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CAPSULE

WRESTLERS ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE IN WFI TRIALS

New Delhi: Delhi High Court on Thursday permitted five wrestlers to participate in the trials being conducted by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) from Friday for the upcoming 2023 Asian Games Championship. **P3**

2 KILLED AFTER SPEEDING SUV RAMS INTO VEHICLES

New Delhi: Two people, including a teenager, were killed and six sustained injuries after a speeding SUV allegedly rammed into two cars in Delhi's Vasant Vihar area, police said on Thursday. **P3**

SUV CARRYING DIGVIJAYA SINGH HITS BIKER IN MP

Rajgarh: A man was injured when SUV carrying senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh hit his motorcycle on Thursday.

Ram Chandra Poudel Nepal's new President

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Ram Chandra Poudel of the Nepali Congress was on Thursday elected as the president, amid increasing political instability in the country ruled by a fragile coalition headed by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda". Poudel, a common candidate of the eight-party alliance that included Prachanda-led CPN (Maoist Center), received the vote of 214 lawmakers of parliament and 352 provincial assembly members.

US Intel: Modi's India to attack Pak if provoked

It cautions that conflict between India, China also may increase

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Cautioning that tension between India and Pakistan and India and China may increase, the US intelligence community has not ruled out a conflict between them. It also said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is more likely than in the past to respond with military force to "perceived or real" provocations from Pakistan. This veiled warning has come against the backdrop of continuing tension at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China for the last more than two years. Moreover, China tried to change the status quo at the LAC in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, in December last year leading to a scuffle between the troops of the two sides.

As regards the note of caution by the US, the American intelligence community has told lawmakers that it apprehends increased tension between India and Pakistan



and India and China with the possibility of a conflict between them.

It also noted that under the leadership of Modi, India is more likely than in the past to respond with military force to "perceived or real" provocations from Pakistan.

This evaluation on Wednesday in Washington forms part of the annual threat assessment of the US intelligence community. It was submitted to the US Congress by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence during a Congressional hearing.

While India and China have engaged in bilateral border talks and resolved border points, relations will remain strained in the wake of the countries' clash in 2020, the most serious in decades, said the report.

The expanded military postures by both India and China along the disputed border

der elevate the risk of armed confrontation between two nuclear powers that might involve direct threats to US persons and interests and calls for US intervention. Previous standoffs have demonstrated that persistent low-level friction on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has the potential to escalate swiftly, it said.

Relations between China and India have virtually frozen ever since the eastern Ladakh military standoff between the two countries in May 2020. India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

According to the report, the crises between India and Pakistan are of particular concern because of the risk of an escalation cycle between two nuclear-armed States. New Delhi and Islamabad probably are inclined to reinforce the current calm in their relationship following both sides' renewal of a ceasefire along the Line of Control in early 2021.

"However, Pakistan has a long history of supporting anti-India militant groups, and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is more likely than in the past to respond with military force to perceived or real Pakistani provocations. Each side's perception of heightened tensions raises the risk of conflict, with violent unrest in Kashmir or a militant attack in India being potential flashpoints," it said.

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"However, Pakistan has a long history of supporting anti-India militant groups, and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is more likely than in the past to respond with military force to perceived or real Pakistani provocations. Each side's perception of heightened tensions raises the risk of conflict, with violent unrest in Kashmir or a militant attack in India being potential flashpoints," it said.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been strained over the Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

India has maintained that terrorism and talks cannot go together and Islamabad should provide a conducive atmosphere for the resumption of dialogue.

Meanwhile, Pakistan and the US have held a round of counterterrorism dialogue. The two-day discussions covered a range of topics including counter-terrorism cooperation at multilateral forums, assessment of the regional counterterrorism landscape, cyber security and countering violent extremism.

During the dialogue, the two sides shared their experience in countering the financing of terrorism.

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ED arrests Sisodia under PMLA in excise case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday arrested former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on money laundering charges in connection with the excise policy case.

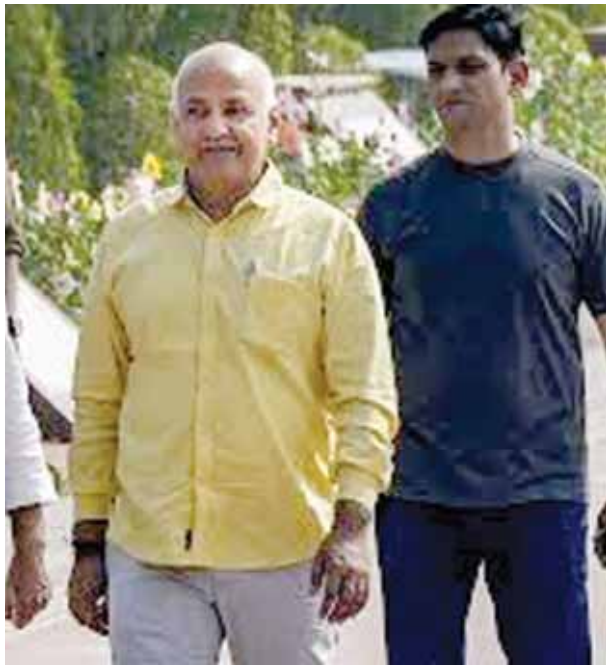
The 51-year-old Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader was arrested under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) following his second round of questioning at the Tihar jail here, officials said.

Sisodia's arrest by the ED comes a day before his bail plea will come up for hearing on Friday before a designated CBI court. He is currently undergoing judicial custody till March 20 in connection with the CBI case in the alleged irregularities in the excise policy. Sisodia was earlier arrested by the CBI on February 26.

The ED alleged that Sisodia was "evasive" in his replies and was "not cooperating in the probe", leading to his arrest.

The agency is expected to obtain a production warrant from a special PMLA court and then produce him before it on Friday seeking his custody for interrogation in the money laundering case.

The first round of Sisodia's questioning by the ED took place on March 7 by a three-member team that obtained court's permission to question him during his judicial custody period. If the ED gets his custody, he will be taken to the



agency's headquarters here for questioning and further recording of his statement and confrontation with other accused, even if he gets bail in the CBI case on Friday.

Sources said the agency questioned him in the jail about the alleged change and destruction of cellphones that were in his possession. The agency has made these charges in its chargesheets filed before the court.

In its chargesheet, the ED has said that its probe found that at least 36 accused, including Sisodia, "destroyed, used or changed" 170 phones to conceal evidence of "kickbacks" worth thousands of crores of rupees in the alleged scam.

The ED posed a specific query as to how the excise policy draft was allegedly available with liquor traders and purported cartels even before it was officially published by the excise department of the Delhi Government, the sources said.

Sisodia was also grilled about the meetings of the Group of Ministers which were chaired by him on the liquor policy issue and his interactions with other ministers on this panel and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, they said.

Modi, Albanese engage in cricket diplomacy in Guj

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/AHMEDABAD

With the stage set for a summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese in the national Capital on Friday, the two leaders on Thursday engaged in cricket diplomacy as they together watched the first day of the fourth test match between the two countries in Ahmedabad.

The two leaders watched the match for about half an hour at the Narendra Modi stadium for half an hour after taking a round of the imposing sports arena on a golf cart.

Modi and Albanese handed over Test caps to their respective team captains Rohit Sharma and Steve Smith at the start of the game, which is the fourth of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The two Prime Ministers saw the match from the President's Box at the world's largest stadium.

The round of the playing turf on a golf cart by the two



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese with Indian captain Rohit Sharma and Australian captain Steve Smith before the start of the fourth test cricket match between India and Australia, at Narendra Modi stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday

PTI

dignitaries was applauded by thousands of spectators. Modi and Albanese met players from both sides and stood alongside them when the national anthems of India and Australia were sung. The two Prime Ministers also visited the Hall of Fame museum at the Narendra Modi stadium.

The crowd had started

assembling from different parts of the State since early morning, most of them carrying the Tricolour and sporting face paint. Vendors selling India t-shirts and other items for match day soon ran out of stock.

Albanese arrived in Ahmedabad on Wednesday and attended some

grammes, while Modi reached the State late night.

Giving details of Australian Prime Minister's schedule, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had said last week, Albanese will be accompanied by Minister of Trade and Tourism Don Farrell, Minister for Resources and Northern Australia Madeleine King MP and senior officials besides a high-level business delegation for the visit from March 8-11.

In Delhi, Albanese will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhawan on Friday. Modi and Albanese will hold the annual Summit to discuss areas of cooperation under the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, besides regional and global issues of mutual interest. Albanese will also call on the President Droupadi Murmu, the MEA said. India and Australia share warm and friendly relations based on common values and democratic principles.

Continued on Page 2

Opp meeting on Sunday against 'unleashing' of Central agencies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the resumption of second part of the Budget Session of Parliament on Monday, the Opposition parties have scheduled a meeting on Sunday evening to mull strategy to corner the Centre on its alleged motive to continue tightening the noose on Opposition party leaders by using Central probe agencies like CBI, ED and Income Tax on them.

Party leaders said they will also raise the issue of "political vendetta" against non-BJP ruled States in Parliament and also question the Union Government on "holding back of funds for schemes such as MNREGA", no clarity on alleged Chinese incursion, price rise amongst range of issues. The second leg of the Session is scheduled to end on April 7. While the Congress continues to demand a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the allegations related to the Adani group, others



Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha arrives at a press conference in New Delhi on Thursday

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

ers like the Samajwadi Party, the Left parties and the DMK have lodged their strong protests against the alleged attack on the federal structure and the misuse of institutions.

Sources said the TMC will raise in Parliament issues such as the LIC and the SBI's risk exposure, price rise of essential

commodities, unemployment and "misuse" of Central agencies during the second phase of the Budget Session.

The TMC, the second largest Opposition outfit in Parliament, has also revived its demand for the introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill.

Continued on Page 2

Cryptocurrency transactions now under money laundering Act

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has imposed anti-money laundering provisions on cryptocurrencies or virtual assets as it looks to tighten oversight of digital assets.

In a gazette notification, the Finance Ministry said the anti-money laundering legislation has been applied to crypto-trading, safekeeping and related financial services.

After this, Indian crypto exchanges will have to report suspicious activity to the Financial Intelligence Unit India (FIU-IND).

The move is in line with the global trend of requiring digital-asset platforms to follow anti-money laundering standards similar to those followed by other regulated entities like banks or stock brokers.

Digital currency and assets like NFTs (non-fungible tokens) have gained traction globally over the last couple of years.

Continued on Page 2

Atishi gets Edu, PWD; Bharadwaj Health Dept

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP MLAs Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi were sworn in as ministers in the Arvind Kejriwal Government in the national Capital to fill the vacant posts left after the resignations of deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and health minister Satyendra Jain.

Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena administered Bharadwaj and Atishi the oath of office and secrecy at a function at Raj Niwas which was attended by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, ministers, Leader of the Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri and others.

Atishi has been allotted Education, PWD, Power and Tourism portfolios, while Bharadwaj has been given the responsibility of Health, Water,



and Industries and Urban Development.

Bharadwaj (43), Delhi Jal Board vice-chairman, is a three-time lawmaker from Greater Kailash who served as a minister in AAP's brief stint in the government in 2013. Bharadwaj is also AAP's chief spokesperson.

Atishi (41), a Rhodes scholar, is a first-time MLA from Kalkaji. She has been closely associated with the AAP Government's education reforms.

Continued on Page 2

11,200 Punjab tillers to get land rights as Prez assents to Bill

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than 11,200 tillers in Punjab, who have been occupying over 4,000 acres of land for generations but had no title rights, will get the ownership after paying due compensation as President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent to the legislation in this effect, officials said on Thursday.

The Punjab Bhonedar, Butemar, Dohlidar, Insar Miadi, Mukarraridar, Mundhimar, Panahi Qadeem, Saunjidar, or Taraddadkar (Vesting of Proprietary Rights) Bill, 2020 was passed by the Assembly in 2020 during the Amarinder Singh Government. "The President gave assent to the Bill passed by the Punjab

Assembly," an official said.

The move allows property rights to more than 11,200 tenants occupying over 4,000 acres land after paying due compensation.

It is expected that the legislation will empower tillers of such land, who belong mostly to the economically and socially weaker sections of society, the official said.

These tenants have been in occupation of small parcels of land for many years and inherit their rights by succession from generation to generation. However, since they were not registered owners, they neither have access to financial institutions for loans nor get relief for any natural disaster.

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(Mr) India loses its Calendar

SWARN KUMAR ANAND ■ NEW DELHI

Satish Kaushik, actor-filmmaker who became a household name for his comic role as "Calendar" the cook in the 1987 blockbuster "Mr India", breathed his last following a fatal cardiac arrest on Thursday. He was 67.

A day after enjoying the festival of colours at a party hosted by lyricist Javed Akhtar in Mumbai on Tuesday, Kaushik was at a friend's house in Delhi for the Holi celebrations when on Wednesday night he felt unease and breathlessness.

He asked his driver to take him to a Gurugram hospital where he was declared brought dead. His friend and veteran actor Anupam Kher shared the sad news in a tweet early on Thursday.

Highly esteemed in Bollywood for his talents and



13 April 1956 - 9 March 2023

dedication to the craft of acting and filmmaking, the Pappu Pagar's (Deewana Mastana) humour and compassion earned him many friends in Bollywood.

The impeccable comic tim-

ing of Kashiram of "Ram Lakhani" and Mutthu Swamy of "Saajan Chale Sasural" won Kaushik Filmfare Best Comedian Award in 1990 and 1997 respectively.

Born on April 13, 1956, in

Haryana, Kaushik — who started his acting career as a theater artist earning kudos for his role as Ramlal in Feroz Khan's adaptation of Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman"—was a master of reinventing himself, adapting to changing times seamlessly with his chronological varied roles as actor, director, scriptwriter and producer. He had acted in more than 100 films.

Kaushik tried his hand at film direction for the first time with "Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja" which proved a box office disaster.

However, the financial fiasco didn't stop him from making box office hits like "Hum Aapke Dil Me Rehte Hain" and "Hamara Dil Aapke Paas Hai".

An actor who would make fun of his own failures and life tragedies in Bollywood, Kaushik lost his son at age two. He is survived by his wife Shashi and daughter Vanshika.

Holi joyride by driver, cook turns deadly for others

2 killed, 6 hurt as Thar rams into 2 cars, 3 carts in Vasant Vihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two persons, including a teenager, were killed and six people sustained injuries after a speeding SUV allegedly rammed into two cars and three vending carts in southwest Delhi's Vasant Vihar area on Wednesday. Two persons have been apprehended in connection with the incident.

The Vasant Vihar Police Station received a call at 7.30 PM regarding the accident and found a Mahindra Thar SUV, two other vehicles and three vending carts damaged, a senior police officer said. The accident was caused by the driver of the Thar who fled the spot. Eight



(Left) The speeding Thar that crushed many people in Malai Mandir area. (Right) The two other vehicles that were hit by the Thar.

people were taken to the AIIMS Trauma Centre, Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Manoj C said. The injured are residents of Shiva Camp, Vasant Vihar, Ekta Vihar, and

RK Puram. Two of the injured – Munna Kumar (28), a resident of RK Puram, and Sameer (15), a resident of Munirka Jhuggi, succumbed to their injuries during treatment, the

DCP said. The injured have been identified as Bhura Khan (47) and five other minors. Preliminary investigation has revealed that the accused Ajay Kumar Yadav (39), a resident of

Madhubani district in Bihar, was the driver of the owner of the Thar. He had access to the SUV as the owner was not in Delhi, police said. The other accused Chij Bahadur (40), a native of Nepal, is a cook in the same house. The two were out on a joy ride around the city when the accident took place. The owner of the Thar is currently in Udaipur, Rajasthan, and will be questioned once he is back in Delhi, police said.

Arif Khan, the cousin of Sameer, said he also sells fruits at the spot and was present when the incident happened. "The SUV came at a very high speed from the Malai Mandir direction. It first hit a red Xcent car which rammed into an electric pole in the middle of the road. Later, the SUV hit another car and our three carts. When the accident took place, dust engulfed the small section and several people gathered there. We did not see the driver escape from the spot. Sameer came under the Thar and probably died on the spot," Arif said.

Parents don't know about Sameer's death: Relative

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Fifteen-year-old Sameer Khan's daily routine included attending classes at a mosque in southwest Delhi's Vasant Vihar and helping his father sell fruits from his cart before returning home for the night. Sameer died at a hospital during treatment while Bhura Khan awaits surgery. The accident claimed another life and left five more, including children, seriously hurt.

"Sameer's cousin Talib, an autorickshaw driver, was passing through the spot when he saw his relatives lying injured and informed us," Mohammad Yunus Khan, a relative said. Till Thursday afternoon,

Sameer's parents were not aware of his death and had been informed that he was undergoing treatment at another hospital.

"Sameer used to live with his family in a jhuggi near the petrol pump in Munirka. He accompanied his siblings and cousins to the mosque for classes daily. Later, they returned to his father's cart where he usually spent time in the evening.

Bhura Khan, who has been selling fruits at the spot for the past three years, is likely to undergo surgery in the next four-five days," Yunus Khan said. "He and his wife have not been informed about Sameer's death. We are not sure how to reveal this news to

them," he added. Sameer's sisters Suhana and Ilma and cousins Sohail and Shejra were also present at the spot during the accident. Suhana suffered an injury on her face and will undergo a surgery next week while Ilma was referred to Safdarjung Hospital for treatment, Yunus added. The other deceased was identified as 28-year-old Munna Kumar Mahto from Bihar's Chhapra.

His elder brother Sunil Kumar said, "I live in Lucknow. My relatives from Bihar called me around 7 PM to tell me that Munna was injured in an accident in Delhi. Later, I got another call telling me that he had died. I took a bus and reached Delhi this morning."

Sisodia pens open letter on 'Politics of Education' vs 'Politics of Jail'

It is much easier to throw political opponents into jail than giving quality education to kids, says ex-Edu Min

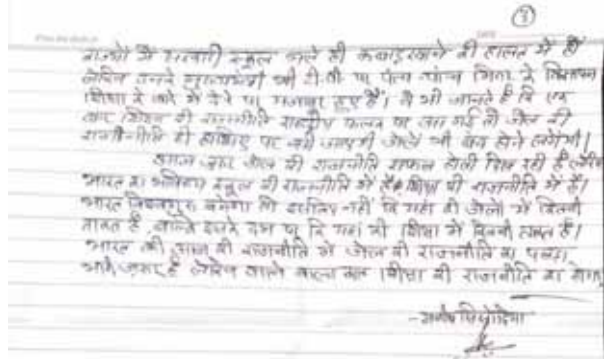
STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday penned an open letter on 'Politics of Education' vs 'Politics of Jail' while in custody, alleging that the BJP's problem with politics of education was that it "builds nations, not leaders."

In the open letter, Sisodia wrote, "It is much easier to throw political opponents into jail than giving quality education to children. BJP's real problem with the politics of education is that it builds nations, not leaders."

"Politics of education is not an easy task and definitely not a recipe for political success. Under, politics of jail might be winning under the rule of the BJP, but the future belongs to politics of education," he continued.

Recalling the Uttar Pradesh Police's notice to folk singer Neha Singh Rathore over her song which sparked controversy and the arrest of Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera who was forced to deboard from a plane and arrested over



alleged derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's father, Sisodia penned, "Arvind Kejriwal's only crime is that he set up a political alternative to the politics of Modi."

Sisodia, who was arrested by the ED on Thursday, wrote, "It is easier to jail people raising voices against the Government or the running of the Government by threatening political opponents, than opening and running state-of-the-art schools and colleges." "Motivating parents, children and teachers for education is a lengthy task. But you only

need to pressurise four officials of probe agencies to excel in jail politics", Sisodia wrote in his letter. Crediting the 'Delhi model of education' for the AAP's success in Punjab, Sisodia said that non-Congress and non-BJP Governments have risen above politics to learn about good works done by each other.

"The schools in BJP-ruled States are in shambles, but their Chief Ministers are now forced to give five-minute ads on television boasting about their commitment to education", the AAP leader said.

After the CBI, the ED



arrested the AAP leader on money laundering charges in connection with alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy, official sources said. The 51-year-old was arrested under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) following his second round of questioning at the Tihar Jail. The first round of Sisodia's questioning by the ED took place on March 7.

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal shared a copy of the letter on Twitter and said: "BJP does politics of putting people in jail, we are doing politics of educating children. It is easy to send to jail, very difficult to teach children. The nation will progress by education, not by sending to jail."

HC allows wrestlers' selection trials

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEWDELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday permitted five wrestlers to participate in the trials being conducted by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) from Friday for the upcoming 2023 Asian Games Championship.

Justice Prathiba M Singh, in a special hearing held on a holiday, said petitioner wrestlers — Anuj Kumar, Chander Mohan, Vijay, Ankit and Sachin Mor — shall be allowed to compete and be judged on their own merit.

The High Court said that participation in the trial shall not be construed as any opinion made by the court on the merit of wrestlers on which the decision of the selection com-

mittee will be final. "Considering this position and the fact that being talented wrestlers the petitioners should not be excluded in view of the fact that there ought to be greater talent which would compete in the trials, this court is of the opinion that the petitioners ought to be permitted to participate in the trials to be held tomorrow and day after in their respective categories," said the court.

The Hight Court was hearing the petition of the five wrestlers, who have won medals and positions at national and international levels, raising grievance of their exclusion from trials being conducted by WFI for the Asian Games Championship

to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan from April 9 to 14, 2023. The petitioners, represented through advocate Rahul Rathore, said the criteria adopted by WFI is totaly arbitrary and unfair and has resulted in admitting wrestlers for trials who are either inferior or at best at par with them. The petitioners prayed that they ought to be permitted to participate in the trials.

Central Government standing counsel Manish Mohan, representing the Sports Ministry and WFI, submitted there were various allegations against office bearers of WFI which had then led to appointment of oversight committee by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in end of January 2023.

AAP readies for door-to-door campaign in city

New Delhi: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has intensified its preparations for a massive door-to-door campaign in Delhi to protest against the arrest of its leaders, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain.

"Representatives from 250 Delhi wards received training on Thursday at the party headquarters, and the process of assembling teams for the door-to-door campaign within each ward has also been expedited," it said.

AAP Delhi State Convenor Gopal Rai, stated that the door-to-door campaign will begin on March 13, and teams will conduct campaigns in each of Delhi's wards. **SR**

8,550 fined during Holi, Shab-e-Baraat in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi traffic police issued more than 8,550 challans for violation of traffic rules during Shab-e-Baraat and Holi this year, according to the official data. Many of those challanned included people who rode motorcycles without helmets and some were also fined for drunk driving.

Ahead of the festivals, the Delhi Police had asked its officials to put a tight leash on stunt bikers during Shab-e-Baraat and Holika Dahan. It had cited past events when young men visited India Gate, Connaught Place and other areas in New Delhi district and performed dangerous stunts on two-wheelers and even on three- and four-wheelers.

The traffic police claimed that presence of policemen at strategic locations and strict enforcement of laws resulted in reduced fatal accidents on Holi



as only five such incidents were reported from the city this year, compared to nine in 2022.

The police said Thursday special teams consisting of 759 traffic police officials were stationed across the city to act against drunken driving, over speeding, reckless driving and stunt biking.

According to the official data, on Shab-e-Baraat, the traffic police issued a total of 908 challans, which included 70 challans for drunken driving, 109 for triple riding on two-

wheelers, 438 for riding without helmet, 22 for driving without seat belt, 42 for tinted glass and 227 challans for other traffic-related violations. On Holi, 7,643 challans were issued.

They included 559 for drunken driving, 698 for triple riding on two-wheelers, 3,410 for riding two-wheelers without helmet, 312 for driving without seat belts, 215 for tinted glass and 2,449 for other traffic-related violations, the data showed.

UP cops challan 1,100 vehicles for violations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Owners of more than 1,100 vehicles, including cars and two-wheelers, landed in the police net over violation of various road safety norms across Noida and Greater Noida on Holi. According to Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Anil Kumar Yadav, around 30 vehicles were impounded and owners of at least five of them penalised hefty amounts ranging between Rs 17,000 to Rs 33,000 for "stunts" and recklessness like car occupants hanging from the windows.

"Throughout Wednesday, around 475 traffic police per-

sonnel including inspectors, sub-inspectors and constables remained on duty across Gautam Buddha Nagar to keep a check on violations of rules," the officer said.

He said 650 challans were issued for two-wheeler rides without helmet, 265 for triple-riding, 75 each for drunk driving and wrong-side driving, while 25 car owners were penalised for having black films on their windows.

Another 25 vehicle owners were penalised for not being able to produce documents, he added. "Thirty vehicles were seized during the day for various violations under the Motor Vehicles Act.

G20 nations to participate in flower fest at Central Park

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Several G20 countries, including China and Japan, will participate in a flower festival at Central Park, Connaught Place on the weekend. In a statement, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) said the objective is to showcase the vibrancy and colourful display of G20 members and guest countries.

The NDMC G-20 Flower Festival is being organised at Central Park, Connaught Place on March 11 and 12. Flowering plants of different colours and varieties will be displayed in different forms and installations, it said. The NDMC will be displaying different flowering plants showcasing the diversity of the Indian Subcontinent. The four G20



countries that are participating in the festival are China, Japan, Singapore and the Netherlands. The corporation will provide the required space to all the participating G20 member countries and guest countries for the flower festival, the statement said. "The flowering plants and any other plants of the guest countries may showcase various varieties of potted plants either locally produced or of their home country," the NDMC said. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)

will also participate in the festival. A large variety of seasonal and exclusive flora would be at display, the statement said. "The Connaught Place in New Delhi is a major tourist/commercial attraction where a large number of tourists and citizens visit every day. The flower festival is an opportunity for publicity and awareness amongst the general public about G20 members and guest countries," the NDMC said.

The festival will also showcase paintings or photographs of flowers such as national flowers or major flower gardens of G20 member countries and guest countries, it said. A painting competition will also be organised at the site on the theme of flora and fauna and school children will participate in it, the statement said.

Afghanistan should not be used for training, financing terrorists: India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE / AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/UNITED NATIONS

Favoring return of peace and stability to Afghanistan, India has said it expects that the territory there should not be used for sheltering, training or financing of terror acts, specifically terrorist individuals and entities proscribed by the United Nations Security Council(UNSC).

"As a contiguous neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, and given our strong historical and civilisational linkages to the Afghan people, India has direct stakes in ensuring the return of peace and stability to the country," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj said late Wednesday.

Speaking at the Security Council briefing on United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kamboj said the collective approach of the international community has been articulated in the Security Council Resolution 2593 of August 2021, which was adopted under



India's Presidency of the UNSC. "In accordance with the Resolution, we expect that the territory of Afghanistan should not be used for sheltering, training, planning, or financing terrorist acts, specifically terrorist individuals and entities proscribed by the UN Security Council," she said, adding that it also means acting against drug trafficking.

The resolution also outlines the need for the formation of a truly inclusive and representative government structure, which represents all sections of the Afghan society, respects the rights of all Afghans, and ensures equal rights for women, girls, and members of minority groups, including their access to edu-

cation. India also voiced concern about increasing attempts towards removing women from public life in Afghanistan and called for women and minorities to be included in Afghanistan's future and their rights to be fully respected.

Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of UNAMA told the Council that "Afghanistan under the Taliban remains the most repressive country in the world regarding women's rights, and it has been distressing to witness their methodical, deliberate, and systematic efforts to push Afghan women and girls out of the public sphere."

"Confining half of the country's population to their homes in one of the world's largest humanitarian and economic crises is a colossal act of national self-harm. It will condemn not only women and girls, but all Afghans, to poverty and aid-dependency for generations to come.

It will further isolate Afghanistan from its own citizens and from the rest of the world," Otunbayeva said. The UNAMA has recorded an

almost constant stream of discriminatory edicts and measures against women by the de facto authorities since August 2021.

In 2023, 13.8 million Afghan women and girls are in need of humanitarian assistance – yet the de facto authorities have undermined the unprecedented international aid effort by also banning women working in non-governmental organisations, even though they are crucial to the delivery of life-saving help, the UN said.

Kamboj underlined that security and stability in Afghanistan will continue to be a priority for India and it will continue to speak out in support of the Afghan people.

"Peace and stability in Afghanistan are critical imperatives that all of us also need to collectively strive for. India will continue to play its constructive role in the pursuit of this objective. The interests of the Afghan people will always continue to be at the core of all our efforts," she said.

Noting that the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains deeply distressing,

Kamboj said India has dispatched several shipments of humanitarian assistance to the country.

Reiterating India's commitment to continue helping the Afghan people going forward, she said India has provided several shipments of humanitarian assistance including 40,000 MTs of wheat, 65 tonnes of medical aid and 28 tonnes of other relief material.

Recently, India also sent around 5,000 units of stationery items and winter clothing for primary school students of Habibia School in Kabul. In addition, India is also partnering with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the welfare and rehabilitation of the drug-user population in Afghanistan, especially among Afghan women.

Kamboj told the Council that India had actively taken part in finalising the draft of the current mandate of the UNAMA after the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 2021. "We are ready to work with the Secretary-General in his efforts to find progress in the situation in Afghanistan," she said.

Rajnath reviews Def ties with Aussie counterpart on phone

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is in India on four-day visit to hold summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral defence ties with his Australian counterpart Richard Marles in a telephonic conversation.

Incidentally, Australia is set for the first time to hold the Malabar series of exercises off its coast in August. Navies of the US, India and Japan will take part in the high-profile drill. All the four nations are part of the Quad combine.

Giving details of Rajnath's talks, defence ministry officials said here

both the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment towards further strengthening the bilateral defence relationship. The teleconference was reflective of the trust and friendship the two countries share especially in matters related to defence and security.

India and Australia are pursuing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and the defence cooperation between the two countries has been consistently deepening in recent years.

Relations between India and Australia have been on an upswing in the last few years. The strategic partnership between the two countries was elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership in June 2020.

"Prime Minister Albanese's visit is expected to provide further momentum to the comprehensive strategic partnership," Ministry of External Affairs had said in a recent statement.

In June 2020, India and Australia elevated their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership and signed a landmark deal for reciprocal access to military bases for logistics support.

The Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) allows militaries of two countries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies, besides facilitating scaling up of overall defence cooperation. In August last year, four Sukhoi-30 MKI fight-



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese onboard INS Vikrant off the Mumbai coast on Thursday. PTI Photo

Albanese first guest PM to see INS Vikrant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Thursday became the first foreign Prime Minister to visit on board India's first indigenously designed and built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant. It was commissioned into the Navy in September last year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Albanese was received on board the aircraft carrier in Mumbai by Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar. The Prime Minister was also given a guard of honour on the ship, navy officials said here.

"I am honoured to be here today on the newly-commissioned, Indian-designed and manufactured INS Vikrant at the invitation of Prime Minister Modi.

My visit reflects my government's commitment to place India at the heart of Australia's approach to the

Indo-Pacific and beyond," Albanese said in a statement. "... What lifts defence relationships to new levels is the resolve and foresight of those who see the relationship not only for what it is, but what it could be. Prime Minister Modi is one such person," he said. The Australian Prime Minister also announced that the next edition of the multilateral naval exercise Malabar would be hosted by Australia later this year. India and Australia are close strategic partners. In August this year, Australia will hold the Malabar Naval Exercise with India, Japan and the US.

The 45,000-tonne INS Vikrant has been built at a cost of ? 20,000 crore. At 262 metres long and 62 metres wide, INS Vikrant is the largest warship to be built in India. It can have 30 aircraft on board, including MiG-29K fighter jets and helicopters. The warship can accommodate a crew of nearly 1,600.

TROPEX: Navy's largest war game culminates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy's largest war game Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX-23) including the Army and IAF tested its operational readiness to deal with any challenge. The drill started in November last year and ended earlier this week.

Nearly 70 Indian Navy ships, six submarines and over 75 aircraft took part in the exercise conducted across the expanse of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) over a duration of four months culminated in the Arabian Sea, navy officials said here on Thursday.

The overall exercise construct included coastal defence exercise Sea Vigil and the Amphibious Exercise AMPHEX. Together, these exercises also witnessed significant participation from the Indian Army, the Indian Air Force and the Coast Guard.

Set in the Indian Ocean including the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, the theatre of operations for the exercise extended approximately 4,300 nautical miles from North to South up to 35 degree South Latitude and 5,000 nautical miles from Persian Gulf in the West to North Australia coast in the East, spanning an area of over 21 million square nautical miles.

The culmination of TROPEX 23 brings to an end an intense operational phase for the Indian Navy that commenced in November last year. As part of the final Joint Phase, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh spent a day at sea onboard Vikrant on March 6.

India quelling Kashmiris' struggle: Altaf Wani at Geneva Rights' meet

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Enjoying all the liberties under the Indian Constitution and travelling on Indian passports, a number of separatist leaders, including the Kashmiris, have sought to berate the democratic framework in the country and their respective home States at multilateral forum by claiming that the government is violating international laws by creating an atmosphere of fear and terror.

Besides Kashmiri separatists, others from the so-called Khalistan independence seekers also managed to reach Geneva to ramp up anti-India propaganda.

One such separatist leader Altaf Hussain Wani from Jammu and Kashmir also displayed such audacity at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

A number of European countries like France and Germany that accorded asylum to Muslim refugees displaced from various countries like Iraq and Syria have also been witness to mass shootings and knife attacks. Such actions as also the anti-India propaganda by the so-called Kashmiri separatist leaders have sought to bring disrepute to Islam, a religion of peace as declared by Islamic scholars. While addressing an event at 52nd session of Human Rights Council in Geneva, Wani sought to peddle a self-defeating narrative that Indian gov-

ernment is using various tactics to suppress the peaceful 'struggle' of Kashmiris'. On the contrary, the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir recorded a marked improvement post-abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, top security officials said. In crude display of anti-homeland sentiment, he further claimed that the "brutal use of force, enforcement of black laws, extrajudicial killings, torture and forced arrests are part of India's repressive policy."

According to official records, the separatist leaders were part of the larger arc of genocide perpetrated by the Pakistani ISI-military combine to displace, kill, maim and rape Kashmiri Pandits before launching the terrorist violence in the nineties.

He also claimed that the Kashmiri people were deprived of all basic rights including the right to life and under the guise of cruel laws, the authorities are depriving Kashmiris of their lands, jobs and homes in their own homeland.

Officials said the separatists have themselves imposed strict and repressive diktat on Muslim women to wear hijab and bar youth from accessing entertainment facilities like cinema halls which remained shut for three decades. Criticising lawful demolition measures in Valley, he sought to portray same as if residential houses are being demolished and lands are being occupied.

Govt wants to hand food grain logistics to Adani, says Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Thursday alleged that the government wants to "hand over" India's food grain logistics to the Adani Group and that such a "conspiracy" was only temporarily foiled by the farmers' agitation that forced the withdrawal of three farm laws.

Posing a set of three questions to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as part of the party's 'Hum Adani ke Hain Kaun' series, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said questions related to the 'hard work' the Modi government had put into 'handing over' India's food grain logistics to the Adani Group. Ramesh urged the prime minister to break his "silence" on the issue.

"A lap of honour around the stadium he got named after himself in his own lifetime is a good occasion for heralding a quarter century of pointed questions with 'Hum Adani ke Hain Kaun'," Ramesh tweeted, referring to the presence of Prime Minister Modi and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese during a Test cricket match between India and Australia in Ahmedabad.

Congress has been persistent on its attack on the government weeks after Adani Group stocks took a beating on the bourses after US-based short seller Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations, including fraudulent transactions and share-price manipulation.

He alleged that the "conspiracy" seems to have been only temporarily foiled by the farmers' agitation of 2020-21 that forced the government to withdraw the "black farm laws". "The publication 'AdaniWatch' has reported that on October

13, 2022, the Supreme Court of India quashed a June 30, 2021 Gujarat High Court judgement that favoured Adani Ports and SEZ over the government-owned Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC), and said that the High Court judgement 'is not sustainable in law', Ramesh claimed.

The corporation was set up in 1957 to support India's food storage needs and stored 55 lakh tonnes of food grains in 2021-22, he said. "The Supreme Court observed that the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution had supported the CWC's stand while the Ministry of Commerce and Industry had aided Adani's bid to take control of two major CWC warehouses near Mundra port by not supporting the denotification of the warehouses as part of the Adani SEZ," he claimed, citing the publication.

"The judgement stated that 'it does not augur well for the Union of India to speak in two contradictory voices' and that 'two departments of the Union of India cannot be permitted to take stands which are diagonally opposite'," Ramesh said.

Why did the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, then headed by Nirmala Sitharaman, took a stand opposed to a strategic public-sector corporation and in support of the prime minister's 'favourite business group', Ramesh asked. "Would she have the courage to do so without clear directions from above?" he said.

"This Adani-inspired inter-ministerial conflict was allowed to continue even after Piyush Goyal became Minister of Commerce and Industry (in May 2019) as well as Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (in October 2020).

'10 mn senior citizens in India may have dementia'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Painting a disturbing picture on the mental health status of the elderly people in India, a first-of-its kind study has claimed that more than 10 million older adults aged 60 or over in India may have dementia. This is comparable to the prevalence rates for countries such as the US and the UK.

The research, published in the journal Neuroepidemiology, used an artificial intelligence (AI) technique known as semi-supervised machine learning to analyse data from 31,477 older adults.

The international team of researchers found that the prevalence rate of dementia in adults aged 60 or over in India could be 8.44 per cent -- equating to 10.08 million older adults in the country. This compares to prevalence rates recorded in similar age groups

of 8.8 per cent in the US, 9 per cent in the UK and between 8.5 and 9 per cent in Germany and France, they said. The prevalence of dementia was greater for those who were older, were females, received no education, and lived in rural areas, the researchers found.

"Our research was based on the first and only nationally representative aging study in India with more than 30,000 participating older adults in the country," said Haomiao Jin, co-author of the study and Lecturer in Health Data Sciences at the University of Surrey, UK.

"AI has a unique strength in interpreting large and complex data like this, and our research found that the prevalence of dementia may be higher than prior estimates from local samples," Jin said in a statement. The research team from the University of Surrey, University of Southern California, University of

Michigan, both in the US, and All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi developed an AI learning model. The model was trained on data, which consisted of 70 per cent labelled dataset with dementia diagnoses from a novel online consensus. The remaining 30 per cent of the data was reserved as a test set to assess the AI's predictive accuracy.

The AI taught itself to predict dementia status for unlabelled observations without dementia diagnoses in the dataset. "As we are seeing with this research, AI has a huge potential to discover patterns in complex data, improving our understanding of how diseases impact people across very different communities to support the development of precision medical interventions to save lives," Professor Adrian Hilton, Director of the University of Surrey's Institute for People-Centered AI, added.

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The world is off-track to achieve its global target of reducing sodium intake by 30 per cent by 2025, given that majority of the countries including India have failed to adopt a comprehensive approach to cut down its consumption that includes adopting mandatory policies and WHO's four "best buy" interventions related with sodium which greatly contribute to preventing NCDs.

These are the alarming observations by a first-of-its-kind World Health Organization (WHO) Global report on sodium intake reduction, suggesting that a vast number of people are at risk of heart attack, stroke, and other



health problems. This also speaks volumes of the government's apathy to save people as NCDs are already posing a huge burden on the government health system as well as households.

Implementing highly cost-effective sodium reduction policies could save an estimated 7 million lives globally by 2030. But the report shows that only 5% of WHO Member States are protected by manda-

tory and comprehensive sodium reduction policies and 73% of WHO Member States lack full range of implementation of such policies.

Sodium, an essential nutrient, increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and premature death when eaten in excess. The main source of sodium is table salt (sodium chloride), but it is also contained in other condiments such as sodium glutamate.

It is an important component of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target of reducing deaths from NCDs. But today, only nine countries (Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Uruguay) have a comprehensive package of recom-

mended policies to reduce sodium intake. "Unhealthy diets are a leading cause of death and disease globally, and excessive sodium intake is one of the main culprits," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

"This report shows that most countries are yet to adopt any mandatory sodium reduction policies.... WHO calls on all countries to implement the 'Best Buys' for sodium reduction, and on manufacturers to implement the WHO benchmarks for sodium content in food."

A comprehensive approach to sodium reduction includes adopting mandatory policies and WHO's four "best buy" interventions related with sodium which greatly contribute to

preventing noncommunicable diseases.

These include, reformulating foods to contain less salt, and setting targets for the amount of sodium in foods and meals; establishing public food procurement policies to limit salt or sodium rich foods in public institutions such as hospitals, schools, workplaces and nursing homes; Front-of-package labelling that helps consumers select products lower in sodium; Behaviour change communication and mass media campaigns to reduce salt/sodium consumption

Countries are encouraged to establish sodium content targets for processed foods, in line with the WHO Global Sodium Benchmarks and enforce them through these policies.

Aussie contingent visits Agra elite paratroopers' brigade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Underlining the growing ties between the defence forces of the two countries, a 15-member Australian contingent on Thursday visited the Agra based Shatruijeet Brigade comprising elite paratroopers. The visit was part of General Rawat Australia-India Young Defence Officers' Exchange Programme instituted in honour of India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

Giving details of the tour, sources said here the Australian group comprised four female officers from the Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force along with 15 selected Indian Officers from the Indian Army, Navy and IAF. Both Indian and Australian Officers

were taken through a series of training demonstrations related to fighting in built-up areas by paratroopers of the elite formation during the visit.

This platform has given the young officers, who are the cutting edge of armed forces of both countries, unique exposure to foster defence ties and cooperation between both the countries by understanding the cultural and professional

aspects. Later, the officers interacted with paratroopers of Shatruijeet Brigade to understand the unique role of the Strategic Airborne Formation of Indian Armed Forces.

The program provides a valuable opportunity for the Australian officers to observe the training and practices of India's military and foster greater understanding and cooperation.

The visit to India by the Australian Defence delegation is another example of the building momentum between Australia and India as comprehensive strategic partners. The Exchange Program reflects the shared vision of both nations to enhance bilateral defence ties, cooperation and collaboration through strong people-to-people links.

Eye on 2024 LS polls, Maha Govt presents populist Budget

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an effort to revive the sagged morale of the distressed farming community and unemployed youth in the State, the Maharashtra Government on Thursday proposed to provide an additional amount of Rs 6,000 to each farmer in a year to match the Centre's similar grant of Rs 6,000 per annum to each farmer, pay up crop insurance premium for farmers and invest Rs 58,748 crore on infrastructure projects to generate employment opportunities.

In somewhat of a populist budget for 2023-24 presented a year ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls, Deputy Chief Minister



Devendra Fadnavis – who holds the State Finance portfolio – spared the people of any new tax during the coming financial year and pledged to revive the state's economy which is expected to grow by 6.8 per cent during 2022-23 as against the 9.1 per cent growth witnessed during the previous year.

In his Rs 16,122 crore rev-

enue deficit budget, Fadnavis announced an amnesty scheme for Goods and Services Tax –for the taxes levied May 1, 2023 to October 31, 2021. He announced a complete waiver of the arrears in cases where arrears are Rs. 2,00,000 or less per year.

“As a result of complete waiver of arrears up to Rs 1 lakh, small dealers will be benefited in around one lakh cases.. The dealers having arrears up to Rs. 50 lakhs or less per statutory order will pay only 20% amount and balance 80% will be waived. As a result medium dealers will be benefited in around eighty thousand cases,” the Finance Minister said.

Fadnavis announced a pro-

fessional tax exemption for female employees drawing monthly salary up to 25000. He said that the definition of ‘Person with Disability’ in the Profession Tax Act was being amended to make more persons with disabilities will become eligible for exemption from payment of Profession Tax. He announced VAT rate on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) from from 25% to 18% in Mumbai, Pune and Raigad districts.

The budget presented by Fadnavis pegged the revenue receipts during 2023-24 at Rs.4,49,522 crore, as against estimated revenue expenditure at Rs. 4,65,645 crore -- resulting in a revenue deficit of Rs. 16,122 crore.

Government has been successful in keeping the fiscal deficit below three per cent of the gross state domestic product. The fiscal deficit for the year 2023- 24 is estimated at Rs. 95,500.8 crore,” he said.

In his budget, Fadnavis proposed a ‘Namo Shetkari Mahasanman Nidhi Scheme’ under which the state government would provide an additional Rs 6,000 along with the Centre's Rs 6000 per annum to each farmer. He said that under the Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme, the state government would pay the insurance premium and the farmer was required to only pay a Re. 1 as registration fee. The state government set aside Rs 3,312 crore for the purpose.

₹500 cr scam in publicity dept in Fadnavis-led Govt, says Ajit

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Ajit Pawar on Thursday alleged that a scam of Rs 500 crore took place in the State Information and Publicity Department during the tenure of the Government led by Devendra Fadnavis.

Government officials gave approval to publish media advertisements worth more than Rs 500 crore in 2019 without the sanction from the chief minister, Pawar claimed



and demanded incumbent CM Eknath Shinde to punish the officials involved in the scam. Speaking in the Assembly, the senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader said, “The officials had men-

tioned in the file that the chief minister had been informed about the expenditure of Rs 500 crore for publishing advertisements without actually taking a sanction from him.”

The information and publicity department is handled by the chief minister. The Fadnavis-led government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena (undivided) ruled the state during 2014-19. “In 2019-20, the government had withheld the payment of these advertisement bills since there was no approval.

5 lakh babus on strike today: TMC Govt warns of service breakage

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With the Mamata Banerjee administration, taking a strong position against the strike called by the State Government staff — demanding 36 per cent hike in Dearness Allowance (DA) — the joint forum of Government employees hardened their stance saying no amount of pressure from Nabanna (State secretariat) would be able to deter them from going ahead with their programme. Weeks after a successful day-long cease-work programme a joint forum of 23 State employees' unions including those of schoolteachers and municipal and panchayat staff on Thursday said that they would go ahead with the strike on Friday.

“The Government is resorting to arm-twisting tactic ... but no amount of such threat can now deter us ... we will not stop until the our DA demand is implemented on part with the central government employees who have been getting in excess of 39 per cent whereas we are getting a pittance of 3 per cent ... they have even defied orders of the State Administrative



Tribunal, and the honourable Calcutta High Court regarding this,” said S Chakrabarty one of the Forum leaders.

Another senior leader said that the “government employees have to do more work than before considering the fact that the government has stopped fresh recruitment on about 5 lakh posts ... the government is bringing new schemes ever month and making us toil hard without even paying our DA which is our right ... now we are fighting with our back to the wall.

“Even the High Court has even observed that dearness allowance is the right of the employees and not a fruit of charity. ... not to delay they matter they have moved the

Supreme Court spending crores by engaging costliest of advocates ... they have the money to grant donations to the clubs and organize khelas and melas but when it comes to the payment of our rightful dues they are backtracking ... this cannot go on ... the battle has come to a decisive point ... come what may we will not retreat.”

In a relevant development the State government has asked the employees to desist from joining the strike warning deduction of salary, and a day's leave apart from breakage in service. A communiqué from the office of State Chief Secretary HK Dwivedi said that no leave would be granted save on specific grounds including health, maternity or bereavement etc.

Army installs 100 ft-tall Tricolour in Doda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The Indian Army on Thursday installed a 100-foot-tall national flag in the land-locked hilly district of Doda in Jammu province.

The Indian Army has already installed high-mast flags at various locations across the Kashmir valley namely Hari Parbat Fort in the heart of the city, Gulmarg, Langate park in Handwara.

In July last year, a 100-foot-high Tricolour was also installed in the neighbouring Kishtwar district to instill a sense of pride and patriotism among the local residents.

General Officer Commanding of the Army's Delta Force Maj Gen Ajay Kumar unfurled the tallest flagpole at the Doda sports stadium along with the commander, Sector 9, Rashtriya Rifles, Brig Samir K Palande, Doda Deputy Commissioner Vishesh Paul Mahajan and Senior Superintendent of Police Abdul Qayoom.

Maj Gen Kumar honoured the next of kin of soldiers who had died in the service of the nation and also felicitated members of the civil society who have contributed immensely towards nation-



building.

“The tallest flag is a tribute to the countless soldiers of Chenab valley region who have made the ultimate sacrifice while safeguarding the unity and integrity of the nation,” the GOC said. He said the 100-foot-high national flag, the first of its kind in Doda, was not only a proud moment for the Army but also for all the residents of the hilly district.

“The national flag, which can be seen from a long distance, will make every citizen feel pride for the country,” Maj Gen Kumar said.

“The feeling of the iconic national flag which is standing tall and beautiful cannot be expressed in words but surely this is making every citizen of India swelling with pride. This

will surely go a long way in inculcating the sense of belonging for the country among the residents of Doda, especially the younger generation,” Deputy Commissioner Doda Vishesh Paul Mahajan said.

Locals especially students and ‘Veer Naris’ (war widows) who had gathered in large numbers to witness the event expressed gratitude to the Army.

“By inviting us to this event, the Army has made us feel proud of the achievements of my martyred husband. This is the beauty of our Army that they never forget the sacrifices of the soldiers and their families,” said Chinta Devi, wife of the most decorated soldier in the history of Indian Army Naib Subedar Chunni Lal.

J&K admin aims for 1,43,00 new bee colonies to boost revenue



MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Union Territory administration in Jammu and Kashmir has set for itself the target of setting up 1,43,000 new bee colonies by successfully implementing the Rs 46.65 crore ‘Promotion of Beekeeping’ project aimed at increasing the annual honey production to 66100 quintal in the region.

The Union Territory administration is also scaling up its resources in order to generate an additional Rs 475 crore income by the sale of by-products under the ambitious project. According to an official spokesperson, the population of bees will be enhanced by 333 percent under the ‘Promotion of beekeeping’ project which

will give a big push to honey production in the region.

According to the spokesman of the UT administration, as many as 86 enterprises will be set up in the coming five years under the project.”

Beekeeping or Apiculture has been one of the age-old traditions in Jammu and Kashmir, which is now turning into a lucrative business with governments' progressive policies and initiatives.

“The potential of apiculture has not been tapped fully in Jammu and Kashmir. So, under this project latest interventions are being brought to produce good quality honey in huge quantities to uplift our beekeepers,” the government spokesman said.

As Assembly polls loom, RSS’ brass to meet in Panipat



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Close to the Assembly elections in several key States, the annual meeting of Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), the highest decision-making body of RSS, will be held in Haryana's Panipat district from March 12-14 and take stock of the organization's coming activities as also that of the current national developments.

RSS ‘Sarsanghchalak’ Mohan Bhagwat, ‘Sarkaryawah’ Dattatreya

Hosabale and all Sahkaryawahs will attend the meeting. About 1,400 activists from all states across the nation are expected to participate in the meeting.

The three-day meeting of the RSS, happening close to several state assembly polls across the country including those in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, is being held at ‘Seva Sadhna and gram vikas Kendra, Pattikalyana, Samalakha, Hariyana, according to the RSS.

Dhankhar attacks Rahul for ‘mikes turned off in Parliament’ remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his comments regarding microphones being turned off in Parliament, and said he would be on the “wrong side” of the Constitution if he stayed silent on the issue.

Speaking at an event to launch veteran Congress leader and former parliamentarian Karan Singh's book on the Mundaka Upanishad, Dhankhar spoke extensively on the former Congress president's remarks made in London.

“The world is applauding our historic accomplishments and functional, vibrant democracy. Some amongst us, including parliamentarians, in overdrive are engaged in thoughtless, unfair denigration of our well nurtured democratic values,” he said.

Rahul Gandhi told British



parliamentarians in London on Monday that functioning microphones in the Lok Sabha are often silenced against the Opposition. He made the comment during an event organised by veteran Indian-origin Opposition Labour Party MP Virendra Sharma in the Grand Committee Room within the House of Commons complex.

“How do we justify such wanton orchestration of factually untenable narrative and mark the timing... India is having a moment of glory being president of G20. And there are people from the country working in overdrive to denigrate us. Such misplaced

campaign mode to taint and tarnish our Parliament and Constitution is too serious and exceptional to be ignored,” Dhankhar told the audience.

“No political strategy or partisan stance can justify compromising our nationalism and democratic values. I am before a noble soul, my silence on this misadventure... If I observe silence on this orchestration by a Member of Parliament outside the country which is ill-premised and motivated, I would be on the wrong side of the Constitution. It would be constitutional culpability and outrage of my oath,” he said.

NPP’s T Sangma elected unopposed as Speaker of Meghalaya Assembly

PTI ■ SHILLONG

Thomas A Sangma of the ruling National People's Party-led MDA coalition was on Thursday elected as the speaker of the 11th Meghalaya Assembly.

The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) 2.0 government, which was sworn in earlier in the week, has the support of 45 MLAs - of which 26 are from the National People's Party (NPP), 11 of the United Democratic Party (UDP) and two members each of the BJP, the Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) and the People's Democratic Front (PDF), besides two Independent legislators.

Sangma, a former Rajya Sabha member, was elected unopposed as three opposition parties - the Congress, TMC and the Voice of the People's Party -- did not field any candidate.

Protem Speaker Timothy D Shira, who chaired the proceedings on the concluding



day of the special Assembly session, said, “Since only one nomination paper was received by the office of the Assembly, I hereby declare Thomas A Sangma as speaker.”

Congratulating the newly elected speaker, Chief Minister

Conrad K Sangma said that he was confident that the former parliamentarian will do justice to the chair.

“It is a matter of great happiness to see you occupy the speaker's chair,” he told Thomas A Sangma.

Compilation of 42 lakh essays on Ahom hero enters Guinness World Records

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

A compilation of over 42 lakh essays on valiant Ahom general Lachit Borphukan has been recognised by Guinness World Records as “largest online photo album of handwritten notes”.

Swapnil Dangarikar, the adjudicator of Guinness World Records here, handed over the official letter of recognition to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday.

The entries, made in over 25 languages, were uploaded in a portal in October-November last year, launched as part of 400th birth anniversary celebrations of Borphukan.

Only the handwritten



entries were considered for the world record. The state government had marked the conclusion of the birth anniversary celebration with a series of programmes in November last year, with the finale held in New Delhi and attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi

and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, among others. Borphukan is known for his leadership in the 1671 ‘Battle of Saraighat’ on Brahmaputra that thwarted a drawn-out attempt by the mighty Mughal forces, led by Raja Ramsingh-I, to take back Assam.

Navy, IAF choppers fight Mhadei park wildfires

PTI ■ PANAJI

The fires that have broken out in Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary in Goa are being kept under control through the joint efforts of the Indian Navy, Indian Air Force and the forest department, state minister Vishwajit Rane said on Thursday.

The Indian Navy has deployed helicopters, with ‘Large Area Aerial Liquid Dispersion Equipment’ mounted on them, to carry out sorties since Tuesday to douse the fires, a defence spokesperson said.

The sanctuary, located in the north-eastern part of the state along the border with Karnataka, has been witnessing fires at multiple sites for the past six days.

“An IAF helicopter has conducted reconnaissance of

the sanctuary while the Indian Navy has deployed four helicopters. The fire has been kept under control and we are monitoring the situation on an hourly basis,” Rane said.

He said forest department officials are inside the sanctuary as part of the dousing operations, and, as on Thursday, there are three minor fires active in the area.

“A total of 28 fires were put out on Wednesday. Minor fires at Satrem and Derodem are being doused by Indian Navy helicopters,” the minister informed.

In a tweet on Wednesday, the Indian Navy's Goa Naval Area said, “Continued efforts towards helping state administration to control the raging forest fires in Goa, the helicopters of #IndianNavy flew multiple missions on 08 Mar and sprayed appx 17 tons of



water at Cortalim and Morlem.”

Morlem is a part of Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary while Cortalim is the site where a fire was reported on Wednesday.

“Special gear LAALDE (Large Area Aerial Liquid Dispersion Equipment) used by helicopter for this operation was mobilized by Indian Navy from Mumbai and Kochi

immediately on receipt of information on 06 Mar from State Forest Dept. More than 26 runs were made over affected areas,” the Navy further tweeted.

“The complex operation required picking up of water from nearby water body and releasing it over affected area in difficult terrain. Helicopters of Indian Navy have been undertaking these operations

since early hours of 07 Mar in coordination with state authorities,” it added.

On Tuesday, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had chaired a State Disaster Management Authority meeting to oversee the situation, while Rane had claimed the fire was “man-made” and had warned of action under the Forest Act for those violating norms.

Fear mongering

SBI has cogently countered the arguments put forth by Raghuram Rajan on ‘Hindu rate of growth’

State Bank of India (SBI) has done a good job in dismissing former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Raghuram Rajan’s concerns about the imminent “Hindu rate of growth.” Delhi School of Economics economist Raj Krishna coined the term ‘Hindu rate of growth’ in 1978 to describe around 3.5 per cent growth in the post-Independence period. ‘Hindu’ in this term is said to pertain to the supposedly fatalistic belief system of Hindus. While Krishna attributed the low growth rate to the socialist policies of government controls and import substitution, he is also believed to have said in one of his lectures that “no matter what happens to the economy, the trend growth rate in India will be 3.5 per cent.” This is one reason that the Bharatiya Janata Party and government supporters despise the very term — and rightly so, because the next four decades saw much higher growth rates without any major change in the religious demography of the country. Rajan’s pessimism originates from the release of quarterly growth data by the National Statistical Office (NSO) last month. It showed that gross domestic product (GDP) in the third quarter (October-December) of 2022-23 came down to 4.4 per cent from 6.3 per cent in the second quarter (July-September) and 13.2 per cent in the first quarter (April-June).

“My fears were not misplaced. The RBI projects an even lower 4.2 per cent for the last quarter of this fiscal. At this point, the average annual growth of the October-December quarter relative to the similar pre-pandemic quarter three years ago is 3.7 per cent,” he told a news agency. “This is dangerously close to our old Hindu rate of growth! We must do better,” the former RBI chief said. The SBI’s Ecowrap report has correctly trashed his argument (without naming him) as “ill-conceived, biased, and premature at its best when weighing the numbers against the data on savings and investments.” The report has underlined the fact that there has been no decline in gross capital formation (GCF) as a percentage of GDP. Also, the SBI report pointed out that the incremental capital output ratio (ICOR), which measures the marginal efficiency of capital, has been improving. From 7.5 in 2011-12, it came down to 3.5 in 2021-22. The lower ICOR is, the better it is for the country, for it means that fewer additional units of capital are required to produce additional units of output. This is not to say that everything about the Indian economy is hunky-dory; there are a host of problems plaguing the economy, the most important being the persistence of a socialist and statist thinking at the levels that matters. Then there is the issue of arbitrariness and unresponsiveness in policy and decision making. The way out, however, is not fear mongering, for this will scare away the potential investors. Rajan’s proximity to the Congress is well-known but this proximity should not cloud his scholarship and analysis.



Nihang Sikhs show their skills during 'Holi Mohalla' festival, in Anandpur Sahib

Clamour for making Kerala a UT

A section of Kerala intelligentsia says Kerala should be made a UT for better administration

The February 13 verdict delivered by the Supreme Court upholding the conversion of Jammu & Kashmir into a Union Territory and carving out of Ladakh as a separate region has led to a demand by Kerala’s intelligentsia that the southern State too should be declared as a Union Territory.

The Supreme Court verdict has been cited by former director general of police Dr Jacob Thomas as a panacea for Kerala too. “It is time we gave serious thought to make Kerala a Union Territory. As things stand today, Kerala has become the most ungovernable territory in India. Allegations of corruption, bribery and scams appear from nowhere on a daily basis. We saw the arrest and incarceration of the chief minister’s principal secretary in connection with gold smuggling through diplomatic channel. Though the central agencies like Enforcement Directorate and NIA probed the gold smuggling, it fizzled out over the last two years as all documentary evidence disappeared from the safe custody in the



secretariat. The video footage from CCTV cameras installed in the CMO and his palatial Cliff House bungalow too vanished into thin air,” said Jacob Thomas who had headed the department of vigilance waging a relentless battle against some of the CPI(M) strongmen whose names are synonymous with corruption.

He also pointed out that prices of essential commodities in the State are higher compared to the neighbouring States. “Prices of all commodities in Mahi, a Union Territory region inside Kerala are much lower. The law and order in Kerala have gone for a sixer as murders and mayhem are on the increase by

the hour. No entrepreneurs would dare to come to Kerala and the administration is groping in the dark when asked about the industrialization of the State,” said Dr Thomas.

T P Senkumar, another former chief of Kerala Police portrayed an alarming picture of drug and narcotics misuse. He said schools and colleges have emerged as the new hub of drug pushing. A leading student organization is behind the flourishing drug market in the State. All professional arts and science colleges have hundreds of junkies and drug pushers. Drug syndicates controlled by film actresses and teachers call the shots in the State. Anti-social elements have infiltrated the ruling party and its youth wing because of the safety assured by the second-rung leadership. Names like Thillankeris and Aayankis evoke the same fear among the people as that of the Karachi-based Don.

Dr Thomas says that the Constitution has empowered the parliament to declare a State as Union Territory and vice versa. “It is an open secret that Kerala is a safe

How to combat global terrorism

QUAD must work on international strategic planning to fight new challenges from militancy and terrorism

The strategy to whip up bigotry by harping on the issue of numerical preponderance of a particular community has helped certain terrorist organisations create and reinforce their base to indulge in a proxy war with states across the globe. The Asia Pacific region is no exception to this. During the last few years or so terror attacks in many parts of developed and developing societies, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Turkey, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan or even in the Scandinavian countries like Stockholm highlight the fact that the world continues to sit on a powder keg. The seriousness can be seen in the recent announcement of establishing a Working Group to encounter terrorism by Quad on 3rd March 2023.

A joint statement of the Group Members US, India, Japan and Australia) speaks volumes about the spectre of the menace which is still looming large. The criticism by the working group of any activities promoting terrorism as a policy is an attempt towards international cooperation amongst the Quad and with Indo-Pacific partners. This is the second important meeting after Oct 2022 that was hosted by Australia. The panel discussion focusing on “The Quad Squad: Power and Purpose of the Polygon,” was a main step towards solving the terror problem.

The member countries showed their commitment to support Pacific Island countries with regional institutions through cooperation in several areas along with the terror such as climate change, resilient infrastructure, and maritime security to strengthen the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The role of India’s leadership in finalizing the IORA in India-Pacific areas was greatly appreciated and getting even more important due to its impeccable reputation and also holding the G20 Presidency. Since then, cooperation among Quad Group countries has set a new road map through diplomatic endeavour towards building a new apparatus for the management of terrorism.

There have been several security-related issues that keep cropping up time and again as sever-

al individuals and non-state actors operating across the globe have been held responsible for exporting terrorism. Rampant use of battery-improvised devices, knives and cars in individual terror attacks, massacring foreign tourists and hostage takings have been some recent tactics adopted by terrorists operating from various countries. Recently there were attempts to export terrorism from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. On account of the rapid rise in terror threats, Moscow recognised the need to set up the Troika alliance in the past.

The need for a common security apparatus has exposed the institution-building process in many parts of developing society as well. The recent influx of illegal migrants and a spate of terrorist activities in Europe and Asia have shaken them off complacency and compelled them to seek cooperation in tackling the menace of transnational terrorism. The disgruntled groups have constantly expressed their dissatisfaction, many times violently. Thus, riots and bomb blasts occur at regular intermissions. Fundamentalists have acquired sophisticated arms, and training and developed a close network with rogue nations around the world. The new attempt by Quad will move in the right direction to increase



Leaders of the Quad (USA, India, Japan, Australia) standing together at a summit.

“THE NEW INITIATIVES OF QUAD MAY ALSO LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF EACH OTHER TO COMBAT TERRORISM. FOR EXAMPLE, FROM THE UNITED STATES’ PATRIOT ACT, OF 2001

the process of sharing information concerning new technologies and to develop strategic mechanisms such as dismantling the Drone attacks, inner-satellite data development, military and intelligence along with logistics facilities in case of any apprehension about the threat and ensure the security of Indo-Pacific Area.

This would also help resolve issues related to the funding of terrorist activities, and policing cooperation dealing with cyber threat secrecy through enhancing technological innovation and tightening border and maritime security information gathering. There have been continuing uncertainties about terrorism which compelled various countries to launch psychological warfare against terrorism in the past too. The London Economic Summit Conference, organized by NATO States and Japan a few years ago, proved to be another landmark for the eradication of terrorism, which decided that unless we attack the roots of terrorism, only superficial relief could be seen but violence would increase in the total quantum of its impact. The creation of general awareness and organization of public support against terrorist acts could be of immense use. Rapid international transportation and the use of

sophisticated weapons have helped the expansion of terrorist networks globally. Besides, the new suicide squads have left the entire security apparatus shocked. As religiously-motivated attacks increase globally, the concept that one man’s terrorist can be another man’s freedom fighter must be done away with.

The new initiatives of Quad may also learn from experiences each other to combat terrorism. For example, the United States Patriot Act, of 2001, gave the country’s security agencies powers to acquire information about communication networks and properties of terror suspects. In India, many attempts have been made to ensure the proper implementation of anti-terror laws and to encounter any form of terror. Security is an ever-changing landscape. The security apparatus needs to continuously upgrade itself to stay ahead of the terror groups. Importantly, they need to develop a capability that can anticipate the security needs of the future and in this regard still, there are serious security and political concern that need to be addressed.

(Writer is a Recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award and is a Professor of Political Science and Strategic Affairs Expert. This is the first part of a two-part series on QUAD. To be continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GENDER BIAS HURTING WOMEN HEALTH
Sir — Unfortunately, gender-based discrimination is hurting women’s healthcare, especially in rural India. According to research conducted at the AIIMS, New Delhi, out of 2,377,028 patients who visited the hospital from January to December 2016, only 37% of women got access to healthcare as compared to 63% of men. (“The inequities of gender bias in India”, March 8). Therefore, some desperate changes are required to achieve the well-being of healthcare for Indian women and gender equality.


Encouraging women to take ownership of their health and hygiene assumes paramount importance. Because of lifestyle decisions and ignorance, women’s health conditions have leapt, especially during the Covid pandemic. Biologically, women deal with more health issues than men. Improving healthcare services along with education can be the most important intervention to make women aware of their rights, and also prevent them from becoming easy prey to severe emotional and mental disturbances.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

CBI INTERROGATION OF LALU YADAV
Sir — The report detailing CBI interrogations of ailing RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav and his wife, former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, in connection with the land-for-jobs scam has sparked outrage from the opposition. This investigation is being conducted into the land scam in exchange for employment. It is claimed that the people were given jobs on the railways in exchange for land parcels gifted or sold at a low cost to the Yadav family and its associates. Though the truth behind the allegations has yet to be determined, the proceedings of the investigating agency are currently creating a perception in the opposition, which both sides are attempting to exploit.

While the BJP accuses Lalu Prasad Yadav of new scams on every such occasion, the RJD and other opposition parties

South nexus in Sisodia’s case



If there is smoke there is fire as well in liquor policy muddle. The case is in CBI and ED’s control and Manish Sisodia is in Tihar Jail for a longer period now. The ED questioned and recorded his statement in the money laundering case and the probe is on alleged irregular-

ities in the excise policy matter. The agency also made a fresh arrest and took into custody a Hyderabad-based liquor businessman. The case is having many twists and turns and may reach a higher court for the final judgment. Sisodia has been accused of corruption in bringing the new liquor sale policy in Delhi. The CBI alleged that liquor companies were involved in the framing of the 2021 policy, for which kick-backs to the tune of Rs 30 crore were paid by a liquor lobby, which it dubbed the “South Group”. In this regard, the South nexus is now under review and a troublesome one for the Delhi government.

CKR Nathan | Ghaziabad

call it an act motivated by political malice. Even RJD leader and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav stated that all of this is taking place because his family is staunchly opposed to the BJP. He claims that all of this will continue until the 2024 elections.

The Congress, which stayed out of AAP leader Manish Sisodia’s case, was seen defending Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi in this matter. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra herself took to Twitter to complain about Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi being harassed. Scam allegations against them are not new. Former Bihar Chief Minister and Union Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav was also imprisoned after being convicted in the fodder scam.

However, this had little impact on his party’s vote totals. There is currently no reason to believe that the new allegations will cause a significant shift in his support group’s perception.

In terms of Lalu Prasad’s opponents, even if these new allegations add to their case, no one would have increased the number of opponents at this point. Aside from these two groups of voters, there is a loose group of voters who are not committed to supporting or opposing anything. These exercises may have an impact on

him. This potential effect, however, can be of either type. That is, if some people can form an opinion based on the BJP’s allegations, then others may be influenced by a sense of sympathy. Now, both sides are focused on these effects, which will result in 2024 results only after the elections.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

FAKE NEWS
Sir — Unfortunately, even established newspapers are guilty of not verifying the news before putting it up in their newspapers. The news that Bihari workers were beaten up in Tamil Nadu spread like wildfire and many migrants thought it better to return to Bihar. Since fake news can create chaos it should be dealt with more seriously.

The needle of suspicion falls on the BJP as it is the only party that would benefit from its fallout. Some of their leaders are already under arrest. Fake news emanates from political parties and their supporters. All parties must reach some kind of agreement on the issue or else the nation may have to pay a heavy price!

Anthony Henriques | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

QUAD TO DEEPEN ENGAGEMENT WITH ASEAN

QUAD sends a message to China in no uncertain terms



One of the most favourable outcomes from the series of high-level meetings in and around G20 finance ministers', central governors and foreign ministers' engagements during the last two weeks, has been the bilateral and plurilateral meetings India managed on the sidelines. The reenergizing of India, the Germany partnership, and the repurposing of India, and Italy's relationship, would bear huge dividends in the long run. India managed to convey its centrality in any Indo-Pacific outlook, to the most significant power centres in Europe, taken together with France (which is already a close defence partner), the trio could significantly alter the European Union's future engagements in the region. The long pending Free trade agreements could get a fresh forward momentum, even as the Technology and Trade Council (a second for the EU with any country) would serve as a permanent secretariat to sort trade issues with India. Meanwhile, India hosted the QUAD foreign ministers meeting in New Delhi, which could be one of the most significant ones in recent times. The QUAD joint statement posts the meeting reiterated the commitment of all four members to a free, rules-based, inclusive, resilient Indo pacific region, which would steadfastly oppose any coercive steps to unilaterally change the status quo, and threaten territorial integrity or sovereignty. The message was loud and clear for China. The QUAD members reiterated the centrality of ASEAN (Association of SouthEast Asian Nations)



principles and approach, for future engagements in the region. India, the US, Australia and Japan would deepen engagement with ASEAN-led architecture, including the East Asia summit and the ASEAN regional forum. They put their weight behind Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship including the theme "ASEAN matters, Epicentrum of Growth". The message to China was, the QUAD will deepen engagements with ASEAN nations including setting up a formal platform for greater collaboration, thereby stalling any coercive practices. The QUAD also expressed firm support for the Pacific island countries by committing to stand by their principles on maritime security, resilient infrastructure and climate change. A similar text found its way into the joint statement for the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), whose members are of great significance to India and Australia. The IORA is an intergovernmental association of 23 countries dotting the Indian ocean. Many of these nations have faced an aggressive China, including, but not restricted to being forced to hand over their critical sea ports, under China's opaque infrastructure financing policy. China has taken note of the situation and in a press conference, this week, newly appointed Foreign affairs minister Qin Gang said "Indo-Pacific Strategy is bound to fail, even as he reiterated the threat of creating a Ukraine-like crisis in the region by the US and its allies.

However, the best outcome from the QUAD meeting was an affirmation by the members, to put serious weight behind the UN charter. The joint statement read "our steadfast commitment to strengthening the UN and international system through a comprehensive reform agenda, including through expansion in permanent and non-permanent seats of the UN Security Council. In this regard, we commit to active and constructive engagement in the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) process on Security Council Reforms with an overall objective of making the UN Security Council more effective, representative, and credible. "This, puts the might of the US firmly behind India's constant struggle to change the contours of the UN security council, to get its rightful place on the global exclusive high table, which has been constantly vetoed by China.

The Quad members also committed to supporting meritorious and independent candidates for various key positions in the UN to maintain its impartiality and integrity. Appointments to top positions in the UN have also been captured by China in the two decades, giving it the unfair advantage of running its stated national policies through a global platform like the UN, thereby sculling many relevant interests of other member nations including India. (The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

Breaking barriers for the financially excluded

Despite many successes, various barriers still prevent the poor from accessing financial services



India now has sophisticated banking markets, but it has yet to find the right formula for serving vulnerable and low-income people. What it means to be financially excluded in the country and, inevitably, banks are not close to finding the solution. Banks' engagement with financial inclusion is critical, but some believe their legacy structures and systems are insurmountable obstacles to reaching low-income people. Financial exclusion can be highly oppressive and stifling for talented individuals in low-income communities.

Poor people often lack access to safe, affordable, convenient and reliable ways to manage the meagre resources they have under their control. As a result, they face exclusion from the financial system that the rest of us rely on. Access to finance is critical for a country's development—as much a part of its basic infrastructure as access to roads, electricity, or the internet.

The process by which low-income and financially excluded communities access formal finance is known as financial inclusion. Conversely, the absence of this access is known as 'financial exclusion'. Financial exclusion is the inability of individuals, households or groups to access the necessary financial services in an affordable, convenient, secure and hassle-free manner. Three gradations of financial exclusion, viz

- core exclusion: those who operate their financial affairs entirely outside the regulated financial system
- limited access: those who may have a basic bank account but poor financial habits and little advice;
- unpleasant access: included but not able to derive positive benefits and to use inappropriate products

There is enormous evidence showing that economies with deep financial sectors and well-functioning financial systems perform better in all spheres. Contrary to common impressions, poor people need and use the same variety of financial services for the same reasons as wealthier clients: to save securely, invest in business opportunities, improve their homes, transform their lives and cope with emergencies caused by the vagaries of nature.



THE PROCESS BY WHICH LOW-INCOME AND FINANCIALLY EXCLUDED COMMUNITIES ACCESS FORMAL FINANCE IS KNOWN AS FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Despite tremendous efforts and many successes, various barriers remain to prevent the poor from accessing financial services, resulting in financial exclusion. Physical access is a deterrent in remote, hilly, and sparsely populated areas with poor infrastructure. Demand-side lack of awareness, low income/assets, social exclusion, and illiteracy are significant impediments. On the supply side, distance from a branch, complicated and annoying processes, unsuitable products, arcane language in documents, and staff attitudes are common reasons for exclusion.

Self-exclusion Access does not equal inclusion. There has, in recent times, been a significant increase in bank accounts, but consumers are not using them. This underlines the importance of creating products and engagement strategies that are better designed to meet the needs of consumers to ensure that they adopt the new products and use them in their daily financial lives.

Exclusion by the group In group-based microfinance programmes, members who gradually improve their economic situation often avoid including the poorest of the poor in their group on the pretext of retaining group discipline. They feel poor members may undermine the homogeneity and credibility of the group. Project Staff sensitize the members to align their objective with the broader goal of enhancing financial access in their community.

Exclusion by staff Absence of quality last mile interface is another deterrent for rural clients joining the banking mainstream. It is important that consumers not feel threatened by official processes. Loan officers may have explicit or implicit incentives to exclude the poorest. This may be based on a perception that the poor are problematic and

will not be viable clients. This can be compounded by an organizational culture where the financial mission overrides the social mission.

Exclusion by design many aspects of the methodology design of a financial programme may deliberately or accidentally exclude the poorest. These may include entry fees, rules that exclude those who do not have an existing business, inflexible loan terms, compulsory savings, penalties for non-adherence to the group's regulations, group liability rules, providing services by financial institutions from main offices rather than community locations, or locating the program in difficult accessible areas. Other aspects of program design may not exclude the poorest but may be biased towards the less poor.

Non-viability for service provider Financial inclusion is not about providing subsidized financial services that are high quality but at the same time self-sustaining. Rural markets need mass but customized products. Informal financial services are more convenient and affordable to low-income communities. But they lack the same level of reliability, security, affordability, value and potential for scale that formal institutions offer. However, formal finance providers find serving these communities expensive and difficult

Lack of a good ecosystem: Even though no shortage of financial products and services could help low-income workers, there is a lack of efficient distribution channels. Villagers have ended up stuck in long queues and struggling with ATMs that often run out of cash or break down. The Business Correspondent model has shown promise of addressing this issue. But it is also facing problems of viability and sustainability.

High costs: Many clients are not

satisfied with the transaction fees associated with the bank accounts. According to their calculation, they may lose more by paying transaction fees than they would recoup in interest earned on their deposits in a year. In such cases, the customers must be aware of the safety of their savings and the protection offered by the government in case the bank undergoes liquidation.

Misalignment of products and services, Products that are misaligned and not designed with the unique needs of users in mind are primary drivers of low penetration of financial services. There are so many technology-integrated financial services that are cheap but are uncomfortable for the illiterate and neo-literate, as well as women

We need increased investments in products that are well suited to the needs of poor consumers and the infrastructure and capital to get them to scale. This needs to be supported with appropriate training and education for adapting to these financial services. A lack of comfort with technology or low literacy may discourage use.

Financial inclusion holds the promise of harnessing the power of technology for financial institutions to create a business opportunity and help achieve social good by bringing reliable, low-cost, secure financial tools to people who have never had access. Banking access through accounts and other risk mitigation services should be a common right of humanity. Financial access can give them a passport for participation in the economy using all financial tools available and doing what most people do daily—manage their money for a better life.

(The writer is a well-known development professional of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

Virginity tests on women are now history

Whether the victim is promiscuous is an irrelevant issue altogether in a case of rape

High Court of Delhi, on February 7, 2023, ruled that conducting a forced Two-Finger-Test (TFT), to check the virginity of Sister Sephy, convicted of killing Sister Abhaya in Kerala in 1992, was unconstitutional, asserting that the intrusive procedure is inhuman and an affront to human dignity.

Sister Sephy, a Christian nun had moved the court in 2009, contending that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had conducted the infamous virginity test in November 2008, 16 years after the crime against her consent, just to humiliate her in custody. She also contended that the CBI spread a false and fabricated story to the media saying that she underwent 'hymenoplasty' to repair



(The writer is a legal journalist and author. The views expressed are personal)

a broken hymen, even though the procedure was not available in India, and neither she has a passport to travel abroad.

Deciding on Sister Sephy's plea against the two-finger test conducted in 2008, the Bench of Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma held that "the test is extremely traumatic for a victim of sexual assault as well as upon any other woman in custody and is bound to have devastating effect on the psychological as well as physical health of the person."

The court further said, "The virginity test conducted on a female detainee, accused under investigation, or in custody, whether judicial or police, is declared unconstitutional and in violation of Article 21 of the Constitution, which includes the right to dig-

nity of an individual, cannot be resorted to by the State and the same shall be in teeth of the scheme of Indian Constitution and the right to life enshrined under Article 21."

Even the neighbouring country Pakistan, despite having a fractured judicial system, did a say with the two-finger test in Sadaf Aziz Vs Federation of Pakistan, albeit half-heartedly as the restriction is limited in the province of Punjab. Medical Jurisprudence embraces all questions which affect the civil or social rights of individuals and injuries to the person and brings the medical practitioner into contact with the law. Virginity test has so far been the medico-legal procedure. The question as to whether a woman is a virgin

(virgo intacta) arises in cases of nullity of marriage, divorce, defamation and rape.

Negating this theory, even earlier in Lillu Vs State of Haryana (2013) 14 SCC 643, the Supreme Court had held, "..... rape survivors are entitled to legal recourse that does not retraumatise them or violate their physical or mental integrity and dignity. They are also entitled to medical procedures conducted in a manner that respects their right to consent. Medical procedures should not be carried out in a manner that constitutes cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and health should be of paramount consideration while dealing with gender-based violence. The State is under an obligation to make such ser-

vices available to survivors of sexual violence. Proper measures should be taken to ensure their safety and there should be no arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy."

Similarly, sentiments were expressed by the Supreme Court in State of Uttar Pradesh Vs Munshi, (2008) 9 SCC 390; wherein, it expressed its anguish and held that even if the victim of rape was previously accustomed to sexual intercourse, it cannot be the determinative question.....Even if the victim had lost her virginity earlier, it can certainly not give a licence to any person to rape her.

Whether the victim is promiscuous is an irrelevant issue altogether in a case of rape.

In Rafique Vs the State of

Uttar Pradesh, Supreme Court declared that the lack of damage marks does not always imply that the sexual act was carried out with the female's permission.

Similarly, in Ranjit Hazarika Vs the State of Assam (1998), Supreme Court held that just because the victim had no visible injuries and the hymen was intact, it does not follow that there was no coitus. The court decided as; "The mere fact that no injury was found on the private parts of the prosecutrix or her hymen was found to be intact does not belie the statement of the prosecutrix."

To constitute the offences of rape, penetration, however slight, is sufficient."

In State of Jharkhand Vs Shailendra Kumar Rai, 2022, a

Bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Hema Kohli, hearing a criminal appeal ruled that the intrusive and upsetting procedure should be removed from the medical study materials and that anyone found to have performed such a test should be severely punished."

As there have been numerous rulings of the courts specifying that the prevalent practice of virginity test to ascertain hymen-intact has been proved irrelevant and medically wrong beyond doubt, the practice has rightly been banned.

As such, the medical fraternity and the police must follow the directions of the courts by not conducting a two-finger test on women in custody or otherwise to avoid contempt proceedings.

CCP is biggest threat to US security, global leadership: Intel

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represents both the “leading and most consequential threat” to US national security and leadership globally, a top American intelligence official told lawmakers on Wednesday as Senators called for taking urgent steps to address the growing Chinese challenge.

“The CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to US national security and leadership globally and its intelligence specific ambitions and capabilities make it, for us, our most serious and consequential intelligence rival,” Avril Haines, Director of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence told members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

“During the past year, the threat has been additionally complicated by a deepening collaboration with Russia, which also remains an area

obvious of intense focus for the intelligence community,” she said during a hearing on worldwide threat assessment.

Needless to say the People’s Republic of China, which is increasingly challenging the US economically, technologically, politically, and militarily around the world, remains “our unparalleled priority” she said adding that China under President Xi Jinping will continue efforts to achieve his vision of making China the preeminent power in East Asia and a major power on the world stage.

“To fulfil Xi’s vision, however, the CCP is increasingly convinced that it can only do so at the expense of US power and influence and by using coordinated whole of government tools to demonstrate strength and compel neighbours to acquiesce to its preferences, including its land, sea, and air claims in the region and its assertions of sovereignty over Taiwan,” Haines said.

She told members of the

Xi for faster improvement in military prowess

Beijing : Amid escalating tensions with the US, President Xi Jinping has called for more quickly elevating the armed forces to world-class standards as he stressed opening new ground for enhancing integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities of the Chinese military to win wars.

Xi, who heads the military besides the ruling Communist Party and the Presidency, made the comments on Wednesday during a meeting of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) delegates attending the annual parliament session here, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

He said that consolidating and enhancing integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities has profound significance in building a modern socialist country, as well as in achieving the goals for the centenary of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in 2027 and more quickly elevating the armed forces to world-class standards.



Chinese President Xi Jinping, bottom centre poses for a group photo with deputies from the delegation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police Force in Beijing

“It is necessary to strengthen the orientation of defence science, technology and industries to serve the armed forces and win wars,” he said. Highlighting the goal of maximising China’s national strategic capabilities, Xi told the PLA del-

egates that efforts should be made in integrating the strategic layouts, resources and strengths in all areas, in a bid to systematically upgrade the country’s overall strength to cope with strategic risks, safeguard strategic interests and realise strategic objectives.

Xi called for efforts to advance collaborative innovation in science and technology, with a focus on independent and original innovation, thus building high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology at a faster pace.

Strategic capabilities in emerging fields must be bolstered in pursuit of new advantages in national development and international competitions, and the resilience of industrial and supply chains must be enhanced, Xi said.

He ordered the coordination of the construction of major infrastructure, accelerating the building of national reserves, and making the reserves more capable of safeguarding national security.

PTI

Senate Committee that after more than a decade of serving

as China’s top leader, Xi’s control over key levers of power

gives him significant power and influence over most issues.

“Xi has surrounded himself with like-minded loyalists

at the apex of the party’s standing committee, China’s highest decision making body, and we assess that during the course of Xi’s third term they will together attempt to press Taiwan on unification, undercut US influence, which they perceive as a threat, and drive wedges between Washington and its allies and partners and promote certain norms that favour China’s authoritarian system,” she said.

Referring to Xi’s criticism during his speech on Monday of what he referred to as America’s suppression of China, reflecting his longstanding distrust of US goals and his apparent belief that the United States seeks to contain China, Haines said Xi’s speech this week was the most public and direct criticism that they have seen from him to date.

This, Haines said, probably reflects growing pessimism in Beijing about China’s relationship with the United States, as well as Xi’s growing worries about the trajectory of China’s

domestic economic development and indigenous technology innovation, challenges that he now blames on the United States.

“He also wants to message his populace and regional actors that the US bears the responsibility for any coming increase in tensions. And despite this more public and directly critical rhetoric, however, we assess that Beijing still believes it benefits most by preventing a spiralling of tensions and by preserving stability in its relationship with the United States,” she said.

Specifically, Beijing wants to preserve stability in East Asia, avoid triggering additional economic punishments from US sanctions and US partners, and showcase a steady relationship with the United States to help avoid setbacks in its other relationships around the world, even while signalling opposition to claimed US provocations, including the shooting down of the PRC balloon, Haines said.

Nepal elects Poudel as new President

AP ■ LONDON

Ram Chandra Poudel of Nepali Congress was on Thursday elected as the new president of Nepal, amid increasing political instability in the country ruled by a fragile coalition headed by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’.

Poudel, a common candidate of the eight-party alliance that included Nepali Congress and Prime Minister ‘Prachanda’-led CPN (Maoist Center), received the vote of 214 lawmakers of parliament and 352 provincial assembly members.

“Hearty congratulations to my friend Ram Candra Poudelji for being elected as the President,” Nepali Congress chief Sher Bahadur Deuba tweeted.

With the support from eight political parties, 78-year-old Poudel’s victory was certain. His rival Subas Chandra Nebmang had support of former prime minister KP Sharma-led CPN-UML.

This is the third presidential election in Nepal since the country became a republic in 2008.

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 Parliament and 550 members of the provincial assemblies of the seven



Presidential candidate Ram Chandra Poudel of the Nepali Congress party waves after casting his vote for Nepal's new president in Kathmandu on Thursday

provinces.

Election Commission spokesperson Shaligram said 518 provincial assembly members and 313 members of parliament cast their votes in the presidential election. Poudel earlier expressed confidence that the lawmakers will elect him.

“I am fully confident that the members of the federal parliament and provincial assemblies will vote for

me. I believe that they will make the right judgment of my long struggle,” he said.

The outcome of the election could impact the stability of the government headed by Prime Minister “Prachanda”. Oli-led CPN-UML, Nepal’s second largest party in Parliament, withdrew its support to Prime Minister “Prachanda”-led government following a rift over backing Poudel for the presidential poll.

The term of office of the President will be five years from the date of election and an individual can be elected for the post for only two terms.

Although the post of President is largely ceremonial, Nepal’s political parties have lately shown a growing interest in the post owing to the discretionary powers the Constitution accords to the post.

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), which has 14 lawmakers in the House of Representatives and 28 lawmakers in the provincial assemblies, decided to stay neutral in the presidential election. The Nepal Workers and Peasants Party also did not participate in the presidential election.

Born on October 14, 1944 in Bahunpokhari in a middle class farmers’ family, Poudel joined politics at the age of 16. He became the founding central member of Nepal Students’ Union, the student wing of Nepali Congress, in 1970.

Key senate committee approves Eric Garcetti as US Ambassador to India

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Former Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti’s nomination as US Ambassador to India cleared a major hurdle after a key senatorial committee voted to advance his name to the Senate floor for a full vote.

Garcetti’s nomination was pending before the US Congress since July 2021, when he was nominated for the prestigious diplomatic posting by President Joe Biden.

His nomination was not brought to the Senate floor for a vote during the last Congress as the ruling Democratic Party did not have enough support to get the 52-year-old close aide of Biden through. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee at its business meeting on

Wednesday voted 13-8 in favour of the nomination of Garcetti. Now the nomination heads to the Senate floor for a full vote.

Two Republican Senators — Todd Young and Bill Hagerty — Wednesday afternoon voted in favour of Garcetti, joining the Democratic lawmakers and passing the nomination through the Senatorial committee.

Garcetti wasn’t confirmed in Biden’s first two years in office amid concerns by some lawmakers that the then-mayor hadn’t adequately handled allegations against a former senior adviser of sexual assault and harassment. Biden renominated Garcetti to the same position in January this year.

Top Republican Senator Chuck Grassley this week called for voting against him.

Republican Senator Young defended his decision to vote in favour of Garcetti. “It’s in our national security interest to have an ambassador immediately in place in India in order to balance China, work with the US throughout the Indo-Pacific. He has an imperfect resume, but the skills to succeed in this capacity,” Young said.

“We must ensure that any chief of the mission will, without question, protect our foreign service officers and embassy staff from all types of harassment,” said Senator Jim Risch, Ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Indonesia landslide deaths climb to 30

AP ■ JAKARTA

Rescue workers recovered more bodies buried under tons of mud following a landslide that crashed onto a hilly village on Indonesia’s remote Natuna islands, bringing the death toll to 30, officials said Thursday.

The landslide, triggered by torrential downpours, plunged down surrounding hills on Monday, burying 30 houses in Genting village on a tiny remote island in the Natuna archipelago at the edge of the South China Sea, the National Search and Rescue Agency said in a statement.

Authorities have deployed nearly 700 rescuers, including police and military with heavy equipment to search for 24 people still missing who were apparently trapped in houses that were buried under the landslide, which was 4 metres (13 feet) deep, said Abdul Rahman, who heads Natuna’s search and rescue agency.

“Improved weather allowed us to recover more bodies,” Rahman said in a video statement.

Eight people were pulled



out alive with injuries, three of whom are in critical condition, National Disaster Management Agency chief Suharyanto said Thursday. They were rushed late Monday to a hospital in Pontianak city on Borneo island, about 300 kilometres (186 miles) from Genting, but one person died at sea on the way.

The search and rescue operation had been hampered by heavy rains around the disaster site. Weather had forced the search effort to be halted several times, while downed

communications lines and electricity also have impeded the operation, said Suharyanto who, like many Indonesians, uses a single name.

“We are doing our best to find the missing victims,” Suharyanto said, adding that sniffer dogs were also being mobilised in the search.

Two helicopters and several vessels carrying rescuers, medical teams and relief supplies, including tents, blankets and food arrived on the island from Jakarta and nearby islands on Wednesday.

3 miners die in Spain

AP ■ MADRID

Three workers died after becoming trapped deep underground in a potash mine in northeastern Spain on Thursday, firefighters said.

The three were working at the Cabanasses de Sùria mine around 80 kilometres (50 miles) northwest of Barcelona.

Firefighters in Spain’s Catalonia region confirmed the deaths, after police said earlier that land collapsed inside the mine just before 9 am. The collapse occurred at a depth of 900 metres (nearly 3,000 feet), according to the firefighters.

Monday’s landslide displaced about 1,300 people who were taken to four temporary shelters, Suharyanto said. Authorities feared the death toll could still rise.

“Relief supplies have reached those in need so far,” he said.

Seasonal rains and high tides in recent days have caused dozens of landslides and wide-

The mine is operated by the Iberpotash company, and owned by Tel Aviv-based ICL Group, which didn’t immediately comment.

Around 20,000 people work in Spain’s mining sector, according to Energy Ministry statistics, a figure that has halved in the last two decades. Between 2016 and 2021, the last year for which statistics were available, an average of four workers died annually in Spain’s mining sector.

Catalan regional president Pere Aragonès offered his condolences to the families affected, describing the incident as a “tragic accident”.

spread flooding across much of Indonesia, a chain of 17,000 islands where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near fertile flood plains close to rivers.

In November 2022, a landslide triggered by a 5.6 magnitude earthquake killed at least 335 people in West Java’s Cianjur city, about a third of them children.

North Korea fired ballistic missile at sea, claims Seoul

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea’s military said it detected that North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile toward waters off its western coast on Thursday.

The South’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said the weapon was fired at around 6.20 pm from an area around the western coastal city of Nampo. It did not immediately release an assessment of how far the missile flew.

The launch came after the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un warned on Tuesday that her country is ready to take “quick, overwhelming action” against the United States and South Korea as the allies expand their military training to cope with a growing North Korean nuclear threat.

Coming off a record year in missile testing, North Korea has conducted more weapons demonstrations to 2023 including test launches of an intercontinental ballistic missile, short-range missiles and a purported long-range cruise missile system in recent weeks.

Experts say North Korea’s weapons push is aimed at forcing the United States into accepting it as a nuclear power and at negotiating badly needed economic concessions from a position of strength.

Last week, the South Korean and US militaries announced they will conduct computer-simulated command post training on March 13-23 and will resume their largest springtime field

South Korea, Japan to hold summit

Seoul: The leaders of South Korea and Japan will meet next week for a summit expected to focus on expanding ties, both governments said on Thursday.

The announcement comes days after South Korea unveiled a major step toward resolving strained bilateral ties stemming from Tokyo’s colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

President Yoon Suk Yeol is to visit Japan from March 16-17 at the invitation of the Japanese government. During this two-day trip, Yoon will hold a summit with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, according to the South Korean and Japanese governments.

Yoon’s office said in a statement the summit would be “an important milestone” in the development of Korea-Japan relations. It said South Korea hopes the two countries will “overcome an unfortunate past” and expand cooperation on security, economy and other sectors as a result of the visit.

AP

exercises, which were last held in 2018.

The United States has also recently sent advanced warplanes, including the B-1B and B-52 long-range bombers, to train with South Korean aircraft in a show of strength.

Harry and Meghan’s children formally granted royal titles

PTI ■ LONDON

The children of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, were on Thursday added to the royal titles list on the official Buckingham Palace website and will be formally known as Prince Archie and Princess Lilibet of Sussex.

The succession list on the royal family website was updated to reflect the change a day after Harry and Meghan first referred to their daughter Lilibet as Princess, following her christening ceremony in the US.

Previously, they were listed as Master Archie Mountbatten-Windsor and Miss Lilibet Mountbatten-Windsor.

As per the rules for the titles of Britain’s royalty, Archie and Lilibet were not automatically made prince and princess at birth because they were then the great-grandchildren of the monarch – the late Queen Elizabeth II. But they gained

the automatic right to their titles once their grandfather, King Charles III, acceded to the British throne.

“The children’s titles have been a birth right since their grandfather became monarch. This matter has been settled for some time in alignment with Buckingham Palace,” a spokesperson for the Duke and Duchess of Sussex has been reported as saying.

The rules for royal titles were set out by Britain’s King George V, the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth II, in 1917.

Under those norms, the Sussexes are also entitled to use the His or Her Royal Highness (HRH) prefixes but Harry and Meghan no longer use these titles after leaving frontline monarchy in 2020.

It is understood the prince and princess titles for their children – Archie, 3, and Lilibet, 21 months – will also be used only in formal settings but not in everyday conversational use.

Georgia to drop bill after massive public protests

AP ■ TBILISI

Georgia’s ruling party said Thursday it would withdraw a bill that opponents warned would stifle dissent and curtail media freedoms, after days of massive protests demanding it be dropped.

The bill would have required media and non-governmental organisations that receive over 20 per cent of their funding from foreign sources to register as “agents of foreign influence.”

Its opponents argued that it was inspired by a similar law in Russia that is used by authorities there to silence critics and that it could hinder Georgia’s aspirations to join NATO and the European Union.

Protests of the bill began last week, but swelled in recent days to bring tens of thousands of people to the streets of the capital, Tbilisi — and were met with tear gas and water cannons.

Massive Russian missile attack rocks Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

Russia unleashed “a massive rocket attack” that hit critical infrastructure and residential buildings in 10 regions of Ukraine, the country’s president said Thursday, with officials reporting at least six deaths in the largest such nighttime attack in three weeks.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the barrage that came while many people slept and knocked out power in cities across the country was an attempt by Moscow “to intimidate Ukrainians again.”

“The occupiers can only terrorise civilians. That’s all they can do,” Zelenskyy said in an online statement. The war has largely ground to a battlefield stalemate over the winter. The Kremlin’s forces started targeting Ukraine’s power supply last October in an apparent attempt to demoralise the civilian population and compel Kyiv to negotiate peace on Moscow’s terms.

The attacks later became less frequent, with analysts speculating Russia may have been running low on ammunition. The last major bombardment took place on February 16.

Overall, Russia launched 81 missiles and eight exploding Shahed drones Thursday, according to Ukraine’s chief



Villagers clear the rubble after Russia's night rocket attack ruined private houses in a village, in Zolochivskyi district in the Lviv region on Thursday

commander of the armed forces, Valerii Zaluzhnyi. Thirty-four cruise missiles were intercepted, as were four drones, he said.

The Russian defence ministry said the attacks were in retaliation for an alleged incursion into the Bryansk region of western Russia a week earlier by what Moscow claimed were Ukrainian saboteurs. Ukraine denied the claim and warned that Moscow could use the allegations to justify stepping up its own attacks.

The Russian defence ministry said Thursday’s “massive retaliation” hit military and industrial targets in Ukraine “as well as the energy facilities that supply them.”

Private electricity operator DTEK reported that three of its power stations had been hit, causing severe damage and bringing preventive emergency power cuts in the Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk and Odesa regions.

The strikes left almost half of consumers in Kyiv without heating, with

temperatures at around 9 C (48 F). Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, was left without running water, heating, trams and trolleybuses after 15 missiles hit the region, mayor Ihor Tereshkov told the Ukrainian public broadcaster.

Around 150,000 households were left without power in Ukraine’s north-western Zhytomyr region. In the southern port of Odesa, emergency blackouts occurred due to damaged power lines.

In southern Ukraine, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which is occupied by Russian forces, lost power as a result of the missile attacks, according to nuclear state operator Energoatom.

It’s the sixth time that Europe’s largest nuclear plant has been in a state of blackout since it was taken over by Russia months ago, forcing it to rely on diesel generators that can run the station for 10 days. Nuclear plants need constant power to run cooling systems and avoid a meltdown, and fears remain about the possibility of a catastrophe at Zaporizhzhia.

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog expressed alarm at the latest blackout, saying he was “astounded by the complacency” of members of the organisation he leads, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Police book Imran Khan on charges of murder, terrorism

PTI ■ LAHORE

The police in Lahore on Thursday booked Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf chief Imran Khan and 400 others on the charges of murder and terrorism during their clash with police personnel during the party's rally that left one activist dead and scores injured. This is the 80th case against ousted prime minister Khan registered by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led coalition government during its 11 months of rule. Police on Wednesday allegedly killed PTI activist Ali Bilal and injured over a dozen during a crackdown outside Khan's residence from where they were to take out a pro-judiciary rally. The police also arrested over 100 PTI workers. The FIR said 11 police officials were injured in the clash with PTI workers who hurled stones at them.

The FIR said six PTI workers also suffered injuries. Senior PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry on Thursday said instead of registering an FIR against the policemen and their bosses for killing the PTI worker on the complaint of his family, the police have booked 70-year-old Khan and 400 others in his murder.

Fawad Chaudhry, Faruk Habib, Hamid Azhar, and Mahmood Rashid are among other PTI leaders named in the FIR. The cricketer-turned-politician uploaded the brutal torture of PTI workers on social media and said: "This is what the corrupt and murderous cabal of crooks have wrought on the nation. They have violated our Constitution, fundamen-



Court issues NBW against Pakistan's former PM

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A court in southwestern Pakistan on Thursday issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against former prime minister Imran Khan in a case of incitement against state institutions. Quetta police on Monday registered a case against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Khan under Sections 153A, 124A, and 505 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, on behalf of a citizen Abdul Khalil Kakar, for "spreading hate" against state institutions and their offices following his speech on Sunday. A judicial magistrate court in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, took up the case and issued the non-bailable arrest warrant.

The court directed the authorities to detain 70-year-old Khan and present him before the court.

Khan heavily criticised the state institutions after a botched attempt by police to arrest him from his residence in the

Zaman Park area of Lahore on the weekend. The police raid unfolded after a court in Islamabad had issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against Khan in the Toshakhana case.

Khan 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, who has been facing dozens of cases, stated last week that so far at least 76 cases have been registered against him. Earlier on Thursday, the Lahore High Court (LHC) declared a petition seeking contempt of court proceedings against Khan for his alleged campaign against the institution of judiciary inadmissible.

Justice Shujaat Ali Khan in the verdict on the petition filed by Naeem Qamar remarked that the statements of the PTI chief, prima facie, appeared to be against the judges who belonged to Islamabad.

tal rights, and the rule of law. Innocent, unarmed PTI workers, including women, were targets of police violence and brutality with one worker murdered while in custody."

The ousted premier asked the party supporters across the country to offer funeral prayers in the absence of the killed worker. The PTI had announced that it would register a murder case against Punjab caretaker chief minister Mohsin Naqvi, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, Punjab IGP Usman Anwar, and Lahore police chief Bilal Saddique Kamayana. Meanwhile, the Punjab IGP has formed a two-member committee to conduct an inquiry into the police clash with PTI workers outside Zaman Park. Police on Wednesday fired tear gas and used water cannons to disperse PTI activists. The party claimed that its "peaceful" workers were arrested after reports emerged that

the provincial capital had been placed under Section 144, banning public gatherings. After the bloody clashes between police and his party workers, Khan called off the party's "pro judiciary" rally from his Zaman Park residence to Data Darbar. Khan said the government wants an excuse to delay the elections in Punjab and for this, it needs dead bodies.

"Police have picked up our 100 workers. We will not let the government and its handlers succeed in its nefarious design," he said. Last Sunday, police failed to arrest Khan primarily because of the resistance of a large number of PTI workers outside his residence.

Khan 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.

Pakistan FM hopeful of bailout deal with IMF this week

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar vowed on Thursday that the government was "absolutely committed" to completing the current USD 7 billion bailout programme with the IMF, once again indicating that the cash-strapped country could sign the staff-level agreement with the global lender this week. The Pakistan government is in a race against time to implement measures to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the country has reserves barely enough for three weeks of essential imports, while hotly contested elections are due by November, Dawn newspaper reported.

Addressing a seminar organised by the Finance Ministry here, Dar said: "My team and I have decided that, in a short period of time, we will implement and we will discharge all the sovereign commitments that the previous government had made."

Pakistan and the IMF have been holding virtual talks after the two sides held 10 days of intensive negotiations with an IMF delegation in Islamabad from January 31 to February 9, which failed to reach an agreement.

He recalled that the coalition government was handed over an economy "in a shambles". "To top it [off], the previous government (led by Imran Khan) had agreed to a loan facility which was extended by the IMF. But instead of honouring the commitments, they reversed some conditionalities before leaving office. This led to a serious trust deficit [between the lender and Pakistan]," he highlighted. However, the minister went on to say, the government had realised that these obligations were not made by an individual but by the sovereign state of Pakistan and decided to honour the commitments. "We have been in the process of the 9th review which has taken longer than it should have [...], we seem to be very close to signing the staff-level agreement, hopefully in the next two days," Dar added.

US encourages Pakistan to continue working with IMF

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The United States has encouraged Pakistan to continue working with the IMF to improve the cash-strapped country's economy and the business environment to "unlock" the much-needed funds from the global lender.

US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price while talking to media on Wednesday said that the US is working with Pakistani partners and, in turn, it is working with international financial institutions, the IMF, to put itself on a sustainable growth path. "Ultimately, it is going to have to be decisions on the part of our Pakistani counterparts to unlock this IMF funding. We encourage Pakistan to continue working with the IMF, especially on

reforms that will improve Pakistan's business environment," Price said. "We believe that it will make Pakistani business more competitive, and will attract high-quality investment," he said. "They improve the competitiveness of partnering Pakistani firms, fuelling economic growth that increases employment and household incomes. We believe that by continuing down this path and continuing to make the necessary economic decisions, Pakistan can put itself on a path to sustainable growth," Price said in response to a question.

"When it comes to economic challenges, when it comes to security challenges, when it comes to political challenges, the United States is ready and able to continue to be a partner to the people of

Pakistan," he added. Pakistan is desperate to unlock the next tranche of a USD 6.5 billion loan facility with the IMF but struggles to meet tough conditions set by the Washington-headquartered financial body. The cash-strapped country is taking various steps on the Fund's behalf for the release of a USD 1.1 billion tranche under the loan facility, including unveiling a mini-budget for fetching additional tax revenues of Rs 170 billion by raising the GST rate from 17 per cent to 18 per cent. Offering condolences to the recent lives lost in clashes in Pakistan, Price said that the US is aware of reports about clashes in Lahore, ahead of a planned rally by former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and it encourages all to exhibit restraint.

year over a policy framework — would not only lead to a disbursement of 1.2 billion but also unlock inflows from friendly countries.

The prerequisites by the lender are aimed at ensuring Pakistan shrinks its fiscal deficit ahead of its annual budget around June. Pakistan has already taken most of the other prior actions, which included hikes in fuel and energy tariffs, the withdrawal of subsidies in

export and power sectors, and generating more revenues through new taxation in a supplementary budget. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced a slew of austerity measures last month, including cabinet members forgoing their salaries, paying their own bills, banning the purchase of luxury vehicles from 2024, and slashing the current expenditure by 15 per cent, among others.

Maryam Nawaz seeks court martial of retd Lt Gen

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's ruling party PML-N's chief organizer Maryam Nawaz has spoken out her mind regarding her and her father former premier Nawaz Sharif's "tormentor" former spymaster retired Lt Gen Faiz Hameed and demanded his "immediate" court martial. Earlier, ousted prime minister Imran Khan had demanded court martial of former army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa.

Interestingly, Nawaz Sharif used to blame Gen Bajwa and Gen Hameed together for getting him disqualified by the Supreme Court in 2017 by pressuring



judges. But now the father and daughter are only demanding action against former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Gen Faiz Hameed.

Khan's party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) said Maryam and her father are

targeting only Gen Hameed because they had cut a deal with Gen Bajwa to oust Imran Khan.

Maryam Nawaz told a news website on Wednesday that she had moved a court against Gen Hameed for his role in getting her and Nawaz Sharif convicted in fake cases in 2017. "Not only Gen Faiz Hameed's court martial should be done but also an example of him is to be made or others," she said.

Last week, Imran Khan had accused Gen Bajwa of backstabbing him. "Gen Bajwa wanted to crush me. If anyone thinks that I will bow, it will never happen. There should be an internal military

inquiry against Gen Bajwa. He should be court-martialled for delivering a speech against Russia (when I was visiting there to buy oil on cheap rates)," Khan alleged.

On the other hand, the PML-N led federal coalition government has resonated with the sentiments of Maryam disclosing "different kinds of investigations are underway against Gen Faiz Hameed."

Federal Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said action would be taken in the light of ongoing investigation against Gen Hamid. "The financial embezzlement allegations against Hameed's brothers are also being probed," he said.

NATO chief tries to let Finland, Sweden in

AP ■ BRUSSELS

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg is spearheading a new drive this week to see Finland and Sweden become members of the world's biggest military organisation by the time US President Joe Biden and his counterparts meet for their next summit in July. Fearing that they might be targeted next after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, the Nordic neighbours abandoned their traditional positions of military nonalignment to seek protection under NATO's security umbrella.

All 30 allies signed Finland's and Sweden's accession protocols. Almost all have since ratified those texts, but Turkey and, more recently, Hungary have sought guarantees and assurances from the two. NATO must agree unanimously for them to join.

Representatives from the Nordic neighbours and Turkey are meeting on Thursday at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Stoltenberg isn't directly involved in the talks, but he organised them after convincing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last month to come back to the table. "This is a process, and I don't expect the process to be concluded" with one round of talks, Stoltenberg told reporters in Stockholm on the eve of the meeting, "but I am confident that Finland and Sweden will become NATO allies. This is a top priority."

Netanyahu airlifted to airport after road blocked by protestors

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had to be airlifted on Thursday to the country's main international airport for an official overseas trip, after throngs of cars and protesters prevented him from driving there. The demonstrations were part of nationwide protests underway for more than two months against his contentious plan to overhaul the judiciary.

Protesters had made blocking Netanyahu's route to the airport a centerpiece of their intensifying efforts to oppose the legal changes, and the optics of the Israeli leader having to make alternate travel plans were a win for the demonstrators.

The helicopter ride, far from the snarling traffic triggered by the protest, was also sure to deepen Netanyahu's reputation as being out of touch with Israelis at a time when the country finds itself torn apart over the government plan and the economy is slowing.

Thursday's disruptions also took a toll on visiting US Secretary of State Lloyd Austin, whose schedule was rearranged to keep his engagements close to the airport. The protesters, launching a "day of resistance to dictatorship", descended on the country's main international airport waving Israeli flags, blocking the road leading to the departures area with their cars.

Elsewhere, protesters blocked main intersections and scuffled with police in the seaside metropolis of Tel Aviv and other cities. A small flotilla of paddleboards and kayaks tried to close off a main maritime shipping lane off the northern city of Haifa. Some protesters barricaded the Jerusalem offices of a conservative think tank helping to spearhead the judicial changes.

"Israel is on the verge of becoming an autocratic country. The current government is trying to destroy our democracy, and actually destroy the country," said Savion Or, a protester in Tel Aviv.

The uproar over Netanyahu's legal overhaul has plunged Israel into one of its worst domestic crises. Beyond the protests, which have drawn tens of thousands of Israelis to the streets and recently became violent, opposition has surged from across society, with business leaders and legal officials speaking out against what they say will be the ruinous effects of the plan. The rift has not spared Israel's military, which is seeing unprecedented opposition from within its own ranks. Netanyahu, who took office in late December after a protracted political stalemate, and his allies say the measures aim to rein in a court that has overstepped its authority.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all concerned that my clients (1) Suresh Chander Kalra s/o Late Sunder Lal Kalra, (2) Smt. Shashi Kalra w/o Suresh Chander Kalra, r/o B-4/19, II/rd Floor, Krishna Nagar, Delhi-110051, vide Public Notice dt. 16.11.2021 disowned and disinherited their son Sumit Kalra from their movable and immovable properties and severed their relations with him. Now, due to change of circumstances, my aforesaid clients hereby withdraw the said legal notice dated 16.11.2021 and all the rights of Sumit Kalra in their movable and immovable properties stands restored and he will inherit their movable and immovable properties to be left by them.

K.K. GAMBHIR (Advocate)
ENRL No. D-592/98
Chamber No. F-205,
KKD Courts, Delhi-110032
Ph. No. 9899553388
Email: kapilgambhir@yahoo.co.in
Dated: 04.03.2023

PUBLIC NOTICE

ENTIRE PROPERTY BEARING NO. C-125, GREATER KAILASH-I, NEW DELHI

Be it known to all concerned that my client, being the absolute owner of the aforementioned subject property, has lost/misplaced the following original documents in respect of the afore-said property:

i) Sale Deed dated 21.03.1964, executed by M/s DLF Housing and Construction Private Limited in favour of Mr. Surinder Kumar Chaudhury and Mr. Rajesh Chaudhury, duly registered as document No. 2166 in Additional Book No. 1, Volume No. 1110 on pages 100-101, in the office of the Sub-Registrar, New Delhi on 28.03.1964.

ii) Relinquishment Deed dated 15.10.1972, executed by Mrs. Dropati Devi in favour of Mr. Rajesh Chaudhury, duly registered as document No. 6921 in Additional Book No. 1, Volume No. 3007 on pages 12-13, in the office of the Sub-Registrar, New Delhi on 28.10.1972. An FIR has been lodged in Police Station Karol Bagh, Delhi, bearing complaint No. 27/1989 for the same.

It is notified that any person/body/institution having any sort of right/claim/title/encumbrance/liability/object/interest on the basis of the aforesaid lost document and/or any other document/fact, shall contact or notify the undersigned with valid documentary proof within Seven (7) days from the publication hereof, failing which, my client shall freely proceed further to deal with the Subject Property in any manner he/she may deem fit.

VIDUR AGNIHOTRI
(Advocate, D/6333/2021)
W-151, G.K-I, N.D.,
PH.9999992344, 011-35552664




NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE

Dy CE/C-II/CSB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against following tender closing date: 28.03.2023 15:00 hrs. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids up to closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Mode of Tender	E-Tender (One Packet) (Open Tender)
Full Name of Work	"Carrying out Final Location Survey (FLS), Geotechnical studies, Preparation of GAD of Bridges, L-section, yard plans, Drawing of other structures, Preparation and submission of DPR & other preliminary activities in c/w/ith New BG Rail Line between Meerut-Hastinapur-Bijnor of Delhi Division (65.50 Km)
Approx. Cost	Rs.92,32,784/- (Rs. Ninety two lakhs thirty two thousand seven hundred eighty four only)
Completion period	06 Six Months from the date of issuance of L.O.A.
Bid security (Cash/BG amount)	Rs. 1,84,700/- (Rs. One lakh eighty four thousand seven hundred only)
Sale/availability of tender document on Rly. Website	Tender documents will be available on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 08.02.2023 to 02.03.2023 upto 15:00 hrs.
Last date / Time of upload of tenders	28.03.2023 upto 15:00 hours. Tender documents can be uploaded by the tenderer on IREPS website w.e.f. 13.03.2023 to 28.03.2023
Date and time of Opening of Tender	28.03.2023 at 15:30 hours. (immediately after close of uploading of tender (D2)).

Tender Notice No: 124-W/Dy.CE/C-II/CSB-FLS-MTC-HASTINAPUR-BJO dated: 06.03.2023

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE



NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE

Dy CE/C-II/CSB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against following tender closing date: 28.03.2023 15:00 hrs. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids up to closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

APPENDIX IV-A
[See proviso to Rule 8(6)]

Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

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

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Properties mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN: L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which is where is, "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 10.04.2023 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 47,68,791/- (Rupees Forty Seven Lakh Sixty Eight Thousand Seven Hundred Ninety One only) i.e. Rs. 35,40,967/- (Rupees Thirty Five Lakh Forty Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Seven only) pending towards Loan Account No. HLAPPAN00339829; and Rs. 12,27,824/- (Twelve Lakh Twenty Seven Thousand Eight Hundred Twenty Four only) pending towards Loan Account No. HLAPPAN0499754, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 01.03.2023 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 02.03.2023 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from DEEPAK KUMAR (PROPRIETOR, NIRMAL TRADING CO.), POONAM DEVI, OMBIR and SEEMA.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Properties will be Rs. 44,00,000/- (Rupees Forty Four Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 4,40,000/- (Rupees Four Lakh Forty Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

PROPERTY NO. 1

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY BEARING SHOP NUMBER 7, ON THE GROUND FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHT AND GROUND FLOOR, MEASURING 18 SQ. YARDS (EAST TO WEST 9 FEET NORTH TO SOUTH 18 FEET) SQUARE YARDS, WAKA ABADI, OM SHOPPING MALL, SITUATED IN MASAD MOHALLA (MOHANPURA), SONEPAT NEAR GEETA BHAWAN CHOWK , TEHSIL AND DISTRICT SONEPAT WITHIN THE LIMITS OF SONEPAT MUNICIPAL CORPORATION , SONEPAT, HARYANA-131001 AND THE SAME IS BOUNDED AS UNDER :-

EAST : SHOP NUMBER 8
WEST : SHOP NUMBER 6
NORTH : OTHER PROPERTY
SOUTH : ROAD 18 FEET WIDE

PROPERTY NO. 2


COMMERCIAL PROPERTY BEARING SHOP NUMBER 8, ON THE GROUND FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHT AND GROUND FLOOR, MEASURING 18 SQ. YARDS (EAST TO WEST 9 FEET NORTH TO SOUTH 18 FEET) SQUARE YARDS, WAKA ABADI, OM SHOPPING MALL, SITUATED IN MASAD MOHALLA (MOHANPURA), SONEPAT NEAR GEETA BHAWAN CHOWK , TEHSIL AND DISTRICT SONEPAT WITHIN THE LIMITS OF SONEPAT MUNICIPAL CORPORATION, SONEPAT, HARYANA-131001 AND THE SAME IS BOUNDED AS UNDER :-

EAST : SHOP NUMBER 9
WEST : SHOP NUMBER 7
NORTH : OTHER PROPERTY
SOUTH : ROAD 18 FEET WIDE

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

Date: 06.03.2023
Place: SONEPAT

s/d
AUTHORISED OFFICER
INDIABULLS HOUSING FINANCE LTD.



Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Tender Notice Reference No.GNDU/Gen/Mar/03/2023


The Department of G.N.D.U Amritsar invites online bids for the following

Sr. No.	Item	Quantity
1	Heavy Duty Printer	01
2	UPS	01

Closing Date & Time : 24-03-2023 at 5:00 PM
For details log onto: www.eproc.punjab.gov.in
Note:- Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.

Assistant Registrar (General),
Guru Nanak Dev University,
Amritsar

NA/12/14942/2022/21914 Dt.3/9/2023



NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE

Dy CE/C-II/CSB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against following tender closing date: 28.03.2023 15:00 hrs. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids up to closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Invitation of tender through E-tendering (e-Procurement Systems)

NIT No.	6-SEFILE-13216ART1Tender
Name of Work and its Location	Tender for " Works contract for Provision for Stripping, fitment, testing & commissioning of CCTV for 85 LHB EOAG Coaches as per scope of work at RCNK/SNP"
Approx. Cost of Work	Tender Cost: Rs.. 4587250/- including GST (Rs. Forty -five Lacs Eighty Seven Thousand Two Hundred Fifty Only)
Earnest Money	Rs. 91,800.00/-
Completion Period of Work	12 months of date of execution of work
Cost of Tender document on cash / by Post	NIL
Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Upto 11:00 hrs. on 22/03/2023 Opening of Tender at 11:30 hrs.
Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in

No.. 6-SEFILE-13216ART1Tender Dated 07/03/2023 741/23

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE



HDB FINANCIAL SERVICES LIMITED
Ground Floor, Zenith House, Keshavnagar Khadye Marg, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai - 400034
Tel No.: +91 22 49116300

FINAL AUCTION CUM SALE NOTICE FOR GOLD ORNAMENTS

The borrower(s) (whose details are provided in the table herein below), in particular, and the public, in general, are hereby informed that the below mentioned accounts are overdue, and the borrowers/account holders have not responded/complied with the communication, and notice sent by HDB Financial Services Limited (the "Company") requesting the borrower to clear his/her/their dues as per the documents in respect of the below mentioned loan signed/ accepted by the borrower(s) (such documents, collectively "loan agreement") and therefore defaulted in terms thereof. The Company has in exercise of its rights as a pledgee, decided to enforce the pledge and therefore hold a public auction of the gold ornaments pledged to the company as security for the loan for the purpose of selling the same and realizing/recovering the dues owned by the borrower(s) to the company. The auction will be conducted on 14-03-2023 at the below mentioned local branch of HDB Financial Services Limited from 11.00 am onwards on the date and branches mentioned in the below table:-

Loan No	Customer Name	Date of Loan	Overdue Amount Rs.	Branch Name
27083476	Sanjeev SO	01/09/2022	3948	Delhi-NCR-Burari
24619412	Ramadharmanjhi	02/06/2022	14148	Delhi-Badarpur
9172406	Anil Kumar Tiwari	15/10/2019	6244	Delhi-Bhajanpura
21689046	Shahrukh Mujamill	07/02/2022	7503	Delhi-Dilshad Garden
23404090	Vipin Brham Singh	29/04/2022	12892	Delhi-Dilshad Garden
18889536	Saifulla Raish	28/10/2021	25764	Delhi-Gandhi Nagar
22917987	Komal Naththilal	07/04/2022	5465	Delhi-Gandhi Nagar
23735569	Kapil Parmod Kumar	04/05/2022	12452	Delhi-Gandhi Nagar
14083714	Rohan Singh	28/03/2021	7762	Delhi-Jagatpuri
12605758	Sanni Kumar	05/10/2020	6098	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
16160994	Sanjeev Kumar	13/11/2021	11880	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
19612378	Moolchand Sharma	16/11/2021	21363	Delhi-Kamla Nagar
21476670	Varun Kumar	09/02/2022	17070	Delhi-Kashmiri Gate
24002398	Himanshu Bodh	12/05/2021	5112	Delhi-Kashmiri Gate
14691126	Sujit Sharma	19/03/2021	5620	Delhi-Mayapuri
13597690	Sandeep Kumar	18/12/2020	21054	Delhi-Nangloi
20840826	Vishal V	04/01/2022	6670	Delhi-Nangloi
24004767	Suman Dalchand	11/05/2022	4500	Delhi-Patel Nagar
13799771	Chander Nath Jha	07/01/2021	84270	Delhi-Ramesh Nagar
25216715	Neeraj Sharma	23/06/2022	16594	Delhi-Sadar
14276471	Namit Kumar	16/02/2021	14769	Delhi-Shastri Nagar
54365656	Arvind Kumar	04/07/2022	8290	Delhi-Tilak Nagar
22303762	Sudlal Mani Parkuram	16/03/2022	12796	Ghaziabad
19457443	Pintu Kumar	13/11/2021	6508	Ghaziabad-Navyug Market
22304528	Aditya Goel	17/03/2022	13708	Ghaziabad-Navyug Market
21490541	Anil Kumar	28/01/2022	6436	Ghaziabad-Navyug Market
27526005	Vikash Kumar	20/09/2022	4612	Noida
7732780	Vipin Sharma	28/05/2019	6080	Noida
17593029	Kushal Bhati	10/09/2021	13476	Noida-Sector 110
9318821	Kapil Bansal	23/10/2019	12270	Noida-Sector 110
8624295	Firoz Khan	23/08/2020	7355	Noida-Sector 110

The auction shall be conducted on an "AS IS WHERE" and "AS IS WHAT IT" basis and the Company is not making and shall not make any representation or warranties as regards the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments. It shall be the sole and absolute responsibility of the potential purchaser to verify, examine and satisfy themselves about the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments prior to placing their bid and for such purpose it shall be open to potential purchasers to examine, at their sole cost and expense, and at the address set out herein above, the gold ornaments whether with or without expert advice 45 minutes prior to the time stipulated for the conduct of the auction. All the bid shall be subjected to such minimum reserve price as the company may deem fit to fix in this regards. The auction process and sale (if any) pursuant to such auction shall be subjected to such further terms and condition as the company may at sole discretion deem fit to impose.

If the borrower(s) mentioned above pays the amount due to the Company in terms of the loan agreement in his individual loan account in full before the auction as mentioned above, the pledged ornaments securing the said loan may be withdrawn from the said auction without further notice. Please note that it is the absolute discretionary power of the undersigned authorized officer of the company, either to postpone or to cancel the auction proceeding without prior notice and without assigning any reason thereof and to reject any or all the bids or offer without assigning any reason for the same.

Place : DELHI
Date : 10-03-2023

Authorised Officer
(HDB Financial Services Ltd)

‘India needs better ₹ volatility mgmt’

To deal with risks of internationalisation: RBI Deputy Guv

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India needs to gear up to manage the exchange rate volatility as the country progresses on the path of internationalisation of rupee and freer capital account convertibility, according to Reserve Bank Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao.

He also said that internationalisation of rupee has its own benefits as well as challenges and risks which the country and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will have to deal with.

Delivering the keynote address at the 17th FEDAI conference at Cairo on Sunday, Rao said as the economy grows and becomes more developed, the scope of participation in foreign exchange markets would change.

“With the increasing inte-



gration of the economy with the rest of the world, more and more entities are likely to, directly or indirectly, get exposed to foreign exchange risks. There are likely to be demands for permitting hedging of economic exposures,” he said.

A whole new market with a new set of market participants has opened up, with banks in India being allowed to participate in the offshore non-deliverable market for rupee derivatives in a bid to integrate markets. This is a part of the overall effort towards greater convertibility of rupee, he said.

According to him, further dynamics are likely to emerge as the country progresses

towards the path of internationalisation of the rupee.

“It is now widely accepted that while internationalisation and a freer capital account comes with its own set of benefits, it is not without risks and that freer capital flows come with their own set of challenges, the primary one being that of volatility and we need to gear up to manage that,” he noted.

Observing that in a constantly evolving world where change is the only constant, he said the journey of the Indian foreign exchange market over the last few decades has been one of continuous development and innovation.

RBI remains committed to continuously move ahead at a steady pace in line with the changing macro-financial environment -- globally and domestically, he said.

Going ahead, he said that greater challenges will emerge as the markets become more developed and interconnected, and as the range of products expand.

Sensex snaps three-day winning run, falls 540 pts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex declined nearly 540 points on Thursday, pressured by heavy selling in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv and ICICI Bank amid a sluggish trend in the global markets.

Besides, concerns over a sharp interest rate hike by the US Federal Reserve and a weak rupee against major currencies overseas further weighed on sentiment, traders said.

Snapping its three-day gaining streak, the 30-share BSE Sensex opened strong but came under severe selling pressure to close 541.81 points or 0.90 per cent lower at 59,806.28.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty declined 164.80 points or 0.93 per cent to 17,589.60.

“Nifty snapped a three day rally and ended in the negative, pulled down by negative global cues. At close, Nifty was down 0.93 per cent or 164.8 points at 17,589.6. Volumes on the NSE fell compared to the recent average. Broad market indices fell less than the Nifty even as the advance decline ratio closed at 0.72:1.

“Global stock markets were mostly lower on Thursday amid worries about weaker-than-expected Chinese inflation data that pointed to a sluggish economic recovery in the country and possibility of more and sharp US interest



rate hikes. The US government’s comprehensive monthly report on hiring is due out Friday that may give some hint about the need to raise rates and quantum thereof,” said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

M&M was the top loser in the Sensex pack, skidding 3.31 per cent, followed by Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Maruti, Tata Motors and Tech Mahindra.

On the other hand, Tata Steel, L&T, Axis Bank, Bharti Airtel and HDFC Bank were among the gainers.

“Selling pressure came to the fore after 3 days of relief rally, as US Fed signalling further rate hike to tame inflation reignited worries of slowing growth. Also, the rising bond yields in the last few sessions are indicating that risk-off sentiment in equities will prevail going ahead and liquidity could tighten,” said Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities Ltd.

Gold falls ₹80; silver plunge ₹390

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price fell ₹80 to ₹55,025 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had closed at ₹55,105 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver also plunged ₹390 to ₹61,955 per kilogramme.

“Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at ₹55,025 per 10 grams, down ₹80 per 10 grams,” Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas market, gold was trading flat at \$1,815 per ounce while silver was down at \$20.02 per ounce.

“COMEX Gold prices traded flat in the Asian trading hours on Thursday amid worries that more aggressive US interest rate rises are expected in the future from the Fed.



Rupee falls 7 paise to close at 82.02 against US dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day lower by 7 paise at 82.02 (provisional) against the US currency on Thursday tracking a muted trend in domestic equities.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 81.93 against the greenback and closed at 82.02 (provisional), registering a fall of 7 paise over its previous close of 81.95.

During the session, the domestic unit witnessed an intra-day high of 81.77 and a low of 82.02 against the American dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.22 per cent lower at 105.42.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures declined 0.01 per cent to \$82.65 per barrel. The 30-share BSE Sensex ended 541.81 points or 0.90 per cent lower at 59,806.28, while the broader NSE Nifty declined 164.80 points or 0.93 per cent to 17,589.60.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital market on Wednesday as they purchased shares worth ₹3,671.56 crore, according to exchange data.

Reliance brings back Campa Cola of the 70s



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance re-launched the 50-year-old iconic beverage brand Campa Cola in a new contemporised avatar as it looks to ramp up its own consumer goods offering to take on competition from Adani, ITC and Unilever.

In January this year, Reliance Consumer Products Ltd, the fast-moving consumer goods arm of Reliance Retail, acquired a 50 per cent stake in Gujarat-based carbonated soft drinks and juice maker Sosyo Hajoori Beverages Pvt Ltd. It had previously acquired the Campa brand from Pure Drinks group for a reported ₹22 crore.

Indian banks’ gross NPAs likely to touch decadal low of sub-4 pc by FY24: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bad loans of Indian banks are expected to decline 90 basis points to less than five per cent in FY23 and hit a decadal low of sub-four per cent by March 31, 2024, said an Assocham-Crisil Rating study unveiled on Thursday.

The study attributed the decline in gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) to the post-Covid economic recovery and higher credit growth.

It said the biggest improvement would be in the corporate loan segment, where gross NPAs are seen falling below two per cent in the next fiscal from a peak of about 16 per cent as on March 31, 2018.

“This follows significant clean-up of books by banks in recent years, as well as strengthened risk management and underwriting, which has led to higher preference for borrowers with better credit profiles. The steady improve-



ment in corporate asset quality is clearly manifested in key indicators such as the credit quality of bank exposures,” Assocham Secretary General Deepak Sood said.

He observed that the twin balance sheet problem has largely been addressed, creating a situation where the credit growth has started to move up significantly.

“Our banking sector is quite robust even in the midst of continuing global challenges,” Sood opined.

The study noted that the gross NPAs in the MSME segment, which suffered the most during the pandemic, may rise to 10-11 per cent by March 2024 from about 9.3 per cent as on March 31, 2022.

L&T Technology Services announces CoE in Mysore to offer automotive solutions on AWS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

L&T Technology Services (LTTs) on Thursday announced a new Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Mysore, Karnataka, that leverages the power of the cloud with Amazon Web Services (AWS).

The CoE will allow L&T Technology Services to transition its suite of technologies focused on the future of mobility and reduce time-to-market for end customers.

“By leveraging AWS infrastructure, LTTs will provide an opportunity to use AWS to support the automotive domain,” according to a release.

Backed by its engineering domain expertise in Electric, Autonomous, and Connected Vehicles (EACV), LTTs has been helping original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to develop next-generation vehicles and aircraft that have tailored solutions focused on safety and security.

“The new CoE will leverage LTTs’ cross-disciplinary skillsets covering embedded,



mechanical, and digital facets of engineering,” the release added. LTTs has been actively working with global technology companies like AWS to bring digital engineering solutions to end customers on the cloud. AnnotAI, Connected Cars, and SafeX are some of the LTTs solutions that will be deployed in AWS marketplace to optimise research and development innovation on the cloud to create technology solutions.

Amit Chadha, CEO and Managing Director of L&T Technology Services, said by working with AWS, LTTs can help global automotive organisations realise the full potential of high-performance and scalable technologies built on an agile AWS cloud infrastructure.

Infosys collaborates with mobility specialist ZF to revamp supply chain operations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Infosys collaborates with mobility specialist ZF to revamp supply chain operations

Infosys said it has collaborated with mobility specialist ZF to revamp its supply chain with SAP Integrated Business Planning and Infosys Cobalt. Infosys was chosen to assist ZF on this transformation journey for its expertise in SAP IBP implementation and a plethora of in-house tools and accelerators, backed by efficient teams, according to a release.

With this engagement with the aftermarket division of ZF, Infosys has implemented SAP IBP for demand planning and inventory optimisation.

“As a part of this initiative, Infosys leveraged its hybrid agile implementation methodology to replace multiple legacy demand planning tools at ZF Aftermarket, with a unified, global SAP platform.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

INT’L WOMEN’S DAY OBSERVED AT NARUVI HOSP

Vellore: International Women’s Day was observed at Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, on Wednesday. Dr. Joyce Ponniah, former Director, Christian Medical College & Hospital, Vellore, who was the Chief Guest handed over prizes to winners of various competitions on the occasion.



WOMEN SHOULD BE GIVEN DUE RESPECT: MIN

Vijayawada/Amaravati/Guntur: As the adage goes where women are revered gods rejoiced (yatra nari pujiyante tatra ramante devata in Sanskrit), one must give due respect to women knowing their aspirations, said Dagubati Purandeswari, Former Union Minister and BJP National General Secretary. She attended a program as a chief guest organised in VIT-AP University to mark the occasion of International women’s day today.



INT’L WOMEN’S DAY CELEBRATED IN NOIDA

Noida: International Women’s Day was celebrated with enthusiasm in NFL Corporate Office, Noida. Vaishali Patil inaugurated the event by giving keynote address on the occasion. She gave the historic references of women empowerment in India and expressed happiness on many women taking up larger roles in society. She exhorted office ladies to provide support to each other in need to become a strong force and give fillip to women empowerment in real. A talk on the topic “Mein Sampoon Huin” was also given on the occasion by Usha Chhabra where she emphasized on the completeness of the women in herself. A Craft Workshop was also arranged for the ladies to provide creative inputs. The programme was attended by all the ladies of Corporate Office Noida and members of the NFL’s Ladies Club.



Power Grid Corporation board OK’s raising up to ₹900 crore via bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Power Grid Corporation of India on Monday said that its board has approved raising up to ₹900 crore through issuance of non-convertible bonds on private placement basis.

“Committee of Directors for Bonds, in their meeting held today i.e. On 9th March, 2023, have approved the raising of unsecured, non-convertible, non-cumulative, redeemable, taxable POWERGRID Bonds-LXXI (71 st) issue 2022-23 on private placement up to ₹900 crore by securitization of cash flows of 10 years i.e., till FY 2032-33 of its operational SPV viz., “POWERGRID Mithilanchal Transmission Ltd (PMTL)” a BSE filing said.

The base issue size will be ₹300 crore with green shoe option of ₹600 crore.

The issue will be listed on NSE and/or BSE Ltd. In a separate filing, the company said, “Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd has been declared as successful bidder under tariff based competitive bidding to establish inter-state



transmission system for Transmission System Strengthening Scheme for evacuation of power from solar energy zones in Rajasthan (8.1 GW) under Phase-II Part-E’ on build, own, operate and maintain (BOOM) basis.”

The Letter of Intent (LoI) has been received by Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd on 7th March, 2023, it stated.

Scope of the project comprises establishment of a 765kV D/c transmission line along with associated line bays in Rajasthan, it stated.

Jio buys US-based Mimosa Networks for \$60 million

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jio Platforms, the digital arm of Reliance Industries Ltd, will buy communications equipment maker Mimosa Networks for \$60 million as it looks to bolster its 5G telecom and broadband services.

RadiSys Corporation, a subsidiary of Jio Platforms, signed a definitive agreement with US-based Airspan Networks Holdings for acquisition of “Mimosa Networks for \$60 million on a debt free, cash free basis,” the companies said in a statement.

While Jio Platforms is the owner of India’s biggest telecom firm, Reliance Jio Infocomm, Mimosa has a portfolio of point-to-multi-point products based on WiFi-5 and the newer



WiFi 6E technologies as well as related accessories.

“These solutions have use cases in the backlog requirements for 5G and FTTX/ FWA rollouts,” the statement said. “Jio has been a major customer of Mimosa.” The deal comes at a time when countries across the world are looking to move away from Chinese technology.

Sebi introduces reward mechanism for informants providing tips on defaulters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to recover fines from elusive offenders, capital markets regulator Sebi on Thursday introduced a reward system for up to ₹20 lakh to informants for sharing information about the assets of defaulters.

The reward may be granted in two stages — interim and final. While the interim reward amount will not exceed two and a half per-cent of the reserve price of the asset regarding which tips was provided or ₹5 lakh, whichever is less and the final reward amount will not exceed 10 per cent of the dues recovered or ₹20 lakh, whichever is less.

Coming out with guidelines on grant of reward to an



informant who provides credible information about the assets of the defaulter under recovery proceedings, Sebi said, “information and the identity provided by the informant or the reward paid to him shall be held in confidence.”

As per Sebi, a person will be considered to be an informant eligible for reward if he or she furnishes original infor-

mation in relation to the asset of a defaulter concerning the dues which are certified as “Difficult to Recover”.

The difficult-to-recover dues are the ones which could not be recovered even after exhausting all the modes of recovery. Also, the regulator issued a list of 515 defaulters, where information can be provided by any informant.

Indian Overseas Bank disburses loans worth ₹5.02 cr to self-help groups

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Public sector Indian Overseas Bank has disbursed ₹5 crore worth of loans to self help groups during a campaign held in the city recently coinciding with the Women’s Day celebrations, the bank said on Thursday.

The women entrepreneur branch of Indian Overseas Bank in the city sanctioned loans worth ₹1.53 crore during the campaign organised by Chennai-I Region and Chennai II and another financial institution.

Loans to the tune of ₹502.09 lakh were sanctioned and disbursed to 84 self-help



groups across Chennai district, Indian Overseas Bank general manager Shubhendu Kumar Verma along with senior officials participated in the event on the occasion, a press release said here.

Govt successfully bids out 29 coal blocks for commercial mining

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

The 29 coal blocks which have been successfully bid out for commercial mining by the government are expected to enhance the average dry fuel output by an additional 7 per cent in the next two years, as the combined peak rated capacity (PRC) of these reserves is around 91 million tonnes.

The 91 million tonnes PRC of 29 coal blocks which have been bid out, would be an additional 7 per cent of the present national average PRC of coal reserves, sources said.

The Coal Ministry had put



up 29 reserves on auction for commercial mining last month, all of which have been bid out, sources informed. The last of the 29 mines was bid out successfully earlier in the day, they added.

With all the 29 mines expected to begin production

by 2024-25, i.e. by the next two years, the government is hoping that all these coal mines put together will enhance the overall national average output by an additional 7 per cent.

The ministry launched the auction of coal reserves for commercial mining in the sixth round and second attempt of fifth round on November 3, 2022.

Forward auctions for these mines had started on February 27. PRC pertains to the maximum production capacity of a coal mine, or in other words, the maximum quantity of coal which can be mined from it annually.

IRB Infra total toll collection rises 27% to ₹351.75 crore in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IRB Infrastructure Developers on Thursday said its total toll collection across all projects has increased 27 per cent year-on-year to ₹351.75 crore in February 2023. The company had reported the toll collection at ₹277.47 crore in February 2022, it said in a statement.

IRB Infrastructure Developers Chairman & Managing Director Virendra D Mhaiskar said that the February 2023 toll collection on all the corridors has once again revealed the consistency and robustness in the growth over last year.

HFCL teams up with Microsoft to roll out private 5G solutions for enterprises

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic telecom gear maker HFCL on Thursday said it has collaborated with Microsoft to roll out private 5G solutions for enterprises, as businesses eye the next generation technology to spur digital transformation.

With the rapid rollout of 5G in India, enterprises are looking at the next generation technology to further their digital transformation, including the promise of Industry 4.0, HFCL said in a statement.

“HFCL has collaborated with Microsoft to create converged private 5G solutions



that harness new-age technologies of IoT (Internet of Things), cloud, edge computing, AI (Artificial Intelligence) and analytics to transform industry verticals that include manufacturing, retail and warehouse, mining, education, defence, railways, smart city,” it said.

BAYERN KICK PSG OUT OF CL

AP ■ MUNICH

Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting scored against his former club as Bayern Munich ended the Champions League hopes of Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday, beating the French club 2-0 in their last-16 second leg to reach the quarter-finals.

Choupo-Moting, who featured for PSG in their 1-0 Champions League final loss to Bayern in Lisbon in 2020, side-footed the ball home after Thomas Mueller dispossessed Marco Verratti inside his own penalty area.

Substitute Serge Gnabry scored in the 89th minute to wrap up a 3-0 aggregate victory for the six-time European champions. Bayern reached the last eight for the 13th time in 15 years, while PSG will need to wait at least another season to lift the coveted trophy for the first time. Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann told DAZN his side "needed the crowd" to help them past PSG's "brutal quality" in the opening half.

"In the second half we were much better than our opponents and deserved to win."

Bayern were indebted to a fine goalline clearance by Matthijs de Ligt in the first period but were otherwise largely untroubled as Kylian Mbappe and Lionel Messi offered little.

"It worked, you need to say honestly that in a football game you need to have luck on your side," said captain Mueller.

"If that became a 1-0, you don't know how the team would react."

The Qatari-owned French champions' lack of squad depth was highlighted, despite the return to full fitness of Mbappe



after he was limited to a substitute appearance in PSG's 1-0 first-leg defeat.

Neymar is set to miss the rest of the season with an ankle injury, while they lost defenders Marquinhos and Nordi Mukiele to injuries during this game.

Coach Christophe Galtier lamented PSG's failure to "make the most of our chances" and conceding "a really stupid goal" through Verratti's error. "There is frustration and disappointment in the dressing room," he said. "We can't repeat the match,

we have to look ahead."

The best chance of a tight opening half fell to Paris midfielder Vitinha, who won the ball when Bayern goalkeeper Yann Sommer attempted to dribble out of a busy penalty area.

Vitinha was presented with an empty net, but his rolled effort allowed De Ligt to clear the ball off the line.

PSG lost captain Marquinhos to a rib problem 10 minutes before the break.

His replacement Mukiele, just back from an Achilles injury,

didn't reappear after the interval, leaving Galtier to introduce 17-year-old centre-back El Chadaille Bitshiabu for the second half.

BAYERN START QUICKLY

Bayern roared out of the blocks after half-time, but PSG were let off by the clumsy feet of Choupo-Moting, who tripped before shooting and then stood in the way of a goal-bound effort from Joshua Kimmich.

The Cameroon striker looked to have redeemed him-

self in the 52nd minute, but his header from a curling Jamal Musiala cross was chalked off for offside against Mueller.

The Bayern stalwart appeared to not have touched the ball before it nestled in the net, but was adjudged to have been interfering with play.

Bayern continued to push and PSG's dam broke on 61 minutes, with Choupo-Moting doing the damage.

Mueller robbed the ungainly Verratti in the box, clipped the ball to Leon Goretzka, who

squared for Choupo-Moting to double his side's two-legged advantage. PSG centre-back Sergio Ramos had a chance to equalise just four minutes later, but his powerful header was brilliantly palmed away by Sommer.

With Mbappe and Messi experiencing off nights, Gnabry put the result beyond doubt, racing onto Joao Cancelo's pass before firing into the far corner left-footed. Sadio Mane looked to have scored a third for the home side in injury time, but his effort was ruled out for offside.



‘That’s our maximum’, admits PSG’s Mbappe

AP ■ MUNICH

Kylian Mbappe admitted that Paris Saint-Germain had performed to their "maximum" despite slumping to another early Champions League exit at the hands of Bayern Munich on Wednesday. PSG, trailing 1-0 from the first leg in Paris, were beaten 2-0 in the return game at the Allianz Arena to drop out of the competition in the last 16 for the fifth time in seven seasons.

"As I said at my first Champions League press conference this season, we were going to do our maximum. That's our maximum, that's the truth," Mbappe told reporters.

"What were PSG missing? Not much when you look at the two squads. They have a great squad, built to win the Champions League."

PSG are still waiting for a maiden European Cup title despite the vast amount spent in the transfer market by

their Qatari owners.

Christophe Galtier's men ended the tie with two 17-year-olds on the pitch in El Chadaille Bitshiabu and Warren Zaire-Emery.

"We're going to question ourselves and then return to our daily life, the league," added Mbappe.

"We have to move on... We lost against a great team, trying to win the tournament."

Mbappe, who wore the captain's armband after Marquinhos went off injured in the 36th minute, signed a bumper new deal with PSG last year.

Despite the team sitting eight points clear at the top of Ligue 1, the Champions League failure will inevitably bring more questions about whether the France star will stay at the Parc des Princes.

"I'm calm," he said when asked about his future. "The only thing that matters to me is this season, to win the league, and then we'll see."

Milan hold Spurs, reach quarters

AP ■ MILAN

Antonio Conte said Tottenham still need time to become a European force after bowing out in the last 16 of the Champions League 1-0 on aggregate to AC Milan after a 0-0 draw on Wednesday.

A European elimination hot on the heels of an exit from the FA Cup means Spurs' 15-year wait to win a trophy will extend for at least another season.

Conte's return to the touchline failed to inspire a response from his side as Tottenham were toothless in attack and had to play the final 12 minutes a man down as Cristian Romero was sent off for two bookable offences.

"I'm really sorry for the fans, but we cannot invent the win or to hope for a miracle one day that a trophy goes into our training ground," said Conte.

"We have to build and have patience. I understand the fans don't have patience as for a long time Tottenham is not winning."

Victory over two legs takes Milan into the quarter-finals for the first time since 2012.

"We deserved this result, even though we could have scored more," said Milan striker Olivier Giroud.

"We showed quality, spirit, and we could have won tonight as well."

Kick-off was delayed by 10 minutes after the later arrival of both sides due to traffic congestion, but it took far longer for the contest to get going.

Conte was back in charge after taking more time after the first leg to recover from gallbladder surgery.



The Italian was his usual animated self and was shown a yellow card by referee Clement Turpin for his protestations at a booking for Clement Lenglet.

However, his players lacked the same energy as Spurs failed to rise to the occasion.

Tottenham have now won just two of their last seven games, including defeat to second-tier Sheffield United in the FA Cup.

Conte's contract expires at the end of the season and he did little to quash speculation that he will leave at the end of the campaign.

"The situation is really clear.

It is one year and three months since I became coach of Tottenham, I always said the same things," added Conte.

"We need time and patience because we don't have a solid foundation to be competitive to win in my opinion.

"At the moment the club knows very well my thoughts and I have a great relationship with my chairman, with (sporting director) Fabio Paratici, but it doesn't mean I don't tell them my vision.

"Now we have to finish the season. I'm happy to work in Tottenham but at the end we'll make a decision."

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann said Matthijs de Ligt "rescued" his side after the Dutch defender made a vital goalline clearance against Paris Saint-Germain to help the Germans qualify for the Champions League quarter-finals on Wednesday.

The tie was in the balance in the first half when De Ligt scrambled Vitinha's shot to safety after goalkeeper Yann Sommer was caught trying to dribble out of his own area. Nagelsmann was not best

pleased with said Sommer's risk-taking but chose instead to praise De Ligt's game-changing intervention.

"Yann obviously has a good connection with Matthijs," Nagelsmann quipped. "Nine out of 10 defenders in the world would have left that because they thought it was already in."

"It was an unbelievable play. He (De Ligt) loves to defend and hates to concede goals," Nagelsmann added.

"Mistakes happen, but thankfully we have a defender who rescued us."



Kane bemoans another trophyless season

AP ■ LONDON

Harry Kane said Tottenham "should be winning trophies" and not settling for a top-four finish in the Premier League after they crashed out of the Champions League.

Kane, who broke the club's all-time goalscoring record earlier this season, was adamant that Spurs need to be doing more than just challenging for the top four, which ensures qualification for the Champions League.

The 29-year-old England captain is out of contract at the end of next season and realistically has one last chance to sign for an elite club that will guarantee him the chance to win regular trophies.

Asked whether a top-four finish is enough, Kane said: "I don't think so. Where we're at as a club, we should be winning



trophies. That's always the aim. "The top four (being our only target) is a consequence of not playing as well as we want to play. Now that's all we can fight for so that's going to be the goal and hopefully we can achieve that come the end of the season."

"But for sure, it's not enough for this club."

Kane said the FA Cup defeat to Sheffield United had "put a dagger in our hearts", halting their momentum.

Brandt to miss next two games with torn muscle

AP ■ DORTMUND

Borussia Dortmund midfielder Julian Brandt has been ruled out for two weeks with a torn thigh muscle, the club announced on Thursday.

The Germany midfielder was subbed off after just five minutes in the 2-0 loss at Chelsea on Tuesday which eliminated Dortmund in the Champions League last 16.

The club tweeted Brandt "tore a muscle fibre in the thigh" and will miss the club's upcoming derby match at Schalke, along with their home clash with Cologne.

Brandt had scored in four of his past five league matches and was named Bundesliga player of the month in February.

Dortmund have won their last eight league matches. The five-time Bundesliga winners sit equal with leaders Bayern



Munich on points atop the table, second on goal difference.

DIACRE SACKED

Paris: Corinne Diacre has been sacked as coach of the France women's team, the French Football Federation (FFF) announced on Thursday, after her position was weakened following a revolt by leading players.

The 48-year-old was under contract until 2024 but came under serious pressure after captain Wendie Renard announced last month she would no longer play for the team, with fellow stars Kadidiatou Diani and Marie-Antoinette Katoto following suit.

The announcement comes just over four months before the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, where a France side ranked fifth in the world will hope to feature prominently.

Alcaraz chases Indian Wells title and return to No 1

AP ■ INDIAN WELLS

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz can replace Novak Djokovic with a victory at the Indian Wells ATP Masters, and the 19-year-old Spaniard says he'll give it all he's got.

"I'm gonna go for it," Alcaraz said on Wednesday as first-round matches got under way in the California desert.

Alcaraz is chasing a third prestigious Masters 1000 title, and if he's successful he'd be just the second player, after compatriot Rafael Nadal, to bag three as a teenager.

The young star will face stiff opposition in former world number one Daniil Medvedev, who rolls into Indian Wells having won three straight tournaments at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai.

Some gloss is gone with Djokovic, who won a 22nd Grand Slam title at the Australian Open

this year, absent because of US restrictions on non-citizens who have not been vaccinated against Covid-19.

Injury forced Nadal out, but eight of the top 10 men in the world are here, including third-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas -- runner-up to Djokovic in Melbourne -- and fourth-ranked Casper Ruud.

Defending champion Taylor Fritz of the United States is seeded fourth ahead of Medvedev.

Fritz beat Nadal in a dramatic final last year to become the first American to win the men's title in Indian Wells since Andre Agassi in 2001.

His current No. 5 in the world rankings makes him the highest-ranked US man since Andy Roddick reached number five in September of 2009.

"Of course there's a lot of great players in this draw who have a

chance to win the tournament, but I say that I have my chances to win the tournament," Alcaraz said.

"For me winning the tournament and being number one again is a really good goal."

Alcaraz downplayed any lingering injury fears after pulling out of the ATP 500 in Acapulco last week with a right hamstring strain.

Alcaraz had been clearly hindered in falling to Cameron Norrie in the Rio Open on February 26, although he'd beaten Norrie seven days earlier in the final at Buenos Aires.

Alcaraz's South American run followed a four-month injury layoff, during which he missed the Paris Masters with an abdominal tear and the Australian Open with a hamstring injury.

However, Alcaraz said he wasn't overly concerned about the spate of injuries.



"I'm not worried about it at all," Alcaraz said, adding that he thought it was largely a matter of "bad luck."

"I'm doing the right things off the court," he said. "I'm doing great work and I just had bad luck sometimes."

While Tsitsipas downplayed his chances on Wednesday, saying he was still struggling with a shoulder injury he sustained after his run to the Australian Open final, Medvedev was understandably bubbling with confidence upon arrival in California.

"I feel great," Medvedev said. "Of course, like always in tennis it's a new week in completely the opposite side of the world, but the level of confidence is there."

"I never had three back-to-back titles, so feeling great."

He's hoping his current hot form can see him change his fortunes at Indian Wells, where he has

yet to reach the quarter-finals in five prior appearances.

"Let's see if I can do it better this year," said Medvedev, who will take on American Brandon Nakashima in his second-round opener. Nakashima ousted veteran compatriot John Isner 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 on Wednesday.

The men's field also features former champions in Cameron Norrie and Dominic Thiem. Norrie won the title 17 months ago when Indian Wells was held in the fall because of a pandemic rescheduling.

Norrie, whose 18 match wins in 2023 are second only to Medvedev's 19, will open against Diego Schwartzman, a 6-1, 6-2 first-round winner over fellow Argentinian Federico Coria.

Thiem, meanwhile, is making his first appearance in Indian Wells since he beat Roger Federer for the 2019 title.

Khawaja guides Aussies to 255/4

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Usman Khawaja combined patience with grit to raise his 14th Test hundred that guided Australia to a comfortable 255 for four as a keen contest between bat and ball marked the opening day of the fourth and final match, here on Thursday.

After dominating the batters in the first three matches of the series, the Indian spinners struggled to trouble the Australians with the Motera track, as anticipated, turning out to be a better wicket.

Khawaja, Australia's best batter on the tour, was determination- personified throughout his six-hour stay as he struck 15 boundaries in his unbeaten 104-run knock.

At stumps the Pakistan-born Khawaja had Cameron Green (49) for company.

As a southpaw, neither does Khawaja have the panache of someone like a David Warner nor the brute power of a Matthew Hayden, who was capable of executing slog sweeps fetching deliveries from wide outside the off-stump.

His game maybe pretty low on aesthetics but is highly impactful as he came across as a batter, who wouldn't try anything which is outside his comfort zone.

Anything pitched on his legs was punished through the leg-side while the occasional cover drive would come out of the closet, like one off Jadeja in the final session.

Otherwise, it was just playing the ball late and rocking on the back-foot, while whipping Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja through the square-leg or mid-wicket region.

It was only fitting that an on-drive off Mohammed Shami (2/65), brought up what would be one of his most cherished Test hundreds that he celebrated with his now-customary leap in the air.

For someone, who faced racism during his early years, with typical Asian stereotype jibes like "Curry Muncher", life did make Khawaja mentally tough and he has shone through time and again during his second coming -- be it Sydney, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Delhi or now in Ahmedabad.



Usman Khawaja, Australia's best batter on the tour, was determination-personified throughout his six-hour stay as he struck 15 boundaries in his unbeaten 104-run knock. At stumps the Pakistan-born Khawaja had Cameron Green (49) for company

It did help that there was no devil on the Motera track and with no significant help on offer, India's spin trio of Ashwin (1/57), Jadeja (1/49) and Axar Patel weren't as effective compared to first three games.

Save Shami's lethal reverse swing to get Peter Handscombe castled, none of the other dismissals came off wicket-taking deliveries and could be attributed to lapse of concentration on part of batters.

It was a track where if one even got deceived in the air, the slowness off the surface ensured that playing on back-foot became second line of defence.

Run scoring wasn't easy but surviving and slowly building an innings wasn't difficult either as Khawaja showed.

Twice Australia lost back-to-back wickets but prior to that and after that, Khawaja remained a constant factor.

He had partnerships of 61 for the opening stand with Travis Head (32), 79 for the third wicket Steve Smith (38) and another 103 for the fifth wicket with Green, who counter-punched towards the end of the day.

The run-rate of 2.83 would show that scoring wasn't very easy, save the first hour when Head hit Umesh Yadav for a flurry of boundaries.

There is nothing in the track and Australia, if they apply themselves well, could post their best total of the series.

Head, in fact, must be feeling horrible as he undid all his good work in the first hour by playing an indiscreet shot. He tried to chip Ashwin over mid-on without reaching to the pitch of the delivery.

Ashwin had just altered the length slightly and deceived Head, who offered the easiest of catches to one of the world's best fielders, Jadeja.

Head got a reprieve while batting on seven when wicketkeeper KS Bharath dropped a regulation catch off Umesh Yadav's bowling. Yadav, who usually invites criticism for his inconsistency, was once again erratic as he gave a lot of boundary balls.

Out of the seven boundaries that Head got, half a dozen came from Yadav's overs.

The end from which Shami bowled, a lot of deliveries kept low and one such ball brought about the downfall of Marnus Labuschagne.

It was an off-cutter and Labuschagne wanted to play the square cut but dragged it back onto the stumps. But then Khawaja took over and made sure Australia had their best opening day of the series.



Sri Lanka 305-6 at stumps on Day 1 vs NZ

AP ■ CHRISTCHURCH

Half centuries by Kusal Mendis and Dimuth Karunaratne helped Sri Lanka reach 305-6 and take the upper hand Thursday on the first day of the first Test against New Zealand.

Mendis made 87 and Sri Lanka captain Karunaratne 50 in a critical partnership which helped tip the first day in Sri Lanka's favor.

At stumps and after only 75 overs in the day, Dhananjaya De Silva was 39 not out and Kasun Rajitha was 16, his highest test score.

Sri Lanka was sent in after losing what seemed an important toss. New Zealand captain Tim Southee said the pitch at Hagley Oval had a "green tinge" and he was happy to take the new ball as part of a Black Caps attack bolstered by a fourth seamer.

Sri Lanka lost an early wicket and had scored only 27 runs at the end of a watchful first hour. Mendis went on the attack in the second hour and reached his 16th half century from 40 balls which had Sri Lanka 120-1 at lunch and was impressive in the conditions.

The 137-run partnership between Mendis and Karunaratne lifted Sri Lanka to 151-2 before both batsmen were out at that score as

Southee and his new ball partner Matt Henry struck back for New Zealand.

Angelo Mathews and Dinesh Chandimal, slowly at first but with growing confidence, built a partnership which was worth 58 runs at tea when Sri Lanka was 210-3. Chandimal especially liked to drive and one through cover was probably the best shot of the day.

Rain briefly delayed the return of players from the tea break but passed quickly and the partnership was 82 when Chandimal was caught by Tom Latham from Southee. He was 39.

The wicket was Southee's 362nd in Tests, taking him past Daniel Vettori into second place on New Zealand's all-time list of test wicket-takers behind Richard Hadlee with 431. Southee also passed Vettori's mark of 705 to become New Zealand's leading wicket-taker across all three formats.

Mathews also reached an important milestone when, at 47, he passed 7,000 runs in Tests, achieved at an average of 45.

He was out at that score, caught by Tom Latham at second slip off Henry and Niroshan Dickwell fall soon after for 7, lbw to spinner Michael Bracewell.

Rotation important for pacers: Mhambrey



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India's call to rotate pacers over the course of a spinner dominated Border-Gavaskar trophy has been questioned but bowling coach Paras Mhambrey insisted on Thursday that their decision will benefit the speedsters in the long term.

While Mohammad Shami and Mohammed Siraj played the first two Tests, it was Umesh Yadav who got a home Test after a long time in Indore at the expense of Shami, who was rested from the game.

For the fourth and final Test,

Shami is back in the playing XI while Siraj has been rested, giving a Umesh a rare back-to-back appearance in a home series.

"You have to take a call as you also have to look at the individual workload of each bowlers," Mhambrey said when asked if pacers' rhythm gets affected due to this break in game time.

"I think the way we looked at Shami, we needed to give him that break and it was an opportunity for us that someone like Siraj or Umesh also get a game.

"Looking ahead after this

series, we have the World Championship (final) and we need to look at that as well. You have to at times, rotate bowlers and it is important for players as well," he outlined.

Umesh, who was the best Indian bowler on view during the Australian first innings at Indore, conceded as many as 11 boundaries in his 0/58 in 15 overs going at an economy rate of nearly 4 runs per over.

"Ideally, you want a bowler to have two or three games consecutively but in these conditions, it might not happen.

"He (Umesh) looked in

great rhythm in Indore in that spell that he bowled and he picked three quick wickets and there are days when you land up don't getting a rhythm.

"May be that first spell that he bowled (to Travis Head) but later on he put the ball in right areas and was effective for us," Mhambrey said in his defence.

'WE LEAKED RUNS'

Mhambrey termed the Motera track as a batting belter but expected that spinners will get some purchase off the track from the third day.

"Looks like a batting track. We expected that having seen the wicket yesterday, unlike other three venues that we played at," said Mhambrey.

The former India medium pacer felt that bowlers conceded extra runs in the last 10 overs.

"First session, they batted well," he conceded.

"Initially the runs that were leaked and second session was good for us but as the ball got old, run scoring became difficult and the last session became difficult.

"We conceded 56 in last 10 overs and I thought the game slightly drifted there from us. End of day, if it was 220 for us, it would have been a good for us. Yes, we gave slightly more runs in last session."

Mhambrey opined that the wicket will remain firm even on second day.

"No, I think as the game progress, may be third session tomorrow there could a little turn and you saw a couple of balls did turn but nothing compared to what you saw earlier.

"You may see little turn from third day, there will be little help for spinners."

It's a ruthless environment: Agar on being sent back home from India tour

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

AGAR HAD LANDED IN INDIA AS ONE OF THE SENIOR SPINNERS IN THE AUSTRALIAN SQUAD BUT RETURNED HOME AFTER NOT FINDING A PLACE IN THE XI FOR THE FIRST TWO TESTS

Left-arm spinner Ashton Agar harbours no "ill feeling" after being sent back from the Indian Test tour without a game because he knows it's "ruthless" in top-level cricket.

Agar had landed in India as one of the senior spinners in the Australian squad but returned home after not finding a place in the XI for the first two Tests with uncapped off-spinner Todd Murphy and left-armer Matthew Kuhnemann preferred over him.

The 29-year-old responded by picking up five wickets for Western Australia in the Marsh Cup final against South Australia.

"I felt I wasn't bowling as well as I needed to be. It's a very clear direction for me now to just work on it and improve," Agar was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"I harbour no ill will or ill feeling at all. I'm very well supported in that (Australian) camp and they've kept in constant communication with me, so it's all in a good place.

"I've been a professional cricketer for ten years now, so I'm far more resilient than when I started. It's a tough game, it's a

ruthless environment, and that's how it should be because it's the pinnacle of the sport."

Agar has taken nine wickets in five Tests, and went wicket-less against South Africa at the SCG Test in January. In limited overs cricket, he has claimed 66 wickets.

"I don't have a lot of cricket coming up. I've chucked my name in the ring for The Hundred... I would like to play cricket in the winter. But the next big target is the World Cup," he said.

Mooney out of WPL, Sneha named GG captain

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Beth Mooney will take no further part in the Women's Premier League. The captain and opener of Gujarat Giants had suffered a calf strain in the opening match of the league and had to leave the field after facing just three balls.

One of the world's leading female batters, Mooney had come to the tournament in cracking form, right after winning the player-of-the-match award for her 74 not out in Australia's final against South Africa at the T20 World Cup at Cape Town. Interestingly, the woman who top-scored for South Africa in that match, Laura



Wolvaardt, is her replacement.

Wolvaardt, one of the most stylish batters in women's cricket, had surprisingly found no takers at the auction. "I am so excited to be joining the Gujarat Giants," she said. "It is an incredible opportunity and I'm very grateful to be able to play in the WPL. I look forward to meeting up with the team and cannot wait to get going."

She will have to wait at least until March 11, when Giants is scheduled to play its next match, against Delhi Capitals.

Mooney's is likely to take four to six weeks. Sneha Rana, who had been leading Giants in her absence, has officially been named the captain.



MI down Delhi by 8 wickets in WPL

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

All-round Mumbai Indians asserted their supremacy in the Women's Premier League with an eight-wicket thrashing of Delhi Capitals in a top of the table clash here on Thursday.

Saika Ishaque, Isabelle Wong and Hayley Matthews — each with three wickets apiece — led Mumbai Indians' charge with the ball to bundle out Delhi Capitals for a mere 105 in 18 overs.

With a small target to chase, Mumbai romped home to their third win in a row in 15 overs

with captain Harmanpreet Kaur (11 not out) and Nat Sciver-Brunt (23 not out) taking them past the finish line.

Chasing 106, the opening pair of Yastika Bhatia (41) and Hayley Matthews (32) knocked off 47 runs in the powerplay and shared 65 runs for the first wicket to ensure a big win for their team.

For Delhi, it was their first loss of the inaugural season.

Yastika played her most convincing innings in the tournament so far, with the hard-hitting Matthews also cashing in on the bad deliveries.

B'desh beat Eng for 1st time in T20Is

AP ■ CHATTOGRAM

Najmul Hossain's 30-ball 51 led Bangladesh's defeat of world champion England by six wickets with two overs to spare in their first T20I on Thursday.

Najmul batted from the fourth over to the 13th, and captain Shakib Al Hasan completed the victory with the winning boundary through deep backward point in an unbeaten 34 off 24.

Bangladesh reached 158-4 after England was restricted to 156-6 in the first of three T20Is.



The hosts made a brisk start to the chase. Rony Talukdar returned after eight years to play only his second game and made 21 off 14.

That brought in Najmul and he responded with four straight boundaries against fast bowler Mark Wood. Najmul brought up his third T20 fifty with a single off offspinner Moeen Ali and Wood returned to rattle his stumps.

Shakib took over steering the side on a slow pitch and managed it serenely in Bangladesh's first T20 win over

England.

Made to bat first, skipper Jos Buttler and Phil Salt gave England an ominous start. Buttler struck 67 off 42 with four fours and as many sixes while Salt hit 38.

They formed an 80-run partnership before left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed made the breakthrough by removing Salt.

Buttler survived on 19 and was dismissed amid a collapse of four wickets for 12 runs. England took just 26 runs from the last powerplay.

Pogba dropped for Juventus' Freiburg clash

TURIN: Paul Pogba has been dropped for the first leg of Juventus' Europa League last-16 tie with Freiburg for "disciplinary reasons", a club source said on Thursday.

Pogba has missed almost the entire season with a knee injury and was not in the squad list for the match.

The source said that coach Massimiliano Allegri had left Pogba out after the 29-year-old arrived late to a team meeting on Wednesday evening. PTI