the militant Islamic State group. "We'll continue working to accomplish this mission together. Through the global coalition to defeat Daesh, we liberated more than 50,000 square kilometers from Daesh and freed more than 4.5 million Iraqis from their cruel grip," Austin said, using an Arabic name for IS. Austin also said that US forces are ready to remain in Iraq at the invitation of its government, adding that these forces are operating in a non-combat and advisory role in support of the "Iraqi-led fight against ter-



rorism." "This is a critical mission and we're proud to support our Iraqi partners," said Austin, one of the most senior Biden administration officials to visit Iraq in recent years. Since the US-led invasion in 2003 that

removed longtime dictator Saddam from power, Iraq has been a point of friction between the United States and Iran. Tehran has widely expanded its influence in Iraq over the past 20 years. "I'm here to reaffirm the

US-Iraq strategic partnership as we move toward a more secure, stable, and sovereign Iraq," Austin tweeted upon arrival. "We continue to believe that Iraq's greater integration with its Arab partners in the region will deliver increased stability, security and prosperity, and it will pay dividends not only for Iraqi citizens, but for all people of the region," Austin said, referring to Iraq's improving its relations with Arab countries. Despite their defeat in Iraq in 2017, IS militants and their sleeper cells are still launching attacks in the country, as well as in neighbouring Syria. IS has killed and wounded dozens of Iraqi troops over the past months.

Hungarian delegation backs Sweden's NATO application

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

Parliamentary delegation from Hungary said on Tuesday that it supports Sweden's NATO membership bid after meeting the speaker of the Swedish parliament to iron out what Hungary's governing party has called "political disputes". Some Hungarian lawmakers have raised doubts about whether to support the NATO membership applications by Sweden and Finland, citing what they call "blatant lies" from Stockholm and Helsinki on the state of Hungary's democracy. But the Hungarian delegation indicated on Tuesday that the parliament in Budapest would ultimately ratify Sweden's NATO bid. "We support Sweden's NATO membership," Hungary's deputy parliamentary speaker, Csaba Hende, told Swedish news agency TT. "We made it clear that the Hungarian government, the Hungarian president, the prime minister and most of the Hungarian parliamentarians clearly support Swedish



NATO membership," Hende said, according to TT. He added that it was necessary to improve bilateral relations between Budapest and Stockholm. Hungarian officials have been saying that Swedish and Finnish politicians have been telling "blatant lies" about Hungary. "It would be appropriate that Swedish politicians, government representatives and members of the EU Parliament, based on completely untrue facts, do not indicate or imply that there is a lack of rule of law in a country," Hende told TT. Earlier, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has said that "it's not right for them to ask us to take them on board while they're spreading blatant lies about Hungary, about the rule of law in Hungary, about our democracy and about life here". According to Aron Emilsson, chairman of the Swedish parliament's committee on foreign affairs, who also met with the Hungarian delegation, Hungary didn't put forward any conditions.

6 Palestinians killed during Israeli West Bank raid

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli army raided the Occupied West Bank city of Jenin on Tuesday, Palestinian health officials said, leading to a gunbattle that killed at least six Palestinians and wounded 10 others. Israeli military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss events still unfolding, said the army had entered Jenin to arrest suspects involved in the killing of two Israeli brothers in the northern West Bank town of Hawara last week. The army also said it was operating in the nearby flash-point city of Nablus for the same reason. Residents of Nablus reported that at least two people were



arrested before the army withdrew. The Jenin brigade, a loosely organized armed group based in the refugee camp, said its militants were shooting and throwing explosive devices at Israeli

soldiers who had surrounded a house in the refugee camp. Videos showed black smoke billowing from the house after the militant group reported that the army fired missiles at the house when the suspects refused to surrender, the militant group reported. The Palestinian Health Ministry said six people were shot and killed, including 26-year-old Mohammed Ghazawi, and at least 10 others wounded. The ministry did not immediately offer further details on the other five killed. The militant group said on Telegram that its fighters shot down two Israeli drones, posting pictures of young men cheering wildly and taking selfies as they held the charred aircraft aloft. The Israeli military

said it was aware of the reports but declined to immediately comment. Tuesday's raid was the latest in a string of deadly arrest operations by the Israeli military in the northern West Bank, as violence and deaths in the occupied territory surge to the highest levels seen in years. Over the last year of near-daily Israeli military raids, the densely populated Jenin refugee camp has emerged as a hub of militant activity. More than 60 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire this year, about half of them militants, according to a tally by The Associated Press. Palestinian attacks against Israelis have killed 14 Israelis, all but one of them civilians, during that same time.

2 boys convicted for Sikh teen's 'cold-blooded' murder in UK

ADITI KHANNA ■ LONDON

Two teenagers have been found guilty of murdering an innocent 16-year-old Afghan Sikh refugee in London who they mistakenly thought belonged to a rival gang, according to Scotland Yard. Vanushan Balakrishnan and Ilyas Suleiman, both 18, were convicted for the murder of Rishmeet Singh "in cold blood" on Monday following a trial at the Old Bailey court in London. The duo will be sentenced at the same court next month. "Rishmeet was an innocent, young 16-year-old who had his whole life ahead of him. He had just spent an enjoyable evening with his friends and was making the short walk home when he was callously chased down



and knifed to death by Balakrishnan and Suleiman," said Detective Inspector Laura Semple, from the Metropolitan Police's Specialist Crime Command.

The police said that between them, the two teens stabbed Singh 15 times while he was "defenceless on the floor". "There is never an excuse to murder someone in cold blood, but this case is made even more tragic by the fact that Rishmeet was wrongly targeted by his attackers. Balakrishnan and Suleiman left the flat that day with the intention of ending someone's life," said Semple. "Poor Rishmeet was simply in the wrong place, at the wrong time. My thoughts remain with Rishmeet's family and friends, who have shown extraordinary courage throughout, including during the trial where they were forced to re-live Rishmeet's horrific last moments," she added. During the trial it emerged

that Rishmeet Singh came to the UK in October 2019 with his mother and grandmother to seek asylum from Jalalabad in Afghanistan. His father was killed by the Taliban six months prior to that, and shortly after they tried to kidnap Rishmeet - forcing the family to flee to the UK. In a statement, Rishmeet's mother Gulinder, said: "Rishmeet was my only child, and he had his whole life ahead of him. No words could ever explain or put into context how I have felt since Rishmeet was taken from us. He has been raised with so much love and now he's gone. I am struggling to understand as to how and why this happened to my baby boy. I feel I have lost everything and my life is over."

Slowdown in GDP growth late last year temporary: Moody's Analytics

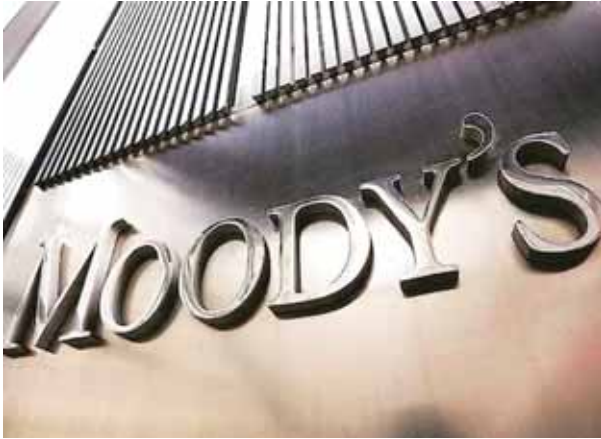
PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Moody's Analytics on Tuesday said India's domestic economy, rather than trade, is its primary engine of growth and the slowdown in economic activity late last year will only be temporary.

The government data released last week showed India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth slowed to a three quarter low of 4.4 per cent in October-December, 2022, mainly due to contraction in manufacturing and low private consumption expenditure.

While the manufacturing sector contracted by 1.1 per cent, private consumption expenditure slowed to 2.1 per cent in the October-December quarter of current fiscal.

In its report on emerging market outlook, Moody's Analytics said growth slowed substantially on a year-ago basis, with private consumption lagging overall GDP for the first time since the Delta wave of Covid-19 struck the economy in the second quarter of



2021.

"Our take is that the slowdown late last year will be temporary and even salutary, helping to wring some of the demand-side pressures out of the economy without stopping it wholesale. On the external front, better growth in the US and Europe's incipient recovery will propel India at the mid-year mark," it said.

The US and Europe are India's largest trade partners and are important destinations for exports of business services.

The slowdown in GDP growth in December quarter was stark when compared to 11.2 per cent growth in the same quarter of last fiscal.

In the current fiscal, the economy grew 13.2 per cent in April-June quarter and 6.3 per cent in July-September quarter.

Moody's Analytics said India's domestic economy, rather than trade, is its primary engine, in contrast to most other emerging-Asia economies. "With this in mind we observe India's fourth-quar-

ter performance with caution," it said.

Sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture that are highly linked to private consumption spending either contracted or barely grew during December quarter of current fiscal.

The normally faster-growing construction and retail and wholesale trade sectors came in somewhat hotter, though both lagged gains from earlier this year. "While high interest rates have slowed the domestic economy and curbed imports, external imbalances have widened, putting pressure on the rupee and adding to inflation," Moody's Analytics noted.

In the current fiscal (2022-23), the GDP is projected to grow by 7 per cent as per official estimates. This would require about 5 per cent GDP expansion in the fourth (January-March) quarter.

In 2021-22 the economy grew 9.1 per cent. In 2020-21 (Covid-impacted year), the economy contracted 5.8 per cent, while in 2019-20 the growth was 3.9 per cent.

'Ill-conceived, biased,' says SBI report on Rajan's remarks on Hindu rate of growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An SBI research report on Tuesday dismissed arguments that India is dangerously close to Hindu rate of growth saying such statements are "ill-conceived, biased and premature" in the wake of the recent GDP numbers and the available data on savings and investments.

"Interpretations of GDP growth based on noisy quarterly numbers is a game of smoke and mirror," said the SBI report 'Ecowrap'. The report comes within days of former Reserve Bank Governor Raghuram Rajan saying that India is "dangerously close" to the Hindu rate of growth in view of subdued private sector investment, high interest rates and slowing global growth.

Rajan said that sequential slowdown in the quarterly growth, as revealed by the latest estimate of national income released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) last month, was worrying.

Hindu rate of growth is a term describing low Indian economic growth rates from



the 1950s to the 1980s, which averaged 3.5 per cent. The term was coined by Raj Krishna, an Indian economist, in 1978 to describe the slow growth

"India's quarterly Y-o-Y GDP growth has been in a declining trend in FY23 sequentially, prompting arguments that India's growth is reminiscent of a pre-1980 Raj Krishna coined growth rate," the report said.

Apart from the fact that, quarterly growth numbers are "noisy and should be best avoided for any serious interpretation (on an average, India's GDP growth has witnessed Rs 2 lakh crores upward revision for the 3 year ended FY23)," we find such argument ill-conceived, biased and pre-

mature at its best when weighing the recent GDP numbers against the available data on savings and investments."

The investment and savings data for the past decade reveals interesting points, said the report authored by Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Group Chief Economic Adviser, State Bank of India.

Gross capital formation (GCF) by the government touched a high of 11.8 per cent in 2021-22, up from 10.7 per cent in 2020-21.

"This also had a domino effect on private sector investment that jumped from 10 per cent to 10.8 per cent over the same period," it said.

In fact, Ecowrap added that the trends in GCF to gross output ratio or the plough back of funds for creation of fresh capacity shows that for public administration the ratio attained fresh peak in 2021-22 owing to the emphasis on capital expenditure in recent budgets.

At the aggregate level, gross capital formation is supposed to have crossed 32 per cent in 2022-23, the highest level since 2018-19.

7% companies have right combination to boost growth, says Infosys report



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amere 7 per cent of companies have the right combination of culture and operating structure to spur growth from digital technologies, according to a new research from the Infosys Knowledge Institute.

The report -- based on a survey of 2,700 business executives across the US, UK, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, China, and India -- found that companies that make decisions based on high quality, transparent data and build a culture of responsible risk-taking are more likely to deliver profitable growth in tough macro-economic conditions.

Moreover, organising around products, not process, gets new products to market faster, increasing early-mover advantage.

Take advantage of Budget initiatives and invest, PM asks India Inc

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday urged India Inc to increase investment in tandem with the government's decision to raise capital expenditure (capex) and take advantage of the opportunities unveiled in the Budget 2023-24.

Addressing the 10th webinar on Budget, Modi said the government has increased outlay on capex to a historic high of Rs 10 lakh crore.

He further said that India is being described as a bright spot of the global economy and the country has attracted the highest FDI in the country in the year 2021-22 with major part going into manufacturing sector.

"I would also call upon the private sector of the country to increase their investment just like the government so that the country gets maximum benefit from it," he said while talking about the key proposals of the Budget.

He stressed that applications are continuously pouring in to avail of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme which makes India an important part of the global supply chain.

Dwelling on the tax-related post-Budget narratives, the prime minister said as opposed



to the past, the tax burden has come down significantly in India due to GST, reduction in income tax and corporate tax.

This, he said, has resulted in better tax collection as the gross tax revenue was about Rs 11 lakh crore in FY14, which can rise to Rs 33 lakh crore in 2023-24, an increase of 200 per cent.

The number of individual tax returns filed increased from 3.5 crore to 6.5 crore from 2013-14 to 2020-21, he said.

"Paying tax is such a duty, which is directly related to nation building. The increase in the tax base is proof that people have faith in the government, and they believe that the tax paid is being spent for public good," he said.

He said Amrit Kaal Budget laid the roadmap of an all-inclusive financial sector for

India's growth and India is moving with new capabilities, the responsibility of those in the financial world of India has increased.

Modi asked the banking sector that they have a robust financial system of the world and a banking system that is in profit after being on the verge of collapse 8-10 years ago.

Also, he said, there is a government that is taking policy decisions with courage, clarity and confidence.

"Today, the need of the hour is that the benefits of the strength in India's banking system should reach the maximum number of people," he said.

Giving an example of the government's support to the MSME sector, the prime minister asked the banking system to reach out to the maximum number of sectors.

"1 crore 20 lakh MSMEs have received huge help from the government during the pandemic. In this year's budget, the MSME sector has also got additional collateral-free guaranteed credit of 2 lakh crores. Now it is very important that our banks reach out to them and provide them adequate finance," he said.

Modi pointed out that the government's policies related to financial inclusion have made crores of people part of the formal financial system.

The government has helped fulfil the dreams of crores of youth by giving Mudra loans of more than Rs 20 lakh crore without a bank guarantee, he said.

For the first time, he said, more than 40 lakh street vendors and small shopkeepers received help from banks through PM Swanidhi Yojana.

The prime minister said that the entire world is witnessing the impact of India's fiscal and monetary policy during the COVID-19 pandemic and lauding its efforts in strengthening the fundamentals of the country's economy in the last 9 years.

Recalling the time when the world looked at India with suspicion, he said that discussions on India's economy, budget and goals would often begin and end with a question.

He highlighted the changes in financial discipline, transparency and inclusive approach and noted that the question mark at the beginning and end of the discussion has been replaced by 'vishwas' (trust) and 'apeksha' (expectations).

Touching upon the issue of 'vocal for local' he said that this is not a matter of choice but 'vocal for local and vision of self-reliance is a national responsibility'.

"Our exports have been at an all-time high, whether in goods or services. This indicates growing possibilities for India," he said, adding, the stakeholders like organisations and chambers of industry and commerce to take up the responsibility to promote local artisans and entrepreneurs up to the district level.

He clarified that 'vocal for local' is bigger than just buying products from the Indian cottage industry.

"We have to see which are the areas where we can save the country's money by building capacity in India itself," he said citing examples of higher education and edible oil where a lot of money goes out.

The prime minister said Indian talent, infrastructure and innovators can take the Indian financial system to the top.

Sebi gives more time to submit applications for auditor empanelment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Capital markets regulator Sebi on Tuesday extended time till March-end for submission of applications for empanelment of forensic auditors for mutual funds, asset management companies (AMCs) and trustee entities.

Earlier, the interested entities were required to submit applications by March 6.

"It has been decided to extend the last date for submission of application and the revised date for submission of application is March 31, 2023," the capital markets regulator said in a public notice.

On February 11, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) had invited applications from eligible firms for empanelment of forensic auditors for MFs, their AMCs and trustee companies.

After being empanelled, the auditors would take up assignments related to forensic audit of mutual funds, their AMCs and trustee companies or board of trustees.

Power Ministry mandates 40% purchase obligation for new coal, lignite-based thermal plants

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Power has mandated new coal or lignite-based thermal plants to either set up renewable energy capacity equivalent to at least 40 per cent of the thermal plant's capacity or procure that much supply of green energy under renewable purchase obligation.

Earlier this month the power ministry amended the Tariff Policy 2016 under Electricity Act 2003 to impose the renewable purchase obligation of 40 per cent for the new coal or lignite-based thermal power plants to be set up from April 1, 2023 onwards, showed a notification.

"... Any generating company establishing a coal/lignite-based thermal generating station and having the Commercial Operation Date (COD) of the project on or after April 1, 2023 shall be required to establish renewable energy generating capacity (in MW) i.e. Renewable Generation Obligation (RGO) of a minimum of 40 per cent of the capacity of the thermal generating station or procure and supply renewable energy equivalent to such capacity," it



explained.

A coal/lignite based thermal generating station with COD of the project between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2025 shall be required to comply with RGO of 40 per cent by April 1, 2025.

Any other coal/lignite based thermal generating station with COD of the project after April 1, 2025 shall be required to comply with RGO of 40 per cent by the Commercial Operation Date.

Further, a captive coal/lignite-based thermal generating station shall be exempt from requirement of RGO subject to its fulfilling Renewable Purchase Obligations as notified by the central government, it stated.

This assumes significance in view of India's ambitious target of having 500 MW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

Homebuyers say NCLT order on Jaypee Infratech case is Holi gift

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Homebuyers on Tuesday described NCLT's order on Jaypee Infratech as a "real Holi gift" and hoped that the successful bidder Suraksha group will deliver the flats as per the schedule proposed in the resolution plan.

On Tuesday, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) approved Suraksha group's bid to buy Jaypee Infratech Ltd, a development that comes as a relief for more than 20,000 homebuyers nearly six years after the debt-ridden company entered into the insolvency process.

The ruling, which also comes nearly two years after the Committee of Creditors (CoC) gave its nod for Suraksha group's offer, will pave the way for the comple-



tion of more than 20,000 housing units in various stalled projects of Jaypee Infratech Ltd (JIL) spread across Noida and Greater Noida in the national capital region.

"Homebuyers of Jaypee are happy and it is a real Holi gift for them. We expect Suraksha to start the construction as prescribed in the resolution plan and deliver them as per the schedule approved by homebuyers," Ashish Mohan Gupta, President of JIL Real Estate

Allottees Welfare Society, said. He also hoped that there would not be any further litigation in this matter so that Suraksha group starts construction at the earliest.

The Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) against JIL started in August 2017 over an application filed by an IDBI Bank-led consortium. For nearly 15 years, investments of more than 20,000 homebuyers are stuck in various projects of JIL.

'Market regulators should constantly inform, educate retail investors'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There is a need for market regulators to ensure that retail investors are constantly informed and educated about the market dynamics as they are "highly sentiment driven", according to an industry report.

Retail participation contributes to improving the liquidity of markets and the depth of the order book, the Assocham-CareEdge Ratings report said.

A diversified investor base, comprising both retail and institutional investors, is important for market resilience in emerging markets during periods of volatile international

flows. However, it could also add to greater market volatility.

"Retail investors are highly sentiment driven and tend to engage in more speculative trading rather than in long-run buy-and-hold investment strategies.

"This could amplify market downturns and upturns. Therefore, there is a need for market regulators to ensure that the participation is informed and educated," the report said. Commenting on the report, Assocham Secretary General Deepak Sood said strengthening investor awareness is imperative for the smooth functioning of the market.

Govt accepts expert panel report on smart electricity transmission system



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The power ministry on Tuesday said that the government has accepted a report of a task force or expert panel, which paves the way for modern and smart electricity transmission system in India.

The country will soon have a modern and smart power transmission system with features such as real-time monitoring and automated

operation of grid, better situational assessment, capability to have increased share of renewable capacity in the power-mix, enhanced utilisation of transmission capacity, greater resilience against cyber attacks as well as natural disasters, centralised and data-driven decision-making, reduction in forced outages through self-correcting systems etc., a power ministry statement said.

Adani group repays share-backed financing worth ₹7,374 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Embattled Adani Group on Tuesday said it has repaid share-based financing of Rs 7,374 crore (over USD 900 million) and will prepay all such remaining loans by the end of the month, as it looks to allay concerns over leverage and debt to win over investors.

The repayment will release pledge on shares of promoters in four group companies, it said in a statement, adding that together with repayments done earlier, the group has prepaid USD 2.016 billion of share-backed financing.

Women in Indian informal economy ready to compromise on salaries for health benefits: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There is a growing aspirational shift in the mindset of female representatives in the informal workforce, as a significant percentage of women said they are ready to compromise on higher salaries in lieu of health benefits, according to a survey.

As per the survey by business service provider Quesq Corp, 63 per cent of women in the Indian informal economy would compromise on salaries

for health security benefits, compared to only 28 per cent of men.

For the report, 4,179 respondents were surveyed between September 2022 and January 2023.

For an increasing proportion of female employees, job security, training and career development are becoming absolute priorities - even beyond the contents of their pay slips, it said.

"We must acknowledge the value and contribution of

women to India's informal formal economy, while simultaneously acknowledging that their requirements have now evolved. 'India Inc must invest in training and skill development for better employability of women, helping them find employment opportunities, and offer social security benefits - as opposed to simply salary considerations - to a wider employable population," said Lohit Bhatia, President, Workforce Management, Quesq Corp Limited.

Furthermore, 38 per cent of female informal workers believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of job security.

There is also a clear indication that health and security are becoming bigger priorities for women, with 16 per cent of female informal workers considering health and protection as the principal benefit of formal employment.

The need for the implementation of safe working conditions and skill training for

women remain crucial for a more equitable distribution of opportunities in the workforce, the study noted.

As per Quesq Staffing Solutions, industries such as Media & Entertainment (46 per cent share), Auto & Auto Comm (42 per cent share), FMCG/FMCD (27 per cent share), Ecom/Logistics (27 per cent share) and IT/ITES/Education (22 per cent share) hold the highest share of women in the workforce.



Mbappe determined to carry PSG

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe heads to Munich fresh from a record-breaking weekend with Paris Saint-Germain and determined to lead the French giants past Bayern and into the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

PSG trail 1-0 from the first leg of the heavyweight last-16 tie, after injury reduced Mbappe to a cameo appearance off the bench in that match last month.

Yet the 24-year-old France superstar did enough in his short time on the pitch then — including having a goal disallowed for a marginal offside — to make it clear that he can swing the tie the Parisians' way.

Since that game, the Ligue 1 leaders have recovered from a worrying slump in form to claim three straight domestic wins, scoring 11 goals in the process.

Mbappe has netted five of them, including one in Saturday's 4-2 win over Nantes that saw him overtake Edinson Cavani and become PSG's all-time top scorer, five and a half years after signing from Monaco in 2017.

The player who in December became the first to score a hat-trick in a World Cup final since Geoff Hurst in 1966, boasts the remarkable record of 201 goals from 247 games in a PSG shirt.

'LEAVE A MARK'

"Every player plays to leave a mark and so that his name goes down in football history, to not be forgotten. I think with this record that people will remember me here," Mbappe said after being awarded a trophy by PSG in a lavish on-field presentation before an adoring crowd.

Mbappe has 30 goals in 30 games for his club this season and has a strong claim to be the best player in the world right



now, even if Lionel Messi recently pipped him to win The Best FIFA men's player award.

Messi, with 18 goals himself for PSG this season, is mainly there to serve Mbappe in Christophe Galtier's side, for whom the absence of Neymar due to injury in Munich — and for several more months — may not matter.

Going out of the Champions League in the first knock-out round for what would be the fifth time in seven seasons really would matter for PSG and their Qatari owners, however.

They lost to Bayern in Lisbon in their only appearance to date in the final, in 2020, but one of the defining performances of Mbappe's time with

PSG so far came in Munich the following year.

It was a snowy night in April 2021 when Mbappe netted twice in a 3-2 quarter-final first-leg win over Bayern in an empty Allianz Arena.

He opened the scoring as Paris went 2-0 up. Bayern pulled themselves back level only for Mbappe to score a superb winner, shaping to curl one towards the far corner only to smash his shot past goalkeeper Manuel Neuer at his near post.

"My mind is already on Wednesday's match. We are going to Munich with the clear aim of qualifying," Mbappe said on Saturday before playing down suggestions a PSG exit would precipitate his departure from

the club.

"I don't think this match will have an impact. If I linked my future to the Champions League, without wishing to show a lack of respect to the club, I would have left a long time ago.

"I am here and I am very happy to be here. I am not thinking about anything other than making PSG successful."

DEFENSIVE PROBLEMS

PSG may need Mbappe's goals more than ever in Bavaria because coach Galtier does not have his defensive problems to seek.

His side have looked their best this season when playing with three centre-backs, but the coach's options in that sector

have been limited by the loss of Presnel Kimpembe for the rest of the campaign with an achilles injury. Captain Marquinhos came off at the weekend with a rib injury, while Nordi Mukiele was also forced off.

The former, whose mobility is so important to a defence also featuring an ageing Sergio Ramos, is expected to play even if not fully fit.

Mukiele's presence would be useful too, although Achraf Hakimi may return at right-back less than a week after being charged with rape.

PSG have said they are supporting the Moroccan while the case is investigated, and the legal proceedings do not stop the player from leaving France.

PSG clash the true test for Bayern's CL recruits

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich host Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday with the stage set for star turns from their 2022-23 additions Sadio Mane and Matthijs de Ligt.

With Bayern having won ten league titles in succession, the two big-name summer recruits were brought to Munich mainly with European nights in mind.

Bayern return to the Allianz Arena with a 1-0 advantage after former PSG forward Kingsley Coman's second-half goal at the Parc des Princes in the first leg, the same scoreline and goalscorer of their 2019-20 Champions League final win.

Bayern need only to avoid defeat to ensure passage to the quarter finals.

But just as it is for PSG boss Christophe Galtier, Bayern manager Julian Nagelsmann is well aware that elimination will leave a burn that domestic results will not be able to cleanse.

Nagelsmann said as much after his side's tighter-than-hoped win at Stuttgart on Saturday, saying he hoped it was not the 'result' but 'the manner and style of our game (against PSG) is how the season will be seen.'

Early European exits are not to be tolerated in the Bavarian capital, regardless of the quality of their opposition.

Only once have Bayern been knocked out before reaching the quarter finals in the past ten years, a decade in which they have lifted the European Cup twice.

That elimination came against eventual champions Liverpool in 2018-19 and despite winning the league and cup double that same season, the sting ultimately proved fatal for then manager Niko Kovac.

After Bayern's 2-1 win at Stuttgart on Saturday, Nagelsmann locked the dressing room door to give a speech reminding his side of the task ahead of them against Paris.

"I told them that on Wednesday we have a very important game and that we need to bring our intensity," the 35-year-old manager told Germany's Sky.

"They're a difficult team to beat and are one of the best teams in Europe."

Key to that intensity and focus will be Mane, who has a habit of performing on the European stage, including scoring a go-ahead goal for Liverpool at the Allianz Arena which helped secure Bayern's elimination.

Mane made the move from Liverpool to Munich in the summer of 2022 having appeared in three of the past five Champions League finals,



winning one and scoring in another.

The forward is line for his first start in four months on Wednesday as he continues his return from a leg injury which ruled him out of Senegal's World Cup campaign.

Mane has made two appearances from the bench in the league since recovering from the injury and despite looking sharp has not yet recaptured his best form.

Behind Mane in the centre of defence is de Ligt, the man tasked with shutting down PSG's strike duo of Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe.

Since moving from Juventus, de Ligt took a little longer than Mane to establish himself in Munich, initially coming off the bench.

France star Lucas Hernandez's ACL injury in Qatar in November however gave de Ligt an opportunity which he grabbed with both hands. De Ligt played perhaps his best game for Bayern against Stuttgart on Saturday, clearing a goal off the line before scoring one of his own at the other end of the pitch in a furious two-minute period.

Tottenham face uncertain future despite Conte return



AP ■ LONDON

Antonio Conte is set to return to the bench for Wednesday's decisive Champions League showdown against AC Milan but persistent questions over the Italian's future risk overshadowing the rest of the season. Conte has missed the past four games as he recovered from gallbladder surgery in Italy with his assistant, Cristian Stellini, taking the reins.

During his time away, Tottenham have shown the frustrating inconsistency that has blighted the club since the Italian took the reins in November 2021.

A pair of 2-0 wins against

of Conte's pedigree has been unable to break that long drought.

The Italian has portrayed Tottenham's problems as beyond his control, subtly hinting at frustration with the transfer policy of chairman Daniel Levy without explicitly condemning him in public.

But the 53-year-old is taking his share of the blame from fans, who have grown tired of his conservative tactics.

Stellini's record of three wins during his time in charge, prior to the FA Cup defeat, led to speculation over what the future would look like without Conte.

The former league winner at Chelsea, Inter Milan and Juventus has yet to sign an extension to a contract that expires at the end of this season and would surely be in demand from Serie A clubs if he became available.

Even if Tottenham finish in the top four to guarantee a return to the Champions League, it would not be a huge surprise if Conte and Levy parted ways.

Against that uncertain backdrop, Tottenham host seventh-time European champions Milan in the second leg of their last-16 tie on Wednesday, looking to overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first meeting at the San Siro.

Spurs need Conte to lift their spirits ahead of a defining night, which could serve as a springboard for an uplifting end to the season.

Neymar will 'come back stronger' from ankle surgery

AP ■ PARIS

Neymar promised to "come back stronger" after Paris Saint-Germain said on Monday the forward requires ankle surgery and will be out of action for three to four months.

The Brazilian, who injured his ankle on February 19 against Lille in Ligue 1, "has had several episodes of instability in his right ankle in recent years," said the club, adding that its medical staff "recommended a ligament repair operation to avoid a major risk of recurrence".

Neymar tweeted he would not be discouraged by his latest injury.

"I'll come back stronger," he wrote with a praying hands emoji.

Qatar-owned PSG said Neymar would go under the knife in Doha "in the next few days" and said it would take

"three to four months before he can return to training with the team".

That would appear to end any prospect of Neymar playing again this season, with the Ligue 1 season due to end on June 3 and the Champions League final, if PSG were to get there, a week later in Istanbul.

Neymar, who has scored 18 goals in all competitions for his club this season, was in fine form for the French champions before the World Cup break.

But the 31-year-old has netted only three times in nine appearances since returning from Qatar, where he injured the same ankle playing for Brazil.

He came off with a sprain in his country's 2-0 win over Serbia in their opening game and didn't play again in the group stage.

The ex-Barcelona man returned in the knockout rounds but Brazil lost to Croatia on

Osimhen targets Scudetto with Napoli, then PL move

AP ■ NAPLES

Serie A top goal-scorer Victor Osimhen said on Monday he dreams of playing in the English Premier League.

The Nigeria striker, who was in Rome to collect the award for foreign athlete of the year in Italy from the foreign press association, said he wanted to deliver a league title to Napoli fans but was also looking further ahead. "A lot of people worldwide



consider the Premier league as the best and strongest league," said the 24-year-old. "I'm in one of the best league of the world, which is the Italian Serie A. "Of course I'm working so

hard to make sure that I achieve my dream of playing in Premier League someday, but it's a process and I just want to keep on this momentum."

"As a football player, when you arrive in Napoli you fall in love even more with football, because they base all their life on the game and the support for the team," he said.

"To be able to try to give them something to remember is a big mission for me."

Ganemat equals national record

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Young shooter Ganemat Sekhon on Tuesday equalled the women's skeet qualification national record but finished ninth after a five-way shoot-off at the ISSF World Cup Shotgun in Doha, Qatar.

The 22-year-old from Chandigarh shot 120 out of 125 after two days of qualification and then found herself in a shoot-off for the final four qualifying spots with four others. She missed her first shoot-off shot to finish just outside the top eight.

Among the other Indians in women's skeet, Darshna Rathore shot 117 to finish 25th.

Toney helps Brentford beat Fulham in PL

AP ■ LONDON

Ivan Toney extended his hot-streak as the Brentford striker's 15th Premier League goal this season helped clinch a 3-2 win over west London rivals Fulham on Monday.

Toney has shown no signs of being distracted since he was charged with 262 breaches, dating back to 2017, of the Football Association's gambling laws.

The 26-year-old recently criticised the FA in an Instagram post over what he alleges are lapses of confidentiality as he prepares to argue his case.

But Toney has kept his focus on the pitch and his penalty at the Community Stadium made it eight goals in his last 10 games.

Only Manchester City's Erling Haaland and Tottenham's Harry Kane have scored more than Toney's tally in the league this term.

Toney's 15th goal put Brentford back in front after Fulham's Manor Solomon had cancelled out Ethan Pinnock's opener.

Mathias Jensen netted late on and Carlos Vinicius's stoppage-time strike was no consolation for Fulham as Brentford extended their unbeaten league run to 12 matches.

Brentford, undefeated in the league in 2023, sit ninth, just one point behind seventh placed Fulham in the race to qualify for



European competition.

Toney has scored 27 of his 28 career spot-kicks, with his only miss coming while playing for Peterborough in 2018.

"Ivan is the best penalty taker in the world for a few reasons, his strategy, he practices it and he is very cool," Brentford boss Thomas Frank said.

"He is a special footballer. His character is unique in terms of leadership and driving his team."

"His link-up play and the way he sees his team-mates in terms of combinations and then his ability to score goals. He is an all-around player."

UEFA to reimburse Liverpool fans who attended Paris CL final

AP ■ PARIS

UEFA on Tuesday said it will reimburse all Liverpool supporters who attended last year's chaos-hit Champions League final between the English club and Real Madrid at the Stade de France in Paris.

Heavily criticised in an independent report published last month for organisational failures which "almost led to disaster", European football's governing body said its refund scheme would cover the entire Liverpool allocation of nearly 20,000, as well as supporters of Real and other spectators affected by the trouble outside the stadium.

"Refunds will be available to all fans... where the most diffi-

cult circumstances were reported," UEFA said, adding that all ticket-holders who did not enter the stadium by the originally scheduled kick-off time, or could not get in at all, would also receive a refund.

"Given these criteria, the special refund scheme covers all of the Liverpool FC ticket allocation for the final, i.e. 19,618 tickets."

Real's 1-0 win at France's national stadium on May 28 was overshadowed by events outside, with the kick-off delayed by 37 minutes as fans struggled to access the stadium after police funnelled them into overcrowded bottlenecks as they approached.

Police then fired tear gas



towards thousands of supporters locked behind metal fences on the perimeter to the stadium.

UEFA tried to pin the blame on Liverpool fans arriving late despite thousands having been

held for hours outside the stadium before kick-off.

A leading Liverpool fans' group, Spirit of Shankly, later said fans were left "fearing for their life" in a "maelstrom of chaos and alarm".

The Spirit of Shankly and the Liverpool Disabled Supporters Association hailed the decision but underscored that it did not go far enough. A joint statement said the announcement "does not excuse UEFA, exempt them from criticism or lessen the need for them to implement all of the recommendations made by the Independent Inquiry".

The French authorities claimed an "industrial scale fraud" of fake tickets was the problem.

Dravid defends ‘poor’ track

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India's head coach Rahul Dravid doesn't regret one bit playing the ongoing Test series against Australia on spinner-friendly tracks as World Test Championship points are at premium and most countries are preparing result-oriented pitches.

While India lead Australia 2-1 in the four-Test series, the "poor" rating of Indore track by ICC match referee Chris Broad has once again raised questions about playing on rank turners, where all the games finished inside three days.

"I won't go too much into it. Match referee is entitled to share his opinion. Doesn't really matter if I agree with his reading or not. Doesn't matter what I think. But sometimes with WTC points at stake, you tend to play on wickets that produce results," Dravid was straightforward in his defence of the three tracks in Nagpur, Delhi and Indore.

However, he didn't forget to mention that data analysis of tracks prepared by home teams in last few years has shown that the 22-yard strips in most places have been challenging.

"It can happen, not only in India but across the world if you see, sometimes it is difficult to get that balance perfectly right for everyone and that can happen not only here but in other places as well," the man with 164 Test matches under his belt said.

Dravid did give a bit of idea as to what has been the trigger behind asking for these kind of raging turners. It was the 2021 Test match in Kanpur against New Zealand where India failed to pick up nine wickets on the final day.

"There is a huge premium on results and if you draw a game like we did in Kanpur versus New Zealand, that sets you back in a home game. When you have 12 for a win and 4 for draw, you want to get a win ahead of a draw," he stated.

There was a hint of sarcasm as well as irritation when he spoke about the tracks in South Africa where India played three Tests early last year.

"We have played on some challenging wickets when we go overseas also. Played in South Africa recently (2022), where spinners were completely taken out of the game," he said curtly.



"And everyone wants to produce wickets where eventually one wants results. You will probably prepare wickets where the ball holds a bit more sway over the bat and that's necessary and part of the game," Dravid didn't deny the bowlers' advantage.

'BIT OF PERSPECTIVE'

India have only one century among top-order batter,

scored by skipper Rohit Sharma, while Cheteshwar Pujara is the only other player with a 50 plus score.

"You need to be realistic as to what is a good performance on these challenging wickets, not only here but if you look at last three to four years, wickets have generally got challenging everywhere.

"So you need to be realistic what the bench-marks are now,

what standards are on these kinds of surfaces just one good performance can change the game. We saw that with Rohit's performance (in Nagpur) and we have seen that."

On these tracks, Dravid, in fact, is not even expecting a double hundred or a 'Daddy Hundred'.

"It might not be a double hundred but a 50-60 or 70 somewhere, but could actually

be a very, very good score in some conditions."

Someone cheekily asked about the critics, saying that during the head coach's playing days there used to be good batting strips on offer and 550 plus used to be scored.

"No one wants extremes but it can happen. I am not going to divulge personal conversations with my players and everyone wants to win and qualify."

Kohli will bounce back: Ponting

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ricky Ponting won't assess Virat Kohli's form on the basis of his performance in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy because the pitches have been a "nightmare" for all batters in the contest so far.

Kohli, who has not scored a fifty in his last 14 innings, has managed just 111 runs in three Tests against Australia but Ponting is not worried about lack of runs.

"I'm not looking at anybody's form in this Test series because, for a batsman, it has just been an absolute, it's been a nightmare," Ponting told ICC Review.

"For Virat, I've said it before I say it over and over. Champion players always find a way, and yes, it might seem like he's in a bit of a drought at the moment and he might not be scoring the runs that we all expect him to score."

"And certainly, you know, he's a realist as well. And we all know as batsmen, when you're struggling and not scoring runs, you don't need anybody else to tell you. You're pretty aware of it yourself."

"But no, I'm every day of the week putting my hand up and not even showing any sort of concern to Virat Kohli. Because I know he will bounce back."

Having played in England multiple times as part of the Ashes, Ponting is aware that the conditions in England in June will be vastly different to what the teams are currently facing



in the sub-continent.

The 48-year-old, who occupies the third place in the list of cricketers with most number of international centuries, said India should also consider tweaking their batting order should they qualify for the ICC World Test Championship Final at The Oval in June.

"With someone like KL Rahul having gone out of this side and Shubman Gill having come in, both these guys have played a bit of Test match cricket and you could potentially have both of those guys in the same team," Ponting said.

Gill was included in the playing XI for the third Test ahead of Rahul, who scored just 38 runs in three innings of the

first two Tests in Nagpur and Delhi.

However, Rahul has scored two of his seven Test hundreds in English conditions and Ponting feels there could be a way to play both him and Gill at The Oval.

"Maybe Shubman could start at the top and KL could potentially move down into the middle order, because he's played cricket in those (English) conditions before, albeit at the top of the order."

"But one thing we know about the UK is that the ball swings for long periods of time during the day. And if the over-head conditions are suitable, then the ball tends to swing right the way through an innings."

Can good batting track at Motera bring Ishan into equation?

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The relatively better batting track at the Narendra Modi Stadium could well bring dashing Jharkhand keeper-batter Ishan Kishan into the mix following Kona Bharat's poor show with the willow in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar trophy.

Bharat, who has been groomed as Rishabh Pant's back-up for the past one year and is an India A regular, has had scores of 8, 6, 23 not out, 17 and 3 in the five innings that he played in the first three Tests.

His keeping has been impressive on slow turners even though he did bungle a bit on a raging turner in Indore.

However, 57 runs from five innings has certainly not been beneficial to Indian team's cause with its batting unit already struggling on difficult tracks.

Ahead of the final Test, head coach Rahul Dravid came to Bharat's defense when asked about the lack of runs from his bat.

"We we are not (concerned) and it again comes to a question of perspective and understanding of some of the challenges and conditions that he has kept in and even though it's not a big contribution but he got 17 in the first innings," said Dravid.

"Got a nice contribution in Delhi where he played positively, and you need a little bit of



luck in these conditions and he hasn't probably had that, and he is shaping really well and keeping really nicely for us. So we need to put batting performance in perspective."

On Tuesday, Dravid did spend a lot of time with Kishan as he got two separate hits at the nets. Bharat was rested from the optional session but is likely to turn up for the training session on Wednesday.

The Motera track has a firm look to it and the even bounce means that Kishan's attacking style of batting can be preferred by the team.

The effect of Rishabh Pant's horrific accident has never been felt as much as it has been dur-

ing the series where India has missed a counter-attacking batter in the middle-order who could take the game away in one session.

Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel are all-rounders and more than capable of playing match-winning knocks but certainly aren't players with x-factor who can change the game in a single session.

Suryakumar Yadav was tried in Nagpur but that was due to the absence of Shreyas Iyer.

The only factor that can go against Kishan is the presence of two off-spinners in the Australian ranks. Kishan has had problems against deliveries that turn away but that has hap-

pened in white ball cricket where he has to attack straight-away.

The Indian team management also needs to keep in mind that if India play the WTC final against Australia at the Oval, chances of which are high, Bharat could well be a walking wicket against the pace trio of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc.

With no chance of Pant's recovery in the near future, Kishan is a way better option and Motera is perhaps the best place to check him out and see if he has the requisite temperament, if not the flawless technique, to play the traditional format.

We were below par: Mandhana



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Having suffered back-to-back defeats, Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Smriti Mandhana on Monday admitted that they were "below par" in their WPL match against Mumbai Indians but promised a strong comeback.

Opting to bat first, RCB were all out for 155 and then saw MI chase down the target with as many as 34 balls to spare.

"We would have loved to put up a better performance. We were below par. Will come back harder. There were two-three batters getting 20-30 runs, a few batters including me couldn't put up a good score," Mandhana said at the post-match presentation.

"We will sit and talk and try to come up with a better performance. We had six-seven good bowlers. As batters we need to put up a good total on board."

"It's a pretty short tournament, we can't dwell on it. In franchise cricket, even after two losses we can turn it around quickly."

Mandhana was, however, happy with Kanika Ahuja (22) and Shriyanka Patil's (23) performance with the bat, having come at number seven and eight in the batting order.

"Lots of positives in the form of Kanika and Shriyanka's batting after the top order collapse, really happy with the way they batted," she said.

While RCB have lost two matches on the trot, this was Mumbai Indians' second victory in as many outings.

NZ stand in way of Sri Lanka's WTC final quest

AP ■ CHIRSTCHURCH

New Zealand will take momentum from their dramatic one-run win over England into this week's first Test against Sri Lanka, who could reach the ICC World Test Championship final with a 2-0 series sweep.

Tim Southee's hosts became just the fourth team to win a Test after following on as they secured a draw in the two-match series against England.

Kane Williamson, who became New Zealand's record run-scorer in the thrilling Wellington win, said it was vital to kick on after the Black Caps ended a seven-Test winless run.

"It's been a long time for us to get over the line," former skipper Williamson said ahead of the first Test against Sri Lanka starting on Thursday in Christchurch.

"We haven't had the results we would've liked, despite putting the work in, so it's nice to get those rewards."

"It's an important series for us now as we are looking to improve and we're focused in trying to put out better performances."

Sri Lanka have only won two Tests of the 19 they have



played in New Zealand.

But skipper Dimuth Karunaratne's side have extra incentive this time.

They can reach the WTC final against Australia with a 2-0 series triumph, providing India fail to beat Australia in the

final Test in Ahmedabad, which also begins on Thursday.

Sri Lanka are an improving and more consistent side under Chris Silverwood, who took over as head coach in April last year.

They beat Bangladesh 1-0

away and drew 1-1 at home with both Australia and Pakistan, all in two-Test series, since the former England fast bowler's appointment.

Their hopes of qualifying for the showpiece at The Oval in June were boosted when Australia clinched their place by winning the third Test against India in Indore inside three days last week.

"To get to the WTC final would be unbelievable," Silverwood said.

"But at the same time we know we've got a very good New Zealand team in front of us as well and we have to respect that, work hard, and try and earn that right."

New Zealand retained the squad that beat England in Wellington while Sri Lanka brought in two uncapped players, the 23-year-old batsman Nishan Madushka and seam bowler Milan Rathnayake, 26.

Madushka forced his way into the Test squad after scoring two centuries and a double hundred in three appearances against the touring England Lions a few weeks ago. Sri Lanka will also play three ODIs and three T20s against New Zealand after the Tests.

Buttler sees room for improvement ahead of WC defence

AP ■ CHITTAGONG

Captain Jos Buttler warned his England side they have "areas to improve" ahead of their one-day World Cup defence after failing to seal a series clean sweep in Bangladesh.

England lost the third and final ODI against Bangladesh in Chittagong on Monday by 50 runs, although the tourists had already secured the series.

With an eye on the World Cup later this year in India — where conditions will be similar to Bangladesh — Buttler changed his England side for the final match.

Sam Curran was promoted to number five in the batting

order, scoring 23 off 49 balls, and the 18-year-old leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed made his ODI debut.

The game was England's last scheduled 50-over match until September 8.

"I think we played some really good cricket throughout the series and I've spoken a lot about these being great conditions for us to challenge ourselves in," Buttler said.

"These are probably the conditions that we would find the hardest as a team."

"Now there's plenty to learn — things that we've done well and areas that we can also improve," the captain added.

England were set 247 to win in Chittagong but folded for 196



and Buttler said that "we needed someone to go on and really take ownership of that chase".

But he had no regrets about experimenting with his line-up.

"We changed a few things today and gave opportunity to people in different ways, but I thought the intensity was there," he said.

England have some difficult decisions on the make-up of their World Cup squad.

Senior players Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow are both likely to return, while Test skipper Ben Stokes has hinted that he could come out of ODI retirement for England's title defence.

Buttler can see a possible repeat of England's build-up to last year's T20 World Cup in

Australia, where they emerged as champions.

"I think the schedule is hugely challenging to always get your best XI on the field," Buttler said.

"Looking back to the T20 World Cup, we probably went into that World Cup having never played our perceived best XI."

"But then to get into the tournament and go on to win it, that gives you great confidence even though we haven't had the opportunities to play our best team."

"I think that's the way we're building. And we know that, come the World Cup, we will have the opportunity to pick from everyone who's available."



South Africa turn to spin for 2nd WI Test

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

Spin pair Keshav Maharaj and Simon Harmer have been drafted into South Africa's team for the second Test against West Indies, coach Shukri Conrad announced on Tuesday.

All-rounder Wiaan Mulder and in-form batsman Ryan Rickelton also come into the starting XI at the Wanderers on Wednesday as South Africa look to build on their 87-run win in the first Test at Centurion.

Injured fast bowler Anrich Nortje gives way while spinning all-rounder Senuran Muthusamy, batsman Keegan Petersen and fast bowler Marco Jansen have all been left out.

The inclusion of two spinners is a rarity for South African teams playing at the Wanderers. Left-arm spinner Maharaj, 33, and off-spinner Harmer, 34, both return having played in harness together in the Sydney Test against Australia in January.

Conrad said the selection of two spinners was based on a tendency for the Wanderers pitch to offer some spin over the past year, while he said left-arm quick Jansen "deserves a bit of a break".

The pace attack of Kagiso Rabada and Gerald Coetzee will get some backing from medium-paced all-rounder Mulder.

Rickelton, a wicketkeeper-

batsman who played his three Tests last year making a best score of 42 against Bangladesh in Gqeberha, replaces an out-of-sorts Petersen at number five.

Heinrich Klaasen, however, will retain the wicketkeeper role. Conrad pointed out that every player in the 15-man squad "has got an opportunity to play".

Conrad also pleaded for more Test cricket for both South Africa and the West Indies, saying both teams had a proud history at the highest level.

"If there is a lack of Test cricket, interest could start to wane," he said.

"We don't play a lot of Test cricket so we've got to find novel ways of finding out about these guys," he said.

Conrad said he wanted to have a settled Test squad by the time India arrive for South Africa's next Test series in December.

Asked how that would be possible given the lack of Test fixtures, Conrad said he hoped to take a South Africa A team on tour which would include some of the younger members of the current Test squad.

South Africa team: Temba Bavuma (captain), Dean Elgar, Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Ryan Rickelton, Heinrich Klaasen (wkt), Wiaan Mulder, Keshav Maharaj, Marco Jansen, Kagiso Rabada, Gerald Coetzee