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PAK: BITTEN BY ITS
OWN CREATIONS

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BIDEN SEEKS TO ASSUAGE FEARS
AFTER SVB COLLAPSE

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SENSEX, NIFTY PLUNGE
TO 5-MONTH LOW

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY MARCH 14, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3

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Naatu Naatu, Elephant Whisperers script Oscar history

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Naatu Naatu”, the irrepressible, fun number from the film “RRR”, and documentary short “The Elephant Whisperers” made Oscar history for India on Monday with one Academy Award each, the two wins showcasing cinema beyond Bollywood and the growing might of the Indian non-feature segment.

This is the first time two India-made productions have bagged the cinema world's biggest prize. Dancers took over the stage at Los Angeles' Dolby Theatre, recreating the hugely popular hook steps from the four-minute Telugu track, and actor Deepika Padukone introduced the song to loud cheers.

It was not just a night for India. The 95th Academy Awards will also be remembered for recognising Asian talent with “Everything Everywhere All at Once” bag-

ging seven awards, including Best Film, Best Director for Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan, Best Actress for Malaysia's Michelle Yeoh and Best Supporting Actor for Vietnamese American Ke Huy Quan.

“All That Breathes”, Shaunak Sen's climate change documentary set in Delhi, lost out to Canada's “Navalny” on Russian dissident leader Alexei Navalny in the Documentary Feature category.

The win for “Naatu Naatu”, “Naacho Naacho” in Hindi, composed by MM Keeravaani and penned by Chandrabose in SS Rajamouli's blockbuster film, is the fourth non-English song to win an Oscar in the category and the first song in foreign language since “Jai Ho” in 2009 to bag the prize.

“Naatu Naatu” is as much a jubilant chorus as was “Jai Ho”, the foot-tapping number by AR Rahman and Gulzar from the British film “Slumdog



MM Keeravaani, left, and Chandrabose, winners of the award for best original song for 'Naatu Naatu' from 'RRR', pose in the press room at the Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles on Sunday

AP/PTI

Millionaire”.

As news of the Oscar win came in, “Naatu Naatu” was the buzz term for the day.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi and a host of showbiz celebs, including

Rajinikanth and Shah Rukh

Khan hailed the Oscar wins.

Congratulating the team for the prestigious honour, the Prime Minister said on Twitter, “Exceptional! The popularity of ‘Naatu Naatu’ is global. It will be a song that will be remembered for years to come... India



is elated and proud. #Oscars.”

“Congratulations to @EarthSpectrum, @guneeetm and the entire team of ‘The Elephant Whisperers’ for this honour. Their work wonderfully highlights the importance of sustainable development and living in harmony with nature. #Oscars,” he added.

“The Elephant Whisperers”, by Kartiki Gonsalves and Gunet Monga, which explores the bond between humans and an abandoned elephant calf in a Tamil Nadu sanctuary, is India's first win in the Documentary Short

category. “Smile Pinki” and “Period. End of Sentence”, both set in India, had also won in the same category but they were foreign productions.

Gonsalves dedicated her win to “motherland India”. Her producer Monga did not speak but struck an exultant pose, lifting the coveted golden statuette high in the air.

“... To all the women watching.... The future is audacious and the future is here. Let's go! Jai hind,” Monga wrote in an Instagram post moments later.

The trophy for Original Song was presented to



Kartiki Gonsalves, left, and Gunet Monga pose with the award for best documentary short film for ‘The Elephant Whisperer’ in the press room at the Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles on Sunday

AP/PTI

Keeravaani and Chandrabose by “Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery” co-stars Janelle Monae and Kate Hudson.

“Naatu Naatu” was competing against “Applause” (sung by Sofia Carson) from “Tell It Like a Woman”, “Hold My Hand” (Lady Gaga) from “Top

Gun: Maverick”, “Lift Me Up” (Rihanna) from “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever” and “This Is a Life” (Son Lux, Mitski, David Byrne) from “Everything Everywhere All at Once”.

Continued on Page 2**Related reports on Page 2****See Edit: Celebrate but...**

CAPSULE

REMOVE MOSQUE INSIDE
ALLAHABAD HC, RULES SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday directed authorities to remove a mosque from the premises of the Allahabad High Court within 3 months, telling the petitioners opposing the demolition that the structure stood on a terminated lease and they can't claim it as a matter of right to continue.

P4

MAN DIES OF COVID-19
IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

Shimla: A 75-year-old man died after contracting Covid in Shimla on Monday.

149 PLACED IN ‘NO FLY LIST’ SINCE 2020: GOVT
New Delhi: The Civil Aviation Ministry on Monday said 149 fliers have been placed in the “No Fly List” from 2020.

**RETAIL INFLATION DIPS
MARGINALLY TO 6.44%**
New Delhi: Retail inflation dipped marginally to 6.44 per cent in February, mainly on account of a slight easing in prices of food and fuel items though it remained above the Reserve Bank's comfort level of 6 per cent for the second month in a row.

P10

Rahul's democracy barb rocks Houses

NDA leaders seek
Cong ex-chief's
apology; Cong
sticks to its guns
on JPC on Adani

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As anticipated, the first day of the second part of the Budget Session of Parliament witnessed verbal jousts between the ruling party and the Opposition on the issue of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's “democracy under attack” remarks in London. The BJP demanded an apology from Rahul.

The war of words between the BJP and the Opposition escalated after the Congress again sought a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the Adani-



Proceedings of the Lok Sabha underway during Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday

PTI

Hindenburg issue.

The Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha could not function with multiple adjournments till Tuesday. Soon after the obituary references in the Lok Sabha, Defence Minister and Deputy Leader of the Lok Sabha Rajnath Singh stood up and said Rahul has tried to defame India in London with his remarks on Indian democracy.

Also, Rajnath requested Speaker Om Birla that the House should condemn Rahul's

remarks and the Congress leader should be directed to tender an apology.

Even before Rajnath could speak on the issue, the ruling NDA members shouted slogans seeking Rahul's apology.

To which Congress member protested vehemently and came to the Well of the House. Some of the BJP leaders, including Union Minister Giriraj Singh, sought a sedition case against Rahul.

Continued on Page 2Pak's anti-India
terror push bid to
hide failures: MEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan continues to stoke terrorism in India and there is no let-up in cross-border terrorism, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in its annual report for the year 2022 said on Monday.

It also noted Islamabad is yet to show sincerity in delivering justice to the families of the victims of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

The report released on Monday mentioned Pakistan

continues to engage in “hostile and fabricated propaganda” to vilify India and to divert attention from its domestic political and economic failures.

It said India desires normal relations with Pakistan and has maintained its stand that issues, if any, should be resolved bilaterally and peacefully, in an atmosphere free of terror and violence.

Continued on Page 2
See P4: Govt sets ₹1.75 lakh crore defence manufacturing target by 2024-25

Constitution Bench to take
call on same-sex marriage

Issue is of ‘seminal’
importance, says SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday referred the pleas seeking legal validation of same-sex marriages to a five-judge constitution bench for adjudication, saying it is a “very seminal issue”.

A bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said the submissions on the issue involve an interplay between constitutional rights on the one hand and special legislative



enactments, including the Special Marriage Act, on the other. The Constitution Bench is expected to hear the case on April 18.

The Centre has opposed the petitions seeking legal validation of same-sex marriages, claiming they will cause a “complete havoc” with the delicate balance of personal laws and accepted societal values.

Continued on Page 2Winter nights' haze in Delhi in 2019
caused by biomass burning: Study

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A study conducted by Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) Delhi and Kanpur, along with researchers from Paul Scherrer Institut (PSI) Switzerland and University Helsinki, Finland, and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), found that high amount of particulate pollution in Delhi during the winter nights in 2019 was caused by biomass burning.

The study, published in Nature Geoscience journal, was conducted in Delhi during the winter months of 2019



where aerosol size distribution and molecular composition of ambient aerosols and gases were measured.

“Delhi often experiences

high amounts of particulate pollution also termed as haze. However the exact reasons behind their formation was hitherto unknown.

“The exhaustive research unearthed the reason behind the severe haze events experienced during winters in Delhi which is one of the world's most-populated cities,” said Sachchida Nand Tripathi, from IIT Kanpur who was the principal investigator in the study.

“The uncontrolled biomass burning for residential heating and cooking in the Indo-Gangetic plain gives rise to ultrafine particles, affecting the health of five per cent of the world's population and impacting the regional climate,” he said.

Continued on Page 2

Frame OROP payment plan by Mar 20: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday said the Ministry of Defence cannot take law in its own hands by issuing communication on payment of One Rank-One Pension (OROP) arrears to pensioners of the armed forces in four installments.

The SC sought a payment plan by March 20 from the

Ministry.

Noting that over four lakh pensioners have died since the OROP litigation started in 2016, the court also asked the Defence Ministry to immediately withdraw its communication and told Attorney General R Venkataramani to prepare a note giving details of the quantum of payment to be paid, the modalities to be adopted and what's the priori-

ty segment.

The January 20, 2023, communication had said the OROP arrears will be paid in four equal installments to ex-servicemen.

The court observed that the Defence Ministry's January 20 communication was “directly contrary” to its verdict on March 16, 2022, that had directed payment of complete arrears within three months

and it cannot unilaterally say it will pay OROP arrears in four installments.

During the Monday hearing, the Attorney General submitted that the Centre has paid to some pensioners and will be paying the rest of them one installment of OROP arrears by March 31, but needed some more time for further disbursement.

Continued on Page 2

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LIC / P / 2022 - 23 / 14 / Eng

‘Exceptional’, Modi hails Oscar feat

Top political leaders from T, AP, film personalities shower praise

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Former vice president M Venkaiah Naidu, Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, his Andhra Pradesh counterpart Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy and a number of other leaders from the two states and Telugu film personalities on Monday hailed ‘Naatu Naatu’, the foot-tapping chartbuster from S S Rajamouli’s Telugu period action film ‘RRR’, winning the Oscar award.

Congratulating the team for the prestigious honour, the Prime Minister said on Twitter, “Exceptional! The popularity of ‘Naatu Naatu’ is global. It will be a song that will be remembered for years to come... India is elated and proud. #Oscars.”

“Congratulations to @EarthSpectrum, @guneetm and the entire team of ‘The Elephant Whisperers’ for this honour. Their work wonder-

fully highlights the importance of sustainable development and living in harmony with nature. #Oscars,” he added.

“Congratulations to composer Keeravani garu, lyricist Chandra Bose, ace director Rajamouli garu, & the crew of #RRR movie for making history by winning the prestigious #Oscar Award for the Best Original Song for the popular number, #NaatuNaatu,” Venkaiah Naidu tweeted.

Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan also took to Twitter to congratulate the ‘RRR’ team. “Congratulations to @RRRMovie team You made INDIANS & telugu film industry Proud by #Oscar,” she said.

It is a matter of pride for all Telugus that a Telugu movie has won the Oscar award which is considered the most prestigious recognition in films at the international level, Rao said.

Union Tourism and



Culture Minister G Kishan Reddy also said the Oscar recognition to the ‘Naatu Naatu’ song is a matter of pride for all Telugus.

He wished that the Telugu film industry should get more such global recognition with quality films.

Congratulating the team, AP Chief Minister Jagan

Mohan Reddy said the song had amplified notations in a variety of genres, including pace, effect, beat and depth, showcasing the Telugu prowess at an international scale, creating history. Reddy said the Academy award is an icing on the cake for Indian cinema which recently celebrated its centenary.

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu complimented the film’s director Rajamouli, composer M M Keeravani, actors Ram Charan and Junior NTR and others who are involved in making the song.

“Naatu Naatu’ has sealed its place in history by winning the Academy Award for Best Original Song at the #Oscars. This is probably the finest moment for Indian Cinema and Telugus achieving it is even more special,” Chandrababu Naidu tweeted.

Telugu mega star Chiranjeevi praised Rajamouli, Keeravani, lyricist Chandrabose and others who were involved in making the song.

“NaatuNaatu ON TOP OF THE WORLD !!! And THE OSCAR for the Best Original Song Goes To : Take a Bow .. @mmkeeravaani garu & @boselyricist kaalabhairava 7 R a h u s i p l i g u n j

#PremRakshith @tarak9999 @AlwaysRamCharan And the One & Only @ssrajamouli,” he tweeted.

Chiranjeevi’s son Ram Charan is one of the protagonists in ‘RRR’.

Speaking to reporters, Chiranjeevi said it is a matter of pride that the greatness of Telugu films is now recognised at the international level as Telugus were once referred to as ‘Madrasis’ within India.

Junior NTR, one of the heroes in ‘RRR’, expressed happiness over the Oscar win and congratulated Rajamouli, Keeravani and others.

“And we did it...

#Oscars95 #NaatuNaatu #RRRMovie Congratulations @mmkeeravaani Sir ji, Jakkanna srajamouli, @bose-lyricist garu, the entire team and the nation,” Junior NTR, a grandson of matinee idol and former chief minister N T Rama Rao, said.

Man gets death for stabbing teen girl 34 times in Gujarat after she rejected advances

PTI ■ RAJKOT

A court in Gujarat’s Rajkot Adistrict on Monday sentenced to death a man accused of brutally killing a minor girl by stabbing her 34 times for rejecting his proposal.

The court of additional district and sessions judge R R Chaudhary at Jetpur sentenced to death Jayesh Sarvaiya (26) for stabbing a Class 11 student 34 times for refusing to enter into a relationship with him.

The accused had also injured the girl’s brother who had tried to intervene during the attack that took place in March 2021.

The court held that this was a “rarest of the rare case” as per the definition given by the Supreme Court in the Nirbhaya case, special public prosecutor Janak Patel said. Sarvaiya was booked under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences

(POCSO) Act.

“The court awarded the death sentence and imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 on the accused under section 302 of the IPC... It was a kind of murder that shook the entire community and hence, was taken seriously,” Patel said.

The convict has been given a month’s time to make an appeal in the high court, he said. The accused and the victim were residents of Jetalsar village in Jetpur taluka of the district. The man had been harassing the victim, and on March 16, 2021, he went to her house with a proposal. Angered by her refusal, Sarvaiya thrashed the victim and stabbed her multiple times outside her house when she tried to escape.

Shocked by the brutality of the killing, locals had demanded that the accused be given capital punishment and even observed a bandh and took out a protest march.

Govt seeks Parliament nod to spend additional ₹1.48L cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Monday sought the approval of Parliament to spend an additional Rs 1.48 lakh crore for the current financial year 2022-23 as part of the second batch of supplementary demands for grants.

Of the total, an additional fund of Rs 36,325 crore is being sought for payment towards fertiliser subsidy, said the second batch of supple-

mentary demands for grants tabled in the Lok Sabha by Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary.

This includes additional subsidy outgo of Rs 21,000 crore for P&K (phosphorus and potassium) and Rs 15,325.36 crore for urea.

In addition, the Government has pegged the fund requirement for additional transfers to the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) at Rs 25,000 crore.

Frame OROP payment...

From Page 1

“First withdraw (your) January 20 notification on payment of OROP arrears, then we will consider your application for time,” a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala sternly told Venkataramani.

“Attorney General, the Ministry cannot take law in its own hands by issuing such communication on payment of OROP arrears in four installments. This January 20, communication is directly contrary

to our verdict.”

The bench told Venkataramani that the concern of the court is that ex-servicemen get their amount at the earliest and there should not be any delay in payment of the arrears especially those who are above 60-70 years.

“We want that there has to be some kind of categorisation and older people should be paid the arrears first. Over four lakh pensioners have died since the litigation started.”

It posted the matter for further hearing on March 20 and

asked the Centre to file a note by that date giving specific details as asked.

Venkataramani said he is personally in touch with the ministry over the payment of the arrears but the Government has to look into the entire fiscal position and that there are several operational hurdles looking at the huge number of 25 lakh ex-servicemen.

“After the tabulation chart was prepared and final vetting by the ministry over seven lakh pensioners have been paid the arrears,” he said.

From Page 1

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi asked, where was democracy when fundamental rights were “trampled” during the Emergency and where was democracy when an ordinance, duly approved by the Union Cabinet, was torn (by Rahul during the UPA Government).

On his part, Birla said democracy in India is strong and getting stronger.

“Let the House function properly. Everyone will get an opportunity. Slogan-shouting is not good. People of this country have great faith in our democracy. Even foreign MPs and chairs, who often visit us, accept this,” Birla said.

As the House reconvened after being adjourned in the first half of the day, the BJP MPs and those from the Treasury Benches raised slogans seeking an apology from Rahul over his remarks.

The Opposition benches hit back, shouting slogans demanding a JPC probe into the Adani-Hindenburg issue.

Senior Congress leader and Leader of the Party in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan

Chowdhury wrote to Birla demanding that certain remarks of Rajnath and Pralhad seeking Rahul’s apology over his “democracy under attack” comments be expunged.

He cited Rule 352, which provides that a member, while speaking, shall not make a personal reference by way of leveling an allegation, imputing a motive to or questioning the bona fide of any other member of the House. “Today, both the Ministers made unsubstantiated remarks against our leader without a prior notice and no opportunity was accorded to the members of his party to refute the allegations,” he said.

The Raja Sabha too was adjourned for the day on Monday as ruling BJP and Opposition MPs traded charges over the same issue. As the Upper House resumed for the afternoon Session, having been adjourned earlier in the pre-lunch session, Leader of the House and Union Minister Piyush Goyal said he had raised a serious matter in the morning regarding a senior Congress leader going abroad and stating that “democracy is in danger” in India and even urged the US and Europe to interfere in the coun-

try’s affairs.

This House must condemn remarks by such a person, Goyal said without taking Rahul’s name.

Till the time he (Rahul) apologises for the allegations he made against the Indian press, Indian judiciary, Indian media, Election Commission and the Indian Army, the country will not forgive him, the Leader of the House asserted.

Leader of the Opposition and Congress MP Mallikarjun Kharge objected to Goyal’s demand citing two previous rulings, implying that no member of the Rajya Sabha can raise an issue regarding a person who is not a member of the House and certainly one who is a member of the Lok Sabha.

He cited a ruling given by late VV Giri on June 19, 1967 that “a member of one House should not use the freedom of speech on the floor of the House to make allegations or charge against the members of the other House” and another one made on March 17, 1983 by the then Vice-Chairman in favour of LK Advani which stated “before referring to a member of the other House, one has to exercise a lot of care and caution...”

Naatu Naatu, Elephant...

From Page 1

An overwhelmed Keeravaani broke into song to describe his feeling. “I grew up listening to The Carpenters and now here I am with the Oscars.”

“There was only one wish on my mind, so was Rajamouli’s and our families’ -- ‘RRR’ has to win... Pride of every Indian... must put me on the top of the world,” Keeravani said in tune to The Carpenters’ much loved 1970s song “Top of the World”.

Chandrabose simply signed off with a “Namaste”.

As is the custom, all five nominees get their Oscar moment by performing the song on stage.

“Naatu Naatu”, which translates into bucolic in Telugu, has had everyone swaying to its catchy rhythm this entire award season. When its turn came, Padukone found herself pausing at least thrice to let the cheers subside. “Do you know ‘Naatu Naatu’? Because, if not, you are about to,” she said. And the dancers from different ethnicities took over, kicking their legs, tap dancing and moving in perfect sync against the backdrop of Ukraine’s presidential palace where the song was shot in the film.

On stage were singers Rahul Sipligunj and Kaala Bhairava.

Once over, the audience, including the who’s who of Hollywood and world cinema, gave them a standing ovation.

It took more than 100 variations and many months of rehearsals before the moves were finalised, choreographer Prem Rakshith told PTI.

This is the third major international recognition for the Telugu song after Golden Globe and Critics Choice Award wins. “RRR” (Rise Roar Revolt), a pre-independence fictional story, follows two real-life Indian revolutionaries - Alluri Sitarama Raju (Ram Charan) and Komaram Bheem (Jr NTR) - in the 1920s. It was released in Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam.

“Naatu Naatu” celebrates the inclusive spirit of dance and bonhomie and features Charan and Jr NTR matching steps to its catchy rhythm.

The film’s team described the win as a “surreal moment”.

“We’re blessed that #RRRMovie is the first feature film to bring INDIAs first ever #Oscar in the Best Song Category with #NaatuNaatu! No words can describe this surreal moment. Dedicating this to all our amazing fans across the world. THANK YOU!! JAI HIND!” read the post on the official Twitter page

of “RRR”.

“Whatever wins up there, an Indian thing, is going to raise the profile of India. I love that song,” Rahman told PTI ahead of Oscar 2023.

“Congratulations @mmkeeravaani garu and @boselyricist garu ...As predicted and well deserved. Jaiho to both of you and the #RRR team!! #RRRatOSCARS,” he tweeted after the Oscars.

He also congratulated the makers of “The Elephant Whisperers”, saying, “...You’ve opened the flood gates of inspiration for indian film makers! Jai ho #bosswomen.”

The Netflix documentary bested “Haulout”, “How Do You Measure a Year?”, “The Martha Mitchell Effect” and “Stranger at the Gate” to scoop the trophy.

India has never won an Oscar in the International Film category or the Best Foreign Film as it was known earlier. Bhanu Athaiya was the first Indian to win the Oscars after she was conferred the Academy Award for Best Costume Design in Richard Attenborough’s “Gandhi”, which bagged eight trophies in 1983.

Directing legend Satyajit Ray was conferred an honorary Oscar in 1992, just a month before his death.

Pak’s...

From Page 1

At the same time, it said the onus is on Pakistan to create such a conducive environment.

“Pakistan continues to engage in hostile and fabricated propaganda to vilify India, and to divert attention from its domestic political and economic failures,” it said. “India has completely and unequivocally rejected all actions and statements by Pakistan on matters which are completely internal to India,”

MEA said, adding there is a greater understanding among countries that J&K is an integral part of India and that the matters related to it are internal to the country.

“Despite India’s persistent urging that Pakistan respect its January 2004 commitment of not allowing its soil or territory under its control to be used for terrorism against India, there was no let-up in cross-border terrorism, infiltration and illegal smuggling of arms into India across the Line of Control (LoC) and international boundary,” the MEA said.

Constitution Bench to take call on same-sex marriage

From Page 1

The bench, also comprising Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala, said this is a matter which is important enough to be decided by a constitution bench of five-judges.

“Having due regard to the broader context of the petitions before this court, the inter-relationship between the statutory regime and constitutional rights, we are of the considered view that it would be appropriate if the issues raised are resolved by a constitution bench of five-judges of this court...,” the bench said while referring to Article 145 (3) of the Constitution, while terming it a “very seminal issue”.

“We accordingly direct that the hearing of these petitions be placed before a constitution bench,” the apex court said while posting the pleas for hearing on April 18.

Article 145(3) of Indian Constitution says there should at least five judges to hear cases that involve “a substantial question of law as to the interpretation” of the Constitution, or any reference under article 143, which deals with the power of the President of India to consult the Supreme Court of India.

Emphasising that the question of granting legal sanction to a relationship is essentially a function of the legislature, the Centre said the issue may have

impact on statue like the one for adoption if recognition is granted to same-sex marriage.

“The adopted child of a lesbian couple or of a gay couple does not have to be necessarily a lesbian or a gay,” the bench told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who was representing the Centre.

The court said in the batch of pleas, the petitioners have sought recognition of the rights of couple of the same gender to marry, and while relying upon the apex court verdicts on right to privacy and decriminalising section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, they have asserted broader constitutional entitlements arising out of right to life and personal liberty,

right to dignity and others.

The bench said one of the issues raised before it also relates to the rights of transgender couples to marry.

When one of the advocates urged the court that the proceedings in the matter be live-streamed, the bench said hearings before the Constitution benches are already live-streamed.

Mehta told the bench that marriage is not just a contract in case of Hindu law which it is in the Mohammedan law.

“When the question of granting recognition, legal sanction to a relationship is concerned, that is essentially a function of the legislature and for more than one reason,” he

said. Giving an example, Mehta said the moment the marriage as a recognised institution between two persons of the same-sex is accepted, the question of adoption comes.

“Parliament will have to examine because Parliament will reflect the will of the people.

“Parliament will have to examine what could be the position of the psychology of a child who has seen either two men as parents or two women as parents...,” he said.

Solicitor General also urged the bench that arguments in the matter should not be cut-short as the judgment on it will affect the society as a whole.

Winter nights’ haze in Delhi in 2019 caused...

From Page 1

Regulating the uncontrolled biomass-combustion emissions may help inhibit nocturnal haze formation and improve health.

The study becomes important as air pollution is responsible for 18 per cent of the total annual premature deaths in India,” he added.

The measurements helped calculate growth of aerosols during night time along with the sources of aerosols and also the sources of gases, it said.

“The study found that very high growth rates (tens of nanometer per hour) of aerosols, especially for those

smaller than 100 nanometers (nanoparticles), have been found in unfavourable new particle formation conditions compared to other places in the world, leading to haze formation in an span of few hours during extreme pollution events,” it said.

It said the molecular information about aerosols clearly showed that organic vapours from biomass burning contributed to the growth of nano particles. “It was also found that the composition of particles, whose sizes were greater than 100 nano meter particles, was dominated by ammonium and chloride species.

“Simultaneously, measurements of

gases at molecular level showed that the biomass burning sources were their chief source which has preferential condensation on nano particles,” he said. Tripathi pointed out that thermodynamic modelling of gaseous partitioning confirmed the observational findings.

“The study points out that the reduction of uncontrolled combustion, especially during conducive weather conditions, may limit the amount of super-saturated vapours available for nanoparticle growth and hence may be an effective strategy for the mitigation of nocturnal particulate number during haze in Delhi,” he said.

Won't revise power subsidy scheme but will simplify it: Atishi

LG was perhaps briefed incorrectly as DERC has withdrawn its statutory advice, says Power Min

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Power Minister Atishi on Monday said that the Delhi Government has no plan to revise its power subsidy scheme and it will continue without any restrictions of sanctioned load to consumers.

The Minister said that the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) had issued a statutory advice to the Delhi Government in 2020, asking it to consider restricting electricity subsidy to the poor and needy consumers. "The DERC withdrew the advisory on January 6 this year, saying the issue did not fall under its jurisdiction," she added.

Last week, Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) VK Saxena asked Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to direct the Power Department to place the DERC advisory before the Council of



Ministers and take a decision within 15 days. "The Prime Minister wants to discontinue the power subsidy in Delhi and forced Delhi L-G to obstruct Kejriwal Government's power subsidy by hook or by crook. The L-G is pressurizing the Power Department to withdraw power subsidy based on flawed legal advice," said Atishi adding that the AAP Government is committed to ensure round-the-clock power

supply. "There is no plan to revise the subsidy scheme as was reported recently. The LG was perhaps briefed incorrectly because the DERC has withdrawn its statutory advice," Atishi said.

She also said the Government will "simplify" the process for consumers applying for subsidy or giving it up. Last year, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal declared that only those who apply for the subsidy will get it.

Atishi said the DERC has stated that its advice was legally "incorrect" and it could give advice to the Government only on four matters excluding subsidy. The consumers have to apply online as well as offline to get a 100 per cent subsidy on consumption of 200 units per month and 50 per cent subsidy (up to Rs 800) on monthly consumption of 201 to 400 units.

The LG's instruction was based on a report by the Chief Secretary that said the DERC had advised the Delhi Government in October 2020 to extend the power subsidy to consumers with a sanctioned load of either up to 3KW or up to 5KW, as it will cover almost 95 per cent of the total domestic consumers and save the Government up to Rs 316 crore.

Atishi alleged that the L-G's instruction hinted at "malafide intent" to create hurdles in the Kejriwal Government's work. She added that around 95 per cent domestic power consumers who earlier availed subsidy have applied for it so far. She justified the power subsidy, saying the Government's revenue has increased and its budget size has gone up from Rs 30,000 crore in 2015 to Rs 75,000 crore at present. "Also,

it's not right in principle that Government decides consumption by the people and what electronic gadgets they use and puts restriction on it.

The Government has just given an opportunity to those who want to give up subsidy," she said. "In order dated 06.01.2023, DERC had recalled its prior advice to Delhi government on curtailing power subsidy to consumers having connections of fixed load above 5kW or 3kW.

After detailed examination of various legal provisions of Electricity Act 2003 and SC judgments, DERC had concluded that it has no legal basis or jurisdiction to advise the Delhi government on withdrawal of subsidy," Atishi added. She said the government was not in favour of it as it was unfeasible. She said the current system of application

by consumers to avail subsidy will be re-launched in April making the process simpler so that they could do so in a 'yes' or 'no' method or likewise.

The Power Minister also said the Government will soon come up with a summer plan for uninterrupted power supply with a common dashboard for micro observation of power cuts. She said the discoms have anticipated peak power demand of 8,000 MW this summer.

On the DERC issue, the AAP has threatened to file defamation case, saying let LG say it on record and they will sue him for defamation. "He is a criminal who assaulted a lady Medha Patkar and is being tried for the same in a Gujarat Court. He has no sense of the constitutional post that he holds", the AAP said in a statement.

Kejriwal Govt making misleading statements, alleges L-G's office

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Reacting to the Delhi Power Minister Atishi's statement that power subsidy will be continued, without any restrictions of sanctioned load to consumers, sources at Lieutenant-Governor's (L-G) Secretariat said that having been caught red handed in the act of benefiting and providing undue financial favours to private DISCOMS, especially BSES, in the name of poor people, the AAP Government and its functionaries are trying to make baseless, false and misleading statements. "Now that their scam of helping the DIS-

COMS to get kickbacks stands exposed, they are trying to redeem themselves in the eyes of the people. The LG in none of his communication has even suggested, leave apart asking the AAP Government to withdraw subsidies.

He has repeatedly asked for subsidy to be given to the poor who are deserving, rather than to private power companies," sources at LG Secretariat said.

"It will be better if the Government stops misleading people behind fig leaves provided by withdrawn DERC orders, which were obviously withdrawn after the scam came to light," sources added.

66% hike in allowances, pay of Delhi MLAs, Mins

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the President's nod, the salaries and allowances of Delhi MLAs and Ministers have been increased by more than 66 per cent. According to a notification from the Law Department of the Delhi government, the MLAs will now get Rs 90,000 every month, an increase from Rs 54,000.

A notification to this effect was issued by the Delhi government. The hike comes after a gap of 12 years. This comes after a proposal was sent to the president clearing the way for increased salary to the lawmakers of the city.

The Delhi Assembly, in July last year, had passed bills pertaining to the hike in pay for the MLAs claiming that they were the lowest-paid lawmakers in the country.

Their monthly basic salary has been increased from Rs 12,000 to Rs 30,000. Their constituency allowance has been raised from Rs 18,000 to Rs 25,000, while the conveyance allowance has been hiked from Rs 6,000 to Rs 10,000. The telephone allowance has been hiked from Rs 8,000 to Rs 10,000, while the



secretariat allowance has been raised from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000. The overall pay of the ministers, Speaker and Deputy Speaker, chief whip, and the leader of opposition has been increased from Rs 72,000 to Rs 1.70 lakh per month. Their monthly basic salary has been raised from the current Rs 20,000 to Rs 60,000.

Their constituency allowance has been raised from Rs 18,000 to Rs 30,000, sumptuary allowance from Rs 4,000 to Rs 10,000 and daily allowance of Rs 1,500 from the existing Rs 1,000.

They will also get a secretariat assistance of Rs 25,000. Besides they will also get reimbursement of annual travel with family up to Rs 1 lakh that

was earlier Rs 50,000. Rent-free furnished accommodation of Rs 20,000 per month, free use of car with driver or monthly Rs 10,000 as conveyance allowance (earlier Rs 2,000), and free medical treatment.

In July last year, the Delhi Assembly passed bills pertaining to the hike in pay for Delhi's MLAs, who were considered among the lowest-paid lawmakers in the country.

Five different bills were tabled for the hike in salaries of ministers, MLAs, chief whip, Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, which were passed by the members. The bills, after being passed by the assembly, were sent for the president's nod.

Dog attack: NCPCR seeks report from MCD over death of 2 siblings

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has summoned MCD Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti and sought an action taken report from him over the death of two brothers reportedly by stray dogs in southwest Delhi's Vasant Kunj area. Two brother, aged seven and five, were mauled to death by stray dogs in a forest area in Ruchi Vihar in separate incidents over two days.

Meanwhile, a team from People for Animals (PFA), an animal welfare organisation founded by BJP MP Maneka Gandhi, conducted a spot investigation into suspected dog-attack cases at Vasant Kunj and said the incidents were "misreported" with dogs being "blamed" for the attacks "without any evidence".

In a letter to to Bharti said it considers it "appropriate to issue summons to your offices to physically appear before the commission on Friday along with action taken reports of the incident". The police have said they have written to the MCD to take appropriate measures to curb the dog menace. Ambika Shukla, a trustee at



PFA, claimed that the incidents were not "subjected to careful scrutiny". Shukla said, "In the Vasant Kunj case, most of the locals have testified that they never saw dogs harming any child.

What we are seeing is a few incidents from different times and places being tied together to create the impression that such instances are common or frequent when, in fact, they are rare abnormalities, which is why they are news."

She further said each incident is "different" and must be analysed in terms of its particular circumstances. "Instead, what we are seeing is hype and hysteria being whipped up to trigger reactions of hate and intolerance that help neither

humans nor animals," Shukla said.

According to the PFA team's findings, there is a "lack of evidence" to confirm these incidents as cases of dog attack. "Even bite marks, if present, cannot be taken to be any indication of cause of death as there is an equal possibility of those being caused post death.

There has to be a clinical forensic determination for that. Without a proper police and medical enquiry, it is irresponsible for anyone to issue any statement regarding the tragic deaths of the two children," the PFA said. The organisation said its volunteers visited the area and met the family members and neighbours of the deceased children.

Cong seeks NIA probe in FBU snooping charges

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Lieutenant Governor's Secretariat has forwarded a letter signed by former Congress MP Sandeep Dikshit and two former ministers -Mangat Ram Singhal and Prof Kiran Walia, seeking an NIA probe under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) into charges of snooping and spying by the Feedback Unit (FBU) to the Chief Secretary for further action.

The expose of FBU has created a political furor in the Delhi politics after the excise policy scam case. The FBU- an Extra Constitutional-Extra Judicial Intelligence Agency was created in 2016 to spy on different Ministries, Opposition political parties, entities and individuals with a provision of Rs 1 crore for secret service expenditure. Dikshit and the former ministers wrote to Lieutenant Governor Saxena on March 1,

saying the sanction to the CBI to prosecute former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia in the Feedback Unit case under the Prevention of Corruption Act was not relevant since it was not just a matter of corruption but a clear case of sedition involving spying on people and institutions, including those of the Centre, in full knowledge of the chief minister and the Cabinet.

"To acquire a capacity to listen to conversations, gather intelligence and information and to spy' on people and institutions in the National Capital Territory that includes the Government of India, the defence establishments, intelligence agencies of the Union Government etc, is a clear case of sedition.

"While we are not lawyers, we believe that this invokes the UAPA, or similar acts and the CBI and the NIA must be directed by yourself to investigate under laws governing sedi-

tion and anti-national activities and as evidence of wrongdoing has already been found, the concerned CM and ministers of Delhi the government and officials must be prosecuted under such sedition and anti-national laws as maybe found applicable in this," the letter to Saxena read.

The letter further stated, "We draw your attention to recent news that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) sought and received sanction from you to prosecute Manish Sisodia, Minister of Delhi government, in a case of the setting up of a Feedback Unit (FBU) by the Delhi government some years back. This sanction is sought under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

"Sir, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that if the Government of Delhi, with full knowledge of its chief minister, the entire Cabinet and in presence of senior government officials sanctioned

and setup a unit that had Saxena gave the nod to the CBI to file a case in matter. Later, the Centre paved the way for registering a new case against Sisodia, a senior AAP leader, by giving the CBI sanction for prosecution in a case related to alleged collection of "political intelligence" through a Delhi government department. Setup

in September 2015 with approval from Delhi Cabinet of Ministers, the 'Feed Back Unit' was tasked with gathering 'relevant information and actionable feedback' regarding working of government departments, autonomous bodies, institutions and entities under jurisdiction of Delhi Government.

BJP, Cong nexus exposed, says AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a statement, the AAP said, "It is very interesting to see that when AAP government makes any complaint or reference to BJP's LG, he never takes any action on that. But BJP's LG has immediately taken action on a complaint by

Congress leaders. "This shows how BJP and Congress are one and same behind the back. Congress and BJP are one. Cong stands exposed." They further said the whole of India is seeing how the BJP is targeting the AAP by slapping false cases against the AAP. "It is only AAP which is fighting BJP tooth and nail.

Drug racket busted in Noida, three arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

Noida Police on Monday claimed to have busted a synthetic drug racket with the arrest of three persons, including a woman techie, after nearly 300 pills worth Rs 25 lakh were seized from her house in Sector 61. All three accused are aged between 24 and 26 years and they allegedly supplied these banned pills to secret rave parties, a police officer said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central Noida) Ram Badan Singh said the police on Sunday caught a drug trafficker, who spilled the beans over the supply network and led them to his two other immediate associates. The trafficker, identified as Mamura resident Abhishek Chauhan, told the police that he was given MDMA drug, also known as ecstasy or molly, by Puja Gupta

and her friend Pulkit Kapoor, the DCP told reporters.

"On the basis of the information, a house in Sector 61 was raided last evening from where 289 pills of MDMA were seized. The woman suspect, her friend and this drug trafficker have been arrested. Three more people are associated with them who have been identified but are at large," DCP Singh said. The accused have been operating for a year and more details about them are being searched, he said.

Gupta, a computer engineer by profession working with a private firm as consultant, lives in the house in Sector 61 where the MDMA pills, estimated worth approximately Rs 25 lakh in international market, were found, while Kapoor lives in Amrapali Zodiac society in Sector 120, according to police.

PM urged to extend Ayushman Bharat benefits to private sector retirees

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A residents' group in Noida has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to extend the benefits of health care scheme Ayushman Bharat to senior citizens retired from the private sector with no medical facilities.

The letter has been written by Noida Federation of Apartment Owners Association (NOFAA), a representative body of around 90 group housing societies and thousands of flat residents.

"A large population of our country consists of senior citizens above the age of 60 years. This figure, which is around 12 per cent now, is increasing day by day with the passage of time. Although they pay their taxes honestly, still some of them are so unfortunate that they are not entitled to any benefit of government schemes. They have been left high and dry on the road," NOFAA stated in the letter.

"Majority of senior citizens working in the private sector do not get pension or medical facilities after retirement. The rate of interest on deposits is so low that they can't manage to even have two meals a day.

"During their sunset years, they need more medical attention. Also the insurance companies are reluctant to give them any suitable cover," the letter added.

The NOFAA said the entire country is praising PM Modi's Ayushman Bharat scheme, which provides certain sections of the population with a medical cover of up to Rs 5 lakh.

SoL rejects exam paper mix charges

New Delhi: A section of students who had appeared in an exam of the Delhi University's School of Open Learning (SoL) alleged on Monday that there was a mix-up in the distribution of question papers and some of them were given the questionnaire for regular students.

However, the Delhi University examination branch said that no such complaint has been received by it so far. In some exam centres like Aurobindo College and Laxmibai College, the students were given the question paper meant for SOL students. **SR**

AAP, BJP continue to spar over Jain, Sisodia's resignations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The tug of war between the AAP and the BJP to control Delhi's political narrative following the resignations of former ministers Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain will go a notch higher on Monday after resorting to mythological imagery.

Delhi BJP staged a "maun vrat" (silent sit-in) at the Rajghat seeking resignation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the alleged excise policy scam case. During their "Maun Vrat", a small video film based on statements of Kejriwal was also screened. The AAP also started a door to door signature campaign against the BJP-led

Centre's "dictatorship," which, it has alleged, put behind bars the former AAP ministers. The campaigns started near the Metro station at Laxmi Nagar in the presence of Gopal Rai, the AAP's Delhi convenor.

Delhi BJP working president Virendra Sachdeva, Leader of Opposition in the assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, MPs Ramesh Bidhuri, Dr Harshvardhan, Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma and other party workers also prayed for good sense to prevail over the Kejriwal government during the protest at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial. A small video film based on statements of Kejriwal was also screened during the sit-in. "Now



Kejriwal is ashamed to admit his relationship with Vijay Nayar whom he used to hug till a few months ago," Sachdeva said, referring to one of the accused in the alleged liquor scam. Rajghat is a sacred

place and it is a matter of great regret that Kejriwal and his The BJP has stepped up its attack on the Kejriwal government following the arrest of former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia in connection with



alleged irregularities in the formulation and implementation of the Excise Policy, 2021-22. On the other hand, the party organised a mega launch event near the Lakshmi Nagar Metro Station on Monday. As

part of the door-to-door campaign, teams of AAP party workers and volunteers reached out to the citizens and also collected signatures from the public for a letter that will be sent to the Prime Minister.

India sets 1.75L cr target for Def manufacturing by 2024-25

Looking at Defence exports of ₹35K cr: Ajay Bhatt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has said it has set a target of achieving defence manufacturing worth Rs 1,75,000 crore, including defence exports of Rs 35,000 crore by 2024-25.

Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt, replying to a question in Rajya Sabha last month, said the value of production undertaken by private companies and state-run defence manufacturers in 2021-22 was Rs 86,078 crore while the amount was Rs 88,631 crore in 2020-21 and Rs 63,722 crore in 2019-20.

The value of production was Rs 50,499 crore in 2018-19 and Rs 54,951 crore in 2017-18. "The government has set the target of achieving defence manufacturing worth Rs 1,75,000 crore including defence exports of Rs 35,000 crore by the year 2024-25," Bhatt said.

The Minister also said the value of defence exports in 2021-22 was Rs 12,815 crore while it was Rs 13,398 crore till March 6 in the current fiscal. To a separate question, he said the modernisation of armed forces to meet future challenges is a continuous process based on the long-



term integrated planning process.

"The annual acquisition plan is formulated annually based on inputs from the services and is based on identified threats and inter-service prioritisation and emerging technologies," Bhatt said.

The minister said there has been a consistent increase in the share of the capital acquisition budget. "An amount of Rs 1,24,408.66 crore has been

earmarked for capital acquisitions in the financial year 2022-23, which has been increased to Rs 1,32,727 crore for the year 2023-24," Bhatt said.

"Further, the DRDO has undertaken 50 mission mode and technology development projects worth Rs 23,722 crore in the last three years for development of indigenous weapons and technologies," he said. Replying to another

query, Bhatt said the Indian Navy has opened all branches to women at graduate level entries. The branches are executive, engineering, electrical and education.

The number of women who have applied for recruitment under the executive branch is 3,941, the number for engineering wing is 360, electrical is 652 and 411 have applied for education wing.

Submarine to get ₹934 crore refit by HAL

New Delhi: In another boost to achieve 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', Ministry of Defence, on Monday signed a contract for normal refit of Sindhukirti submarine at Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam at an overall cost of Rs 934 crore.

Sindhukirti is 3rd Kilo Class Diesel Electric Submarine. After completion of refit, Sindhukirti will be combat worthy and will join the active submarine fleet of the Indian Navy. **PNS**

India's engagement with China is complex, reveals MEA report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With tension persisting in Ladakh for the last more than two years, India's engagement with China is "complex" and its attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh starting from April-May 2020 seriously disturbed the peace and tranquility in border areas, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in its annual report for 2022 on Monday.

It said these attempts were invariably met with an "appropriate response" from Indian armed forces. "India's engagement with China is complex. The two sides have agreed that pending the final settlement of the boundary question, maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas is an essential basis for the overall

development of the bilateral relationship," the report said.

"However, starting from April-May 2020, the Chinese side undertook several attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo along the LAC in the Western sector, which seriously disturbed the peace and tranquility along the LAC in the Western sector and impacted the development of the relationship," it said. The government refers to eastern Ladakh as the Western sector.

The MEA said both sides have agreed to resolve the issues along the LAC in eastern Ladakh through peaceful dialogue and that discussions have continued with the Chinese side to achieve complete disengagement from all friction points and full restoration of peace and tranquility in the India-China border areas at an early date. "However, the continued unilateral attempts by

China to change the status quo have impacted the bilateral relationship since then," it said.

"The two sides continued to make some progress in the resolution of the issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh. Continuing with disengagement in Pangong Tso in February 2021 and in the Gogra area in August 2021, this year, disengagement was achieved in Gogra-Hot Springs (PP-15) in Eastern Ladakh (September 2022)," the MEA said.

Stating that there are still some outstanding issues that need to be resolved, the report said "India has maintained its engagement with the Chinese side both through diplomatic and military channels to resolve the remaining issues at the earliest so as to restore peace and tranquility in the border areas." It said External Affairs Minister

S Jaishankar held a meeting with the then Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi during the latter's visit to India on March 25 last year.

"The two ministers exchanged views on the border situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh. The minister conveyed to Wang Yi that restoration of normalcy will require a restoration of peace and tranquility," the report said.

The report also mentioned the meeting of the two foreign ministers in Bali on July 7 last on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting. During the meeting, Jaishankar called for an early resolution of all the outstanding issues along the LAC in eastern Ladakh and reiterated the need to sustain the momentum to complete disengagement from all the remaining areas.

SIPRI: India world's largest arms importer for last five years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Faced by two hostile neighbours namely China and Pakistan, India continued to be the world's largest arms importer for the last five years. Moreover, Russia, France and Israel were the main exporters of weapons and allied equipment to India, the annual report of the prestigious Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said on Monday. The second biggest importer is Saudi Arabia.

Noting these two points, the Swedish think tank also said even though Indian remained the biggest importer from 2018-2022 its imports dipped by 11% between 2013-17 and 2018-22.

Among the exporters of weapons to India, Russia was the largest supplier of arms to India in both 2013-17 and 2018-22, but its share of total Indian arms imports fell from 64% to 45% while France emerged as the second largest

supplier between 2018-22, the SIPRI report said. As per latest SIPRI data, among the top 10 arms exporters for the period 2018-22, India was the biggest arms export market to three countries — Russia, France and Israel and the second largest export market to South Korea. India was also the third largest market for South Africa which was ranked 21 in the list of arms exporters.

Russia accounted for 45% is India's imports followed by France (29%) and the US (11%). At the same time, India was the third largest arms supplier to Myanmar after Russia and China accounting for 14% of its imports.

"India's tensions with Pakistan and China largely drive its demand for arms imports. With an 11% share of total global arms imports, India was the world's biggest importer of major arms in 2018-22, a position it has held for the period 1993-2022. It retained this position even though its arms imports dropped by 11% between

2013-17 and 2018-22," the SIPRI said.

"The decrease can be attributed to several factors including India's slow and complex arms procurement process, efforts to diversify its arms suppliers, and attempts to replace imports with major arms that are designed and produced domestically."

The report noted that Russia's position as India's main arms supplier is under pressure due to strong competition from other supplier states, increased Indian arms production and, since 2022, the above-mentioned constraints on Russia's arms exports related to its invasion of Ukraine.

"India's arms imports from France, which included 62 combat aircraft and four submarines, increased by 489% between 2013-17 and 2018-22. France therefore displaced the USA to become the second largest supplier to India in 2018-22," the report said.

Just under two thirds of Russian arms exports went to three states in 2018-22 —

India (31%), China (23%) and Egypt (9.3%). India was also the largest recipient of Russian arms in 2013-17, but exports to India decreased by 37% between the two periods.

In contrast, exports to China (+39%) and Egypt (+44%) increased within the same time frame, the report said while noting that Russia made no deliveries to Egypt in 2021-22 and the volume of deliveries to China in 2020-22 was at a much lower level than in 2018-19. "It is likely that order volumes from these two states will reduce in the coming years," it stated.

Arms imports by Pakistan increased by 14% between 2013-17 and 2018-22 and accounted for 3.7% of the global total with China supplying 77% of Pakistan's arms imports in 2018-22.

While the global level of international arms transfers decreased by 5.1%, imports of major arms by European states increased by 47% between 2013-17 and 2018-22 in the backdrop of war in Ukraine.

Those crushing democracy talking of saving it, Cong tells PM for seeking Rahul apology

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Monday hit back at the government for raising Rahul Gandhi's democracy remarks in Parliament and demanding an apology from him, saying those 'crushing' democracy are talking of saving it.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, who took out a protest march from Parliament House complex to Vijay Chowk along with MPs of other opposition parties, including those of the BRS, Left parties and AAP, charged there was no rule of law and that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was running the country like a "dictator".

The protest march was taken out after the BJP launched an offensive against Rahul Gandhi for allegedly defaming India by his remarks



on democracy in London. Kharge said the Leader of the House cannot raise the matter concerning the member of the other House as it was against the rules and the issue can only be raised in the House of which Rahul Gandhi is a member. "They (BJP) are crushing and destroying democracy and are talking of saving democracy and the country's pride. There is no place for the

Constitution in Modi ji's regime. They are 'suppressing' opposition parties through 'misuse' of agencies. These people are talking about democracy, nationalism and the country's pride.

This is like 'ulta chor kotwal ko daante' (pot calling the kettle black)," Kharge said talking to media at his protest site Vijay Chowk. Opposition parties earlier met in the chamber

of Leader of Opposition to coordinate their strategy in Parliament. While defending Rahul Gandhi's remarks, the Congress chief claimed that autonomous bodies in the country were being suppressed and democracy is being "crushed" under the BJP regime. Kharge alleged that PM Modi has "ridiculed" India abroad several times and cited examples of his speeches in China, South Korea, Canada, UAE.

"I want to remind you of your statement made in China. You said - 'Earlier, you felt ashamed of being born Indian. Now you feel proud to represent the country'."

Was this not an insult to India and Indians? Tell your Ministers to refresh their memories," Kharge said. He also referred to the remarks made by Prime Minister Modi in South Korea.

25 AAI airports earmarked to be leased between 2022-2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 25 airports have been earmarked for leasing over the years between 2022 and 2025. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has been earmarked for leasing over the years 2022 to 2025 airports under the National Monetization Pipeline (NMP) which include Bhubaneswar, Varanasi, Amritsar, Trichy, Indore, Raipur, Calicut, Coimbatore, Nagpur, Patna, Madurai, Surat, Ranchi, Jodhpur, Chennai, Vijayawada, Vadodara, Bhopal, Tirupati, Hubli, Imphal, Agartala, Udaipur, Dehradun and Rajahmundry. The information was provided by the Ministry of Civil Aviation in a written reply to Rajya Sabha. India has 148 operational airports including 137 airports,

two water aerodromes and nine heliports. Earlier, AAI has leased out eight of its airports namely Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Guwahati, Jaipur, Lucknow, Mangaluru and Thiruvananthapuram through Public Private Partnership (PPP) for operation, management and development on long term lease basis.

Out of these, Delhi and Mumbai airports were handed over in 2006. During the last five years i.e. from 2017-18 to 2021-22, AAI has received revenues of approximately Rs. 5500 crore from Delhi Airport and Rs. 5174 crore from Mumbai Airport. In a written reply to Rajya Sabha, Minister of State in the Ministry of Civil Aviation Gen. (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd) said that the six airports recently awarded under public-private partnership (PPP), Mangaluru,

Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Guwahati, Jaipur and Thiruvananthapuram have been handed over to the Concessionaires on 31.10.2020, 02.11.2020, 07.11.2020, 08.10.2021, 11.10.2021 and 14.10.2021 respectively.

Till February, 2023, AAI has received concession fees of approximately Rs. 896 crore from the concessionaires for these six airports.

Further, AAI has also received an amount of approximately Rs.2349 crore in the form of upfront fee towards the capital expenditure incurred by AAI at these airports. "During the PPP process i.e. from March, 2018 till handing over the airports to the PPP Partner, AAI spent an amount of approximately Rs. 1970 crore towards capital works at the recently awarded Six PPP airports.

Wildfire smoke can reverse recovery of ozone layer: Study

New Delhi: A study has warned that huge smoke emitting from wildfires in the last few years threatens to slow and even reverse the recovery of the Ozone, a protective cover shielding the Earth from the Sun's damaging ultraviolet radiation.

The Researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US noted that a wildfire can pump smoke up into the stratosphere, where the particles drift for over a year. The wildfires in various regions are being fueled by climate change that is making the atmosphere drier and warmer. The study has come at a time when India is battling raging fires in Goa forests and at a Kochi's waste plant. However,

the study, published in the journal Nature, focused on the smoke from the "Black Summer" megafire in eastern Australia, which burned from December 2019 into January 2020. But India too has reported wildfires in the recent years. The study noted that while an international agreement to ban CFCs in 1987 had helped the hole in the ozone is gradually shrinking, but in 2021, the hole above Antarctica began to swell once again — a year after the devastating megafires that burned 60 million acres of vegetation in Australia.

The findings help explain why there seems to be such a lag effect on the ozone layer's thickening following wildfire activity. **PNS**

SC junks plea seeking CBI closure report on MSY, Akhilesh DA cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea seeking a copy of the CBI report on closure of its preliminary enquiry in the disproportionate assets case against former Uttar Pradesh Chief Ministers Mulayam Singh Yadav and his son Akhilesh Yadav.

The CBI had told the apex court in 2019 that since "no prima facie evidence" of commission of a cognisable offence was found against Mulayam and his two sons- Akhilesh and Prateek- the Preliminary Enquiry (PE) was not converted into a criminal case/FIR, and as such, no enquiry was conducted in the matter after August 7, 2013. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and

JB Pardiwala said, "Since the judgements dated March 1, 2007 and December 13, 2012, the CBI has closed its preliminary enquiry on August 7, 2013 and submitted its report on October 8, 2013 to the CVC. This application has been filed in 2019 after six years. There is no merit in the application and hence it is dismissed."

The top court pointed out that former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav had passed away and asked petitioner Vishwanath Chaturvedi as to what remains in the case. Counsel for the petitioner said the proceedings against Mulayam have been dropped but allegations are also against his sons-Akhilesh and Prateek.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Akhilesh and Prateek, said the CBI filed

the closure report after conducting the preliminary enquiry and said no case is made out for registration of a regular case. Counsel for Chaturvedi contended he had filed an RTI application before the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and he was informed that no such closure report was filed by the CBI.

Justice Narasimha said the closure report was filed in 2013 and the petitioner filed his plea in 2019. "Tell us how we can entertain this application after so many years", Justice Narasimha asked. Chaturvedi had in 2005 filed the PIL in the top court seeking a direction to the CBI to take appropriate action to prosecute the Yadavs for allegedly acquiring assets more than the known sources of their income by misusing their power of authority.

Tourism Min slammed over lax global promotion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Parliamentary panel has expressed its disappointment at the Union Tourism Ministry's failure to prepare a clear roadmap to leverage the opportunity presented to the country in view of its presidency of the G20 to increase tourist footfalls.

The observation came after the Ministry drew blank when asked how it was planning to exploit the huge tourism potential offered by the global summit. The Ministry had submitted that more than 200 meetings are being organized at 56 destinations across the country.



All the State Governments are making efforts to provide cultural, traditional and other experiences to these delegates so that they can become India's Ambassadors for promoting our cultural and tourism offerings. The Union Tourism Ministry is also organizing the Global Tourism Investors Summit, Incredible MICE

Summit, Tourism Expo and other events to promote India in the G20 Presidency.

However, noted the panel, while the Ministry is "planning to leverage India's presidency of G20 to promote both domestic and inbound tourism this year, the Overseas Promotion and Publicity scheme has not yet been approved and the Ministry can conduct only the crucial and unavoidable activities at this stage. It "would be a setback to the Ministry's plans for global campaigns for promotion," said the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture which submitted its report in

Parliament on Monday. The panel also took exception that "all eight functioning overseas promotion offices are being shut down. The Ministry has stated that alternative methods of promotion are being used but has not specified the methods in this regard.

"The Committee observes that Tourism Officers have been appointed in Indian Missions abroad for the purpose of promotion of tourism. The Committee desires that details of the work being done by the Tourism Officers and the roadmap of the Ministry for the promotion of Indian tourism abroad may be provided," the report further said.

SC orders removal of mosque from Allahabad HC premises

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed authorities to remove a mosque from the premises of the Allahabad High Court within three months, telling the petitioners opposing the demolition that the structure stood on a terminated lease property and they can't claim it as a matter of right to continue.

The petitioners, Waqf Masjid High Court and UP Sunni Central Waqf Board, had challenged a November 2017 Allahabad High Court order, which had given them three months to move the mosque out of the premises. The apex court dismissed their plea on Monday.

A bench of Justices MR Shah and CT Ravikumar, however, allowed the petitioners to make a representation to the UP government for allotment of land nearby for the mosque. Bench told the petitioners that the land was a lease property, which was terminated, and they can't claim it as a matter of right to continue. "We further grant three months time to

demolish the construction in question by the petitioners and if the construction is not removed within a period of three months from today, it will be open for authorities including the high court to have them removed or demolished," the bench said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the management committee of the mosque, said the mosque has been there since the 1950s and it cannot be just asked to move out. "The Government changed in 2017 and everything changed.

Doha-bound IndiGo flight sent to Karachi

New Delhi: An IndiGo Airline Delhi-Doha flight, 6E-1736, was diverted to Karachi airport in Pakistan after a medical emergency. The passenger, identified as Abdullah, a Nigerian national who was around 60 years old, was declared dead on arrival by the airport medical team.

According to IndiGo, the flight 6E-1736, operating from Delhi to Doha was diverted to Karachi due to a medical emergency on board. Unfortunately, on arrival, the passenger was declared dead by the airport medical team. **PNS**

Hit gold mine in SSC scam probe, ED tells court

2 recovered phones giving imp numbers, says agency

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) which had recovered Rs 50 crore in cash from the woman aide of now-jailed Bengal Minister Partha Chatterjee in its course of investigating the multi-crore school-level recruitment scam on Monday told a designated court that there was no limit to the total money-value of the scam which at present stood at about Rs 350 crore and was increasing by the day.

Telling the court that it had stumbled upon a "gold mine" after recovering two mobile phones of Shantanu Banerjee an arrested TMC leader and Hooghly district board member, the ED advocates said that at present the total money value which was earlier fixed at Rs 110 crore was hovering around Rs 350 crore.

According to sources quoting the ED the two phone numbers of Banerjee had yielded phone numbers that could even shock the court. "The case diary will tell it all and the number cannot be revealed now for the consequences it may bear," the ED advocate is known to have told the court saying how Banerjee had amassed properties worth tens of crores.

These properties included luxury restaurants, highway dhabas, upmarket resorts, plush home-stays and hotels, flats river-side bungalows, shell



Partha Chatterjee



Shantanu Banerjee

companies and farmhouses, ED said adding Banerjee — just a Group D employee in the State Electricity Board — who had risen up the ladder post 2016 was in direct touch with "topmost who's who of the TMC." Already a Minister, an MLA, a vice-chancellor, a State TMC Youth wing vice president, a School Services Commission chairman, a WBSEB president apart from an advisory committee — cre-

ated by the Government to "advise" the SSC on recruitment process — were presently languishing in jail.

The ED's submission came on a day when the School Service Commission following an order of the Calcutta High Court published the names of about 3,400 Group C workers out of whom 3030 had obtained their jobs through illegal means.

The list suggested that most of the candidates had obtained

high marks despite submitting blank OMR sheets. "In one place the actual number obtained by the candidate was '0' whereas in the SSC website he got 58 ... in another case a person getting '3' marks was given 53 in the SSC website," said an advocate adding the most sorry part of it all was how the successful candidates were shown "failed" in the examinations.

"At least in 86 cases the marks of the candidates who got high marks were reduced so that they failed to compete," the advocate said adding in each case the monetary transaction involved hovered anywhere between Rs 5 and Rs 10 lakh or even more. The education system in West Bengal is facing one of its biggest crises in recent times. Allegations of rampant corruption at almost every level in the recruitment process of the SSC has not only exposed the rot in the system

but also, more dangerously, raised questions regarding the credentials and credibility of teachers who have been recruited in the last 10 years. With two heavyweight leaders of the ruling Trinamool Congress-former Cabinet Minister Partha Chatterjee and influential legislator Manik Bhattacharyya-arrested by Central agencies and protests and public outrage intensifying by the day, the Trinamool Congress appears to have its back against the wall.

From manipulation of marks to giving appointments for payment, the organised manner in which the alleged irregularities have taken place points to a well-planned racket. The CBI and ED-in their submissions and reports before courts have indicated that the recruitment scam may well amount to hundreds of crores, as around 8,000 candidates appear to have been illegally recruited across categories.



TMC to raise Adani, inflation issues in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The second leg of Budget session is likely to see the Trinamool Congress raise issues related to Adani Gate, unemployment and inflation in Parliament sources privy to the party core committee meeting called on Monday by TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee said adding however that the Bengal ruling outfit is unlikely to join hands with the Congress and the Left in its in-House crusade against the saffron Government.

The TMC made its intentions clear regarding the BJP and more in relation to the Congress by skipping an all- Opposition meeting called by Congress Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge.

In Kolkata most senior leaders of the party ducked posers on the issue and asked in return "whether the Congress is sincere about its fight against the BJP."

Curiously the TMC's joining skipping Congress meeting notwithstanding Mamata Banerjee who is also the Bengal Chief Minister is likely to attend a similar meeting called by her Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal. "Our party chief may go to Delhi in the end of March," a party leader said adding during her visit to the Capital she would attend Kejriwal's meeting.

Banerjee is also likely to meet former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav in Kolkata when he comes to the

city to take part in an SP organizational meeting later this week.

When asked as to whether the two leaders would have any preliminary round of talks regarding 2024 general elections, a TMC leader who is also a State Minister said, "TMC and Mamata Banerjee will play a definite and decisive role in the general elections together with SP and other likeminded parties."

When asked as to whether the Congress and the Left would fit into her scheme of things, the leader said "it is for the Congress and the Left to decide whether they want to sink together or float and swim with the mainstream Opposition parties."

The Chief Minister is known to have told her party leaders to up the ante against the BJP Government in Delhi on a host of issues like the alleged Adani scandal and its impact as also rising inflation and unemployment, sources said.

"The Adani issue has impacted the national economy and the economics of large PSUs ... the Government must account for that," the TMC leader said adding, Banerjee had also asked the leaders to take up the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament and State Assemblies which was lying for clearance in the Lok Sabha.

Besides, Banerjee has directed her party leaders to raise the issue of "misuse of central agencies," against the opposition parties and holding back of central funds."



NIA holds searches in Srinagar in ISIS Kerala module case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday said it conducted searches in Srinagar in the ISIS Kerala Module case.

The NIA searched the premises of Uzair Azhar Bhat, who is suspected to have been part of the conspiracy. The NIA conducted searches at Bhat's house in Karfali Mohalla, Srinagar and seized digital devices which are being examined, and further investigations are in progress, the NIA said in a statement.

In 2021, the NIA had started investigations into Mohammed Ameen alias Abu Yahya of Kadannamanna, Mallapuram (Kerala), who had been running various ISIS propaganda channels on different social media platforms, such as Telegram, Hoop and Instagram.

Through these channels, Ameen was propagating violent Jihadi ideologies of ISIS and was radicalizing and recruiting new members to this ISIS module," the NIA said in a statement.

He and his associates had even identified certain individuals for targeted killings. They had also made plans to under-

take Hijrah to Jammu and Kashmir for engaging in terrorist acts and had raised funds from various sources for this trip, it said.

"During the probe, it was found that Mohammad Ameen was in touch with Deepthi Marla of Kerala, a converted Muslim, married to Anas Abdul Rahiman of Mangalore," it said.

In 2015, Marla had gone to Dubai to pursue studies where she met Mizha Siddeeqe and both women developed an inclination towards ISIS, it said.

In 2019, they tried to do Hijrah to Khorasan and reached Tehran, Iran. After reaching Tehran, their contact with ISIS operatives based in Khorasan could not be established.

The duo returned to India, and Deepthi got in touch with Ameen, Obaid Hamid Matta, Madesh Shankar alias Abdullah and others, and made plans to undertake Hijrah to ISIS-administered territory. In January 2020, she went to Srinagar to meet Obaid to plan the Hijrah and stayed in Srinagar for one week, it said, adding that one of the common contacts between Marla and Matta was Bhat, who is suspected to have been part of the conspiracy.

494 convicted out of 8.7K charge-sheeted in Assam child marriage crackdown

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Amere 494 people out of 8,773 people who were charge-sheeted for child marriage and POCOS cases in Assam have been convicted since 2017, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday. Replying to a query by Congress MLA Abdur Rashid Mandal in Assam Assembly, Sarma said a total of 8,773 people have been chargesheeted under Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) between 2017 and February 2023. "A total of 494 people were convicted and a total of 6,174 people released on bail," he added. This represents a conviction rate of just 5.63 per cent. Sarma informed the House that 4,049 persons were arrested under the PCMA and

8,908 people have been nabbed under the POCOS (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) across Assam from 2017 to February this year.

During the period, 134 boys under the age of 21 years, and 2,975 girls below 18-years of age married (the permissible age of marriage for males and females respectively), he added.

Reacting to the data and on the recent crackdown against child marriage accused, Mandal alleged that the Assam Government is "terrorising" people using the two Acts.

On this, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika said: "How is it terrorising people. You (Congress Government) did not frame the rule. Because of vote bank politics, you did not take any initiative."

This led to a noisy scene in the House with both Treasury and Opposition benches trading

charges. In a separate query by Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi, the Chief Minister stated that 4,111 incidents of child marriage took place in the state from April 2021 to February 2023.

"A total of 4,670 cases have been registered naming 7,142 accused. Already 3,483 persons have been arrested, of which 1,182 are in jail, 2,253 have got bail and notices have been issued to 48 others," he added.

Sarma also informed the legislators that the government has not taken any step to take responsibility for the children born out of child marriages, but said steps will be initiated if any child requires care and security.

During the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the Governor's address, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia said slapping of POCOS and rape cases on child marriage accused have created distur-

French former-PM on visit to India from today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister of France and Mayor of Le Havre Édouard Philippe will be paying an official visit to India, covering the cities of Delhi and Mumbai from March 14 to 17 to boost bilateral economic ties, particularly cooperation on ports, and decentralised cooperation between local Governments. Edouard Philippe served as the Prime Minister in President Emmanuel Macron's Government from April 2017 to July 2020. In Delhi, Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar will exchange views on tackling major global challenges as well



as on the outlook for the France-India strategic partnership, which marks its 25th anniversary this year.

Philippe will also call on Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal to discuss ports cooperation, particularly with regard to the implementation of the Indo-French Roadmap on the Blue Economy and Ocean Govern-

nance. In Mumbai, Philippe will meet Iqbal Singh Chahal, Brihanmumbai Municipal Commissioner, to discuss cooperation opportunities between the two port cities of Le Havre and Mumbai.

People-to-people ties being at the heart of the Indo-French relationship, Philippe will also share his experience as Prime minister at two major academic institutions of India. At St Xavier's College in Mumbai, he will give a lecture on the quest for balance in an imbalanced world. At St Stephen's College in Delhi, he will speak on how literature and politics are intertwined.

Multilateral naval exercise La Perouse begins in IOR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The third edition of the multilateral exercise La Perouse that was scheduled to be conducted in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for two days began on Monday. It witnessed the participation of personnel, ships and integral helicopters of the Royal Australian Navy, French Navy, Indian Navy, Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force, Royal Navy and the US Navy.

The biennial exercise La Perouse is conducted by the French Navy, and is aimed at enhancing maritime domain awareness and optimising maritime coordination amongst the participating navies in the Indo-Pacific Region, Navy officials said here on Monday.



The two-day exercise provides an opportunity for like-minded navies to develop closer links in planning, coordination and information sharing for seamless maritime operations. The exercise will witness complex and advanced naval operations including surface warfare, anti-air warfare, air defence exercises, cross deck landings and tactical manoeuvres.

Indigenously built guided missile frigate INS Sahyadri and fleet tanker INS Jyoti will participate in this edition of the exercise, they said adding participation of Indian Navy in the exercise showcases the high levels of synergy, coordination and interoperability between the friendly navies, and their commitment to a rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Maha Govt staff to strike for OPS today; CM forms panel of babus

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Monday announced a panel comprising senior bureaucrats to look into the demand of State Government employees to revert to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) even as their unions have decided to go ahead with the strike from Tuesday.

The panel will give its report in a time-bound manner, officials said.

Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis also appealed to the Government employees not to go ahead with the strike, which can potentially paralyse the functioning of the administration.

A meeting was chaired by Shinde, which was also attended by Fadnis, Leaders of Opposition in the Assembly and Council Ajit Pawar and Ambadas Danve, respectively, Chief Secretary Manu Kumar Srivastava, Additional Chief Secretary (Finance) Manoj Saunik and various unions of the State Government employees.

Acknowledging the role of employees in the State's growth, Shinde said the solution for their social security will be found through dialogue.

Maha to give ₹300 per quintal ex-gratia to onion farmers

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Government on Monday announced an ex-gratia relief of Rs 300 per quintal to onion farmers in the State who are severely affected by a steep fall in the prices. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde announced this decision in the State Legislative Assembly and said it will provide relief to onion growers.

However, farmers are demanding a Minimum Support

Price (MSP) of Rs 2,000 per quintal for onions for 2023, Rs 600 per quintal grant for onions, export of onions on large scale, 12-hour supply of electricity for agriculture.

Prices of the kitchen staple have crashed in Maharashtra, resulting in farmers getting very little for their produce. Shinde said due to the rise in onion production, the price of the crop has seen a decline.

Meanwhile, leaders of a farmers-workers march that



started from Dindori in Nashik will meet Shinde in Mumbai on Tuesday, one of the organisers said. The march, organised by

the Communist Party of India (Marxist), started on Sunday and more than 10,000 participants reached Sarul here during the day.

"We will meet Chief Minister Eknath Shinde in Mantralaya tomorrow. Former MLA JP Gavit who is leading the march, All India Kisan Sabha state general secretary Ajit Nawale will be part of the delegation," Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) national vice president DL Karad told.

BSES

BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, New Delhi

TENDER NOTICE **Date: 14.03.2023**

Sealed tenders under two parts (Un priced & priced) are invited for the supply of following materials from all bidders:-

NIT No.	Brief Tender Description	Estimated Cost (₹)	Cost of EMD (₹)	Due Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening
CMC/BR/22-23/RB/PR/MS/1039	TENDER FOR SETTING UP OF DATA CENTER FOR DISASTER RECOVERY, BACKUP SOFTWARE, HARDWARE AND SUPPORT IN BRPL	3.43 Cr.	6,86,000/-	03.04.2023 15:00 HRS	03.04.2023 15:30 HRS

Cost of each Tender Document: ₹ 1180/-

For any query call on 011-49107235 or e-mail on Brpl.Eauction@relianceada.com

For details in respect of Equipment/BOM/Services, Qualifying requirements, Terms & conditions, purchase/ submission of tender documents etc. please visit our website www.bsesdelhi.com

Head (Contracts & Materials)

Regd. Off. : BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019 | Corporate Identification No.: U40109DL2001PLC111527
Telephone No. : +91 11 4910 7235 | Website : www.bsesdelhi.com

PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Home Finance **Registered office:** ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai- 400051

Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai- 400059
Branch Office: 1st floor, no. 159/20, Sudha Complex, Atlas Road, Near Subhash Chowk, Sonipat- 131001

Whereas

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

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

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Joginder Singh Malik (Borrower), Seema Rani (Co-Borrower), LHSNP00001341764.	N House/ Plot No.420 Sectors 65 Huda Faridabad Haryana Na Faridabad-121001. Bounded By- North: Plot No.419, south: Plot No.421, East: Others Vacant Plot, West: 20 Ft Road./ Date of Possession- 11-Mar-23	12-12-2022 Rs. 24,81,981/-	Sonepat- B
2.	Joginder Singh Malik (Borrower), Seema Rani (Co-Borrower), LHSNP00001341765.	N House/ Plot No.420 Sectors 65 Huda Faridabad Haryana Na Faridabad-121001. Bounded By- North: Plot No.419, South: Plot No.421, East: Others Vacant Plot, West: 20 Ft Road./ Date of Possession- 11-Mar-23	12-12-2022 Rs. 95,956/-	Sonepat- B

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : March 14, 2023
Place: Faridabad

Authorized Officer
ICICI Home Finance Company Limited

Celebrate but...

The Elephant Whisperers and RRR's song 'Naatu Naatu' have won Academy Awards

The Elephant Whisperers winning the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short and RRR's song 'Naatu Naatu' for the Best Original Song is surely good news for Indian cinema. It would delight every Indian who believes that their country's soft power has an enormous potential. The two works that have won the awards are as diverse as India is. The Elephant Whisperers is a documentary about a tribal Bomman and Bellie who take care of orphaned baby elephants named Raghu and Ammu, almost becoming a family in the process. RRR (Rise, Roar, Revolt), on the other hand, is a SS Rajamouli-directed fantasy — replete with dance, drama, musical extravaganza, and action—about the friendship of two revolutionaries fighting against British rule in the 1920s. Quite expectedly, the Oscar wins have generated euphoria among not just RRR fans but also movie buffs. In her Instagram post, Alia Bhatt, who was associated with RRR, was ecstatic.



Ajay Devgn, who acted in RRR, tweeted, "As it is often said, cinema speaks a universal language. Congratulations to the teams of RRR and The Elephant Whisperers for their #Oscar wins. It's a proud moment." More congratulatory messages would follow, for the awards are an international recognition of Indian artists' creativity, diligence, and determination. They have proved that originality can shine on its own; it need not depend on reputation. In fact, it was for the first time that three Indian productions got nominated for the Academy Awards. Also, actress Deepika Padukone was among the presenters.

While this is the time to celebrate the achievements of Indian cinema, this should also be the moment when the powers that be, public intellectuals, film critics, and others should ponder over the future of cinema in the country. Our political masters would be jubilant over the success of the winners, but they should remember that the success is not because, but in spite of, the system they (politicians) have made. Filmmakers, other artists, indeed all people in the country have to endure a system that is scornful of, if not antithetical to, creativity. Demands can be made—and are often made—for a ban on any song, joke, movie, book, etc., that some politician or the other find inconvenient. Often they initiate official action against the song, films, etc., they don't approve of. Worse, the action could be unofficial; members of the front organisations supported by the ruling party at the Centre or in a state can wreak havoc at the film set of a movie that their political overlords don't like—with no consequences for the violent offenders. Then there are blackmailers and attention-hungry activists who go to any length to campaign against any movie or song. Always keen to give publicity to such characters are some news channels. Hence the puerile, indeed sickening, debates on the look of Ravan and the attire of Hanuman. It is time those who matter decided not to suppress freedom of expression on grounds of 'hurt sentiments.'



A butterfly sits on a flower at Ruppur in Birbhum district of West Bengal

PTI

Poverty, population proscribe progress

To be in the fast lane of growth we must eradicate poverty and control population growth

Be it a Progress Positive with a pragmatic shift auguring positive development or a pyrrhic one; wise men depict that growth with equity (ethics) connotes progress and as such growth trajectory gets influenced by the waxing and waning of the impact of poverty and population growth. Development is a process that procreates growth as well as progress and positive change. The concept is closely associated with physical, socio-economic, environmental and demographic factors. Whereas progress is associated with a movement, especially towards an objective and it has manifestations like technological progress, scientific progress and socio-economic progress.

In Amartya Sen's words 'no nation has grown out of poverty to prosperity without taking care of the basic needs of its people.'

Modern definition projects poverty not just as relative but also as absolute. It is stated that poverty connotes failure to achieve certain minimum capabilities or lack of capability which is absolute



(Amartya Sen). Therefore development economics with microeconomic analysis and measurement of the well-being of the poor is being focused on in modern times.

Poverty hinders growth and affects the progress (and development) of the nation with predicaments of the impecunious affecting growth factors like per capita income etc.

The rapidly growing population and its upsurge transform a growing economy into an economy of mass unemployment as well as low employment. All the major theories of the population like Malthusian theory, Optimum theory of population (Edwin Cannan) and Theory of

demographic transition interpret the correlation between population growth and development. Malthusian theory harangues eloquently about the negative impact of population growth. Needless to say, rapid population growth precipitates unemployment and other associated problems like lack of shelter and housing, the poor living conditions of the poverty-stricken people and food insecurity etc. The decrease in individual income and dwindling of resources with scanty access to financial resources by the vulnerable group accentuate the problem.

Is seen poverty and rapid population growth pose and seem to be Siamese or conjoined twins, both symbiotic to each other and as such form the vicious cycle of poverty. The rapid growth of the population witnesses the waxing of the number of poverty-affected people, as has been mentioned supra.

Last but not least pessimism also affects the economy at the micro level with households reducing current demand and firms posting fewer job vacancies. Fear of higher future costs reduces

incentives for firms to lower prices. Pessimism as such in economics can be stated as a tendency to see the bad side of the thing or to expect the worst in any situation.

Any concept of all-around progress and development (Vikash) has to start with the eradication (vinash) of poverty, along with control of population growth. Closing the eyes to harsh realities doesn't stop its occurrence rather it provides the impetus to proliferate. Prophylactic action with accurate perception is always preferable to a curative one as it saves time, stops consequential damages and nips the repercussions.

Things are clear that unless and until we eradicate poverty higher economic growth would remain a chimera. The task at hand is to eradicate poverty and control population growth.

While the first task is on the anvil, the second has to be given a kick-start. If these two problems are not squarely addressed, no matter how much effort we may put in, the result would remain much to be desired.

(The author is a super-annuated senior IAS officer)



SANGRAM MISHRA

AS PER HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, PAKISTAN'S HAND IN THE TALIBAN IS 'DISTINGUISHED BOTH BY THE SWEEP OF ITS OBJECTIVES AND THE SCALE OF ITS EFFORTS'

Longtime warrior and Afghan spymaster (Head of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security), Amrullah Saleh, who went on to become First Vice President (now self-styled 'Acting President' in the resistance movement) has lived to tell Pakistani fate. Amrullah tweet-

ing a haunting memory. That, it was going to be anything but okay for the brand owners (read, Pakistan) or for Lt Gen Faiz Hameed himself, is a classic twist in the tail.

Hillary Clinton's much-ignored forewarning to the Pakistanis of keeping snakes in the backyard under the misplaced assumption that they would only bite the neighbours was to come true with the metastasizing of its export products i.e., terrorists, within Pakistan itself. One such offshoot of the original Pak-created Taliban was Baitullah Mehsud who created a new organisation to fight the US presence in Afghanistan, albeit, with one additional objective i.e., resistance to the Pakistani State. His outfit added a telling 'P' to the standard nomenclature of the Taliban when it called itself Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP. Suddenly products made exclusively for export purposes went out of Pakistani control and got themselves a domestic purpose and market – Pakistan soon came under attack from its own creation.

Pakistan Institute of Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) recorded Jan 2023 as the most violent month with 44 recorded terror attacks and 134 fatalities. Last month was even more chilling with 80 policemen perishing in a singular mosque attack and brazen other attacks on Police stations and outposts. Ironically, portents of a seemingly 'Reverse Strategic Depth'

Pak: bitten by its own creations

The terror groups, once supported by the Pakistan establishment, have become its nemesis, compounding its myriad problems



ed mockingly, "Tehrik Taliban (TT) is a Pakistani brand exclusively for export. Per military law it shouldn't be used internally. The problem is just with the P in the TTP. Should the TTP assure Rawalpindi that it is ready to fight elsewhere then within minutes the brotherhood will be restored". Amrullah states the obvious of a rogue strain within the Pakistani brand that has become its nemesis. This is the same Amrullah who had tweeted three days before Kabul fell i.e., on 12th Aug 2021, "The official name of the Taliban for the last 20 years has been 'Quetta Shura'. Quetta is a Pakistani city & capital of Balochistan province. @sanctionPakistan". Valiant Amrullah was only calling the bluff of the real power behind the picture of marauding Taliban, though his pleas to 'sanction' Pakistan went obviously unheeded and it took nature to take its own Frankenstein course, to turn its back on the Pakistani narrative.

Pakistan Institute of Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) recorded Jan 2023 as the most violent month with 44 recorded terror attacks and 134 fatalities. Last month was even more chilling with 80 policemen perishing in a singular mosque attack and brazen other attacks on Police stations and outposts. Ironically, portents of a seemingly 'Reverse Strategic Depth'

are looking for the Pakistanis, with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan attacking Pakistani State with utter impunity and an undiscussed shadow of 40 million Pashtuns on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line, as opposed to just 16 million on the Afghan side, of its unrecognised Durand Line.

Today, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) leader is Noor Wali Mehsud (4th 'Emir') who too was part of the original Taliban and has since redirected his ire at Pakistan. Mehsud alluded to the religious texts to contextualise and posit TTP's inextricable linkages to the principal Taliban movement, "according to the teaching of Islam, the victory of one Muslim is necessarily helpful for the other Muslim. But how the victory of the Afghan Taliban will prove helpful for the Pakistan Taliban, time will tell". The 'P' in the TTP is already paining unbearably for the Pakistanis.

Blurb: Hillary Clinton's much ignored forewarning to the Pakistanis of keeping snakes in the backyard under the misplaced assumption that they would only bite the neighbours, was to come true with the metastasizing of its export products

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OPPOSITION CRYING FOUL

Sir — The 'No big idea' (The Pioneer, March 14) actually hits the nail on the head that the veracity of their allegations apart, the raison d'etre of the opposition parties largely in unison crying foul over the use of the Central agencies including the CBI and the ED in particular against them, happens their common apprehension of being victimized at the Centre's hands. For instance, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi(BRS) leader and daughter of Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, K Kavitha along with leaders from several major political parties including the AAP, the RJD, the JD(U), the Left, the Shiv Sena, the Akali Dal, the National Conference and the NCP—save the grand old party and the TMC that conspicuously stood aloof—is staging a dharna at the Jantar Mantar in Delhi, apparently demanding 33 per cent reservation for women in the Parliament and State Assemblies and urging presentation of the Bill in the second part of the ongoing Budget Session itself but they at heart long to dethrone the BJP from the Centre's helm.

Hence, this unending vicious circle of allegations and counter allegations between the ruling and the opposition parties continues in all regimes without some pragmatic solutions for the woes the Aam Admis are bearing the brunt of, coming from neither. I concur with the view that the glue that can bring some opposition parties together would be some good idea, some narrative, not fortuitous circumstances.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

ALL ENGLAND OPEN BADMINTON TAKES OFF

Sir — The 115th edition of the All-England Open badminton takes off on March 14. Though it has lost some of its sheen as the most celebrated of all tournaments on the world badminton circuit, the All England trophy is definitely a moment to cherish, and a dream, for top players. World number one Victor Axelsen is the hot favourite to lift the men's singles. The

INDIAN RAILWAYS' COLONIAL LEGACY

Sir — The Indian Railways were started in 1853 by the British. Although through its nationalization in 1952, the reins of this

Oscar Awards

It was followed by the song "Jai Ho" from Slum Dog Millionaire in 2009. Then in 2019, the best documentary film 'Period End of Sentence' was awarded. But in 2023, once again the moment came to make the entire film industry proud when two Oscars for India 'Naatu Naatu' won Best Original Song and The Elephant Whispers won Oscar for Best Documentary Short Subject. Now the time has come for Bollywood India to move away from only commercial cinema and focus on artistic films as well. Otherwise, the dryness of Oscar awards will become worse for us. Every year at least two films from India should be nominated for the Oscars.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

massive superstructure were overtaken by the Indian Govt, one railway line in Maharashtra is a living example of colonial legacy.

Railways have been the harbinger of a massive transformation of the Indian economy. It is not only a career of goods and services but also of ideas, and thoughts and caters to the needs and aspirations of the underprivileged and sections of society on a daily basis. The Indian Railways have seen remarkable progress over the years. Surprisingly, one railway line over a stretch of 190 km is still owned by a private British company, Shakuntala Railways that runs between Yavatmala and Achalpur in Amravati district in Maharashtra. Known as the lifeline for the poor people, it is still under the control of colonial masters. It reminds us of the colonial hangover that we are still carrying over our shoulders even after gaining independence from foreign yoke way back in 1947. It is also a grim reminder of the pathetic state of affairs considering the fact that about 1 crore rupees are going down the drain and filling the coffers of the erstwhile Britishers.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

FIRST COLUMN

THE SAGA OF NON-VIOLENCE IN ACTION

Salt Satyagraha was a landmark march that paved the way for future nonviolent protests



Ninety three years ago on March 12, 1930, one of the greatest movements to awaken the country and her citizens began. The ground was prepared by a 60-plus man with a staff in hand when he decided to foot march from Sabarmati to Dandi to break the unjust salt tax imposed by the British. Mahatma Gandhi had indeed given a clarion call for world sympathy in this “Battle of right against might”.

Gandhi had begun the march with 78 of his satyagrahis barring different age groups to cover a trek of 385.6-kilometres; across 47 villages; over 24 days and nights, starting from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad and ending in Dandi in coastal Surat – from March 12 to April 6 – in a nonviolent march towards freedom. Seeing this enthusiasm of the swaying crowd that joined Mahatma Gandhi in villages to villages that he traversed during the Salt March, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru expressed, “It seemed as though a spring had been suddenly released.”



It is noteworthy to reflect that Mahatma Gandhi wrote his first article on ‘Salt’ as early as February 14, 1891. He was twenty-two. The article appeared in The Vegetarian, where he described the utter poverty of his fellow country-men who lived on bread and salt, a ‘heavily taxed article’ (Source: The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 1894-96, Vol. I. (Ahmedabad, 1958), pp.24ff.) Similar views appeared time and again from him during his sojourn in South Africa. It was also in Hind Swaraj that he wrote: “The salt-tax is not a small injustice”. Therefore, the object, ‘salt’, too was carefully chosen that was directly linked with the survival of the people and it had roused the conscience of a sleeping nation towards a non-violent struggle. Mahatma Gandhi clearly understood that salt was the only relish that the teeming poor in Indian villages could afford for their monotonous diet and that it was perhaps the greatest necessity of life and taxing it increased the burden.

Given his personal life of extraordinary simplicity and his identification with his countrymen, through this Salt March, Gandhiji inspired and motivated the teeming millions to follow him. Secondly, Gandhiji utilized this moment (read march) to target issues of the ‘caste divide’ in the villages en route. This was evident as he chose to stay in the so-called ‘untouchable’ quarters and drew water from the well there for his wash. By also staying at Sirajuddin Vasi’s (better known as Shiraz Abdulla) place a powerful message of brotherhood was sent. Thirdly, he inspired women to lead for the first time. From Kasturba Gandhi, his wife, to Sarojini Naidu the Parsi social worker Mithuben Petit, to other women leaders like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Hansa Mehta, Amina Tyabji, and Rukmini Lakshminpathy, the women led the protest at other places and broke the salt law and also courted imprisonment. Finally, this saga of non-violence in action was demonstrated by the nonviolent satyagraha as they faced the brutality of the oppressors with patience and steadfastness, especially at Dharasana, 25 miles south of Dandi. The amazing self-discipline of the satyagraha in the face of repressive violence was demonstrated.

Gandhi embodied the tradition of pilgrimages and added his values of spiritualism to it that he had imbibed through this travel across the length and breadth of the country. He had said that his feeling was like that of the pilgrims of Amarnath or Badri-Kedar. This small voice had expounded the glories of freedom and the beauties of moral life. It was almost like a mythical quest for a pilgrim. Mahatma Gandhi immersed himself deeply in this role of nonviolent struggle, leading his nonviolent forces to a triumphant moral victory. He believed that “Nonviolence is like the radium in action”. As Mahatma Gandhi stood up with a lump of salt in one hand and said, “With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire,” there were around 60,000 to 100,000 marchers behind him. This was because Mahatma Gandhi was able to touch the ‘Soul’, ‘Soil’ and ‘Society’ and embrace them in his constructive actions.

(The author is a Programme Executive in Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India)

Let FDI in retail come from the front door

Allowing FDI in retail would be in the best interest of consumers as this will enable all retailers to compete with one another on equal terms



Following complaints from consumers and traders against “widespread cheating and unfair trade practices” by e-commerce marketplaces such as Amazon and Flipkart, the Union government intends to amend consumer protection rules to bar these firms from (i) selling their private labels on their platforms; (ii) make them liable for frauds committed by a seller; (iii) prohibit them from having their logistics chain for supply-chain management.

The marketplace is a platform where vendors sell their products to consumers even as its owner merely acts as a facilitator by providing services such as booking orders, raising invoices, arranging the delivery, accepting payments, handling rejections, etc. He can’t hold inventory or undertake direct selling. As per the guidelines issued in early 2016, the government had allowed 100 per cent FDI under the marketplace model.

Amazon and Flipkart have come under this model and together invested over US\$10 billion in setting up supply-chain logistics. They have indulged in a vast array of practices that are detrimental to sellers on their platform as well as to consumers.

To address their concerns, on July 23, 2020, the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, issued the Consumer Protection (e-commerce) Rules, under Section 101 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The rules bar affiliated entities from selling on a marketplace, restrict ‘flash sales’ (such sales involve instant, heavily discounted, time-bound sale offers), and disallow sellers from using the name or brand associated with that of marketplace e-commerce entities for the promotion of goods.

On June 21, 2021, the DCA came up with an amendment to the rules to restrict business-to-business, or B2B, sales (this is to prohibit transactions between the owner of the marketplace and seller on his platform) in e-commerce and a provision to prevent ‘abuse of dominant position’ by e-commerce firms. The government sought stakeholders’ views on these amendments.

These were not pursued as during intermenstrual consultations, the department for the promotion of industry and



APART FROM PLEADING WITH THE GOVERNMENT, SMALL SELLERS/TRADERS HAVE ALSO TAKEN TO THE LEGAL COURSE

internal trade (DPIIT) – nodal authority for dealing with FDI-related issues - expressed concerns that some of the changes in the rules would go beyond consumer protection and impede the flow of foreign investments in the sector. It was also felt this would impact existing investments.

Now, those amendments have been resurrected with some more being added to the list such as prohibiting e-commerce giants from having their logistics chain for supply-chain.

This time again, the process of giving effect to the amendments is unlikely to be taken to its logical end. Things will simply be allowed to linger on. This is because the government while allowing FDI in the marketplace left some loopholes in the guidelines which keep coming to haunt it whenever it tries to go for a course correction.

In 2016, while permitting FDI in e-commerce, it prescribed two conditions. First, the entity cannot permit more than 25 per cent of total sales on the marketplace from one vendor or its group companies. Two, it cannot directly or indirectly influence the sale price. Without any mention as to who the vendor is, a firm linked to the marketplace either its subsidiary or a joint venture (JV) with an Indian company is eligible.

As for the second condition, it is not easy to establish that the marketplace owner has manipulated the sale price. Thus, contrary to the stated intent of the policy, these norms permitted e-commerce majors as direct sellers, albeit through their subsidiary/JV. No wonder, Amazon established a JV Prione Business Services (PBS), in collaboration with an Indian entity owned by Narayan Murthy of Infosys. PBS in turn owned a firm Cloudtatt India Pvt Ltd which was a “preferred” seller on Amazon’s marketplace.

In this backdrop, notwithstanding much ado about the foreign

giants indulging in anti-competitive behaviour in a host of manifestations such as preferred often related sellers, deep discounts, abuse of dominance and so on, the fact remains that the 2016 guidelines provided for the possibility of a total of four sellers on the e-commerce platform (based on a threshold of 25 per cent of total sales for each seller) who could all be related to the owner of the platform.

Amazon and others were not doing anything wrong in so far as the rule book on FDI was concerned. Meanwhile, on December 26, 2018, the Commerce Ministry issued a clarification saying: “The owner of the marketplace or its subsidiary or its JV with an Indian company can’t have ownership of the seller.” Moreover, “a seller on the platform can’t source more than 25 per cent of its inventory from a firm connected with the latter.”

The marketplace owner could get around both the clarifications: first, by having less than 50 per cent shareholding in the seller firm, they can argue that they have no control (albeit majority) over the latter, and second by its wholesale arm restricting supplies to the seller within the 25 per cent threshold.

The clarification has done little to rein in the hold of e-commerce majors in direct selling to consumers to the detriment of small traders. For instance, only three dozen firms out of the 400,000 sellers on the Amazon platform account for 67 per cent of sales on it.

Apart from pleading with the government, small sellers/traders have also taken the legal course. A most talked about case relates to a complaint by Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh (DVM) on January 13, 2020, with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) alleging anti-competitive behaviour by Amazon Seller Services (it operates an e-commerce marketplace) and Flipkart Internet.

DVM argued that Amazon and

Flipkart had entered into exclusive sales agreements with smartphone makers to sell certain phones through a small number of preferred sellers. It also alleged that they had given preferential treatment to certain sellers by giving them higher search rankings and offering to pay for part of the discount that such sellers would offer during key sales periods such as Flipkart’s Big Billion Days and Amazon’s Prime Day.

The CCI agreed with DVM’s contention and ordered a probe. Amazon and Flipkart approached the Karnataka High Court (KHC) with a plea to quash the CCI order. The KHC refused to quash it, which prompted the duo to challenge the order in the Supreme Court (SC). In August 2021, the SC dismissed their applications and ordered that “the CCI Director General will complete the probe and submit the findings to the commission which will pass final orders.”

Even if the CCI-DG establishes anti-competitive behaviour by Amazon, the matter will be heading for interminable litigation. The issue has to be sorted out by none other than the government itself. It can’t drastically alter the rules (it is intended through 2021 amendments) as it will be tantamount to overturning the 2016 guidelines. It will be viewed as a retrospective change of policy and send a wrong signal to foreign investors. If it continues with the status quo, small traders will continue to face unfair treatment.

The government can get out of the mess if it dispenses with the marketplace and legitimises 100 per cent FDI in online retail. It should also allow 100 per cent FDI in offline retail sans riders (at present, 51 per cent is allowed in this segment subject to onerous riders). This will enable all retailers, online or offline, big or small, to compete with one another on equal terms.

(The writer is a policy analyst)

What Opposition-free Govt really means for democracy

Nagaland’s Opposition-free government shows that the space for the Opposition in state assemblies is shrinking

After the recent Assembly results, all parties in the tiny State of Nagaland formed an Opposition-free government to get a share in the power pie. All the parties unconditionally supported the ruling alliance, and all parties were in the Government with no Opposition.

It isn’t the first time Nagaland has chosen an Opposition-free government. In 2015 and 2021, there were such governments, but this was the first-ever Assembly where there was no opposition party even before the elected members had been sworn in.

The stakeholders justified their decision in their plea to bring all sections together for Nagaland’s political solution. The State faces serious development challenges attributed to long



years of insurgency. This complete lack of Opposition shows the convulsions of a democracy in its worst form.

The ruling NDPP (Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party)-BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) alliance retained power for a second straight term. In the 60-member House, the BJP won 12 seats, and its ally NDPP got 25. Independents won four and Nationalist Congress Party 7. Congress, which ruled the State earlier, did not open its account in the current or the previous Assembly. To explain the historical perspective, the Naga movement, the longest-running insurgency in the country, began during the British regime and continued even after independence. In 1997, the Centre signed a cease-

fire agreement with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSC-IM), the largest rebel group.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi renewed the negotiations after he came to power in 2014. As a result, the Naga peace accord was signed to end the six-decade-old insurgency on 3 August 2015. All the parties formed an Opposition-free government before that.

The Government’s interlocutor for Naga Peace Talks, R. N. Ravi, signed it on behalf of the Government of India. Lt. Isak Chishi Swu, Chairman and Thuingaleng Muivah, General Secretary, signed on behalf of the NSCN in the presence of Modi. For a second time, in 2021, the NPF and Independents joined the NDPP-BJP alliance

to seek a collective solution to the Nagaland problem and formed an Opposition-free government.

However, as the circumstances differ, the Nagaland experiment cannot be extended to other States or the Centre. Suppose such a thing happened at the national level? Our Founding fathers would shiver in their graves.

Former Chief Justice of India N. V. Ramana, addressing Rajasthan Assembly before his retirement, expressed concern over the diminishing space for the Opposition in legislative bodies. He lamented that the laws were passed without detailed deliberation and called for a robust, vibrant, active Opposition.

As a larger question, there are many reasons for the

declining Opposition space within the state Assembly. They include an increasing number of dynastic leaders, lack of debate in the Legislature, absence of a good counter-narrative, and their adoption of an obstructive agenda.

The BJP has been aggressive in its expansion. Modi and his deputy Amit Shah worked feverishly to expand the party. Even nationally, the opposition space has been systematically eroded in the last decade, mainly after Modi took over.

In contrast, the main political party, the Congress, unable to protect its turf, has continuously declined in its electoral performance. The Left Parties, too, face a similar situation. The regional leaders needed the numbers that could only come

through alliances with these national parties. Above all, the Opposition parties needed an alternate vision and an engaging narrative to check the ruling BJP.

While drafting the Constitution, our founding fathers went into all aspects, including the role of the Opposition. Ideally, in genuine parliamentary democracies, governments and oppositions have equal obligations and responsibilities to the people who elected them to represent their interests. There is no democracy without Opposition, and theoretically, at least, it is as powerful as the Government. However, the success of democracy depends on the constructive role of the opposition parties as they provide an alternate viewpoint.

They also scrutinize and challenge the ruling parties and hold them accountable for their actions. Opposition is strong when people join it. Today, it is ordinary Indians who are performing the role of a formal Opposition to the Government. The effectiveness of the Opposition lies in raising the right questions. Any opposition party, civil society group, any organization willing to engage with the issues can be a vehicle for opposition politics.

The moral of the story is that democracies can survive authoritarians; they cannot survive the absence of vigorous Opposition. It performs a restraining role and constantly challenges the Government of the day by promising a viable alternative.

Xi vows to build military into ‘Great Wall of steel’

SAUDI-IRAN DIPLOMATIC COUP AFTERMATH

PTI ■ BEIJING

President Xi Jinping on Monday vowed to build China's military into a "Great Wall of steel" to protect the its sovereignty and developmental interests as he sought a bigger role for Beijing in global affairs, days after brokering a Saudi Arabia-Iran detente, regarded as a diplomatic coup.

Speaking for the first time since the rubber-stamp Parliament last week approved his precedent-breaking third term as head of state, Xi called on the nation to uphold the leadership of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) headed by him.

"This is my third time assuming the lofty office of president," Xi, 69, said at the closing ceremony of China's national legislature, adding that "the trust of the people is the biggest driving force for me to move forward, and it is also a heavy responsibility on my shoulders". He pledged that he would "faithfully perform the duties entrusted by the Constitution" and would "never

let down the great trust" of all Chinese people.

"Security is the bedrock of development, while stability is a prerequisite for prosperity," Xi said Xi also called for efforts to advance the modernisation of China's defence forces and build the people's armed forces into a "Great Wall of steel" that is capable of effectively safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests.

Xi's reference to the Great Wall was significant as the mammoth structure, with a total length of more than 20,000 km, was built over centuries by China's emperors to protect their territory. It also came amidst growing tensions between China and the US and some neighbouring countries. Xi is regarded as the 'core leader' of the party very much like the party founder Mao Zedong.

He was endorsed by the rubber-stamp Parliament last week as the President and head of the Central Military Commission (CMC) the high command of the Chinese mil-



Chinese President Xi Jinping, left, chats with Chinese Premier Li Qiang during a session of China's National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Sunday. PTI

itary, marking the beginning of his new five-year term.

He was elected as the head of the CPC for an unprecedented third term in October last year, the only leader to have more than two five-year terms after Mao. He was the only leader to have a third five-year term while all his predecessors retired after two five-year terms.

In his speech at the NPC closing ceremony attended by about 3,000 legislators Xi said, China will play an active part in the reform and development of the global governance system to advance the implementation of his initiatives the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security

Initiative (GSI) which aims to expand Beijing's diplomatic role in the world.

His comments came in the backdrop of China clinching a Saudi-Iran deal, regarded as a diplomatic coup, to end their years of hostilities and restore diplomatic ties.

Also speculation is rife that Xi is planning a visit to Russia next week to meet President Vladimir Putin to discuss a negotiated settlement to end the Ukraine war.

Russia's state-run Tass news agency quoted Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying that "as a rule, announcements of official foreign visits are made synchronously, by mutual agreement".

As announced by earlier by China, Saudi Arabia and Iran on last Friday reached a deal that includes the agreement to resume diplomatic relations and reopen embassies and missions within two months.

The deal reached after talks in Beijing from March 6 to 10 was regarded as a major achievement for China in expanding its global outreach and countering the US influence, especially in the Middle East.

Last week, in unusually direct remarks, Xi accused the US of leading Western countries to "contain and suppress" China and bring it "unprecedented severe challenges."

A key agenda for the legislative session is to provide a strategy to cut reliance on the US. As part of that plan, the central government proposed to raise R& D spending by 2 per cent in 2023 to 328 billion yuan (USD 47 billion).

Also on March 5, China hiked its defence budget for the 8th consecutive year with a 7.2 per cent increase to USD 225 billion.

On Taiwan, which China claims is part of it, Xi said China is actively promoting the peaceful development of cross-strait relations, resolutely opposing external interference

and "Taiwan independence" separatist activities, and firmly advancing the process of national reunification.

He also promised to continue the one-country two-system formula to develop Hong Kong despite the crackdown to subdue pro-independence forces in the former British colony under China's new security law.

Stressing that China will make concrete efforts to advance high-standard opening up, Xi said the country will not only leverage global markets and resources for its own development but also promote the development of the whole world.

He also called for building China into a great modern socialist country and advancing national rejuvenation.

From this day forward to the mid-21st century, the central task of the entire CPC, and all Chinese people will be to build China into a great modern socialist country in all respects and to advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts, Xi said.

"The relay baton of building a great modern socialist country and advancing national rejuvenation has been historically passed on to our generation," he said.

Tough to achieve 5% GDP target, says Li Qiang

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's new Premier Li Qiang on Monday said achieving the five per cent GDP target for the slowing down economy is not an easy task for the world's second-largest economy and requires redoubled efforts but assured the country's battered private sector better environment to boost growth.

Li Qiang, the long-term aide of Chinese President Xi Jinping who succeeded Li Keqiang, in his first press conference, drew on Chinese folklore to demonstrate the country's resilience in the face of difficulties but concedes the economy faces challenges.

He acknowledged that achieving the 2023 gross domestic product (GDP) growth target of around five per cent for this year on the current high base of China's economic output is not an easy task and requires redoubled efforts.

Playing down the importance of GDP, he said most people do not keep their eyes on GDP growth all the time.

China, the world's second-largest economy, last year reported a three per cent GDP, the lowest in decades and the target of about five per cent set for this year by Li Keqiang in his work report on March 5 is also the lowest in recent years.

What people care more about are the things that happen in everyday life like housing, employment, income, education, medical services, and the environment, Li said.

He also pointed to signs of improvement, saying the economy will break through the wind and waves and sail towards a brighter future as China's development is supported by multiple advantages, including a vast market, a complete industrial system, abundant human resources, solid foundation for development, and institutional strength. The government will step up efforts to foster a business environment that is mar-

ket-oriented, law-based and internationalised, treat companies of all types of ownership as equals, and protect the property rights of enterprises and the rights and interests of entrepreneurs in accordance with the law, Li told a press conference. Commenting on China's crackdown on business during the past few years, including on e-commerce giant Alibaba and tech companies besides the detention of a star banker Bao Fan for questioning has created a fear psychosis in China's private sector, Li said the government's commitment to the development of the private sector is unequivocal and steadfast.

He said discussions and rumours that Beijing does not support private entrepreneurs are "inappropriate", and that policies on the private sector have always been consistent.

He reiterated China's commitment to protecting private entrepreneurs and creating a level playing field and highlighted new opportunities. On the deteriorating China-US ties, Li termed the talk of "decoupling" of the world's top two economies as just hype.

He noted that there are some people in the United States who have been trumpeting decoupling with China in recent years. "But I wonder how many people can truly benefit from this kind of hype," Li said. Li noted that two-way trade between the two countries had amounted to a record high of nearly USD 760 billion.

"China and the US are closely intertwined economically, and both have benefited from the other side's development," he said.

"Encirclement and suppression are in no one's interests," he said. On China's worsening demographic crisis due to falling birth rates and an increasingly old age population, Li said China has nearly 900 million working-age population and 15 million people join the workforce annually, he noted.



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, left, shakes hands with Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, in the Lionfish seafood restaurant, in San Diego, Sunday. AP

On US tour, Sunak hikes UK's defence spending

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is on a tour of the US on Monday for a trilateral meeting with US President Joe Biden and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, during which he confirmed a hike in Britain's defence budget of an extra GBP 5 billion over the next two years.

The world leaders will agree on details of a UK-US agreement to supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines as part of the AUKUS pact, which was signed in 2021 as part of a joint effort to counter Chinese military

power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Downing Street said GBP 3 billion from the extra defence spending would be earmarked to support the pact, along with boosting industrial infrastructure and servicing UK submarines.

"As the world becomes more volatile and competition between states becomes more intense, the UK must be ready to stand our ground," said Sunak.

"By investing in our armed forces for the long-term, we will be ready for the challenges of today and of the future. As I will discuss with our American

and Australian allies in the US today, the UK will remain a leading contributor to NATO and a reliable international partner, standing up for our values from Ukraine to the South China Seas," he said.

"We have seen all too clearly in the last year how global crises impact us at home, with Russia's appalling invasion of Ukraine driving up energy and food prices. We will fortify our national defences, from economic security to technology supply chains and intelligence expertise, to ensure we are never again vulnerable to the actions of a hostile power," he added.

8 dead after smuggling boats capsize

San Diego (US)(AP): At least eight people were killed when two migrant smuggling boats capsized in shallow but treacherous surf amid heavy fog, authorities said Sunday, marking one of the deadliest maritime human smuggling operations ever off of US shores. A Spanish-speaking woman on one of the panga-style boats called 911 Saturday night to report the other vessel overturned in waves at Black's Beach, authorities said. She said there were 15 people on the capized vessel and eight on hers.

Coast Guard and San Diego Fire-Rescue crews pulled bodies of eight adults from the water, but fog hampered the search for additional victims. Recovery efforts resumed Sunday but no additional bodies were found.

Survivors may have escaped on land, including the woman who called 911. Authorities did not know her whereabouts.

San Diego Lifeguard Chief James Gartland said rescuers found the two boats overturned in shallow waters when they arrived. Surf was modest, with swells around 3 feet (about 1 metre), but skies were foggy and black.

"That area is very hazardous, even in the daytime," Gartland said at a news conference. "It has a series of sandbars and in-shore rip currents, so you can think that you can land in some sand or get to waist-high, knee-high water and think that you're able to be safe to exit the water, but there's long, in-shore holes. If you step into those holes, those rip currents will pull you along the shore and back out to sea."

Black's Beach is about 15 miles (24 kilometers) north of downtown San Diego in a secluded area not far from the popular La Jolla Shores. Its reputation for some of the best breaks in Southern California draws many surfers. Hundreds of maritime smuggling operations occur every year off California's coast and sometimes turn fatal.

Masks stay put in Japan after 3 yrs

Tokyo (AP): Japan on Monday dropped its request for people to wear masks after three years, but hardly anything changed in the country that has had an extremely high regard for their effectiveness at anti-virus protection.

Most commuters exiting Tokyo's main train station in the morning were wearing masks as they headed to work. So were people on the streets. During a televised budget committee meeting at parliament, some lawmakers still wore masks, though Prime Minister Fumio Kishida wasn't wearing one when he arrived at his office Monday.

Baseball fans who gathered outside of the Tokyo Dome hours before Monday's games Australia-Czech Republic and China-South Korea also had on masks. They'll also be able to cheer without their masks as that

ban was lifted, too. Dropping the mask-wearing request is one of the last steps Japan's government is taking in easing COVID-19 rules in public places as it tries to expand business and other activity.

"From today, mask wearing is left up to individual judgment. We are not forcing anyone to wear it or take it off," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters as he arrived at his office. "I think there will be more occasions when I will take my mask off."

Kishida, however, asked people to use masks around vulnerable people to protect them from risks of infection. In a country where the pressure for conformity is extremely strong, many people were expected to keep wearing them for now. The mask request was dropped for outdoors last summer, yet many have kept wearing them.

22k held in Iran protests pardoned

AP ■ TEHRAN

The head of Iran's judiciary says 22,000 people arrested in the recent protests that swept the Islamic Republic have been pardoned.

The state-run IRNA news agency quoted Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei on Monday as announcing the figure. The Associated Press could not independently verify the statement.

State media previously suggested Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei could pardon that many swept up in the demonstrations ahead of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. The protests began in September over the death of a 22-year-old woman named Mahsa Amini after she was detained by the country's morality police.

Cohen to testify before grand jury in Trump hush money probe

AP ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump's former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen is expected to testify Monday before a Manhattan grand jury investigating hush money payments he arranged and made on the former president's behalf. Cohen's impending grand jury appearance was confirmed by two people familiar with the matter who were not authorised to speak publicly about grand jury proceedings and did so on condition of anonymity.

Cohen's closed-door testimony is coming at a critical time as the Manhattan district attorney's office closes in on a decision on whether to seek charges against Trump. A Trump loyalist turned adversary, Cohen is likely to provide critical details about whatever involvement the Republican presidential candidate may have had in the payments, made in the final weeks of the 2016 campaign, to two women who alleged affairs with him. Cohen has given prosecutors evidence, including voice recordings of conversa-

tions he had with a lawyer for one of the women, as well as emails and text messages. He also has recordings of a conversation in which he and Trump spoke about an arrangement to pay the other woman through the supermarket tabloid the National Enquirer.

Prosecutors appear to be looking at whether Trump committed crimes in how the payments were made or how they were accounted for internally at Trump's company, the Trump Organisation.

One possible charge would be falsifying business records, a misdemeanor unless prosecutors could prove it was done to conceal another crime. No former US president has ever been charged with a crime. Appearing Monday on ABC's "Good Morning America," Trump lawyer Joseph Tacopina said it is unlikely that the former president will accept an invitation, extended by prosecutors last week, to testify before the grand jury.

"We have no plans on participating in this proceeding," Tacopina said. "It's a decision that needs to be made still. There's

been no deadline set, so we'll wait and see."

Tacopina is also accusing the Manhattan district attorney's office of prosecutorial misconduct, writing in a letter to New York City's inspector general that prosecutors are engaging in a "blatant and unconstitutional" attempt to hamper Trump's chances in the 2024 presidential election. Tacopina is asking the city's Department of Investigation to probe what he deems a "patently political prosecution."

A message seeking comment was left with the Manhattan district attorney's office.

Cohen served prison time after pleading guilty in 2018 to federal charges, including campaign finance violations, for arranging the payouts to porn actor Stormy Daniels and model Karen McDougal to keep them from going public. He has also been disbarred.

Trump's lawyers could point to those factors in an attempt to undermine Cohen's credibility, if the former president is charged and Cohen ends up testifying at trial.

‘Everything’ wins best picture, is everywhere at Oscars

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

The metaphysical multiverse comedy "Everything Everywhere All at Once" wrapped its hot dog fingers around Hollywood's top prize, winning best picture at the 95th Academy Awards, along with awards for Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan and Jamie Lee Curtis. Though worlds away from Oscar bait, Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's anarchic ballet of everything bagels, googly-eyed rocks and one messy tax audit emerged as an improbable Academy Awards heavyweight. The indie hit, A24's second best picture winner following "Moonlight", won seven Oscars in all. Only two other films in Oscar history — "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Network" — won three acting Academy Awards.

Fifty years after "The Godfather" won at the Oscars, "Everything Everywhere All at Once" triumphed with a much different immigrant experience. Its eccentric tale about a Chinese immigrant family — just the second feature by the Daniels, as the filmmaking duo is known — blended science fiction and alternate realities in the story of an ordinary

woman and laundromat owner. "The world is changing rapidly and I fear our stories are not keeping that pace," said Kwan, who shared best director and best original screenplay with Scheinert. "Sometimes it's a little scary knowing that movies move at the rate of years and the world on the internet is moving at the rate of milliseconds. But I have great faith in our stories."

Yeoh became the first Asian woman to best actress, taking the award for her lauded performance in "Everything Everywhere All at Once". The 60-year-old Malaysian-born Yeoh won her first Oscar for a performance that relied as much on her comic and dramatic chops as it did her kung fu skills. It's the first best actress win for a non-white actress in 20 years.

"Ladies, don't let anyone ever tell you you're past your prime," said Yeoh, who received a raucous standing ovation. "Everything Everywhere", released all the way back in March 2022, helped revive arthouse cinemas after two years of pandemic, racking up more than USD 100 million in ticket sales with scant initial expectations of Oscar



Jamie Lee Curtis & Ke Huy Quan pose in the press room at the Oscars on Sunday in LA. AP/PTI



Jimmy Kimmel, hosting for the third time, pledged a ceremony with "no nonsense". He said anyone who wanted to "get jiggy with it" this year would have to come through a fearsome battalion of bodyguards, including Yeoh, Steven Spielberg and his show's "security guard" Guillermo Rodriguez.

as a 600-pound reclusive professor in "The Whale". The best-actor race had been one of the closest contests of the night, but Fraser in the end edged out Austin Butler.

"So this is what the multiverse looks like," said a clearly moved Fraser, pointing to the "Everything Everywhere All at Once" crew. "Everything Everywhere All at Once", a shock of freshness in a movie industry awash in sequels and reboots, helped Hollywood turn the page from one of the most infamous moments in Oscar history: The Slap. Jimmy Kimmel, hosting for the third time, pledged a ceremony with "no nonsense". He said anyone who wanted to "get jiggy with it" this year would have to come through a fearsome battalion of bodyguards, including Yeoh, Steven Spielberg and his show's "security guard" Guillermo Rodriguez.

The former child star Quan capped his own extraordinary comeback with the Oscar for best supporting actor for his performance in the indie hit "Everything Everywhere All at Once". Quan, beloved for his roles as Short Round in "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" and Data in

"Goonies", had all but given up acting before being cast in "Everything Everywhere All at Once".

His win, among the most expected of the night, was nevertheless one of the ceremony's most moving moments. The audience — including his "Temple of Doom" director, Steven Spielberg — gave Quan a standing ovation as he fought back tears. "Mom, I just won an Oscar!" said Quan, 51, whose family fled Vietnam in the war when he was a child. "They say stories like this only happen in the movies. I can't believe it's happening," said Quan. "This is the American dream."

Minutes later, Quan's costmate Jamie Lee Curtis won for best supporting actress. Her win, in one of the most competitive categories this year, denied a victory for comic-book fans. Angela Bassett ("Black Panther: Wakanda Forever") would have been the first performer to win an Oscar for a Marvel movie.

Curtis is the rare Oscar winner whose parents were both Oscar nominees: Tony Curtis was nominated for "The Defiant Ones" in 1959 and Janet Leigh was nominated in 1961 for "Psycho".

Biden seeks to assuage fears after SVB collapse

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden on Monday sought to reassure jittery Americans that they can have confidence that the US banking system is “safe” and vowed stricter bank regulation after a string of bank failures raised concerns about the nation’s financial stability.

The president’s early morning comments came after US bank regulators spent the week-end working on a plan to shore up the public’s confidence in the soundness of the financial system and limit spillover effects following the closing of the Silicon Valley Bank last week.

“Americans can rest assured that our banking system is safe. Your deposits are safe,” Biden said from the Roosevelt Room of the White House. Taxpayers will not bear any losses from the move, which will be funded by fees regulators charge to banks, he said. The banks’ leaders will be fired, he added.

Biden in his address allayed fears, directly explaining what he has instructed his administration to do to protect small businesses and workers in the wake of regulator shutdowns of both Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank over the last few days.

The California-based



HSBC to buy UK subsidiary of Silicon Valley Bank

London (AP): The UK Treasury and the Bank of England have “facilitated the sale” of Silicon Valley Bank UK to HSBC, ensuring the security of 6.7 billion pounds (USD 8.1 billion) of deposits. British officials worked throughout the weekend to find a buyer for the UK subsidiary of the California-based bank that failed last week. “This morning, the government and the Bank of England facilitated a private sale of Silicon Valley Bank UK to HSBC,” Treasury chief Jeremy Hunt said in a Tweet. “Deposits will be protected, with no taxpayer support. I said yesterday that we would look after our tech sector, and we have worked urgently to deliver that promise.” HSBC said it will acquire Silicon Valley Bank UK Ltd for one pound.

Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), the 16th largest bank in the United States, was closed on Friday by the California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation which later

appointed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) as its receiver.

It was the largest failure of a US bank since the financial crisis in 2008. It came after SVB

was scrambling to raise money to plug a loss from the sale of assets affected by higher interest rates. Word of the troubles led customers to race to withdraw funds leading to a cash crisis. Authorities on Sunday also said they had taken over Signature Bank of New York, which was seen as the institution most vulnerable to a similar bank run after SVB. “Every American should feel confident that their deposits will be there if and when they need them,” President Biden said. “Let me also assure you, we will not stop at this. We’ll do whatever is needed.”

Investors in the banks, however, will not be protected, the president said, and management will be fired.

“They knowingly took a risk, and when the risk didn’t pay off, investors lost their money. That’s how capitalism works,” Biden said. Customers will “have access to their money as of today. That includes small businesses across the country that bank there and need to make payroll, pay their bills and stay open for business,” Biden said, adding that no losses will be suffered by the taxpayers.

“Instead, the money will come from the fees that banks pay into the deposit insurance fund,” he explained.

Militants attack Pak census team in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Peshawar (PTI): A Pakistani security official was killed while four were injured on Monday when unidentified militants attacked a police van deployed to protect the population census team in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the second such attack in the province in less than a week.

The armed terrorists opened fire at a police mobile team on duty with the population census team in Tank districts’ Kot Azam area in the province, a police official said.

The militants managed to flee from the scene after the shootout, following which police sealed the area and launched a massive combing operation to nab them. The injured police officials were admitted to a nearby health facility. On March 8, a Pakistani security official was killed and two others were injured when militants attacked a police van.

Imran Khan leads thousands at election rally as arrest looms

Lahore (PTI): Pakistan’s ousted premier Imran Khan Monday led a march of thousands of his supporters as Islamabad police arrived here to arrest him after two non-bailable arrest warrants were issued against him, a day after he called off his party’s election rally following a ban on public gatherings in Punjab’s provincial capital.

The 70-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician’s supporters threw rose petals at a convoy carrying him to Data Darbar shrine where he is expected to address his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers. A large number of women also joined the rally.

Khan left his Zaman Park residence as Islamabad police arrived in Lahore on a special helicopter to arrest the PTI chief after two non-bailable arrest warrants were issued against him for failing to appear in courts in the Toshakhana case

and for threatening a woman magistrate while addressing a public gathering here last year. Earlier, the Lahore district administration met with the party’s leadership to discuss the rally, its route and security arrangements.

The district administration, however, imposed a condition that no leader would give a statement against the judiciary or any other institution. As the caretaker government had directed the PTI leadership to end the rally at 5.30pm, it could not reach its destination (Data Darbar shrine) at 7.45pm. Khan is leading the rally while sitting in a bomb-proof car.

Senior PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry has warned the government against any attempt to stop the rally. “Watch the scenes of the rally in Lahore at this time and understand that stopping Imran Khan is like inviting people’s wrath,” he said. Khan on Sunday called off his

party’s planned election rally in Lahore after Punjab’s caretaker government banned public gatherings in the provincial capital.

In a televised address, Khan on Saturday announced that he will lead an election campaign rally in Lahore on Sunday and urged his supporters and workers to participate in face of the police brutality purportedly committed against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. Soon after his announcement, the local administration enforced Section 144 in the provincial capital and banned public gatherings, citing concerns in the wake of a Pakistan Super League (PSL) cricket match in the city.

Khan’s party approached Election Commission offices and the courts against the government’s move, saying the imposition of Section 144 should be declared null and void.

Hindus in Pak protest forced conversion, abductions

Karachi (PTI): Members of Pakistan’s minority Hindu community will organise a rally and converge at the Sindh Assembly building here later this month to protest the rising incidents of forced conversions, abductions and marriages of minors.

The rally, which is being organised by several Hindu community leaders in Sindh province, will be held on March 30, under the banner of Pakistan Darawer Ittehad, an organisation working for minority rights in the country.

Posters released by the organisation on social media said the rally is being held to protest the abduction, forced conversion and marriages of minor girls and forced possession of land belonging to the Hindu community in the Sindh province.

“We are expecting thousands from the Hindu community to participate in the rally as the government has turned a blind eye to the abductions, forced conversions and fake marriages of our women and girls,” Chairman of Pakistan Darawer Ittehad Faqir Shiva Kuchi said.

He said the outfit has already begun mobilising rallies across the province to raise awareness.

“When this protest rally will be held on March 30, we want everyone to see the issues faced by Hindus and members from other minority communities in the country,” he explained.

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that Mrs. Anmit Kaur, Mrs. Varsha Rani, Mr. Ravinder Pal, Mrs. Neha Chhabra are intending to sell Residential property bearing No. 36, Land area measuring 10111.11 sq. yds, Sector-21B, Urban estate, Faridkot Bahara, Jd. M. Mahinder Singh, to be Inherited & mortgaged by my client i.e. Aves Finance Limited The Original Allotment letter in favour of Mr. T.K. Mahotra, Possession letter issued by HUDA in favour of Mr. T.K. Mahotra, Sale Deed dated 24.05.1988, in favour of Mr. T.K. Mahotra, Sale Deed dated 27.02.2004, executed by Mr. T.K. Mahotra in favour of Mr. Arvind Singh Sahni, Re-Allotment letter issued by HUDA, from Mr. T.K. Mahotra in favour of Mr. Arvind Singh Sahni, Sale Deed dated 23.08.2005 executed by Mr. Arvind Singh Sahni in favour of Mrs. Navada Gupta, Re-Allotment letter issued by HUDA from Mr. Arvind Singh Sahni in favour of Mrs. Navada Gupta, Transfer permission in favour of Mrs. Navada Gupta, Sale Deed dated 12.09.2012, executed by Mrs. Navada Gupta in favour of Mrs. H & H Builders Pvt. Ltd., Re-Allotment letter issued by HUDA from Mrs. Navada Gupta in favour of Mrs. H & H Builders Pvt. Ltd., Transfer permission in favour of Mrs. Anmit Kaur, Mrs. Varsha Rani, Ravinder Pal and Neha Chhabra, Transfer permission in favour of Mr. Arvind Singh Sahni, pertaining to the aforesaid property have been lost and complaint bearing LA No. 25684/2023, was registered on 13.03.2023 with Delhi Police. Any person(s) found in possession of aforesaid original documents, their kindly contact the undersigned along with original property document, within 7 days from date of this notice on below address, failing which, the claim as per aforesaid sale deed shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subject property.

Raghav Tiwari, Advocate
Ch. 630, Patiala House Courts,
New Delhi - 110001 Mob.: +91-8076188328

PUBLIC NOTICE

The members of the General Public are hereby informed that the project Name “MIGSUN WYNN” OR “MIGSUN WYNN” of SJP Hotels & Resorts (P) Ltd, project site situated at “GH-1B(1), ETA-II, Greater Noida, U.P.” and other media and advertising platforms has been herewith changed to “MIGSUN TWIINZ” and the Name & style “TWIINZ” will replace the words and style “WYNN” OR “WYNN” from all documents, places, social and media platforms etc.

In all the legal documents and registries wherever the word “WYNN” OR “WYNN” is mentioned it should be replaced with the word “TWIINZ” and wherever it was previously mentioned as “WYNN” OR “WYNN” should be henceforth be read as “TWIINZ” only. It is requested to the public at large to take note of the same and refer all further communications in reference to the project as the name of “MIGSUN TWIINZ”.

The company M/s. SJP Hotels & Resorts (P) Ltd., reserves its right & remedies to safeguard and protect its entity in all respects to any claims arising out of this changeover. The company shall not be responsible to any claims arising out of this name change.

“MIGSUN TWIINZ”
UPRERAPR27269
SJP Hotels & Resorts (P) Ltd,
GH-1B(1), ETA-II,
Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

Putin may visit India for G20 summit

Moscow (PTI): Russian President Vladimir Putin may attend the G-20 summit in India in September, but no decision has yet been made, his spokesperson said on Monday.

“It cannot be ruled out,” Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked if Putin’s participation in the summit in India in September was being considered. “But no decision has been made yet,” Peskov was quoted as saying by the state-run Tass news agency. “Russia continues its full participation in the G20 format, we intend to continue it,” Peskov added.

The Russian delegation at the G20 leaders’ forum in Bali, Indonesia last year was headed by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. In 2020 and 2021 Putin attended the G20 summits via video link. The G20 Leaders’ Summit is scheduled to be held on September 9 and 10 in New Delhi. G20 or the Group of 20 is an intergovernmental forum of the world’s major developed and developing economies.

The members represent around 85 per cent of the global GDP, over 75 per cent of the global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population. The grouping comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK, the US and the European Union (EU).

44 dead as Cyclone Freddy pounds Malawi, Mozambique

AP ■ BLANTYRE (MALAWI)

An unrelenting Cyclone Freddy that is currently battering southern Africa has killed at least 44 people in Malawi and Mozambique since it struck the continent for a second time on Saturday night, authorities in both countries have confirmed.

At least 39 people in Malawi’s commercial hub of Blantyre have died with several others missing or injured, the city’s chief executive officer told The Associated Press on Monday. Authorities in Mozambique reported that five people were killed in the country since Saturday.

The deaths in Malawi include five members of a single family who died in Blantyre’s Ndirande township after Freddy’s destructive winds and heavy rains demolished their house, according to a police report. A three-year-old child who was “trapped in the debris” is also among the victims, with her parents among those reported missing, authorities also said.

“We suspect that this figure will rise as we are trying to compile one national report from our southwest, southeast and eastern police offices which cover the affected areas,” Malawi police spokesperson Peter Kalaya told the AP.

The cyclone lashed over Mozambique and Malawi over the weekend and into Monday. It’s the second time the record-



breaking cyclone — which has been causing destruction in southern Africa since late February — made landfall in mainland Africa. It also pumelled the island states of Madagascar and Reunion as it traversed across the ocean.

The cyclone has intensified a record seven times and has the highest-ever recorded accumulated cyclone energy, or ACE, which is a measurement of how much energy a cyclone has released over time. Freddy recorded more energy over its lifetime than an entire typical US hurricane season.

Freddy first developed near Australia in early February and travelled across the entire southern Indian Ocean. Its set to be the longest-ever recorded tropical cyclone. The UN’s weather agency has convened an expert panel to determine whether it has broken the

record set by Hurricane John in 1994 of 31 days. Freddy made landfall in the seaport of Quelimane in Mozambique on Saturday where there are reports of damage to houses and farmlands, although the extent of the destruction is not yet clear. Telecommunications and other essential infrastructure are still cut off in much of the affected Zambezia province, impeding rescue and other humanitarian efforts.

French weather agency Meteo-France’s regional tropical cyclone monitoring centre in Reunion warned Monday that “the heaviest rains will continue over the next 48 hours” as Freddy barrels on.

Mozambique’s central provinces and Malawi have been identified as especially vulnerable to “floods and landslides in mountainous areas” by weather monitors.

Ahead of IMF bailout deal, Sri Lanka hit by strikes against tax reforms

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Trade unions of most state sector establishments in Sri Lanka went on a strike on Monday against the government’s tax reforms to secure approval for the much-required USD 2.9 billion bailout package from the IMF.

The debt-struck country introduced painful economic measures such as tax hikes, and utility rate increases, part of the reforms prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a must for the release of the bailout package.

The doctors’ trade union said it launched a day of strikes on Monday, covering four of the nine provinces of the island nation. “The doctors will be on

strike until 8 am tomorrow. We only operate emergency services at hospitals,” the union spokesman, Dr Chamil Wijesinghe, said.

“We want the government to roll back the new tax policy,” he added. The university teacher’s trade union spokesperson, Shyaman Banneheka, said industrial action had begun on March 9 with the workers staying away from work.

“We will join other trade unions for collective action from Wednesday (March 15) until the government withdraws the new tax policy,” Banneheka said. “We are opposed to it and want the government to withdraw it,” Shamal Sumanaratne of the port workers’ trade union said, adding that

the new high taxes would bring down the living standards of all.

He said the port workers launched a ‘go slow’ trade union action at the port. “We will join other trade unions on March 15 to stage the biggest strike in history,” Sumanaratne said. The water sector trade unions have also joined in with its spokesman Engineer Upali Ratnayake saying that the workers would only do emergency work from Monday.

“We will be doing a half-day strike on March 14 and join other trade unions on March 15 for the bigger strike,” the spokesperson said. The trade unions oppose the tax reforms imposed on the dictates of the IMF. The cash-strapped country awaits the global lender’s for-

mal approval on March 20 for the USD 2.9 billion bailout package.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe said that the public would have to undergo hardships for a limited period to emerge from the island nation’s worst-ever economic crisis. Wickremesinghe told Parliament recently that all of IMF’s pre-conditions for the bailout had been fulfilled and the reforms prescribed were a must for implementation.

His government had raised personal taxes and utility bills and cut subsidies as part of the reforms required. The IMF bailout process made slow progress due to the need to restructure Sri Lanka’s nearly 50 billion dollar external debt.

Paudel sworn in as Nepal’s third Prez

Kathmandu (PTI): Senior Nepali Congress leader Ram Chandra Paudel was on Monday sworn in as Nepal’s third President, days after he comfortably defeated a candidate fielded by an alliance led by CPN-UML. At a special ceremony at Sheetal Niwas, the President’s Office, Acting Chief Justice Hari Krishna Karki administered the oath to 78-year-old Paudel.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’, Vice-President Nanda Bahadur Pun, outgoing President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire, National Assembly Chairman Ganesh Prasad Timilsina and other high-ranking government officials were present on the occasion.

Nepali Congress senior leader Paudel was elected the third President of the country on Thursday, defeating Subas Chandra Nembang of the CPN-UML.

Paudel replaces Bidya Devi Bhandari, whose term ended on March 12. This is the third presidential election in Nepal since the country became a republic in 2008.

President of India Droupadi Murmu congratulated President Paudel on his election. In a congratulatory note, President Murmu said that she looks forward to working closely with Paudel in further strengthening the bilateral partnership, the Kathmandu Post newspaper reported.

“I am confident that under your able guidance, our wide-ranging cooperation will be



strengthened further. I look forward to working closely with you in nurturing and further strengthening our bilateral partnership,” she wrote in the note.

The US Embassy in Kathmandu sent a congratulatory message to President Paudel and wished him a successful tenure, according to Foreign Ministry sources.

Former Speaker and multiple-time minister, President Paudel has traversed a long political journey to make it to the country’s highest state position.

He spent over a decade in jail. He was a lawmaker six times, a minister five times, and Speaker for one term.

Paudel had support from eight political parties. Out of 52,628 weightage-based votes, Paudel secured 33,802 while Nembang got 15,518 votes.

The outcome of the Presidential election came as a relief for the government headed by Prime Minister ‘Prachanda’ as former premier KP Sharma Oli-led CPN-UML withdrew its support to his government following a rift over backing Paudel for the presidential poll.

नलको NALCO
National Aluminium Company Limited
(A Government of India Enterprise)

NALCO Bhawan, Plot No. P/1, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751013, Odisha
(CIN : L27203OR1981GOI000920)
A NAVRATNA COMPANY

NOTICE

The Board of Directors in their meeting held on 13th March, 2023 has approved 2nd interim dividend @ Rs.2.50 per share for the financial year 2022-23.

In this connection, Notice is hereby given that **Tuesday, the 21st March, 2023** has been fixed as **‘Record Date’** for payment of 2nd interim dividend for the financial year 2022-23. 2nd Interim Dividend will be paid to those shareholders whose names appear:

- as beneficial owners as at the end of the business hours on 21.03.2023 as per the beneficial owners position to be downloaded by NSDL and CDSL in respect of the shares held in the electronic form and
- as members in the Register of Members of the Company, after giving effect to transmission/transposition if any, in physical form lodged with the Company on or before 21.03.2023.

Dividend income is taxable in the hands of the shareholders w.e.f. 01.04.2020 and accordingly, the Company will deduct tax at source (TDS) as per provisions under the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Information about the record date is also available on the website of the Company i.e. www.nalcoindia.com and on the websites of Stock Exchanges i.e. www.bseindia.com and www.nseindia.com.

For National Aluminium Company Limited
Sd/-
(N. K. Mohanty)
GGM & Company Secretary

Place : Bhubaneswar
Date : 13.03.2023

G20 NORTHEN RAILWAY
CORRIGENDUM No. 1

Tender Details :

Tender No.: 124 (Open Tender) **Closing Date/Time:** 28/03/2023 15:00

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 New BG Rail line between Meerut - Hastinapur-Bijnor of Delhi Division. (65.50 Km)

Items Modified Compliance

1. Clause Description (Commercial-Compliance):- The tenderers must necessarily upload/submit the legal documents, pertaining to the constitution of their Concern as applicable, along with the tender, as enumerate in clause 2.4 of spl tender condition and instruction to tenderers of tender document.

Field Name	Existing Value	Modified Value
Description	As Above	The tenderers must necessarily upload/submit the legal documents, pertaining to the constitution of their Concern form as applicable, along with the tender, as enumerate in clause 2.4 of spl tender condition and instruction to tenderers of tender document.

2. Clause Description (Undertakings):- I/We do not submit the Performance Guarantee within the time specified in the Tender document.

Field Name	Existing Value	Modified Value
Description	As Above	I/We do not submit the Performance Guarantee within the time specified (within 5 working days before closing date of submission of bids) in the Tender document i.e. as per clause 3.1 (3) in the office of Dy. CE/C-II/CSB, Shivaji Bridge, New Delhi.

Tender Notice No: 124-W/Dy.CE/C-II/CSB-FLS-MTC-HASTINAPUR-BJO date: 10.03.2023
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 779/2023

Sensex, Nifty plunge to five-month low

Over contagion fears from US bank failure

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty declined for a third day on the trot to close at five-month low levels on Monday due to a massive sell-off in banking, finance and auto stocks triggered by fears of potential contagion from the biggest bank failure in the US since 2008.

Unabated flight of foreign capital and a weak domestic currency amid global rate hike fears added to the gloom, traders said. Falling for the third straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 897.28 points or 1.52 per cent to settle at 58,237.85, the lowest closing level in five months. Only one Sensex stock ended higher while the rest 29 dropped.

The index opened higher and later rose by 375 points to touch a high of 59,510.92 in early trade amid positive Asian markets. However, bears gripped the markets and the index tanked over 1,400 points from the day's high to 58,094.55.

The NSE Nifty tanked 258.60 points or 1.49 per cent to end at a five-month low of 17,154.30, with 45 of its scrips ending in the red.

IndusInd Bank was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 7.46 per cent, fol-



lowed by SBI, Tata Motors, M&M, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank and Infosys. In contrast, Tech Mahindra was the only winner.

The US-based SVB Financials, which mainly funds startups, crashed 60 per cent in the US market last week, triggering concerns over the health of banks' bond portfolios and its possible rippling effects globally.

"...Jitters over the largest US bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis, driving investors to the safe-haven asset," Navneet Damani, Senior VP — of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

"Bloodbath was seen in the global market as the fallout of

Silicon Valley Bank was followed by turmoil at Signature Bank, keeping investors worried about the strength of the US banking system. Importantly, the Fed's decision in the upcoming meeting will have a crucial impact on the market sell-off, as the consensus is reversing to no rate hike trajectory," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

"Also, the US inflation data due on Tuesday will have a vital impact in the short-term as the market anticipates a cool down from January levels," he added.

The selling pressure was widespread wherein banking, auto and IT majors were beaten down badly. The broader

indices too plunged sharply lower and lost nearly 2 per cent each.

"The move shows that participants are not comfortable, citing the US banking crisis and reducing positions, ignoring the news of the bailout. Banking and financials were acting as saviors earlier but the tone has changed completely now, which is further adding to their worries," Ajit Mishra, VP — Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

US President Joe Biden has assured the American people and businesses that a resolution of the collapse of the Silicon Valley Bank will not put taxpayer's money at risk, and they can have confidence that their bank deposits would be there when they need it.

In a late-night statement on Sunday, Biden also announced that on Monday morning he will deliver remarks on how the US will maintain a resilient banking system to protect the economic recovery.

The California-based Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), the 16th largest bank in the United States, was closed on Friday by the California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation which later appointed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) as its receiver.

21,200 cases pending before NCLT till Jan: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 21,205 cases, including 12,963 cases under the insolvency law, were pending before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) at the end of January this year, the government said on Monday.

Currently, one principal bench and 15 other benches of NCLT are operational.

In a written reply to Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs Rao Inderjit



Singh said the benches of NCLT and National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) are being set up in a phased

manner depending on quantum of workload and other factors.

As of now, he said no proposal to set up any new bench of NCLT and NCLAT is under consideration.

"As per information provided by NCLT, 21,205 cases were pending with NCLT benches as on 31.01.2023, including 12,963 cases under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 1,181 cases of Merger and Amalgamation (M&A), and 7,061 other cases," the minister said.

Citing data provided by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), Singh said that since the inception of IBC, 2016, a total of 6,199 CIRPs have commenced as on December 31, 2022.

CIRP refers to Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process.

The minister said that as per information provided by IBBI, as on December 31, 2022, 611 CIRPs have yielded resolution where the realisable value to the financial creditors have been around Rs 2.44 lakh crore.

Retail inflation dips marginally to 6.44% in Feb

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation dipped marginally to 6.44 per cent in February, mainly on account of a slight easing in prices of food and fuel items, as per government data released on Monday.

The inflation rate based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 6.52 per cent in January and 6.07 per cent in February 2022. The inflation rate for the food basket was 5.95 per cent in February, lower than 6 per cent in January.

Except for November and December 2022, retail inflation has remained above the RBI's upper tolerance level of 6 per cent since January 2022.

The Reserve Bank has projected retail inflation at 6.5 per cent for 2022-23, with the January-December quarter at 5.7 per cent.

FM: E-rupee worth over ₹130 cr in circulation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Digital or e-rupee worth over Rs 130 crore is in circulation on a pilot basis as of February 28, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had launched pilots in digital rupee in the wholesale segment (e-W) on November 1, 2022 and in the retail segment (e-R) on December 1, 2022.

Nine banks, viz., State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Union Bank of India, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Yes Bank, IDFC First Bank and HSBC, have been participating in the digital rupee wholesale pilot, Sitharaman said.

"As on February 28, 2023, the total digital rupee - Retail (e-R) and digital rupee - wholesale (e-W) in circulation is Rs 4.14 crore and Rs 126.27 crore, respectively," Sitharaman said in

a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

The e-R is in the form of a digital token that represents legal tender. It is being issued in the same denominations that paper currency and coins are currently issued. It is being distributed through financial intermediaries, i.e., banks. Users can transact with e-R through a digital wallet offered by the participating banks and stored on mobile phones/devices.

The e-pilot for retail segment was launched on December 1, 2022 in 5 select locations in closed user group for making Person to Person (P2P) and Person to Merchant (P2M) transactions. The on-boarded merchants comprise various segments like tea vendors, fruit sellers, street side and sidewalk vendors (including migrant fruit vendors selling on pavement opposite RBI's headquarters)," Sitharaman said.



SBI Mutual Fund raises ₹3,600 cr through dividend yield NFO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

SBI Mutual Fund on Monday said it has mobilised around Rs 3,600 crore in its New Fund Offer (NFO) for a dividend yield fund offering, giving it a market share of over 25 per cent in the segment.

The fund house collected the amount on the back of a strong promotion in regional languages, with around 1.23 lakh applications from 70 per cent of pin codes in the country and around 40,000 new investors.

The NFO of SBI Dividend Yield Fund was opened during February 20 to March 6, and it will reopen for subscriptions on March 17, the company said in a statement.

With this fund collection, SBI Mutual Fund now commands over 25 per cent share, the largest in the Dividend Yield category, which now has a total assets under management of Rs 13,844 crore.

The fund house believes that the category has a lot of potential and dividend yield funds should be part of an investor's portfolio, especially those looking to invest directly in equity or looking for a regular cash flow from dividends.

Blue economy, AI cannot be ignored, says CAG

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Comptroller and Auditor General of India Girish Chandra Murmu on Monday said "prominent sectors" like 'blue economy' and artificial intelligence can no longer be ignored, as he urged delegates of the Supreme Audit Institutions-20 to come up with an auditing framework for these categories.

Murmu was speaking at the inaugural session of the SAI20 Engagement Group meeting, which is being hosted by the CAG as part of the country's G20 presidency.

"It will be imperative for leading SAIs to start working on an auditing framework and checklists so that

auditors not only have broad guidelines, but also specific toolkits to audit these two sectors in a meaningful way," Murmu said.

Both 'blue economy' and artificial intelligence are emerging areas and "we as Supreme Audit Institutions cannot afford to ignore these prominent sectors", he said.

Recognising the importance of sustainability, growth and role of emerging technologies, the SAI20 has identified 'blue economy' and 'responsible artificial intelligence' as the two themes to discuss at this forum, the CAG said.

'Blue economy' is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods,



and jobs while preserving the health of the ecosystem

Responsible AI is a governance framework aimed at what data can be collected and used, how AI models should be evaluated, and how to best deploy and monitor models, it said.

The framework can also define who is accountable for any negative outcomes of AI.

"These two priority areas represent the new-age opportunities and concerns, underline the need for genuine cooperation," Murmu said.

He noted that SAI20, with its collaborative commitment to an accountable, economic, efficient and effective governance, and a strategic

partnership with the governments, has a crucial role to play.

The SAIs have the mandate to provide independent and objective examination of public services and serve as the much-needed feedback mechanism for policymakers in identifying the areas for improvements and opportunities, Murmu said.

The Centre has come out with a National Strategy for AI, which includes policy and programmes, global partnership, upskilling, capacity building, safe and ethical framework.

"SAI's, too, must imbibe a data culture while simultaneously building data capability," Murmu added.



Sebi to auction 66 properties of Saradha Group

Auction on April 11 to recover investors' money

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Monday said it will auction 66 properties of Saradha Group on April 11 at a reserve price totalling Rs 32 crore to recover money raised by the firm from the public through illicit schemes.

The properties to go under the hammer include land parcels located in West Bengal, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a notice.

The regulator said that the e-auction will be conducted between 11 am and 1 pm on April 11, 2023. The total reserve price of these properties is pegged at about Rs 32 crore.

Sebi has engaged Quirk Realty to assist it in sale of the properties and appointed C1 India as the e-auction provider.

The development came after the Calcutta High Court passed an order in June 2022, whereby it directed Sebi to proceed with the auction of properties of Saradha Group of Companies. The entire exercise was directed to be completed

within three months.

Saradha Group, a consortium of over 239 private companies, allegedly ran chit fund operations in West Bengal, Assam and Odisha and raised around Rs 4,000 crore from 1.7 million depositors before it collapsed in April 2013.

As per the notice, the regulator said bidders should make their own independent enquiries regarding the encumbrances, litigations, attachments and acquisition of liabilities of the property put on auction, prior submitting their bid.

"The purchaser shall participate in the e-auction on his own behalf and no third party intervention, like authorized agent/representative, would be permitted. The successful bidder shall bear the charges/ fee payable for transfer of the property in his/her name. All taxes shall be borne by the purchaser," the notice said.

In September 2022, the regulator said that it will auction 69 properties of Saradha Group of Companies on November 1 at a reserve price of Rs 30 crore.

Rupee falls 10 paise to close at 82.16 against US dollar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The rupee pared its initial gains to settle 10 paise down at 82.16 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, tracking the weak sentiment in the domestic equity market and unabated foreign fund outflow. Traders said fall in crude oil price and weaker dollar against major currencies, however, restricted the fall of the Indian currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened stronger at 81.78 against the American currency and touched a low of 82.20 during intra-day. It settled at 82.16 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a loss of 10 paise over its previous close of 82.06.

RBI may hike benchmark lending rates by 25 bps in April policy: DBS Research

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank is likely to hike benchmark lending rates by 25 basis points in its bi-monthly policy next month to bring down inflation within the central bank's comfort zone, DBS Group Research said on Monday.

To contain the rising prices, the RBI has hiked interest rates by 250 basis points since May last year. The latest rate hike of 25 basis points in February took the benchmark policy rate to 6.50 per cent.

In an online session on 'Growth resilience and sticky inflation', DBS Group Research Executive Director & Senior Economist Radhika Rao said the RBI may hike interest rates by 25 basis points in April and maintain a hawkish bias as

retail inflation is still high. Retail inflation in January spiked to 6.52 per cent against 5.72 per cent in December last year.

Rao, however, said inflation caused by supply-side constraints cannot be dealt with by monetary policy alone and is not enough to tackle inflation.

"Weather conditions are important for farm output. The local weather agency has said in the next 3 months you could see high temperatures... The upcoming monsoon in June-July would be a crucial period. Weather...Would be important for inflation and farm output as the sector employs about 45 per cent of the population," Rao said. She said inflation is still on the higher end of the target.

68K cases picked up for e-verification for income mismatch in AIS, ITR for FY 2019-20

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 68,000 cases have been picked up for e-verification by the income tax department for unreporting or under reporting of income in tax returns for 2019-20 fiscal, CBDT chief Nitin Gupta said on Monday.

Under the e-verification scheme, the I-T department informs the taxpayers about mismatch in Annual Information Statement (AIS) about financial transaction and the I-T returns filed. The taxpayer can reply to the tax department giving explanation for the mismatch or can file updated returns if they feel the mismatch flagged in e-verification notice is correct.

"On a pilot basis, about 68,000 cases pertaining to 2019-20 fiscal have been taken up for e-verification based on risk



management parameters set by the department. Of this, in 56 per cent cases or 35,000 cases the taxpayer have already satisfactorily replied to the notice or filed updated tax return," Gupta said.

He said a total of 15 lakh updated returns have been filed so far and Rs 1,250 crore worth tax was collected. However, no response has been received in the remaining 33,000 cases.

Gold jumps ₹970; silver zooms ₹1,600

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price jumped Rs 970 to Rs 56,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a rally in rates of precious metal internationally, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal had settled at Rs 55,580 per 10 grams.

Silver also zoomed Rs 1,600 to Rs 63,820 per kg.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at Rs 56,550 per 10 grams, up Rs 970 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas markets, both gold and silver were trading higher at USD 1,875 per ounce and USD 20.75 per ounce, respectively.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

STAYFREE JOINS HANDS WITH KIARA

Mumbai: Stayfree, one of India's leading brands in women's menstrual hygiene today named Bollywood's superstar and popular youth icon Kiara Advani, as its brand ambassador, and the face of its latest campaign for Stayfree Secure XL pads.

ANNUAL SPORTS DAY 'SPARDHA' ORGANISED

Gurugram: RITES Ltd., the leading Transport Infrastructure Consultancy and Engineering firm, organised its Annual Sports Day titled 'Spardha' on 5th March, Sunday with great zeal and fervor at Tau Devi Lal Stadium, Gurugram. The event organized by RITES Sports Association (RSA) saw many members of the RITES family participating in various sporting competitions.

52ND NATIONAL SAFETY PROGRAMME CELEBRATED

Delhi: 52nd National Safety Week was celebrated in POWERGRID Northern Region-1 from 04th to 10th March 2023. At Regional Head Quarters Pratyaksha CGM (F&A), NR-1 read the appeal by CMD-POWERGRID, released on this occasion & administered Safety pledge to all employees.

CBSE DOWNGRADES SCHOOL IN DEHRADUN

Dehradun: Lucent International School, Manduvala (Kothari), Sudhawal, via Premnagar, Dehradun-248007, Ultrakhand has been downgraded from Senior Secondary level to Secondary level with immediate effect on account of gross violations of CBSE Affiliation byelaws repeatedly. The school has been directed not to conduct any classes.

BARCA RESTORE 9-POINT LEAD



AP ■ BARCELONA

Raphinha's strike earned Barcelona an agonising 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao on Sunday to restore their nine-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

In the club's first game after being charged with corruption by Spanish prosecutors, Barcelona shut out the noise and took another step towards their first title since 2019.

The Catalans secured their 19th clean sheet in 25 La Liga games this season as they held on to earn their ninth 1-0 win of the season, keeping second-

place Madrid at arm's length after the champions beat Espanyol on Saturday.

Goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen made some superb saves in the second half and Alex Berenguer struck the post, but Athletic could not break down the league leaders.

When Inaki Williams eventually did late on, the goal was disallowed after VAR spotted a handball by Iker Muniain in the buildup.

With Ronald Araujo suspended, Xavi used Jules Kounde alongside Andreas Christensen and started Sergi Roberto at right-back.

Ferran Torres, starting on the left, pulled a shot narrowly wide of the near post as Barcelona began brightly, still without injured duo Ousmane Dembele and Pedri.

Ernesto Valverde, who won two league titles with Barcelona before he was sacked in 2020 with the team still top of the table, moved Nico Williams over to the left flank to try and get in behind Sergi Roberto.

Athletic pressed well and never let Barcelona rest, the Catalans uncomfortable but staying afloat despite the absence of key center-back Araujo.

Lewandowski should have

sent Barcelona ahead but took a heavy touch and Athletic goalkeeper Julen Agirrezabala was able to snatch the ball from the striker's toes.

The midfield battle was intense, exemplified by Gavi throwing himself at the ball to try and block a pass with a diving header.

Athletic fans threw fake banknotes with the word "mafia" printed on them into the air, in protest after Barcelona's corruption charge.

On the pitch, the Catalans were under the cosh, too, with Ter Stegen denying Inaki Williams' low at his near post.

Raul Garcia crashed a header off the crossbar from the resulting corner as Barcelona clung on. Against the run of play, they took the lead before half-time when Sergio Busquets cleverly found Raphinha, who finished clinically with his weaker right foot.

The goal was initially flagged offside, but VAR showed Raphinha was in a legal position when he received the ball, and soon the Brazilian was able to celebrate.

Raphinha's goal helped Barcelona beat Valencia by the same scoreline last week, and the Brazilian is enjoying his best form since joining from Leeds United last summer.

BACKS TO THE WALL

Lewandowski might have doubled Barcelona's lead in the second half but headed wide after a fine run and cross by Alejandro Balde. Athletic came close to equalizing again when Berenguer broke in down the left but struck the post.

Ter Stegen made a fine save at full stretch to claw out a Muniain effort from the edge of the box as Athletic attacked in waves.

Eventually, Inaki Williams blasted past Ter Stegen after racing through on goal, but Athletic were left infuriated after Muniain's handball was spotted at the start of the move.

In stoppage time, Los Leones had another fine chance as the ball bounced around in the box, but Ter Stegen produced another superb save and Marcos Alonso blocked another goal-bound effort to secure Barcelona's victory.

It leaves the Catalans sitting comfortably clear ahead of next Sunday's Clasico at Camp Nou.



Medvedev rolls on at Indian Wells

AP ■ INDIAN WELLS

Daniil Medvedev, no fan of the slow hard courts of Indian Wells, nevertheless came out on top in a back and forth battle with Ilya Ivashka on Sunday to push his ATP win streak to 16 matches.

Medvedev, the world number six who is coming off three straight titles at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, said his 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 third-round victory over 85th-ranked Ivashka was a "matter of a few points."

Medvedev lined up a fourth-round meeting with Germany's Alexander Zverev, the former world number two who is seeded 12th as he works his way back from the torn ankle ligaments that ended his 2022 campaign at the French Open. Zverev said he felt fortunate to come out with a 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 victory over Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori, who Zverev judged "the much better player" in the third set.

TSURENKO WITHDRAWS

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus

reached the fourth round at Indian Wells by walkover on Sunday as Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko pulled out of their scheduled match.

Organizers said Tsurenko cited "personal reasons" for yet another withdrawal.

No further details were given, and there was no indication that the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year — which has resulted in Russian and Belarussian tennis players from being barred from competing under their national flags — was a factor.

Indeed, Tsurenko has now lost by retirement or walkover in nine of her 18 tournaments dating back to Indian Wells last year.

She gave up a semi-final walkover at Canberra this year and gave up quarter-final walkovers at Eastbourne and Portoroz, Slovenia, last year.

Sabalenka, whose first Grand Slam title in Melbourne was part of a perfect 13-0 start to the year that ended in the quarter-finals at Dubai, had breezed into the third round with a 6-2, 6-0 victory over

Evgeniya Rodina.

She next faces former French Open winner Barbora Krejickova, who ousted China's Wang Xinyu 6-2, 6-7 (1/7), 6-2. Krejickova beat the top three players in the world on the way to the title in Dubai last month, climbing 14 places in the WTA rankings to 16th.

TSURENKO WITHDRAWS

American Jessica Pegula still finds it "weird" to think of herself as the world's number three player, but she doesn't feel any particular pressure to live up to the ranking. The American said her ability to compartmentalize keeps her focused on each match — just as it helps her take it point by point in the kind of comeback win she needed Sunday to reach the fourth round of the Indian Wells combined WTA and ATP Masters 1000 hard court tournament.

"That was definitely a battle today," Pegula said after rallying for a 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 victory over Anastasia Potapova, who lifted the WTA trophy in Linz last month.

Babar, Shaheen rested for T20I series against Afghanistan

PTI ■ LAHORE

Senior Pakistan cricketers, including captain Babar Azam and pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi, have been rested for the three-match T20I series against Afghanistan, beginning in Sharjah on March 24.

The Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) national selection committee has also not included opener Muhammad Rizwan, Haris Rauf and veteran batter Fakhar Zaman in the squad to be led by all-rounder Shadab Khan.

Four new faces — fast bowlers Ihsanullah, Zaman Khan and batters Tayyab Tahir and Saim Ayub — have been included along with sidelined players Azam Khan, Faheem Ashraf and Imad Wasim.

"I have spoken to Babar, Rizwan, Haris, Shaheen and Fakhar and taken them into confidence about the fact that we are using this series as a testing ground to try out new players and recall some of those who have performed well in the PSL (Pakistan Super League)," said chairman of the PCB management committee Najam Sethi on Monday.

Sethi said the seniors needed rest and added their place in the side was secure.

"Their places are confirmed in the team and we have given them genuine rest. There is no threat to our established captain, he remains captain of the national squad. The day he says I want to leave captaincy of one or more formats, that will be his decision. He is our top star and I am happy he has supported our initiative," said Sethi.

Chief selector Haroon Rasheed said the plan was to develop and test "our new players against Afghanistan."

"It is a tour to groom and assess our talent properly,"



Sethi also expressed disappointment with speculation in the media around selection of the team and captain, saying it was unfair.

"No one asked us. Let me tell you, Shaheen (Afridi) was never under consideration for captaincy for this series. It is Shadab's

right to lead the team."

Media reports ahead of the squad announcement suggested that the left-arm pace bowler would lead the team for the series against Afghanistan.

Pakistan squad: Shadab Khan (C), Abdullah Shafique, Azam Khan, Faheem Ashraf,

Iftikhar Ahmed, Ihsanullah, Imad Wasim, Muhammad Haris, Muhammad Nawaz, Muhammad Wasim jr, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shan Masood, Tayyab Tahir, Zaman Khan.

Reserve players: Abrar Ahmed, Haseebullah Khan and Osama Mir.

I have kept my options open: PCB chairman on Asia Cup & WC

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Najam Sethi is exploring all options as far as this year's Asia Cup in Pakistan and ODI World Cup in India are concerned, saying it's time to "take a clear position".

Sethi said he will raise these issues in the next Asian Cricket Council (ACC) and ICC meetings. "We have complex issues on hand but for me when I go to the ACC and ICC meetings I have kept all options open for us and we have to take a clear position now," he said.

He said while there had been no change in India's stance on not sending its team to

Pakistan for the Asia Cup, the PCB is also firm that it will have to think about not playing the World Cup in India, if they don't come to Pakistan for the continental event.

"I have kept my options open because when all teams are coming to Pakistan and have no issues with security. Then why is India worried about the security. In the same way we can also have security concerns over sending our team to India for the World Cup and I will be bringing this to the table at the coming meetings," he said.

The ICC CEO and Executive Board meetings are being held this month with Sethi and other officials representing

the PCB at the meetings.

"Obviously we don't support this stance (by India) because we want to hold the Asia Cup and remember it is not just about the Asia Cup and World Cup it is also about the Champions Trophy in 2025 in Pakistan."

Sethi said that before going to the meeting he had sought consultation with the government on the issues.

"I had sought advice from the government and the situation is that we have to go by what our patron in chief tells us to do. If he says go and play in World Cup even if India doesn't come for Asia Cup, what can we do? If he says don't go it is a similar situation for us."

Juve fight off last-placed Samp

AP ■ TURIN

Adrien Rabiot made sure Juventus continued their charge towards European football with a decisive brace in his team's tight 4-2 Serie A win over struggling Sampdoria.

France midfielder Rabiot put Juve two ahead with a first-half header and then smashed them back in front in the 64th minute after Samp had stunned the home crowd by leveling with two rapid-fire goals from Tommaso Augello and Filip Djuricic.

Youngster Matias Soule nodded home in stoppage time to make the scoreline more flattering against Samp, who are bottom and 12 points from



safety.

Rabiot almost left Juve in the summer but has become a key figure in Massimiliano Allegri's team, his double taking his league tally to seven and moving the Turin giants to within four points of the European places.

Juventus, in seventh on 38 points, are contesting a 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity, and as it stands, they would be second should their appeal be successful.

They would still be a whopping 15 points behind champions-elect Napoli, but given the inconsistent form of Serie A's other top clubs, they would be a strong bet to reach next season's Champions League.

BBC reaches deal with Gary Lineker

AP ■ LONDON

Gary Lineker will return as presenter of the flagship BBC football show Match of the Day, the broadcaster said on Monday, ending a crisis sparked by his criticism of the UK government's new asylum policy.

The former England footballer was suspended on Friday after using Twitter last week to compare the language used to launch the new policy to the rhetoric of Nazi-era Germany.

His comments and removal sparked days of frenzied media coverage, that escalated on Friday after fellow presenters, pundits and commentators refused to work over the weekend in support. That threw the publicly funded broadcaster's sports coverage into disarray, curtailing its highlights package to just 20 minutes, without commentary or analysis.

Brook beats Jadeja to ICC player of the month award

PTI ■ DUBAI

England's Harry Brook on Monday overcame India's Ravindra Jadeja and Gudakesh Motie of the West Indies to win the ICC player of the month award for February with Australian Ashleigh Gardner claiming the top prize in the women's section.

Brook bagged his second player of the month award after his exploits in New Zealand Test series, becoming only the second man to win it on two separate occasions along with Babar Azam of Pakistan.

Gardner won the honour following Australia's successful ICC women's T20 World Cup campaign recently. Gardner has also won it two times now, after winning one last December.

The outcomes of the ICC Player of the Month Awards for February replicate the results of December 2022, where both claimed their maiden awards following prolific months for their respective teams in short and long formats of the game.

Gardner was crowned after a series of outstanding performances inspired Australia's successful defence of their Women's T20 World Cup crown in South Africa. Brook earns his second prize after once more demonstrating his rising stock in international cricket, the game's apex body said of him. The free-scoring batter has impressed in all formats, and recent performances in England's resurgent Test side continue to outline his high potential.



Kosovo boxer set to miss World C'ship due to visa issue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Having lost all hope of securing an Indian visa to compete at the Women's Boxing World Championship, starting here on Wednesday, Kosova boxer Donjeta Sadiku has questioned International Boxing Association's (IBA) decision to grant the event's hosting rights to India. Uncertainty looms large over Sadiku's participation at IBA's flagship event since the Indian government is yet to grant her visa.

India does not recognise Kosovo — a disputed territory in South Eastern Europe. Sadiku said Kosovo's Sports Ministry is trying to get in touch with the Indian government but it seems she will have to miss the prestigious tournament yet again.

This is not the first time Sadiku has faced such a situation. The 2022 lightweight World Championship bronze medalist boxer has been denied the Indian visa twice before, which led to her missing the 2018 women's World Championship in Delhi and the Youth Women's World Boxing Championships in Guwahati respectively.

"I don't know why IBA allowed India to organise this championship, knowing that India didn't allow me participate there in the past."

"This is the third time that the India government is not allowing me to participate in world boxing championship. I'm very disappointed, as I've trained very hard and I was very motivated to take a medal in India."

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 but India does not recognise it as a state. Sadiku said the Boxing Federation of Kosovo had filed her visa application in December.

Indian shuttlers face uphill task in quest for All England glory

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

Returning from injuries and battling in different form, Indian shuttlers will have to play out of their skins to end the country's agonising wait for a title at the All England Championships beginning here on Tuesday.

It has been 22 years since India won the coveted title when Pullela Gopichand (2001) followed the legendary Prakash Padukone (1980) to achieve the honour.

While Lakshya Sen came close to securing the crown when he reached the final in the last edition and Saina Nehwal was runners-up in the 2015 edition, other Indians, including two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu, couldn't go beyond the last-four in the prestigious event.

This time around, things will only be tougher as both Sen and Sindhu, since returning from a long injury lay-

off, had subdued starts to the new season, having made early exits in Malaysia and India Open.

World No. 12 Sen is coming into the event after a shock loss to world No. 41 Christo Popov of France in the first round of German Open, while Sindhu, in a desperate measure, has parted ways with Korea's Park Tae-sang a few weeks ahead of the event.

Sen will face "Mr. Consistent" Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei, seeded fifth, while Sindhu will be up against tricky Chinese Zhang Yi Man, who has a 1-1 record against her.

The former world champion is expected to meet fifth seed He Bingjiao of China if she crosses the opening hurdle, while nemesis and third seed Tai Tzu Ying of Chinese Taipei could be her likely opponent in the quarters.

If there is one Indian who could be the dark horse, it is world No. 9 HS Prannoy, who has been consistent



and has registered some big wins against top players, the latest being Malaysia's world No. 4 Lee Zii Jia at the Badminton Asia Mixed team championship (BATC) in February.

Prannoy will open his campaign against Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei, while Kidambi Srikanth, who also has been struggling for some time, is pitted against France's Toma Junior Popov.

While none of the singles players are seeded this time, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will hope to live up to their sixth seeding, especially after their nemesis and first-round opponent Marcus Fernaldi Gideon and Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo of Indonesia pulled out at the last moment.

Satwik is making a comeback after recovering from a hip injury he sustained during the India Open in January and a lot will depend on how

he performs.

The world No. 6 pair had reached the semi-finals at the season-opening Malaysia Open.

Among other Indians in fray, MR Arjun, having recovered from an injury, will pair up with his men's doubles partner Dhruv Kapila to take on China's Ren Xiang Yu and Tan Qiang.

Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who were semi-finalists in 2022, will also look to dazzle after their good show at BATC when they open against the seventh-seeded Thai pair of Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai.

Former world No. 1 Saina Nehwal, who gave a slight glimpse of her old self at the India Open, will meet China's Han Yue.

The mixed pair of Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto and women's pair of Ashwini Bhat K and Shikha Gautam are also in fray.

INDIA QUALIFY FOR WTC FINAL, WIN BGT

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

On an uneventful day of cricket, India qualified for the World Test Championship (WTC) final and clinched the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the fourth successive time after the fourth and final match against Australia ended in a drab draw, here on Monday.

India's spot in the WTC final against Australia was locked before the post-lunch session when Sri Lanka lost the Christchurch Test to New Zealand by two wickets as Kane Williamson's magnificent hundred steered his side to one of the most thrilling wins in Test cricket.

Australia were 175 for 2 in 78.1 overs in their second innings with a lead of 84 runs when the two teams agreed to settle for a draw. India have now beaten Australia by an identical 2-1 margin in the last four series — 2017 (home), 2018-19 (away), 2020-21 (away) and now 2023 at home.

It was a 'Memorable Monday' for India as a country in both performing arts and sports with 'RRR's song 'Natu Natu' getting the Oscar for the best song and Elephant Whisperers winning the 'Best Documentary Award'.

By the afternoon, cricket added to the list of global accomplishments and now Rohit Sharma would love to break the decade-long ICC Trophy jinx.

DRAW WAS ONLY RESULT

With a feathered of a track on offer, which former Australian opener Mark Waugh sarcastically said can host a "22-day Test match", an outcome favouring either side was almost impossible, with only two completed innings in four days.

For Australia, it was important that their batters made the best use of the flat surface without being under pressure as they had already qualified for the WTC final. Travis Head (90 off 163 balls) will certainly put pressure on David Warner when he comes back while Marnus Labuschagne (63 not out, 213 balls) also did well.

The Indian team could feel chuffed after back-to-back WTC final qualification but head coach Rahul Dravid and captain Sharma would know well that Australia will be a different proposition in the final where the track will certainly not aid the



It is going to be a challenge: Dravid on playing WTC final right after IPL

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Playing the World Test Championship (WTC) final against Australia within one week of the IPL's conclusion is going to be a huge challenge, India head coach Rahul Dravid said on Monday. Terming it a "challenge", the Indian head coach said they would have to plan it out properly.

"We just qualified at lunchtime today. I wasn't counting my chickens before they hatched. We'll celebrate this for starters," Dravid said after the Test match.

"It is going to be a challenge. There's going to be a lot of logistics involved given the IPL final is only a week before the WTC final. We'll think about it."

The WTC final will be played at The Oval in London from June 7-11, while the IPL ends on June 1.

Regarding the Test series against Australia, Dravid was most impressed by the Indian team's ability to fight back from extremely difficult situations.

"Whenever we were under pressure with our backs to the wall we had to respond and we always found that. It's one of the heartening things about coaching this team," Dravid told the official broadcaster

Star Sports.

"Rohit led the way in the first Test with a brilliant hundred and it was bookended by Virat Kohli's brilliant 186. In the middle we had performances from (Ravichandran) Ashwin, (Ravindra) Jadeja, Axar (Patel), Shubman there. I've probably missed out a few. I think our fight stood out."

India won the first two Tests in Nagpur and Delhi while Australia pulled one back in Indore as each of the first three matches of the series lasted two and half days on spiteful turning tracks.

But the pitch on offer for the series-deciding fourth Test was good for batting as Australia made full use of winning the toss to post a big total with centuries from Usman Khawaja (180) and Cameron Green (114).

"It was a really hard-fought series, there were moments where we were put under extreme pressure by a really good cricket team and we responded. Whenever we needed someone to step up and put in a special performance, we found it."

'JADEJA GIVES FREEDOM'

R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja shared the Player-of-the-Series award. Veteran



off-spinner Ashwin finished with 25 wickets and also scored 86 runs in the series, while left-arm spin-bowling all-rounder Jadeja accounted for 22 wickets and scored 135 runs with one half-century.

"It's been a great journey together. We wouldn't be the same without the other. He gives me a lot of freedom to be creative on the field with the ball. Credit to him. I thought he bowled beautifully in the Delhi Test. That's why we're here," Ashwin said of Jadeja.

Jadeja said they have a great chemistry on the field and they always keep discussing about the game.

"We're always talking about the wicket, what field we should have to particular batters. We're always talking and discussing."

Jadeja however added he could have scored more runs.

"I'm not happy with my batting in the series. I missed on a few occasions. Especially in this game... Hopefully I'll work harder and be more focussed on my batting for the next series," he said.



Not in a space where I'll go out and prove someone wrong: Kohli

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Indian star batter Virat Kohli, who ended his century drought in Tests with a patient 186 against Australia here, on Monday said he's not in a "space where I will go out and prove someone wrong".

Kohli endured a painful wait of more than three years to notch his Test century number 28, the knock helping India finish with 571 in reply to Australia's 480 in the drawn fourth and final game.

"The expectations that I have for myself as a player are more important to me," Kohli told the official broadcasters after being adjudged Player of the Match.

"I am not in a space now where I will go out and prove someone wrong. I also need to justify why I am there on the field," Kohli, who now has 75 international centuries, said.

"I think in Test cricket I wasn't able to play with my tempo and template that I

have played with for the last 10 years for awhile now. So that was the one thing I was trying to do. I felt like I was batting really well from the first innings in Nagpur."

Kohli admitted he was not in his own in the Test format so he had to apply himself harder. Kohli faced 364 balls in his knock of 186 and scored only 60 runs in boundaries.

It was a deliberate ploy as India had a batter short in their XI after Shreyas Iyer pulled out because of a back injury.

"We lost Shreyas to injury and were a batter short. So, we decided to play time. We focused on batting long."

"We focussed more on batting as long as possible for the team. I did that for periods but not to the capability that I have done in the past."

"From that perspective I was disappointed but there was belief there that I was playing well and if I got an opportunity on a decent wicket then I can make a big one," he concluded.

Jadeja will be CSK's X-factor in IPL 2023, says Harbhajan

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India and Chennai Super Kings cricketer Harbhajan Singh feels that star all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja will be the X factor for the four-time champions in the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League.

Jadeja has made a successful return to top-flight cricket after spending several months away due to a knee surgery, playing a vital role in India's 2-1 win in the four-Test series against Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy 2022-23.

The veteran all-rounder will once again be playing a key role for CSK after a rocky season last year, when he was named the captain with the regular leader for many years, MS Dhoni, stepping down.

But the captaincy stint didn't go well for Jadeja, who has played for Chennai since 2012. The team lost six out of the first eight matches and Jadeja stepped down from the post, with Dhoni taking over the leadership role once again, which he will continue with in the 2023 IPL.

The IPL 2023 starts on March 31 with Chennai Super Kings slated to face the defending champions Gujarat Titans in the opening match.

Harbhajan told Star Sports, "The one person who everyone should keep an eye on is Ravindra Jadeja, especially how he bats for CSK. He may be promoted up the order plus he has his four overs. If you look at it from a world cricket perspective, I don't think there's a better all-rounder than him."

"I'm looking forward to seeing Ravindra Jadeja in the IPL. The X factor for me will be Ravindra Jadeja because he has been very successful in these conditions as a bowler and as a batsman, he's been playing there for so many years. So for me, he is definitely going to be the X factor for the side."

The ex-India spinner, also a former player for CSK, said Dhoni remains the heart of the team.

"The biggest strength of this team is MS Dhoni. He is the heart of the team. He knows the team very well and he is probably the best person to get the most out of each player in the team."

According to the spin great, the likes of Ben Stokes, Moeen Ali and Devon Conway and Maheesh Theekshana will play a vital role in their IPL 2023 season.



Saika Ishaque knows her game very well: Ecclestone

PTI ■ MUMBAI

UP Warriorz and England left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone has heaped praise on uncapped India and Mumbai Indians tweaker Saika Ishaque, who has lit up the Women's Premier League with 12 wickets in only four matches, saying she knows her game very well.

Ishaque led Mumbai Indians to a big win on Sunday night against UP Warriorz, after the opposition threatened to run away with the game, taking 3/33 to take her wickets tally far ahead of any of her peers in the league.

World No. 1 ODI bowler, Ecclestone, who is behind the Indian left-arm spinner Ishaque with eight wickets in four matches of WPL, is all praise for her opponent.

"She is doing great, she has been around for a lot of years and played a lot of cricket. She knows her game so well and she got along with us during the game and it has been very exciting for her," Ecclestone said.

The England spinner, who has so far played 70 T20Is, 55 ODIs and five Tests for her country, says her side UP Warriorz have plenty of room for improvement after a mixed

start — two wins and two losses from four matches — to the WPL. "I think the feeling about it is that it has been scratchy in all our games. There is still a lot to improve in this group. We have not bowled our best yet and that is definitely a place where we can improve and hopefully in the next few games we start peaking at the right time in the competition," she said.

"It has been a really enjoyable stint so far. We have got a great group at UP (Warriorz). We obviously are a new franchise and we have to see how things work. I think it is very exciting to have the WPL here.

Williamson leads NZ to last-ball win over Sri Lanka

AP ■ CHRISTCHURCH

Kane Williamson was hailed as "world class" after New Zealand's record Test run-scorer orchestrated a dramatic last-ball win over Sri Lanka on a rain-disrupted final day in Christchurch on Monday.

The thrilling triumph at the Hagley Oval scuppered Sri Lanka's chances of making the World Test Championship final, handing the spot to India.

In a helter-skelter finish, the only Sri Lankans not guarding the boundary for most of the closing 10 overs were the bowler and wicketkeeper as New Zealand chased down their target of 285. Having lost eight wickets and on a day limited to 53 overs, skipper Tim Southee paid tribute to his star batsman Williamson.

The former captain finished 121 not out and ran a bye

off the final delivery of the match in a remarkable conclusion, to go with New Zealand's one-run victory over England a fortnight ago. "Seeing how calm he is out in the middle keeps us calm as well," Southee said as New Zealand celebrated another famous, nail-biting win.

"The guys were very trusting in what he was going to do and alongside Daryl (Mitchell) for most of the day it was a great partnership that got us in that great position."

"He's a world-class player and world-class players are able to perform in different conditions." Visiting captain Dimuth Karunaratne said that fielding errors let his side down, particularly dropping the talisman Williamson on 33.

"We had a good chance to win, unfortunately we are the losing side," he said.

"We had misfields a few



times that cost us the game. We have to minimise those mistakes."

When rain wiped out the first two sessions on the fifth day, the umpires ruled there would be a minimum of 53 overs played in the evening, which meant New Zealand would have to average 4.85 an over.

After a steady but slow start

which saw the hosts at 90-3, Williamson and Mitchell picked up the pace.

They put on 142 in 26 overs for the fourth wicket with the precision of a one-day partnership as Sri Lanka paid a heavy price for Niroshan Dickwella dropping Williamson.

"If we had grabbed that catch it would have been a dif-

ferent story," said skipper Karunaratne. The 31-year-old Mitchell, a late arrival on the international stage, contributed 81 to lift his average to a phenomenal 59.04 from 26 innings.

In a match of see-sawing fortunes, Sri Lanka had the upper hand on the opening two days before a first-innings century from Mitchell and a swashbuckling 72 from Matt Henry — the last 60 from only 35 deliveries — swung the game in New Zealand's favour.

Sri Lanka fought their way back into contention on the fourth day with a defiant 115 from Angelo Mathews, who built partnerships of 105 for the fifth wicket with Dinesh Chandimal and then 60 with Dhananjaya de Silva.

When the Sri Lanka second innings folded at 302 it left New Zealand needing 285 to win on a ground where the highest

fourth-innings score was 256-8 by New Zealand in a 2018 draw against England. Devon Conway was removed for five, leaving the outcome on a knife edge going into the final day.

When play resumed on Monday, Prabath Jayasuriya made early in-roads with the wickets of Tom Latham for 25 and Henry Nicholls for 20.

Asitha Fernando bowled Mitchell and Tom Blundell (three) and had Michael Bracewell caught for 10 to leave New Zealand 266-6 and needing a further 19 runs with 16 balls left.

Williamson kept going to take the game to the final ball as Southee (one) and Matt Henry (four) came and went, with Neil Wagner not out nought.

For Sri Lanka, Fernando took 3-63 and Jayasuriya 2-92. The second Test starts in Wellington on Friday.