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CHINA'S FORAYS INTO
INDO-PACIFIC REGION

WORLD 9

2.5 TONNES OF URANIUM MISSING,
SAYS UN NUCLEAR WATCHDOG

MONEY 10

MARKETS EXTEND GAINS
IN SEE-SAW TRADE

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Akhilesh, Mamata for new front sans Cong

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Two “good friends” the Trinamool Congress and the Samajwadi Party will not join hands with the Congress in the run-up to the 2024 general elections, the leaders of the two parties — Mamata Banerjee and Akhilesh Yadav — said on Friday.

Akhilesh, who is in Kolkata to attend his party's two-day-long national executive meet, met the Bengal Chief Minister at her Kalighat residence. He later said there was no question of going with the Congress, adding that the SP's friendship with the TMC would continue.

“Mamata didi will continue to fight the BJP as she had been doing in the past,” he said.

There was “no question of joining hands with the Congress,” he said, adding that the SP would “maintain equidistance both from the Congress and the BJP.” In Bengal his party would be with the Trinamool Congress.

On whether there would be a Third Front coming up, he did not rule out completely of “some kind of alliance mechanism” coming up before the elections.

On what transpired between the two leaders, Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said, “It is natural for them to talk politics when two senior politicians meet... They dwell on a whole lot of issues... including



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, national vice-president Kironmoy Nanda and party leader Shiwpal Singh Yadav during a meeting in Kolkata on Friday

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their joint fight against the BJP.”

Earlier, upon his arrival in Kolkata, Yadav told reporters that the BJP was misusing the Enforcement Directorate and the Central Bureau of Investigation to victimise Opposition leaders.

Like Akhilesh, the TMC too would not join hands with the Congress, its parliamentary party leader Sudip

Bandopadhyay said after coming out of a party meeting at the Bengal Chief Minister's residence.

Another TMC leader said, “The Congress cannot take us for granted.” On the one hand, Congress leaders say that TMC has links with the BJP and Adani and, on the other, they want the TMC to join hands with them, he added.

Rahul apology vs Adani JPC demands: Slugfest continues

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha proceedings were again adjourned for the day on Friday due to slogan shouting by the Opposition and protests by the ruling party members over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's “democracy-under-attack” remarks made in London recently.

BJP president JP Nadda led his party's attack on Rahul, charging him with becoming a “permanent part of the anti-India toolkit” that seeks a weak Government here so as to exploit it for its benefits.

In a statement, Nadda accused Rahul of speaking the language of “anti-India” George Soros, a billionaire financier, and alleged that the Congress and the “so-called Left liberals” have become a part of the “deep state” conspiracy involving foreign forces against the country.

Meanwhile, sources in the BJP said they won't let Rahul speak in Parliament unless he apologises for his London remarks.

Proceedings on Sansad TV were mostly inaudible. While Parliament sources said it was the result of a “technical glitch”,



Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and other Opposition MPs during a protest over the Adani issue at Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Friday

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several Congress leaders alleged that proceedings were “muted” when its MPs raised slogans demanding that Rahul be allowed to speak, and asked if this was democracy.

This was for the fifth consecutive day that the House did not function ever since the second half of the Budget session began on March 13.

As soon as the Lok Sabha assembled for the day, some Congress members trooped to the Well of the House shouting

slogans and demanded that Rahul be allowed to speak in the House. They also demanded a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into alleged stock manipulation by the Adani Group, a business conglomerate headed by industrialist Gautam Adani.

The members of the Treasury Benches also raised counter-slogans from their seats, demanding an apology from Gandhi for his remarks.

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Sisodia's ED remand extended by 5 days, asked to vacate house

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A court here on Friday extended by five days the Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody of AAP leader Manish Sisodia in a money laundering case related to the Delhi Excise Policy. The ED told the court that it wants to confront Sisodia with 1.23 lakh emails.

Also, weeks after resignation from the Delhi Cabinet, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain's bungalows have been allotted to newly inducted Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj.

Sisodia and Jain have been asked to vacate the bungalows on or before March 21, according to a letter by the Public

Works Department on March 14.

In its remand application, the ED claimed that Sisodia was involved in “large scale destruction of digital evidence to impede probe” into the excise case and had changed and destroyed 14 phones.

In its remand application, seeking an extension of Sisodia's custody, the ED said the major recommendations that ultimately formed the basis for the Excise Policy 2021-22, including fixing of 12 per cent profit margin for wholesalers, were not decided in the group of Ministers (GoM) meetings and instead “imported from external sources.”

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Rani's film ruffles Norway's feathers

Oslo terms film work of fiction

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Norway has termed Rani

Mukherjee starrer “Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway”, a film based on Indian couple who fought the Norway Government for custody of their kids as a “work of fiction”. Norway also said “child

welfare is not driven by profit”.

Meanwhile, film producer Nikkhil Advani said Norwegian Ambassador was invited for a screening of the movie where he “admonished” them for film, based on Sagarika Chakaraborty's book *The Journey of a Mother*.

Asserting that “some general facts must be set right”, the Norwegian Embassy in a statement said on Friday.

“In Norway, we value and respect different family systems and cultural practices, also

when these are different to what we are accustomed to — apart from corporal punishment in the upbringing. There is zero tolerance for violence in any shape or form,” said the Norway Embassy.

The film follows the story of an Indian immigrant couple whose world came crashing down in 2012 when their two children were removed from their care by the Norwegian foster system due to differences in culture.

Continued on Page 2

Can't bulldoze Govt authority, says SC

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday observed that a signal must not go to the Government that the court can bulldoze its authority by passing judicial orders, while hearing a plea moved by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) to convert a 1.33 acre land allotted to the top court for the construction of lawyers' chambers.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and comprising Justices SK Kaul and PS Narasimha, said it would take

up the land allotment issue for lawyers' chambers with the Government.

“We must trust the court to take it up on the administrative side with the government. A signal must not go to the government that we can bulldoze their authority by passing judicial orders”, said the bench.

The bench queried senior advocate and SCBA president Vikas Singh, how could the court pass an order to take over the land for allotment of chambers? Lawyers are part of us, but can we use our own judicial powers to safeguard our own people?



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat launches the first Urdu translation of the Samaveda, one of the four Vedas, at Red Fort in New Delhi on Friday. Bollywood script writer and filmmaker Iqbal Durrani translated it from Vedic Sanskrit to Urdu. While reading out from the book, Durrani said Dara Shikoh translated Upanishads and wanted to translate Vedas but Aurangzeb got him killed; but after 400 years, that dream has been fulfilled by me under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

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CAPSULE

6 KILLED IN HIGH-RISE INFERNO IN HYDERABAD

Hyderabad: Six people, including four women died of asphyxiation following a major fire in a multi-storey commercial complex in Secunderabad here, officials said on Friday. All the dead were found in an office room on the fifth floor.

PARENT OF SVB SEEKS BANKRUPTCY SHIELD

New York: The parent of Silicon Valley Bank, seized last week by the US, is filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. SVB Financial Group, along with its CEO and its chief financial officer, were targeted this week in a class action lawsuit that claims the company didn't disclose the risks that future interest rate increases would have on its business.

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A new-age Natwarlal, posing as a senior bureaucrat from the Prime Minister's Office, has been arrested by the Jammu & Kashmir Police after he took the entire security apparatus for a ride by getting a Z-plus security cover, multiple rides in a bulletproof SUV, and a plush hotel accommodation during his stay in the Kashmir Valley at different intervals.

If this was not enough to wake up the babus at the helm of affairs from their deep slumber in J&K, the conman from Gujarat identified as Kiran Bhai Patel also chaired a few meetings with local bureaucrats and visited a few tourist destinations to discuss the proposals of creating tourist infra-

structure and raising a temple to woo tourists from Gujarat and other States.

Patel, who posed as Additional Director (Strategy & Campaigns) in the Prime Minister's Office, was picked up by the police from a five-star hotel in Srinagar on a tip-off from the CID wing of the J&K Police on March 2.

He had been visiting the Kashmir Valley at regular intervals since November 2022. Though he has been in police custody since March 2, his arrest was kept a tightly guarded secret as this episode exposed the glaring loopholes in the multi-tier security apparatus and the complacent approach of the babudom in the UT administration.

According to his various



An undated photo of Kiran Patel with his security

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social media pages, Patel was enjoying the warm hospitality of the UT administration. Patel posted several images and short clips of video footage shot around tourist destinations of Gulmarg, Doodhpathri, Aharbal Waterfall, Dal Lake, Lal Chowk Srinagar, etc. His family was seen accompanying him in some of the videos; security guards were seen escorting him.

On Friday, the spokesman of the Jammu & Kashmir Police issued a written statement: “On 2nd of March 2023, CID wing of J&K Police gave information to police about the arrival of an impersonator in Kashmir. SSP Srinagar immediately sent a team led by SP East to Lalit hotel. The particulars of this person were found

as Kiran Bhai Patel, son of Juddesh Bhai Patel, resident of Ahmadabad, Gujarat, who was impersonating himself as Additional Director (Strategy and campaigns) PMO.”

As his replies were found suspicious, he was taken to Nishat Police Station wherein he admitted to his crime. Ten fake visiting cards and two mobiles were seized from him, the statement said.

The verified twitter handle of the impersonator claims Patel acquired a PhD from Commonwealth University, Virginia, an MBA from IIM Trichy, and an MTech in Computer Science and BE in Computer Engineering. He also described himself as a “thinker, strategist, analyst and campaign manager.”

Govt bats for Lok Sabha, Assembly polls in one go

Lists out imperatives before idea implemented

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday battled for holding simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies, saying it would result in huge savings to the public exchequer, as it listed out “imperatives” such as amending the Constitution and bringing all political parties on board before carrying out the gigantic exercise.

In a written reply in Lok Sabha, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said a parliamentary panel had examined the issue of simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies in consultation with various stakeholders, including the Election Commission. The Committee made certain recommendations in this regard. “The matter now stands referred to the Law Commission for further examination to work out a practicable road map and framework for simultaneous elections ...,” Rijiju said.

Simultaneous elections, he noted, would result in huge savings to the public exchequer and avoid replication of effort on part of administrative and law and order machinery in holding repeated elections. It would bring considerable savings to political parties and candidates in their election campaigns.

“Further, asynchronous Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly elections (including bye-election) result in prolonged enforcement of Model Code of Conduct with its concomitant adverse impact on developmental and welfare programmes,” the minister said.

He also listed out “major impediments/imperatives” for synchronisation for Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly elections.

He said the change would require amendments in “not less than five” articles of the Constitution -- article 83 relating to duration of Houses of Parliament, article 85 relating to dissolution of Lok Sabha by the President, article 172 relating to duration of the state legislatures, article 174 relating to dissolution of the state legislatures, and article 356 relating to the imposition of President’s Rule in the states.

Before the proposal is implemented, it would also require obtaining consensus of all



political parties.

“Having regard to the federal structure of our system of governance, it is imperative that consensus of all state governments is also obtained,” the minister pointed out.

He said it would also require an additional number of electronic voting machines and VVPATs (paper trail machines), “which would cost a huge amount, might be in thousands of crores (of rupees).”

“Considering that the life of a machine is only 15 days, this would imply that machine would be used for about three or four times in its life span, entailing huge expenditure in its replacement after every 15 years.”

He also flagged the need for additional polling personnel and security forces.

He said the department-related Parliamentary standing committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice in its 79th report had highlighted that in South Africa, elections to national as well as provincial legislatures are held simultaneously for five years and municipal elections are held two years later.

In Sweden, elections to national legislature (Riksdag) and provincial legislature/county council (landsting) and local bodies/municipal assemblies (Kommunfullmaktige) are held on a fixed date — second Sunday in September for four years.

In the UK, the term of Parliament is governed by the Fixed-term Parliament Act, 2011, he informed the house.

NIA frames charges against J&K scribe, scholar for writing ‘seditious’ article

PTI ■ JAMMU

In a first, a special NIA court in Jammu has framed charges against two accused — a journalist and a university scholar — for writing and publishing a “seditious” article on a news portal.

The case against arrested journalist Peerzada Fahad Shah and Kashmir University scholar Abdul Ala Fazili was probed by the Special Investigation Agency (SIA) which successfully brought it up to the stage of framing charges, an official said. The official said the Special Judge designed under the NIA Act, Jammu, Ashwani Kumar framed the charges against Shah and Fazili on Thursday.

The case pertains to an information received by the CIJ police station (SIA Jammu) on April 4 last year along with a copy of an article titled ‘The Shackles of Slavery Will Break’ written by Fazili and published in the digital magazine (portal) ‘The Kashmir Walla’ through its editor-in-chief cum director Shah, according to the official.

“The duo under an active conspiracy and Pakistan’s support had resurrected a platform reviving the narrative in support of the terrorist and separatist eco-system. They had been spreading anti-India narrative by exploiting digital platforms under a concealed and camouflaged setup, with the help of illicit funding received from hostile foreign agencies



and proscribed terrorist organisations,” he said.

After hearing the rival contentions, the special court found sufficient material collected by the SIA against the accused and framed charges against Fazili and Shah. Fazili has been charged under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act’s (UAPA) section 13 (unlawful activity) and 18 (conspiracy, advocating,

abetting, inciting, facilitating a terrorist act or any preparation to commit a terrorist act) and the Indian Penal Code’s sections 121 (abetting waging of war against government of India), 153B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence of offence).

Shah was charged under UAPA’s section 13 and 18, and IPC sections 121 and 153-B and Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act’s sections 35 (accepting foreign contribution in contravention of provisions of FCRA, or any order or rule therein) and 39 (violation of FCRA by a company tantamount to contravention by the persons incharge or responsi-

ble for business of such company), the official said.

The official said the investigation has established that the accused were in touch with secessionists across the border and also with some identified terrorists locally. “Through their publications they have brazenly advocated terrorism and glorified the terrorists with the sole intention to radicalise the youth of J&K (Jammu and Kashmir) and to entice and incite them in joining secessionist and terrorist organisations,” the official said.

The official said the SIA had chargesheeted the case in the court of special judge Jammu on October 13 last year after procuring the requisite government sanction.

Two aides of Atiq’s brother held in UP

Bareilly: Two alleged aides of former MLA Ashraf, who is currently lodged in a jail here, were arrested, police said on Friday.

Ashraf is the brother of gangster-turned-politician and former MP Atiq Ahmed.

Police arrested Farhad alias Guddu, a resident of Partapur Jeevan Sahay village of Izzatnagar, and Yameen, a resident of Saqlain Nagar in the Baradari area, Bareilly Superintendent of Police Rahul Bhati said. The two were wanted in connection with several cases registered at Bithri Chainpur police station, he added.

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Man arrested for filming woman in G’gram mall loo

PRAVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

A man was arrested while he was allegedly filming a woman using the washroom of ILD Trade Centre Mall located on Sohna Road, Sector-47 Gurugram, the police said. The accused has been identified as Akash Chaurasia.

The woman stated in her police complaint, the incident took place on Wednesday around 6.50 pm when she was using the 2nd-floor ladies’ washroom. “Akash entered into 2nd-floor ladies’ washroom and took my video while I was using the washroom. By the time I realised



that he is inside the ladies’ washroom taking video, I started shouting at him. I immediately came out but then he ran away,” the woman told the police.

The victim said she remembers Akash’s face as before this incident happened she was talking to her husband on phone outside the ladies’ washroom for about 10 to 15 minutes and this man was standing there scrolling his mobile. “In the past three

days, the same man has repeatedly committed the same act with three women inside the mall. He was overpowered by the mall security on Thursday where I identified him,” the woman said.

The victim demanded strict action against the accused, who was filming abrupt videos of ladies while they are using washrooms and can misuse those videos,” she added. “The accused has been arrested and booked under 354C (voyeurism) of the Indian Penal Code and IT Act, 2000 at Sadar police station and investigation into the matter are on,” Station House Officer of Sadar police station said.

Rahul apology vs Adani JPC demands...

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The turmoil continued for about 20 minutes, with Speaker Om Birla urging the members to allow the House to function smoothly.

“Members, I appeal to you to allow the House to run smoothly. People did not send you here to do this. I will give everyone an opportunity to speak, but the House has to be in order,” he said.

The protesting members ignored his pleas and the speaker adjourned the House for the day. It will meet again on March 20. In a tweet, the Congress alleged that the proceedings were “muted” when its MPs raised slogans demanding that Gandhi be allowed to speak. Is this democracy, the party asked.

Tagging this tweet, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh posted: “Democracy” in words but ‘dictatorship’ in action.”

Hitting out at the Government, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said in a tweet in Hindi, “Question of the

people of the country: What is the relationship between the Prime Minister and Gautam Adani? Why is the Prime Minister not getting the allegations levelled against him (Adani) investigated? BJP Government’s answer -- Mute Modi. Mute Parliament.”

“What is the reason that on hearing the questions related to Adani and the Prime Minister, the entire BJP goes into silent mode,” she asked.

Taking a dig at the Government, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor tweeted, “The muting of sound on @satsad_tv is a new technique. You don’t need to switch off individual microphones if you can shut down the transmission of sound to the world!”

Congress leaders Rahul, Sonia Gandhi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and several other Union Ministers were present in the House.

During his interactions in London, Rahul had alleged that the structures of Indian democracy are under attack and there is a “full-scale

assault” on the country’s institutions. The remarks triggered a political slugfest, with the BJP accusing Gandhi of maligning India on foreign soil and seeking foreign interventions, and the Congress hitting back at the ruling party by citing previous instances of Prime Minister Narendra Modi raising internal politics abroad.

BJP president Nadra accused the former Congress chief of joining hands with foreign conspirators against India to encircle the country economically and strategically. Never before in independent India any leader has done what Rahul has done on foreign soil, he said.

“This is a most serious matter,” Nadra said, adding that what the Congress leader has done has hurt every patriotic MP as well as the people of the country.

The BJP president said anti-India forces have always had problems with a strong India, its robust democracy and decisive government. By criticising the state of democ-

racy in India and seeking the intervention of the United States and Europe on foreign soil, Rahul has attacked the country’s sovereignty, he added.

“Rejected repeatedly by people, Rahul Gandhi has become a permanent part of the anti-India toolkit,” Nadra said. He accused the former Congress chief of insulting India, its Parliament, its democratically-elected Government and people in Britain, a country that ruled over India for long. What Rahul has done amounts to strengthening those working against India, the BJP president said.

The Congress has dismissed the BJP’s accusations and asserted that Rahul will not apologise. He has sought permission to speak in Parliament to respond to the criticism levelled against him by the ruling party members in both houses. Parliamentary proceedings during the second half of the Budget Session have so far been a washout over the row.

Sisodia’s ED remand extended by 5 days, asked to vacate house

From Page 1

The ED had arrested Sisodia on March 9 from Tihar jail, where he was lodged in connection with a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) case about alleged corruption in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped policy. The CBI had arrested him on February 26. The ED is probing money laundering charges against the AAP leader. The application before Special Judge M K Nagpal, who extended Sisodia’s custody by five days, also claimed that the investigation conducted so far indicated that Sisodia is “actually involved in the activity connected to the acquisition, possession and use of proceeds of crime” and “therefore guilty of the offence of money laundering”.

In its application, the ED had sought a seven-day extension in Sisodia’s custody. The agency alleged that Sisodia had withheld information which is in his “exclusive knowledge” and “extremely relevant to the investigation”.

tion.”

It alleged that during the one-year period of the liquor scam, Sisodia changed or destroyed 14 phones or IMELs, of which only one phone could be recovered by the CBI and two were produced during interrogation by the ED. Sisodia changed or destroyed most of these phones right from the day of the complaint by the Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) to the CBI, which was also reported by the media on July 22 last year, the application claimed. When questioned about the reason for changing a phone on July 22 last year, Sisodia said the phone was damaged, but he was unable to answer regarding what he had done with the broken or damaged phone, it claimed.

“This conclusion of the destruction of mobile phones is based on the fact that these 11 mobile phones or IMELs were not recovered during intensive searches conducted by Central investigative agencies or during interrogation,” the ED said.

Meanwhile, the BJP hit out

at the AAP, accusing it of “drowning Delhi in alcohol” and trying to divert the country’s attention away from the liquor scam. At a Press conference, the BJP’s national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi claimed that evidence available in the public domain show that decisions to subvert the liquor policy were taken at Kejriwal’s residence.

“Those (AAP) who used to call themselves ‘kattar maandaar’ (hardcore honest) seem to be the ‘jhoathon ke sardaar’ (chieftain of liars). The rapidly emerging reality of this party is unmasking the true faces of its leaders,” he said. The BJP spokesperson also alleged that corruption in AAP is not just restricted to one leader, but the entire Government is slept in it.

“By latching on to various issues, they have been wanting for the past several months to create an atmosphere where they can either suppress or deny the truth. In this commotion, people who are drowning Delhi in alcohol are trying to escape,” he claimed.

Rani’s film ruffles Norway’s feathers

From Page 1

“Children will never be taken



CHANGE OF NAME.

I, Kunal Jerath S/o Sh. Satish Jerath R/o A-330, Defence Colony, New Delhi-110024. Have changed my name for all purposes in the future known as Kuunal Jeraath.

PD(90300)A I, Ishwanti Devi W/o Dinesh Singh Lamba R/o House no 164, Shahabad Mohdpur, Delhi - 110061 have changed name from Iswanti Devi / Ishwanti Lamba to Ishwanti Devi for all future purposes.

PD(90301)C

away from their families based on cultural differences described. Eating with their hands or having children sleeping in bed with their parents are not considered practices harmful to children and are not uncommon in Norway, irrespective of cultural background,” the Norwegian Embassy said.

“The reason for placing children in alternative care is if they are subject to neglect, violence or

other forms of abuse.”

The Embassy statement said child welfare is “not driven by profit” and refuted the alleged claim made in the film that “the more children put into the foster system, the more money they make”.

“Alternative care is a matter of responsibility and is not a money making entity,” it said.

The Embassy stated that children are placed in alternative care

when they face neglect or are “subject to violence or other forms of abuse”.

The statement highlighted that “such experiences” are difficult for those involved in it and that “child welfare cases are not easy” for the children, parents, and the Child Welfare Service.

While taking away Sagarika Chatterjee’s children, the Norwegian Government had alleged that she fed her kids using her hands.

The couple was also accused of beating their children and not giving them enough room to play and giving them “unsuitable” clothes and toys.

The Norwegian authorities later handed custody of the children to their uncle, enabling him to bring them back to India.

Meanwhile, ‘Mrs Chatterjee Vs

Norway’ producer Nikkhil Advani said Norwegian Ambassador Hans Jacob Frydenlund was invited for a screening of the movie where he ‘admonished’ them for film.

Producer Nikkhil Advani took to Twitter to share what actually happened at the screening where Frydenlund was invited. He said the Ambassador ‘admonished’ two women after the show.

It is not known if the ‘women’ mentioned includes director Ashima Chibber.

Nikkhil wrote in his twitter message, “Atithi Devo Bhava! is a cultural mandate in India. Every Indian is taught that by our elders.

“Last evening we hosted the Norwegian Ambassador and volunteered to show him our film Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway.

“Post the screening, I sat quietly watching him admonish two strong women who have chosen to tell this very important story. I was quiet because just like Sagarika, they don’t need me to fight for them and ‘culturally’ we do not insult our guests. As far as a clarification is concerned, Video Attached.”

The attached video in his tweet featured Sagarika, on whose life the film is based.

She said in the video that the Ambassador spoke about her case ‘without having any decency’ to speak with her first.

She added that the Norwegian Government ‘continues to spread lies’ about her. Nikkhil also attached a picture of the Ambassador with the film’s team from the screening.

In his op-ed for Indian Express, the Ambassador wrote that ‘Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway’ has ‘factual inaccuracies’ and the story is a ‘fictional representation of the case’.

He also said in the film cultural differences has been shown as the primary factor in the case, which is ‘completely false’.

Hans also ‘categorically’ denied that ‘feeding with hands and sleeping in the same bed would be the reason for placing in alternative care’.

He hoped that the film will not discourage Indian from going and settling in Norway.

In the film, Rani plays the role of a mother battling the state for her kids. Helmed by Ashima Chibber, ‘Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway’ also stars Neena Gupta, Jim Sarbh and Anirban Bhattacharya among others.

LG addresses Budget Session, lists achievements of AAP Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant-Governor VK Saxena on Friday listed out various achievements of the Arvind Kejriwal Government and hoped that the national Capital would become a progressive global city one day. He was addressing the Budget Session beginning from Friday.

His address, which began at 11 am, was interrupted as BJP legislators raised slogans demanding Kejriwal's resignation over alleged corruption in the now-scrapped excise policy and AAP legislators opposing them.

To bring order to the house, Speaker Ram Niwas Goel marshalled out three BJP MLAs – Jitendra Mahajan, Anil Bajpayee and OP Sharma following the interruptions. Other party legislators too walked out

of the assembly shortly after. Later BJP MLAs protested outside the House and shouted slogans against the Kejriwal government.

Resuming his address, LG Saxena said Delhi students have performed well due to the government's focus on education.

Saxena, in his inaugural address of the Budget session Friday, said that "due to the Delhi Government's keen focus on the education sector, the students have performed well." Saxena went on to compare the government's School of Excellence to world-class schools, and said, "Delhi has performed well in the education sector in the past five years." Mission Buniyad has led to significant improvement in learning capabilities of the students," he noted.

Saxena also said the edu-



cation infrastructure has improved in Delhi with around 20,000 new classrooms being constructed. "All classrooms will be converted into digital classrooms within 5 years. 'Project Voices' is being

launched in all schools for students of Class 3rd to 12th for sharing thoughts through speaking," he said.

Talking about the labourers welfare, the LG said that minimum wages for unskilled

workers is Rs.16,792/- per month; for semi-skilled worker, it is Rs.18,499/- per month while for skilled workers the minimum wages are Rs.20,357/- per month. "These rates are the highest amongst all

the States and Union Territories in the country and at par with the Central Government Rates in A-class cities," Saxena said.

Reacting to the LG address, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that the Delhi Government has doubled the speed of progress in every field including education-health, electricity-water and infrastructure. "There were many hurdles but the Delhi Government has done a great job. The government is being harassed, its work is being obstructed, yet AAP's government is doing good work," Kejriwal said. Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri has said that the Lieutenant Governor has been forced to read the Kejriwal government's bundle of lies in the form of his address, otherwise there is nothing true in his

address.

In his 20 minutes speech, the Lieutenant Governor said the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Delhi at current prices increased from Rs. 6,16,085 Crores in 2016-17 to Rs.9,23,967 crores during 2021-22, registering a growth of 50%. The contribution of Delhi to national GDP (at current prices) is 4.22% as compared to its share of 1.52% in the total population of the country.

"The per capita income of Delhi at current prices is estimated at Rs. 4,01,982/- during 2021-22 registering an increase of 16.81% as compared to Rs. 3,44,136/- during 2020-21," he said. The LG said that 1,35,500 CCTV cameras have been installed throughout Delhi.

Talking about the health infrastructure, he said more than 16,000 beds will be added

with new hospitals coming up, while the existing hospitals are being upgraded. He also said that the people of Delhi will be provided voter ID card-based health cards.

Talking about the various initiatives of the transport department, he said people can avail 33 transport department related services online and 1,500 electric buses have been added to the DTC fleet. He said the government is committed towards a "green and lean" Delhi.

Talking about the power sector, Saxena said Delhi has extended electricity subsidy, irrespective of the load, of entire bill amount of domestic consumers utilizing up-to 200 units in a month and up-to Rs.800 per month to the domestic consumers utilizing up-to 201 units to 400 units per month during 2022-23.

Have directed authorities to conduct early screening to detect flu cases: Health Min

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Friday said the city government has directed authorities to conduct early screening to detect cases of influenza in the national Capital. Addressing a press conference, Bharadwaj said the city government has no plan for making masks mandatory. The focus is on taking precautionary measures such as avoiding public places, washing hands etc, he added.

The advisory issued by the Delhi health department encourages people of Delhi to use tissues, and handkerchiefs to cover while coughing and sneezing. It also asks people to stay away from sick people and maintain one arm's length distance. People are advised to follow the same guidelines and Covid-appropriate behaviour.

Speaking at the press conference, Bharadwaj said that though the peak of seasonal influenza is usually over by



March, a large number of cases are being registered this time in parts of the country.

"Patients with flu-like symptoms and patients with severe respiratory complaints will be monitored in the OPD and IPD of hospitals in all districts of Delhi to ensure early screening. If early rising trends are seen anywhere, they will be detected well in time. Apart from this, the government will advertise this in different languages through newspapers and FM radio in a few days. Through these advertisements,

awareness will be spread among the people," he added.

"People who have had severe asthma or Covid are among those impacted the most by influenza. The symptoms of influenza are similar to those of corona infection and the prevention of corona and influenza are the same. In such a situation, people should avoid going to crowded places. If you have a cough and cold, do not touch public things in public places. Keep washing your hands from time to time. Do not put your hands on your

nose, eyes, mouth, etc.

Bharadwaj also said that the city government has no plan for making masks mandatory urged the people to stay away from crowded places.

"Delhi is not one of the six states where the cases of Covid and influenza are increasing. But we are working to tackle the situation," said Bharadwaj. Citizens above 65 and those having lung diseases need to be more careful and are advised to stay away from crowded places, he added.

"However, we are issuing an advisory to check the spread of influenza. The precautionary measures to be followed in case of influenza and Covid are the same," Bharadwaj said.

"Instructions have been issued to district surveillance units, health facilities and government hospitals authorities to monitor the situation on a daily basis. All districts have been asked to ensure early screening to detect cases," he said.

Delhi Assembly to refer disruption of LG's speech to ethics committee

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Assembly on Friday passed a resolution to refer to the Ethics Committee the disruption of Lieutenant-Governor VK Saxena's address by BJP MLAs as a violation of the tradition of the House. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal termed it a violation of the decorum of the House while Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri termed the decision to marshal out BJP MLAs "dictatorial".

Earlier in the day, as Saxena commenced his address in the House on the first day of the Budget session, BJP MLAs raised slogans demanding Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's resignation over alleged corruption in the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. AAP MLAs opposed the BJP and raised slogans against it over the Adani issue.



While three BJP MLAs -- Jitendra Mahajan, OP Sharma and Anil Bajpai -- were marshalled out on Speaker Ram Niwas Goel's directions, the rest walked out. Later, the LG continued his speech. Delhi Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj put forward a resolution terming the disruption by BJP legislators as contempt of the House, which was passed unanimously and sent to the Ethics Committee.

Bharadwaj, while presenting the resolution, cited Schedule 5 of the Vidhan

Sabha, which outlines the House's responsibility in the event of its contempt by members during the Lieutenant Governor's address.

According to Schedule 5, any member who interrupts, raises slogans, questions, walks out of the House, or talks about the point of order during, before or after the LG's address in the House will be considered in contempt of the House. The House can settle this problem by passing a resolution in this regard.

Bharadwaj emphasised that

this matter concerns the sanctity of the House, and despite differences with the LG, traditions must be upheld.

He urged all members to respect the decorum of the House and maintain the integrity of the institution.

Later, while talking to reporters, he said, "We have differences with the Lieutenant Governor.

But these differences exist because we want the LG to maintain the dignity and constitutional supremacy of democracy. The Delhi government tells the LG that he should act as per the constitution and follow the law."

"While passing the resolution, the house could have ruled on this case even today. This is the right of the House. But the House has sent this matter to the Ethics Committee so that the Ethics Committee after examining this matter gives its recommendation to the House," Bharadwaj said.

Can't let relations break as it's my Govt, says Saxena

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid an ongoing tussle with the AAP government, Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Friday said that the dignity of speech has been shattered in the last few days but asserted that the relationships between the two can't break down as it is his own government.

While exiting the Delhi Assembly, following his maiden address on the first day of the Budget Session, he was asked by reporters about the sour relations between him and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was accompanying him at the time.

"See, there is no doubt that in the last few days, some limits that exist in speech have been shattered. But I would like to say one thing. A tree has said a very beautiful line for the wind -- It makes my leaves fall every day, but still my relations do not break with it. This is our government, how can relations break," he told reporters. His



remarks came amid a war of words between the city government and his office over a range of issues, including sending teachers of state-run schools to Finland for training.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, responding to Saxena's remark, said he understands that these are minor issues, but democracy should be respected. "If two crore people have elected a government, it should be allowed to work. If you don't let it work, and put obstacles in its way, then it's not right," he said.

Kejriwal called the BJP's interference during the Lieutenant Governor's speech

a violation of the decorum of the house.

"It's, in a way, contempt of the House. A resolution has been passed by the whole house that this matter be sent to the appropriate committee that such disturbance shouldn't have happened during the LG's speech," he added.

The AAP had accused the LG of "interfering" with the functioning of the Delhi government and alleged that he was "obstructing" the trip of some Delhi teachers to Finland for training. The AAP said the Delhi government had to sent the proposal for LG Saxena's approval several times.

Budget 2023-24 to focus on city's last mile connectivity

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government budget for the year 2023-24 is likely to focus on a dedicated last mile connectivity scheme and a roadmap to strengthen and modernise the city's transport system that will be tabled in the assembly on Tuesday. The Delhi assembly's Budget Session began on Friday with Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena addressing the House.

"For the first time in Delhi's history, a dedicated last mile connectivity scheme called 'Mohalla Bus' scheme will be launched next year," a source said and added that the city's transport system will be strengthened and modernised to "world class standards" as part of the government's infrastructure push.

The source also said that "over 1,500 zero-emission e-buses will be inducted, making Delhi's e-bus fleet the largest in the country". Delhi's public transport infrastructure will be modernised to meet global



standards with the development of multiple ISBTs (Inter-State Bus Terminals) with airport like amenities, multi-level bus depots and bus terminals.

With a boost in tax revenue, the government's budget outlay for 2023-24 may be close to Rs 80,000 crore and "the biggest" outlay of capital expenditure would be for infrastructure projects, sources had said on Thursday.

The annual budget size of the Delhi government for 2022-23 was Rs 75,800 crore and Rs 69,000 crore in the year earlier.

Appoint PWD Secy soon to speed up work: Atishi to LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Atishi wrote to the Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena urging him to appoint a Secretary for the works department on a priority basis. Through the letter, PWD Minister Atishi, reminded the Lieutenant Governor that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced in January the redevelopment of about 1400 km of major roads in Delhi.

"This entails the upkeep of footpaths and the maintenance and repair of the central verge of roads, the blacktop of roads, etc. This project is being undertaken so as to deliver a world class road experience to the citizens of Delhi, at par with European standards," she wrote.

Atishi asserted that while the proposal for this project was supposed to be placed before the EFC and the Council of Ministers for approval in February 2023 and the project was scheduled to start from



April 2023, the same has not been done because no one has been posted as a regular Secretary to the PWD since mid-February. Given that the project involves an expenditure of thousands of crores, those currently holding temporary charge do not feel confident to clear the proposal.

The Minister went on to assert that the PWD has remained practically 'headless' for the last 2 months. Providing more details, Atishi added in the letter: "Vikas Anand- who was PWD Secretary from November 2022 to February 2023 - was relieved of his charge on 15th February 2023, after which no officer was posted as the PWD Secretary. Sanjay Goel, by virtue of being the Link-Officer, was handling the charge of PWD Secretary. An order dated 3rd March

Action ordered against IP University's Joint Registrar for submitting flawed report

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognizance of the submission of a flawed report by the Joint Registrar of Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (IP) before the State Fee Regulation Committee, education minister Atishi ordered disciplinary action against the concerned official on Friday. The allegations against the Joint Registrar of IP University are that as a representative of the Vice Chancellor in the State Fee Regulation Committee, she presented inaccurate reports of three colleges under IP University. Due to this, the grading of the colleges was affected. The education minister directed the University to take strict action against this



negligence by the then Joint Registrar. According to officials, the then Joint Registrar of IP University was the representative of the Vice Chancellor in the State Fee Regulation Committee. She submitted an inaccurate report with regard to three colleges under the University to the committee. This impacted the grading as well as the fees of the colleges. Being unsatisfied with the report of the committee, the colleges reached out to the Court and demanded revaluation. The Court directed the same, and it was found that the report of the Joint Registrar on the colleges was inaccurate.

Sisodia asked to vacate, villa allotted to Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After the CBI had arrested former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia in the excise policy scam case, the Delhi government has allotted his official bungalow to Atishi, who has been inducted in the cabinet early this month.

The Delhi government has asked Sisodia to vacate the bungalow at AB Mathura Road on or before March 21. The letter also asked Atishi to give her acceptance within eight days of the issuance of the letter. Sources said the nameplate bearing Sisodia's name and cabinet rank had also been removed from the bungalow.

Sisodia had been staying at the AB-17 bungalow on Mathura Road, which was earlier with former Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. The bungalow was allotted to



Sisodia in 2015, when the AAP government came to power in Delhi.

"It is a routine exercise. Since Sisodia had resigned, his bungalow will be reallocated to Atishi," said an official. The letter said only 15 days retention period is permissible under the relevant rules.

The BJP questioned the urgency to get Sisodia's bungalow vacated. "Why is Kejriwal in such a tearing hurry to get rid of Sisodia? What happened to his promise to take care of Sisodia's family after his arrest," Delhi BJP media cell head Harish Khurana said.

Meanwhile, the AAP has lashed out at the Delhi LG for

leaking the information to media. "Delhi is insulting the dignity of a constitutional office by leaking news to the media like this. And this coming from a person whose video of assaulting a woman activist like a street thug has been seen by the whole country is rather ironic. As far as the order regarding the former Deputy CM's residence is concerned, it is the law that a minister upon resigning from his/her office, is bound to vacate the government residence occupied by them within 15 days. This order is nothing but a compliance of the law. The AAP unequivocally reaffirms that not only CM Arvind Kejriwal but the whole country stands behind Sisodia. The AAP has been running a signature campaign across Delhi and the country," the AAP said in a statement.

Closure of road stretches in South Delhi leads to jams for 5th day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Closure of key stretches in Delhi's southern parts for repair and construction works led to traffic snarls for the fifth consecutive day of the week on Thursday as commuters faced a harrowing time to reach their destination. Besides, there are several stretches where commuters face traffic snarls every day. The stretch between Anand Vihar to Shahdara border and Marginal Pusta Bund road connecting Shastri Park to Khajuri Chowk are nightmares for commuters due to ongoing construction works.

Noida resident Sunita Singh relies on the Chirag Delhi flyover to travel to her workplace near IIT-Delhi. These days, her daily commute is dotted by countless stops and inordinate delays as closure of



one of the flyover's carriageways for repairs has choked traffic along the route.

"I have no option but to take this route. I am waiting for the work to finish so that it can return to normality. It's not that there were no jams before the closure but that used to happen once in a while.

Now, it has become a daily affair," she said.

The Chirag Delhi flyover was closed from Sunday for 50 days, while a section of the

Delhi-Jaipur Highway (NH-48) between Rangpuri and Rajokari was closed from Tuesday for 90 days.

The Delhi Traffic Police has been regularly updating commuters about traffic movement along the routes on its official Twitter handle. A senior traffic police official said, "We have deployed extra personnel along the closed routes and those on the ground are trying their best to ensure smooth flow."

Boost to self-reliance: PM on ₹70K cr def projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A day after defence projects worth Rs 70,500 crores were approved by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed the go-ahead as a "boost to self-reliance" and said it was a reaffirmation of the faith in Indian talent.

India on Thursday approved the capital acquisition of a plethora of indigenously-developed military hardware from local industry, including the indigenous BrahMos missiles, marine diesel engines, artillery gun systems, electronic warfare suits and utility helicopters.

Tagging Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's tweet asserting that persistent efforts are being undertaken to ensure self-reliance in the defence sector and proposals worth more than Rs 70,500 crore have been approved, Modi said, "A boost to self-reliance in defence, also reaffirming our faith in Indian



talent."

In a major boost to self-reliance, all the systems will be bought from Indian companies under the Buy (Indian-IDDMM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)category. The go-ahead was given in the backdrop of ongoing tension with China and to maintain operational readiness to counter Pakistan.

Elaborating upon the details, officials had said out of

the total proposals, Indian Navy proposals constitute more than Rs 56,000 crore, which largely includes indigenous BrahMos missiles, Shakti Electronic Warfare (EW) systems and Utility Helicopters-Maritime. The Navy proposes to procure 200 additional Brahmos worth over Rs 15,000 crores.

While this additional procurement of BrahMos missile system will enhance the maritime strike capabilities and

Anti-Surface Warfare Operation, the addition of Utility Helicopters will multiply the operational readiness of the Indian Navy in the domain of Search and Rescue operations, Casualty Evacuation and Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR).

Similarly, Shakti Electronic Warfare systems will equip and modernise the frontline ships to counter any naval Operations by the adversaries.

Nod was also given for Medium Speed Marine Diesel Engine under Make-I category, officials said adding it is a significant step as, for the first time, India is venturing into the development and manufacturing of such engines indigenously. To keep pace with the emerging technologies and counter the adversaries in the Western (Pakistan) and Northern front (China), the necessity of the new weapons and its integration with the delivery platforms was felt by the Government.

To achieve the same objec-

tives, the DAC accorded the approval to Indian Air Force's proposal for Long Range Stand-Off Weapon (LRSOW) which will be indigenously designed, developed and integrated on SU-30 MKI aircraft.

For Artillery modernisation, in addition to the ongoing Dhanush Gun System and K-9 Vajra-T Gun System, approval was given for procurement of 155mm/52 Caliber Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) along with High Mobility Vehicles (HMTVs) and Gun Towing Vehicles (GTVs).

The apex body also approved procurement of Advance Light Helicopters (ALH) MK-III from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Indian Coast Guard. The Helicopter will be able to carry a suite of surveillance sensors which will enhance the surveillance capabilities. It will also give full night capability and Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) capability for operations of the Indian Coast

Guard.

Including the latest proposals, the total approvals granted for Capital Acquisition in the Financial Year 2022-23 is over Rs 2.71 lakh crore, out of which 99% of the procurement will be sourced from Indian industries. Such quantum of indigenous procurement will galvanise the Indian industries towards achieving the goal of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

Meanwhile, in another tweet, the Prime Minister urged people to visit the Matua Maha Mela 2023, to be held from March 19 to 25 at Shreedham Thakurnagar, Thakurbari, West Bengal.

"The Matua Maha Mela 2023 is an important event which showcases the vibrant culture of the Matua community. I would urge more people to visit the Mela," he said. "Humanity will forever be indebted to Shri Shri Harichand Thakur Ji for showing the path of kindness and service," Modi added.

Iran praises India for importing Russian oil despite sanctions

Urges New Delhi to buy oil from it, speed up work on Chabahar port

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Praising India for procuring oil from Russia despite pressure from western countries in the backdrop of the ongoing Ukraine war, Iran on Friday urged India to resume importing oil from there. It also called for faster implementation of the Chabahar port project.

These assertions were made here by Iranian ambassador to New Delhi Iraj Elahi who also urged India to use the Chabahar port to send various shipments saying the key transit hub will benefit both the countries.

Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the Chabahar port is being developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan to boost connectivity and trade ties.

On resumption of import of oil from his country, Elahi cited New Delhi not succumbing under pressure by the Western powers to not continue procurement of petroleum products from Russia following the Ukraine crisis. India stopped procurement of crude oil from Iran after the US did not continue with sanction waivers to India and several other countries.

"We believe that India is and was strong and powerful to stand against the pressure of the West... India is a rising power. India has a powerful economy. So India could easily resist pressure from the US and the West," the ambassador told a group of journalists.

Citing India's resistance against pressure to not buy oil from Russia, Elahi hoped that New Delhi would soon start importing oil from Iran as such a move would benefit the Indian economy, Indian people and the Indian oil firms concerned. On the Chabahar port project, he called for its speedy implementation while highlighting its strategic impor-



tance.

"We should view Chabahar port not just from an economic perspective but it should be considered as a strategic partnership. Because of this importance, the speed of cooperation, the speed of progress and the speed of promotion in Chabahar should be faster than what is now," he said. "It is important for India as well as Iran. It will be for our benefit," he added.

The envoy said Iran believes that the Indian government has a positive approach towards it.

"Of course there are shortcomings from both sides. We understand the willingness of the Indian government towards Chabahar. We believe that Chabahar is not just an economic issue," he said.

"For India, Chabahar is important. For Iran also, it is important. But Iran has different ports in all parts of the Persian Gulf. We can use different ports for transit and import and export," Elahi said, suggesting that the port is crucial for Indian interests. "Chabahar is an oceanic port. It is close to the Indian Ocean and closest to the route to Afghanistan," he said.

Citing financial constraints being faced by Iran due to Western economic sanctions, the ambassador said if Tehran had money, then it may not have required any country to come to Chabahar.

Describing India as a maritime nation, Elahi said Iran expected India to send shipments through Chabahar.

"We are under sanctions. The Chabahar is not connected to Iranian networks. Because, if we had money and did not have any problem, (then) we may not have required any country to come to Chabahar.

NIA files 2 chargesheets against 68 PFI leaders in Kochi, TN

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday filed two chargesheets against a total of 68 Popular Front of India (PFI) leaders, cadres and members in two separate cases in Kochi (Kerala) and Chennai (Tamil Nadu).

With these, the total number of chargesheets filed by NIA against PFI cadres this month has gone up to four. The first such chargesheet was filed in Jaipur on March 13 and the second in Hyderabad on March 16.

The chargesheets filed on Friday in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the two States where PFI is the most active, relate to separate criminal conspiracies hatched by the PFI to create a wedge between people of different communities through radicalisation of impressionable Muslim youth, providing them with training in handling of weapons, and raising funds for carrying out acts of terror and violence with the ultimate objective of establishing an Islamic Rule in India by 2047.

The Kerala PFI case was registered in September 2022



by the NIA to probe the criminal conspiracy hatched by the PFI, its leaders and cadres to create a wedge between people of different communities through radicalisation of impressionable Muslim youth, training them in handling of weapons and raising funds for carrying out acts of terror and violence with the ultimate objective of establishing an Islamic Rule in India by 2047, the NIA said.

"In addition to the above-mentioned criminal conspiracy, the NIA has, in its Kerala chargesheet, also included the connected case of the brutal killing of a Palakkad resident, Sreenivasan, who was hacked to death by armed PFI cadres (FIR No. 318/2022 of Palakkad Town South Police Station).

NIA investigations had shown some of the accused in the PFI criminal conspiracy case (September 2022) to have been involved in the Sreenivasan killing too," it said.

The accused in the two chargesheets have been charged under various sections of IPC, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, and the Arms Act, 1959.

In the Kerala case, registered in September 2022, the chargesheet has been filed in the Special Court for NIA Cases, Ernakulam, against the PFI as an organisation and 58 other accused persons. NIA had arrested 16 of the accused after taking over the case in 2022, while the others were arrested earlier by Kerala Police.

NIA books 2 IS men in K'taka



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a charge sheet against two alleged Islamic State operatives who were found involved in over two dozen incidents of arson and sabotage, including burning of the national flag in Karnataka. The Shivamogga IS conspiracy case relates to the conspiracy hatched to further the activities of Islamic State by carrying out acts of arson, sabotage and violence in Karnataka. The NIA re-registered the case in September 2022 and took over the investigations of the case registered by Karnataka Police after the stabbing of one Prem Singh at Shivamogga (Karnataka) on August 15, 2022 by accused Zabiulla and others.

NIA chargesheets 5 members of PFI for radicalising youth, imparting weapons training

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The five accused--- Shaik Raheem alias Abdul Raheem, Shaik Wahaid Ali alias Abdul Wahed Ali, Jafrulla Khan Pathan, Shaik Riyaz Ahmed and Abdul Waris---have been chargesheeted under sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 153A (indulgence in wanton vilification or attacks upon the religion, race, place of birth, residence) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and relevant provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Earlier in December 2022, NIA had filed its first chargesheet against 11 accused in the case after taking over the investigations of the case in August 2022 from Telangana Police.

The case had initially been registered as FIR No. 141/2022 on July 4, 2022 at Police Station VI Town, District- Nizamabad, Telangana.

HC seeks Centre, RBI, SEBI response on PIL on Yes Bank

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Friday sought response of the Centre, RBI and SEBI on a petition filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy PIL seeking to form a committee of experts to investigate the transfer of a stress asset portfolio of Rs 48,000 crore from Yes Bank to JC Flowers Asset Reconstruction Company. In his PIL, Swamy sought to direct the Union Ministry of Finance, Reserve Bank of India and Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to formulate comprehensive guidelines in accordance with recommendations of the committee to check any such future agreements/ transactions and to regulate the arrangements entered into between banks/ NBFS or other financial institutions and Assets Reconstructions Companies

(ARC).

A bench of Chief Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Subramonium Prasad asked the authorities to file their responses within four weeks and listed the matter for further hearing on July 14. It also asked Yes Bank Ltd and J C Flowers Asset Reconstruction Pvt Ltd to place their responses. Swamy in his petition questioned how the NPA of Yes Bank worth Rs.48,000 crore was transferred to JC Flowers for sale and sought how RBI approved such deal between the bank and the asset reconstruction company JC Flowers Ltd. Swamy was represented through senior advocate Rajshekhar Rao and lawyer Satya Sabharwal in the matter.

The former MP said through this petition he wishes to highlight the growing rot prevalent in private banking sector, which has been further



accelerated by perpetual decay of corporate governance and ethical standards prevailing in private banking industry and asset reconstruction industry. "This is growing case of concern as there is apparent conflict of interest between functioning of banks and ARCs. The situation is further complicated, when motivated and mala fide transactions between the two are allowed to stand as the regulator (RBI), fails to act and enforce its own guidelines



causing significant loss of public monies," the plea said.

"This transfer is linked to another deal in which Respondent No.4 (Yes Bank) has obtained a stake of up to 19.9 per cent in the company of Respondent No.5. (J C Flowers Asset Reconstruction Company)," it said. Submitting that Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) are a growing concern for private sector banks in India, Swamy said poor credit risk management practices and

insufficient internal controls have contributed to the high levels of NPAs in private sector banks.

These types of deals not only undermine the trust of public in the banking sector but also jeopardises the economic stability of the country, said Swamy adding that the transactions between the bank and the company seem to be an attempt to bypass RBI guidelines and harm the general public.

DGCI calls for pharmacists' presence in drug stores

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Even as the National Medical Commission has not agreed to Pharmacy Council of India's (PCI) proposal to allow pharmacists to write prescription, saying writing a prescription is dependent on examining patients and making a diagnosis, the drug regulator DCGI has called for their physical presence in retail medical stores and that medicines are sold under their direct supervision.

In a letter to drug controllers of all states and Union territories and the PCI, Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) Dr Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi has sought strict implementation of section 42 (a) of the Pharmacy Act 1947 and Rules 65 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1945 in retail



pharmacies.

"Ensure that pharmacists are physically present in the retail pharmacies/medical stores, and that medicines are sold/dispensed under their direct supervision. Ensure that no prescription medicine is sold/dispensed from the retail medicines shop without a proper and valid prescription," the DCGI said in the letter sent on March 9.

The drug regulator referred to a letter from Suresh Khanna, National General Secretary, IPA, Mumbai which

highlighted issues pertaining to implementation of Section 42(a) of the Pharmacy Act 1947 and Rules 65 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1945 in retail pharmacies.

In the meantime, Minister of State for Health Bharati Pravin Pawar in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha on Friday said that "the NMC had not agreed to PCI's proposal to allow pharmacists to write prescriptions, saying writing a prescription is dependent on examining patients and making a diagnosis.

Pawar also said the recruitment of pharmacists in government hospitals, their salaries and the eligible qualification for becoming pharmacists in hospitals in any state is governed by the rules of the respective state.

Helmet row: Sikh soldiers wear bulletproof patka too, says Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI



In the backdrop of some Sikh organizations expressing reservation over its soldiers wearing bullet proof helmets after a recent proposal to buy more than 12,000 ballistic helmets, the government on Friday said Sikh troops battling terrorism have been wearing bullet proof patka over cloth patka while maintaining their religious identity.

Giving this information in the Lok Sabha, minister of state for defence Ajay Bhatt, in a written reply to Preeten Kaur, said Indian soldiers are provided the requisite protection to include bullet proof jackets and helmets to operate in challenging environment. Safety of soldiers who are deployed on security duties is

considered paramount. A modern day soldier needs to have all round protection from the newer and emerging threat of warfare. Sikh troops battling terrorism have been wearing bullet proof patka over cloth patka while maintaining their religious identity. Tank Crew of armoured regiments also wear padded communication head gear, he said.

In January, the government floated a proposal for procuring nearly 12,000 ballistic helmets. These helmets attempt to completely enclose the head, in contrast to the bul-

letproof "patkas" that Sikh soldiers already wear. The proposal specifies that extra-large and large sizes for the helmets are required.

Bhatt said tactical helmets are an integral part of flying gear for combat aircraft operations and protective gear of soldiers against enemy gunfire. All pilots of fighter aircraft and combat helicopters and soldiers deployed in the areas where enemy attacks are anticipated or

defending important installations are to wear the full protective gear for personal safety.

Fighter Pilots and Helicopter Pilots of the Indian Defence Forces have always been wearing helmets over their religious head gear for heads up display and communication, he said.

Lack of sleep may lead to chronic health disorders: Docs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Lack of sleep is an emerging public health crisis having the potential to adversely impact on the body by causing health issues such as anxiety, fatigue and depression. "This in turn can lead to chronic NCDs such as stroke, heart ailments and high blood pressure," doctors warned on Friday on the World Sleep Day having the theme "Sleep is essential for health."

In fact, health experts like Dr Nasreen Akhtar and Dr HN Mallick from Department of Physiology, AIIMS, New Delhi have in their study in 2019 pitched in for a National Sleep Policy in the country underlining that while awareness about sleep disorders is abysmally low in the country, any intervention in this area will lead to a large impact. Dr.

Mallick is now Professor and HoD of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, SGT University Gurgaon and President of the Indian Society for Sleep Research, ISSR.

Commonly found sleep disorders are insomnia, obstructive sleep apnea, hypersomnia, restless leg syndrome, and shift work disorder. Various recent studies too have revealed that the prevalence of sleep disorders in India is high. For instance, a study has pegged the percentage of insomnia to be as high as 33 per cent among adults in India while another found that it's not only in urban areas, but sleep disorders are a problem in the rural community too.

The study, 'Prevalence and determinants of sleep disorders in a community in rural southern India,' published in 2021 suggested that capacity building among the existing health

workforce to identify and treat sleep disorders and health education activities focusing on sleep hygiene among the general public are needed to tackle sleep disorders in the community.

The recommendation for adults is at least 7-8 hours of sleep every night and for children 10 hours of sleep every night. However, the population does not get enough sleep.

"Even a small amount of sleep loss produces measurable outcomes. For example, if only 5 hours of sleep is provided for 4 consecutive nights, it impairs task performance to the same degree as a blood alcohol level of 0.6%," opined Dr Akhtar and Dr Mallick in the article published in The National Medical Journal of India.

Dr. Sayoni Roy Chowdhury, Neurologist at Delhi-based Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital



talked about the importance of sleep among children and how inadequate sleep often adversely impacts a child's physical, emotional and cognitive development. "Despite being quite common in the pediatric population, sleep problems remain poorly recognized and addressed. Cognitive impair-

ments and psychological issues are most often the repercussions of this. Hence, optimum sleep is essential for the sound functioning of myriad cognitive and psychological functions such as learning, memory consolidation, attention, emotional regulation and coping mechanisms," she added.

Will shut all madrasas in Assam, says Sarma

Assam CM calls Cong ‘new Mughals’ at event in Karnataka

PTI ■ BELAGAVI (K'TAKA)

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is visiting Karnataka, said he intended to shut all the madrasas (Muslim religious schools) in his state, as they were not needed in “New India.” Addressing an event here on Thursday night, Sarma said what Assam needed were schools, colleges and universities to produce doctors, engineers and other professionals to serve the state and the country, and not madrasas.

“I come from Assam, where everyday people arrive from Bangladesh. There is a threat to our culture and traditions,” the Chief Minister said. “Recently in a TV interview in Delhi, I was asked what my intention was in having shut down 600 madrasas. I said that I have shut 600, but my intention is to shut all madrasas,” he added.

Going on a tirade against opposition parties, Sarma accused the Congress and Communists of having distorted history and misrepresented facts. He also labelled the Congress “new Mughals”.

“There is no need of madrasas in this ‘New India,’” he asserted, adding, “We have to move forward in this direction, we have to transform our education system; time has come to rewrite our history in a new way as it was distorted earlier.” The Assam Chief Minister was addressing a large



gathering here after inaugurating a light and sound show on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

Noting that Abhay Patil, a local BJP MLA, had planned the light and sound show six years ago, Sarma again made accusations against the Congress. “The Congress government then did not extend any help. Why will Congress help,” he asked, adding, “Congress will never help. Congress will think about Babar, but not Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.”

“With this light and sound show, he (MLA) has ensured that the ideals of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj will be followed in this country and that in the future too Sanatana (dharma) will be followed, and that Sanatana ideals will become stronger in this country,” he said.

Pointing out that there are a large number of people in this country, who claim with pride that they are Muslims or Christians, the Assam CM said, “I have no objections, but we want people who will with pride say, ‘I’m a Hindu.’”

Sarma then went on to claim that the 17th century Mughal ruler Aurangzeb had allegedly tried to destroy Hinduism, while insisting that his contemporary Shivaji worked to protect Sanatana Dharma and its traditions. “Till today India is Sanatani and Hindu, and until the sun

and moon exist India will go forward on the basis of its traditions,” he declared.

He also claimed that it was communist historians who tried to make it appear that Aurangzeb ruled with “complete” India under his control while all of south India and the region from Assam to the North-East was never a part of his empire.

Sarma insisted that India’s history is only that of Shivaji, Durgadas Rathore and Guru Gobind Singh and claimed that “Congress and Communists have made the history of Babar, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb as India’s history.”

Speaking about the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the construction of corridors at Kashi, Ujjain, and Kamakhya among others, Sarma claimed that “the Badshahs of Delhi spoke and worked on destroying temples”. He went on to compare India’s Mughal rulers with the Opposition party, Congress. “Earlier, Mughals tried to weaken India, and now Congress is doing it,” he said.

“Congress people are today’s new Mughals.... They have an objection to Ram Mandir. Are you (Congress) children of Mughals? Why do you speak in favour of Babri Masjid and not for Ram Mandir? They represent new Mughals.”

ED arrests sea cucumber smuggling racket kingpin

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Villayutham, a smuggler based in Rameswaram, who was consistently indulging in smuggling of sea cucumbers, a protected marine species, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Villayutham was produced before the Special Court for PMLA, Madurai and the Court has granted ED custody of the accused for eight days.

Sea cucumbers are a marine species protected under schedule 1 of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Sea cucumbers are crucial to the marine ecosystem as they consume decomposing organic matter and convert it into recyclable nutrients for other marine life, the agency said in a statement.

The ED had initiated money laundering probe on the basis of multiple FIRs registered by Tamil Nadu Police and Wildlife Authorities under various sections of Wildlife Protection Act. The probe revealed that Villayutham had, over the years, been using the business entities floated by him like VVN Sea Foods, VV Agency, Hotel Ramajayam, and VV Sea Shell Mart etc as a front.

Hoteliers slam BEST’s ‘wheeling charges’ for retail power users

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The hike in “wheeling charges” proposed by the BEST Undertaking Ltd for its 10 lakh consumers in the metropolis has sparked fierce resistance from the Indian Hotel and Restaurant Association (AHAR) which has dubbed the power undertaking’s move as “illegal”.

Quoting a petition filed by the BEST undertaking before the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC), AHAR President Suresh Shetty said: “In its latest petition with the MERC, BEST has proposed to increase wheeling charge to Rs 2.26/ per unit. The wheeling charges would affect all retail consumers who consume as meagre as 100 units will now have to shell out Rs 226 as ‘wheeling charges’ to the BEST.”

“The levy of wheeling charges to its retail electricity consumers by BEST is illegal and is in violation of Electricity Act and MERC Regulations,” Suresh Shetty said.

Under section 76 of the Electricity Act, 2003, “wheeling” means the operation whereby the distribution system and associated facilities of a transmission licensee or distribution licensee, as the case

may be, are used by another person for the conveyance of electricity on payment of charges to be determined under section 62.”

Suresh Shetty said that the section 76 implies that the “operation whereby the distribution system of a distribution licensee is used by another person for conveyance of electricity” comes with a charge.”

Regulations no (32) of MERC Regulations 2019 defines “ Distribution Wires Business” as the Business of operating and maintaining a distribution system for wheeling of electricity in the area of supply of a Distribution Licensee.

Elaborating on the issue, Gurnunath Shetty -- who is AHAR’s Legal Committee Chairman -- said that explained that BEST - which supplies retail power to the entire south Mumbai - did not give ‘open access’ to a third party to use its distribution network for conveyance of electricity, meaning it is not in the Distribution Wires Business.

“The BEST is charging its consumers under its Retail Supply Business and again the ‘wheeling charges’ under the Distribution Wires Business, but this is not charged anywhere else in India,” he said.

‘Bottled water industry can slow SDG’s progress’

It masks world’s failure to supply safe water for all: UN report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With more than 1 million bottles of water being sold every minute around the world, the industry is raking in huge moolah but this has come at a huge climate, health, social and environmental costs at the same time exposing limited progress in and many failures of public water supply systems, a UN report has flagged concerns ahead of the World Water Day on March 22.

While sales are expected to almost double by 2030, from \$270 billion to \$500 billion, the report by the UN University’s Canadian-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health has expressed concern that the rapidly-growing industry can undermine progress towards a key sustainable development goal (SDG): Safe water for all.

“This points to a global case of extreme social injustice, whereby billions of people worldwide do not have access to reliable water services while others enjoy water luxury,” said the report which is based on an analysis of literature and data from 109 countries including

India. It noted that in just five decades bottled water has developed into “a major and essentially standalone economic sector,” experiencing 73% growth from 2010 to 2020, but the unrestricted expansion “is not aligned strategically with the goal of providing universal access to drinking water or at least slows global progress in this regard, distracting development efforts and redirecting attention to a less reliable and less affordable option for many, while remaining highly profitable for producers.”

“The rise in bottled water consumption reflects decades of limited progress in and many failures of public water supply systems,” the report says, noting that providing safe water to the roughly 2 billion people without it would require an annual investment of less than half the US\$ 270 billion now spent every year on bottled water. Bottled water per litre can cost 150 to 1,000 times more than the price a municipality charges for tap water.

The study quotes surveys showing bottled water is often perceived in the Global North as a healthier and tastier product than tap water - more a luxury good than a necessity. In contrast, in the Global South, sales are driven by the lack or absence of reliable public water supplies and water delivery



infrastructure limitations due to rapid urbanization.

What’s worst, in mid- and low-income countries, bottled water consumption is linked to poor tap water quality and often unreliable public water supply systems - problems often caused by corruption and chronic underinvestment in piped water infrastructure.

UNU-INWEH researcher and lead author Zeineb Bouhleh pointed out that beverage corporations are adept at marketing bottled water as a safe alternative to tap water by drawing attention to isolated public water system failures. He added that “even if in certain countries piped water is or can be of good quality, restoring public trust in tap water is likely to require substantial marketing and advocacy efforts”.

Dr. Bouhleh further noted in the report that the source of bottled water (municipal sys-

tem, surface, etc.) the treatment processes used (e.g. chlorination, ultraviolet disinfection, ozonation, reverse osmosis), the storage conditions (duration, light exposure, temperature), and packaging (plastic, glass), can all potentially alter water quality.

Enlisting examples from over 40 countries in every world region of contamination of hundreds of bottled water brands and all bottled water types, researchers further said, “the mineral composition of bottled water can vary significantly between different brands, within the same brand in different countries, and even between different bottles of the same batch.”

Co-author Vladimir Smakhtin, past Director of UNU-INWEH, underscores the report’s finding that “bottled water is generally not nearly as well-regulated and is

tested less frequently and for fewer parameters. Strict water quality standards for tap water are rarely applied to bottled water, and even if such analyses are carried out, the results seldom make it to the public domain.”

Bottled water producers, he says, have largely avoided the scrutiny governments impose on public water utilities, and amid the market’s rapid growth, it is “probably more important than ever to strengthen legislation that regulates the industry overall, and its water quality standards in particular.” On the environmental front too, the industry has come under the scanner. The researchers noted that the industry produced around 600 billion plastic bottles and containers in 2021, which converts to some 25 million tonnes of PET waste - most of it not recycled and destined for landfills.

Also “little data available on water volumes extracted, largely due to the lack of transparency and legal foundation that would have forced bottling companies to disclose that information publicly and assess the environmental consequences,” it said.

As per the report, five companies - PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Nestlé S.A., Danone S.A. and Primo Corporation have combined sales of \$65 billion, over 25% of the global total.

Take action against those trolling CJI, says Nana Patole

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president Nana Patole on Friday rooted for stern action against those trolling Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud on social media over his observations during the hearings on the 2022 State political crisis that saw the fall of the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA Government in the State.

Patole issued a statement in this regard a day after a five-judge Bench headed by CJI Chandrachud reserved its ruling over a bunch of petitions filed in connection with the crisis triggered within the Shiv Sena by the breakaway rebel leader Eknath Shinde.

In the statement Patole said, “Based on some observations made by the Chief Justice of India during the Supreme Court hearing on the power struggle in the State, some people are fearing that the decision could go against them and have started trolling CJI Chandrachud in social media”.

“Everyone knows who has set up the army of trolls and action should be taken against those who dare to troll CJI Chandrachud. Congress MPs have approached President Droupadi Murmu seeking action in this incident,” Patole

said in the hard-hitting note.

Hitting out at the ruling BJP for its “hunger” for power, Patole said: “There is no end to how much power-hungry the BJP is, what happened from Surat to Guwahati during the attempt to overthrow the Mahavikas Aghadi government in the state, how the governor misused his position, we all have seen all these incidents”

“During the Supreme Court hearing on the Shiv Sena, the judges were trolled on the questions they asked, observations recorded, this type of trolling is serious.

“Congress MPs have approached the President Droupadi Murmu to take cognisance of the issue because no one has faith in the government at the Centre,” the state Congress chief said.

“It is not appropriate to comment on the Supreme Court’s decision regarding the power struggle in the state, but the rumours are afloat in Mantralaya and it seems that they have got to know about something,” he said.

“Usually, this kind of restlessness starts when the term of the government or when the time for a government to collapse is near. We are waiting for the verdict of the Supreme Court,” Patole said in his statement.

ED chargesheets seven entities, five people in Chinese loan App case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ED has filed a prosecution complaint (chargesheet in police parlance) against seven entities and five individuals involved in the Chinese Loan App case before the Special PMLA Court in Bengaluru. The court has taken cognizance of the complaint.

The accused entities include three Fintech companies --- Mad Elephant Network Technology Private Limited, Baryonyx Technology Private Limited and Cloud Atlas Future Technology Private Limited --- which are controlled by the Chinese nationals, three non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) registered with the RBI namely X10 Financial Services Private Limited, Track Fin-ed Private Limited and Jannadas Morarjee Finance Private Limited and one Payment gateway, Razorpay Software Private Limited, the ED said in a statement.

Earlier, the ED has issued two provisional attachment orders and attached Rs 77.25 crore in this case lying in the bank accounts and payment gateways and the same has been confirmed, it said.

Public Notice This is to inform general public that: Mrs. Sudha is the owner of Property bearing no. 3316(A), land area measuring 50 sq. yds. out of khasra no. 22, situated at Village Ghonoli in the abadi of Raghur Puru no. 2, Gandhi Nagar, Delhi 110031 vide Gift deed dated 24.02.2023 Doc Nos. 1957. Now, Mr. Neeraj Singh, Mr. Mahender Singh and Mrs. Sudha is registering the above property with Shriram finance Ltd. & in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 7 days of this publication to Mr. Munesh Dhanwan/ Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocates), Law Veritas, Unit no 907, 9th Floor, GD-ITL Tower, (B-08), Netaji Subhash Place, Delhi-110034 or contact at 9067071722/9811228636 (MJA)

**IN THE COURT OF
SH. PARAMJIT SINGH, LD.
DISTRICT JUDGE
(COMMERCIAL COURT)- 06
CENTRAL, TIS HAZARI
COURTS, DELHI**

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING
ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT
(Order 5, Rules 20 of the Code
of Civil Procedures)
CS (COMM) 4949/21
Next date of Hearing 05-04-2023**

**ICICI BANK LTD.
VS.
SALMAN SIRAJ SHAIKH**

**TO,
SALMAN SIRAJ SHAIKH
(BORROWER)
OFFICE ADDRESS
MESTO INDIA PVT. LTD.
1ST FLOOR, DLF BUILDING
NO. 10A, DLF CYBER CITY
GURGAON, HARYANA- 122001
PERMANENT ADDRESS
IW CHAKKIWALA CHAWL
I BLOCK, PREM NAGAR,
MUMBAI- 400060**

**WHEREAS you are intentionally
evading service of summons it is
hereby notified that if you shall not
defend the case on the 05-04-
2023 the day fixed for the final
disposal, it will be heard and
determined ex-parte**

**Given under my hand and the seal of
the court, this 21st day of
February, 2023.**

**District Judge
(Commercial Court (Central),
Tis Hazari, Delhi)**

PUBLIC NOTICE

**Entire First Floor of Plot No. EC-34, area
admeasuring 500 Sq. Yds., Inderpuri,
New Delhi**

That our client Bobby Puri & Jaspreet Puri, proposed to mortgage and absolute owner in possession of the above said property vide Sale Deed (5000) dated 07.10.2021, having purchased the same from M/s. Kaiser Infratech Pvt. Ltd. The said plot previously owned by Meela Ram Badhan who died intestate left behind Kamlesh Wati Badhan, Balbir Krishan Badhan, Jasbir Krishan Badhan, Nirmal Krishan Badhan, Aasha Bashal and Pushpa Howard as only legal heirs and further the abovesaid legal heirs relinquished their share in favour of Kamlesh Wati Badhan who further sold the said plot to M/s. Kaiser Infratech Pvt. Ltd vide sale deed dated 18.04.18.

Under the circumstances, notice is hereby given to the General Public, Bank/Financial institutions or other persons, organizations, companies, government authorities, having any claim, rights, title, or any interest of any nature whatsoever into or upon the said property, is hereby called upon to make the same known, in writing with documentary evidence by registered AD Post to the undersigned at the address mentioned herebelow within 10 days of the publication of this notice and in the event no response having been received to the notice, the title of Bobby Puri & Jaspreet Puri to the said property shall be deemed to be clear of any claim, charge or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever and any subsequent claim shall not bind our client in any manner whatsoever.

**Kumar Abhishek
Advocate
Legal Access
132A, Anarkali Complex,
Jhandewalan Ext. New Delhi**

**DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, DELHI
4th FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING,
PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001**

SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned Assets will be sold through auction on “**AS IS WHERE IS BASIS**” and “**AS IS WHAT IS BASIS**” for recovery of dues as per court orders, in the following cases:-

Case Details	Asset Details
ICICI BANK LTD VS AKSHAY GIRI OA No. 494/2019	Vehicle No. UP14GT8288 Make & Model- SWARAJ MAZDA LTD SAMRAT, Manu Year-2017
ICICI BANK LTD VS BHARAT SOMASTAMB, OA/308/2013	Vehicle No. HR51Y0945 Make & Model- MERCEDES BENZ, Manu Year-2006

Auction Date: April 3, 2023 From 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.
Auction Type: Online Auction
Auction Portal Name & URL Link: Car Dekho
<https://auctions.cardekho.com>
Contact Person- Jitendra Kumar (7304914763) Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)

Terms of Sale

The particulars of the said asset specified herein above have been stated to the best of the information and knowledge of the undersigned, who shall however not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission in the said particulars. The interested participant/s are therefore requested, in their own interest, to satisfy himself / themselves/ itself with regard to the said asset and other relevant details pertaining to it before submitting the bids.

Successfully bidder shall have to deposit sale amount within 5 days from the auction date by the way of pay order/demand draft/RTGS/NEFT. In case if you fail to make the remaining sale amount within 5 days, your EMD amount will be forfeited.

The intending bidders may visit at ICICI Bank Ltd, SHAL TOWERS, Plot No 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh Delhi-110005 for details and inspection of the said hypothecated vehicles.

India, African nations forge robust Def ties

Pune to host first conclave of 25 army chiefs during AFINdex

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to forge more robust defence ties with the countries of the African continent, India will host the first-ever conclave of chiefs of respective armies in Pune during the ongoing Africa India Field Training Exercise (AFIndex). Nearly 25 chiefs from African nations are expected to take part in the conclave on March 28. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will also attend the

event.

Giving details of the high-profile event, officials said here on Friday AFINDEX exercise commenced on Friday in Pune and will culminate on March 30. The first Africa - India Field training Exercise was held in Pune in March 2019. India Africa Defence Ministers Conclave was held on the sidelines of the Defexpo 2020 in Lucknow. The Lucknow Declaration was issued that laid down the future path of cooperation between India and African nations in the defence sphere. India- Africa defence dialogue was held at Gandhinagar and the first India - Africa Chiefs Conclave is a landmark event and will provide a fillip to the cooperation between the Indian Army and the armies of African nations while simultaneously addressing the capacity enhancement requirements of African armies.

The first India - Africa Chiefs Conclave has been envisaged. This is being held along with the second iteration of the AFINDEX, they said. Maximum use of indigenous equipment is being made during the exercise. New generation equipment manufactured in India will be showcased during the exercise to give a feel of their efficacy to the troops of the participating nations.

The first India - Africa Chiefs Conclave is a landmark event and will provide a fillip to the cooperation between the Indian Army and the armies of African nations while simultaneously addressing the capacity enhancement requirements of African armies.

FIRST COLUMN

TECH TRENDS TO WATCH OUT FOR IN 2023


2023 will be another year of exhilarating and swift evolution in business technology



Technology has significantly changed how we live and work over the last few decades. However, the relationship between workplace and cultural changes and how technology is used and developed is not one-way. The technology used by professionals and consumers and their expectations of it have undergone significant changes in recent years, particularly since the start of the COVID pandemic.

Technology experts predict that 2023 will be another year of exhilarating and swift evolution in business technology, both in terms of what tools will see new or increased usage and how businesses and sectors will adapt to market changes and challenges. We will dive deeper into some of the biggest technological trends envisaged to emerge in 2023.

1. Composability will keep expanding and transforming. More and more tools will be made available to us as technology develops to aid in the creation of our software solutions. For instance, more assistance with developing databases, web services, and other technologies is anticipated. We also hope to witness more tools that make it simple to combine already existing solutions.
- There will also be more options for how to put together solutions. For instance, you could create code that produces source code for you automatically. Alternatively, you could create a graphic representation of your solution using code. Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), component-based systems, frameworks, integrated development environments, object-oriented languages, object relational mapping, repositories, services, web services, and extensible markup languages are a few examples of composable technologies.



2. There will be a push for eco-friendly and sustainable technology in 2023. We are all heavy users of technology, using our computers, tablets, and smartphones every day. Where do the components for these gadgets originate? Cloud-based services like Spotify and Netflix will continue to be operated in sizable data centres that use a lot of energy. As consumers demand energy-efficient goods and services backed by more environmentally friendly technology, the movement to make supply chains more transparent will continue in 2023.
3. Workplaces will have a ton of data to monitor and manage with the rollout of 5G and the integration of the Internet of Things (IoT). Businesses will need a real-time data collection strategy if they want to take advantage of the benefits that real-time analytics' intelligent twins (5G and IoT) can offer.
4. A global race is currently underway to create quantum computing at scale. We can expect computers to operate a trillion times faster than the fastest traditional processors currently on the market thanks to quantum computing, which employs subatomic particles to create new methods of processing and storing information.
- Any country that develops quantum computing at scale has the potential to render our current encryption practices useless, making it possible for them to decrypt the encryption used by other countries, businesses, security systems, and other entities. As nations like the US, UK, China, and Russia invest heavily in the development of quantum computing technology, this is a development to keep an eye on in 2023.
5. Any tech leader should be paying attention to Web3. Although it's still early and the practicality isn't clear, I believe there's a good chance it will change much more than finance. In general, decentralized business models and architectures are more robust. Therefore, regardless of blockchain, applying decentralization and open ownership strategies is a good bet. Technology adoption and the digitalization of businesses across all industries continue to be significant global trends. The global technology market will keep expanding exponentially.

(The writer is Founder & CTO, Contentstack)

Bring petroleum products under GST

The Finance Minister should proactively engage with states to speed up the process of taxing petroleum goods under the GST

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has exhorted the states to give their concurrence for fixing the tax rate for five petroleum goods—crude oil, natural gas (NG), petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF)—under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to enable the GST Council to give its stamp of approval to this pending proposal.

GST is a single nationwide tax with a provision for set-off tax paid on inputs. It subsumes within it more than a dozen taxes from the pre-GST era, namely central excise duty (CED), service tax, and sales tax/value added tax (VAT). Besides, a host of local taxes exist, such as octroi, purchase tax, turnover tax, etc. The Constitutional Amendment Act of 2016 on GST, while providing for the inclusion of petroleum products under its ambit, kept them 'zero-rated'. Hence, these goods continue to attract CED and state-level VAT.

The multiplicity of taxes widely varying across states under the pre-GST dispensation led to the criss-cross movement of goods and services, lopsided development, regional disparities, and so on. It was also afflicted by the 'cascading' effect of 'tax-on-tax' and high transaction costs due to businesses having to deal with several authorities involved in the administration of a host of taxes. Above all, that regime was prone to massive tax evasion. The GST is intended to be free from all these maladies.

Petroleum being the prime source of energy, petroleum goods are used in almost all sectors of the economy. Given this and the fact that the GST holds the promise of yielding unprecedented benefits in terms of reining in price rises and making the industry more competitive, the case for taxing them under this regime was all the more compelling. Yet, these continue to be subject to being governed by the pre-GST era.

As per the Constitutional Amendment Act of 2016, the GST Council has the mandate to fix the rate under GST. But it has been dragging its feet. While, it has put fixing the rate for NG and ATF on its agenda umpteen times only to defer it, for other products it hasn't even thought it fit to consider it.

Apart from the Union finance minister, who is also the chairman of the Council, it has finance ministers (FMs) of all states, wherein all decisions are generally taken by consensus. For both the Centre and states, revenue from taxes, particularly on gasoline and diesel, acts like a 'milk cow'. During 2020–21, the Centre collected Rs 335,000 crore from taxing them, whereas the states got Rs 203,000 crore.

The transition to taxing these products under the GST will result in a substantial decline in their tax collection. To get a sense, let us look at some numbers.

In Delhi, the pump price of around Rs 97 per litre (as of February 4, 2023; the price has remained unchanged since May 22, 2022) includes the ex-refinery price plus freight of Rs 47 plus a buffer of Rs 10 for the so-called 'future inflationary aspect etc', dealer commission of Rs 4, CED, Rs 20, and VAT, Rs 16 (@ 19.4 per cent). The taxes alone make up Rs 36 per litre or 37 per cent of the pump price ((in the case of diesel, it accounts for 32 per cent).

The buffer of Rs 10 per litre for the so-called 'future inflationary aspect etc' is inexplicable. This could have been inserted to enable the oil marketing public sector undertakings (PSUs), viz., Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), Indian Oil

“THE AMENDMENT ACT OF 2016 ON GST, WHILE PROVIDING FOR THE INCLUSION OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS UNDER ITS AMBIT, HAD KEPT THEM ‘ZERO-RATED’

(The author is a policy analyst)



Corporation Limited (IOCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), to generate some surplus, which they could use in times when international prices of these products rise but they won't be able to raise the pump price (courtesy, elections). Excluding this and taking the pump price at Rs 87 per litre, the tax component would be 41 per cent.

The CED of Rs 20 per litre includes Rs 8 due to the Road and Infrastructure Cess (RaIC), which is entirely retained by the Centre. Of the balance of Rs 12, it retains 59 per cent or Rs 7, and gives Rs 5 to the states (41 per cent under the 15th Finance Commission or FC devolution formula). On a net basis, therefore, the Centre gets Rs 15 (8+7), while a much higher amount of Rs 21 (16+5) goes to the states.

Expressed as a percentage of ERP (ready to send to petrol pump), or Rs 47, the tax component would be 77 per cent of which 32 per cent accrues to the Centre and 45 per cent to the states.

If petrol and diesel are taxed under GST and placed in the highest slab of 28 per cent (as proposed by NITI Aayog last year during a discussion with economists and industry experts on the 'transition of energy products into the GST'), the Central government and states will get to tax it at 14 per cent each.

As per the FC devolution for-

mula, out of its collection, the Centre can retain only 59 per cent implying that it will have to contend with only 8.26 per cent (14x0.59) even as the state will get 19.74 per cent (14+14x0.41). The shift to GST will thus result in the Centre's tax collection plunging from 32 per cent to a low of 8.26 per while the collection of the states dips from 45 per cent to 19.74 per cent.

It is this fear of substantial loss of revenue for both states and the Centre that has deterred the Council from even taking up the subject matter for consideration. But, deferring it indefinitely will defeat the very purpose of including these products under GST. If the intent was to keep them zero-rated 'perpetually' then why keep stakeholders in a make-believe world? Instead of leaving it entirely to the states, Nirmala Sitharaman should proactively engage with them to speed up the process of taxing the products under the GST.

To help get over the main stumbling block (read: revenue loss), NITI Aayog had suggested that states could be compensated for the loss of revenue resulting from the shift 'partially' and mooted levying a 50 per cent cess. This is not workable, as compensation to the states for the loss of revenue consequent to the introduction of the new regime was available under the GST Compensation Act, 2017 only

for five years, from July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2022.

As for the cess (it is levied on the supply of demerit goods such as automobiles, tobacco, drinks, etc. and the proceeds thereof are used to compensate the states), this provision is not available under an amendment to the GST Compensation Act (2018), this could be collected only for five years from July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2022 (extension of this levy beyond June 30, 2022, is only for the limited purpose of 'servicing the loan taken by the Centre for funding the shortfall in proceeds from the cess vis-à-vis the compensation requirement during those five years'). That apart, NITI Aayog's proposal fell far short of what was needed as it provided only 'partial' compensation to the states; besides, it was silent on making up the loss incurred by the Centre.

The Centre and states need to broaden their vision. Given the long-term benefits of taxing these products under GST, they should take the revenue loss in the near term in stride. Even in the short term, the surge in GST collection during 2022–2023 (it has seen an average monthly collection of Rs 150,000 crore) should give the much-needed confidence. Additionally, there is scope for increasing tax collection by plugging various loopholes.

Combat gender-based violence with responsive counseling

Making support systems more responsive and accessible can be effective in preventing violence against women

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a globally pervasive yet largely invisible human rights violation. It includes physical, sexual, mental, or economic harm inflicted on a person because of gender-based power imbalances in society. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), almost one in every three women, or approximately 736 million women, have been subjected to intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their lifetime. Violence is prevalent in all spaces women occupy, including digital spaces.

During the pandemic, several reports indicated, a significant increase in domestic violence cases due to loss of income and decreased access



to services, disruption of social and protective networks, increasing household workload, drudgery, etc. Significant evidence and insights, which are India-specific, have also been generated from various studies and community interventions during the pandemic. World Health Partners (WHP), through its comprehensive intervention focused on addressing gender-based violence (GBV), will be working in the states of Delhi, Gujarat, and Jharkhand, from June 2021–December 2022. The project supported individuals with GBV issues through counseling and referral, and facilitated linkages with government social security and protection schemes. Close to 40,000 people were screened and more than 2,500 were

found affected with GBV. Interestingly, physical violence is not always the dominant form of coercion. In terms of the nature of violence, WHP data showed that 72% of GBV survivors faced emotional violence such as belittling, abusive language, and isolation from family; 15% faced economic violence as they were not given access to economic resources such as mobile phones or money for daily expenses, 11% faced physical violence. Gender-based violence results in short- and long-term consequences, which sometimes are quite devastating. Injuries, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, as well as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and even self-harm and suicide, are

some of the impacts of violence that survivors may face.

WHP's findings presented strong linkages between mental health and gender-based violence, an area that has largely been ignored. More than 75% of women, in the project intervention areas, who had faced GBV had some mental health issues; 62 % were mild, 27% were moderate, and 11% had severe mental health issues. As per the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, suicides among housewives, in India, have risen gradually over the last three years, from 21,359 in 2019 to 22,374 in 2020 to 23,179 in 2021. Also, the share of housewives in female suicides increased to 51.5% (23,179) in 2021, from 50.3% (22,374) in the previous year.

It has been found that a lack of response from support services like legal cells, police, and hospitals, together with a lack of financial resources and distance from home, have proved to be major deterrents for aggrieved women in taking any timely action that could have provided immediate and appropriate relief. Timely, responsive, evidence-based, and often low-cost interventions, when activated in an integrated manner, can help save lives. WHP's intervention shows that even access to simple tele-counselling services alone can make a lot of difference, as GBV survivors feel supported to overcome the violence they are facing. In addition, ensuring receptive, collaborative, and accessible referral pathways like One

Stop Centres (OSCs), also called Sakhi centres is a major requirement to address the issue of gender-based violence and prevent it from becoming.

The need of the hour is to create massive community awareness about various government support services. Currently, the government of India's 'Mission Shakti', and its two sub-schemes, 'Sambal' and 'Samarthyā' are aimed at strengthening interventions for women's safety, security, and empowerment in a mission mode. However, its success will largely depend on overcoming the lingering challenge of inter-departmental coordination and collaboration. For instance, the Women's Helpline (WHL) (181, and OSCs have been designed to operate in an integrated man-

ner, however, no such integration has ever been done. Several states have been running their own distress helpline services like 104, but even these have not been integrated with OSCs. Similarly, necessary linkages between various legal provisions like the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 are yet to be worked out. This led to weak enforcement of laws and resulted in victims' apathy, distrust, and avoidance of the system.

Addressing GBV requires a comprehensive, survivor-centred response system, based on the right to safety, confidentiality, non-discrimination, and self-determination for all survivors.

Xi Jinping to travel to Russia

Stronger ties, Ukraine war on agenda with Putin

PTI ■ BEIJING/MOSCOW

Chinese President Xi Jinping will travel to Moscow on a state visit on Monday for crucial talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin during which he is expected to pitch for peace talks to end the raging war in Ukraine. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying said on Friday that at the invitation of President Putin, President Xi will pay a state visit to Russia from March 20 to 22. Xi's visit will be seen as a powerful signal of Beijing's support for Putin in Western capitals, where leaders have grown increasingly wary of the two neighbouring nations' deepening partnership as war rages in Europe.

It will also be Xi's first foreign trip since securing an unprecedented third term as president at China's rubber-stamp Parliament last week. Answering a spate of questions about whether Xi will promote peace talks between Russia and Ukraine to end the war, another Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told the media: "We always believe political dialogue is the only way to resolve conflicts and disputes."

Xi's visit to Russia comes days after China clinched the Iran-Saudi Arabia peace deal,



regarded as a diplomatic coup, aimed at expanding Beijing's role in world hotspots to end conflicts. Beijing has not condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and continues to maintain close political, trade, and military ties with Moscow. A simultaneous announcement made in Moscow by the Russian government about Xi's visit said the two leaders will discuss "pressing issues related to the future of relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction between Russia and China." Putin and Xi are also expected to exchange views on ways to enhance Russian-Chinese cooperation on the international stage, Russia's state-run news agency Tass reported. The Kremlin press service said "a number of

important bilateral documents will be signed" during Xi's visit. The announcement on Friday came a day after Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang spoke to his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in which Qin called for peace talks between Moscow and Kyiv. According to the Chinese foreign ministry, Qin expressed hoped that Ukraine and Russia would keep the door open for dialogue and negotiation, and not close the door to a political settlement. On his talks with Qi, Kuleba said on Twitter that "we discussed the significance of the principle of territorial integrity. He said he underscored to Qin the importance of instituting Zelenskyy's "peace formula" for ending the aggression. Referring to a 12-point

position paper issued by China earlier to end the Ukraine conflict, Wang said the document fully lays out China's "fair and objective position" on the Ukraine issue. "Fanning flames during the fight and imposing unilateral sanctions will make matters worse," he said, in a veiled dig at the US and EU's firm backing of Ukraine.

Asked whether Xi will speak to Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy about the peace deal, Wang said: "China will uphold an objective and fair position on the Ukraine crisis and play a role in promoting talks for peace."

"China's position is consistent and clear. We maintain communication with all parties," he said. Wang also sought to play down US warnings to China not to supply weapons to Russia, saying China-Russia cooperation is "completely above board and shall be free from disruption or coercion from any third party."

On the US and the EU criticism of China-Russia relations as an alliance-building a new world order, Wang said: "the China-Russia relationship is based on no alliance, no confrontation and no targeting of any third party." China is committed to the UN-centred international system and an international order underpinned by international law, he said.

Turkish FM to visit Egypt as countries mend ties

AP ■ ISTANBUL

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Egypt, his ministry announced Friday, the first such high-level trip in more than a decade as the countries repair relations damaged in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring. A statement from the Turkish Foreign Ministry said Cavusoglu will go to Egypt on Saturday at the invitation of his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shoukry.

The ministers will discuss bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues. Cavusoglu's trip follows Shoukry's visit to Turkey's earthquake-hit region last month. Diplomatic relations between Ankara and Cairo have been frosty for almost a decade. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was a close ally of Egypt's previous Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, who was ousted by the military amid widespread protests in 2013. Turkey in recent years abandoned its critical approach to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi's government, as it tried to repair the frayed ties. In November, Erdogan and el-Sissi were photographed shaking hands in Qatar.

Turkiye President says he will back Finland's NATO bid

AP ■ ISTANBUL

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said Friday that his government would move forward with ratifying Finland's NATO application, paving the way for the country to join the military bloc ahead of Sweden. The breakthrough came as Finnish President Sauli Niinisto was in Ankara to meet with Erdogan. Both Finland and Sweden applied to become NATO members 10 months ago in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, abandoning decades of non-alignment.

NATO requires the unanimous approval of its 30 existing members to expand, and Turkey and Hungary are the only countries that have not yet ratified the Nordic nation's bids. The Turkish government accused both Sweden and Finland of being too soft on

groups that it deems to be terror organisations, but expressed more reservations about Sweden.

"When it comes to fulfilling its pledges in the trilateral memorandum of understanding, we have seen that Finland has taken authentic and concrete steps," Erdogan told a news conference in Ankara following his meeting with Niinisto.

"This sensitivity for our country's security and, based on the progress that has been made in the protocol for Finland's accession to NATO, we have decided to initiate the ratification process in our parliament," the president added. With Erdogan's agreement, Finland's application can now go to the Turkish parliament, where the president's party and its allies hold a majority. Ratification is expected before Turkey holds its presidential and

parliamentary elections scheduled for May 14.

Erdogan suggested Wednesday that his country might take up Finland's accession following Niinisto's trip. Turkey, Finland and Sweden signed an agreement in June of last year to resolve differences over the Nordic states' membership.

The document included clauses addressing Ankara's claims that Stockholm and Helsinki did not take seriously enough its concerns with those it considers terrorists, particularly supporters of Kurdish militants who have waged a 39-year insurgency in Turkey and people Ankara associates with a 2016 coup attempt. A series of separate demonstrations in Stockholm, including a protest by an anti-Islam activist who burned the Quran outside the Turkish Embassy, also angered Turkish officials.

Slovakia agrees to give Ukraine fleet of Soviet warplanes

AP ■ BRATISLAVA

Bratislava (Slovakia) (AP) — Slovakia's government has approved a plan to give Ukraine its fleet of 13 Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets, becoming the second NATO member country to agree to fulfill the Ukrainian government's pleas for warplanes to help defend against Russia's invasion.

Prime Minister Eduard Heger announced the unanimous decision of his government on Friday.

Slovakia grounded its fleet last year and no longer uses the jets. "Promises must be kept and when @ZelenskyyUa asked for more #weapons incl. fighter jets, I said we'll do our best," Heger tweeted, adding that military aid was key to ensuring Ukraine can "defend itself and the entire #Europe against #Russia."

On Thursday, Poland's president said his country would give Ukraine around a dozen MiG-29 fighter jets.

President Andrzej Duda said on Thursday that Poland would hand over four of the Soviet-made warplanes in the coming days and others that need servicing and would be supplied later.

Both Poland and Slovakia had indicated they were ready to hand over their planes, but only as part of a wider international coalition doing the same.

It remains unclear whether other countries would also share their military planes. The debate over whether to provide non-NATO member Ukraine with military fighter jets started last year, but NATO allies held off, citing concern about escalating the alliance's role in the war.

Russia to award pilots involved in drone incident

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian fighter pilots involved in an incident with a US drone that resulted in its crash will be given state awards, the Defence Ministry announced Friday. The move appears to signal Moscow's intention to adopt a more aggressive stance toward future US surveillance flights.

The US military said it ditched the Air Force MQ-9 Reaper in the Black Sea on Tuesday after a pair of Russian fighter jets dumped fuel on the surveillance drone and then one of them struck its propeller while it was flying in international airspace.

Moscow has denied that its warplanes hit the drone, alleging that it crashed while making a sharp maneuver. It said that its warplanes reacted to a violation of a no-flight zone Russia has established in the area near Crimea amid the fighting in Ukraine.

On Friday, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu lauded the pilots for preventing the drone from flying into the area that Moscow has banned for flights. The Defence Ministry said the ban was "in line with international norms."

Moscow's announcement comes a day after the US military released a declassified 42-second colour footage showing a Russian Su-27 fighter jet approaching the back of the US drone and releasing fuel as it passes in what appeared to be aimed at blinding the drone's optical instruments to drive it from the area.

On a second approach, either the same jet or another Russian Su-27 that had been shadowing the MQ-9 struck the drone's propeller, damaging a blade, according to the US military, which said it then ditched the aircraft in the sea. The video excerpt does not show the collision, although it does show the damage to the propeller.

Ramsahay Yadav elected Nepal's Vice-President

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Ramsahaya Prasad Yadav, a senior leader from the Madhes region, was elected as Nepal's Vice President on Friday, in a further boost to the coalition government headed by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'.

Ramsahaya Prasad Yadav, a candidate from the Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), comfortably defeated his nearest rival Ashta Laxmi Shakya of CPN-UML to become the Himalayan nation's third Vice President and the first from

the Madhes region, bordering India. Yadav, 52, secured 30,328 votes against 16,328 secured by Shakya, according to the Election Commission.

Yadav had the support of the Nepali Congress, CPN-Maoist Centre, CPN-Unified Socialist, and other fringe parties. Rastriya Prajatantra Party did not take part during the vice presidential voting held on Friday.

Likewise, Mamata Jha from Janamat Party has secured 2,537 votes. Parmila Yadav, from the JSP Nepal itself, though she announced



her withdrawal in the midway, got 48 votes.

There are 333 federal

parliament members and 550 provincial assembly members, who were eligible voters dur-

ing the vice-presidential election. The weightage of the vote of a federal MP is 79 and that of the province assembly member is 48.

The outcome of the election comes as a relief for the government headed by Prime Minister 'Prachanda' as the CPN-UML led by former prime minister K P Sharma Oli withdrew its support to his government following a rift over backing Poudel for the presidential poll. Ram Chandra Poudel of the Nepali Congress was elected as the new president of Nepal on March 9.

Greece raises min wage to pre-bailout levels

AP ■ GREECE

Greece announced on Friday an increase in the minimum wage that will restore pay to levels existing before sweeping cuts were imposed more than a decade ago during an international bailout.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said the gross minimum monthly salary will go up on April 1 to 780 euros (USD 830) from 713 euros. "I have no illusions.

We know that in our country, wages are still low, and they are being squeezed even more by inflation," said Mitsotakis, whose centre-right government faces a general election in the spring. Under

pressure from lenders, Greece imposed severe pay cuts in 2012 during bailout programmes funded by a European Union rescue fund and the International Monetary Fund.

As the country was on the brink of bankruptcy, the government took control of wage policy previously set through labour negotiations and slashed the minimum monthly pay from 751 euros to 586 euros.

Greek salaries are paid out over 14 installments annually, to provide extra at Christmas, Easter and the summer holidays. Averaged over 12 payments, the new gross minimum monthly pay will rise to 910 euros.

Lack of independence at Central Bank led to Lanka's bankruptcy: Weerasinghe

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka Nandalal Weerasinghe has cited the lack of independence of the apex bank in determining the monetary policy as a reason for the country's unprecedented economic crisis. The Sri Lankan government in May last year declared a debt default on over USD 51 billion in foreign loans -- a first in the country's history.

Weerasinghe made the statement on Thursday while talking about a proposed bill aimed to provide autonomy to the Central Bank without any undue influence from the fiscal authorities or the govern-

ment. "In 2020, 2021 and 2022, the policy interest and exchange rates were fixed without the Central Bank," Weerasinghe said.

"The exchange rate was fixed at Rs 203 leading to the total loss of our reserves and bankruptcy," he said, recalling the situation prevailing at the time of his takeover last year from his predecessor Ajith Cabraal.

He said it was important to let the Central Bank act independently to determine the policy interest rates and exchange rates.

"The omission of the Secretary to the Treasury from influencing the monetary policy is a new welcome feature," he added. The Secretary to

the Treasury is left out of both the 11-member monetary policy board and the 7-member governing board under the proposed bill. "What happened was the Treasury unduly influenced the monetary policy in favour of the fiscal policy, that's why our key policy indicators (KPI) dipped by 50 per cent", Weerasinghe said.

Setting up of a new Coordination Council has also been proposed under the draft law to maintain coordination of fiscal, monetary and financial stability policies.

However, the Central Bank executive officers have objected to the new bill, claiming that it does not promise full independence.

Report: Covid-19 in raccoon dogs strengthens natural origin theory

AP ■ NEW YORK

A new analysis of genetic samples collected from a seafood market in central China's Wuhan city shows the presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in raccoon dogs sold at the venue, strengthening the case for the natural origin of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a team of international experts.

The New York Times said in a report on Thursday that genetic data was drawn from swabs taken from in and around the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market starting in January 2020, "shortly after the Chinese authorities had shut down the market because of suspicions that it was linked to the outbreak of a new virus." The new evidence comes weeks after an intelligence assessment from the US Department of Energy pointed out that an "accidental laboratory leak" from a virology laboratory in Wuhan was most likely the cause of the pandemic. While the animals had been cleared out from the market, researchers took swabs from the walls, floors, metal cages and carts used for transporting animal cages, the report said.

"In samples that came back positive for the coronavirus, the international research team found genetic material belonging to animals, including large amounts that were a match for the raccoon dog," it said, quoting three scientists involved in the analysis.

The report noted that after the international team came across the new data,



it reached out to Chinese researchers who had uploaded the files with an offer to collaborate.

However, after that, the sequences disappeared from GISAID (Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data), it said.

The report said that the "jumbling together" of genetic material from the virus and the animal does not prove that a raccoon dog itself was infected.

"And even if a raccoon dog had been infected, it would not be clear that the animal had spread the virus to people. Another animal could have passed the virus to people, or someone infected with the virus could have spread the virus to a raccoon dog," the report said. "But the analysis did establish that raccoon dogs — fluffy animals that are related to foxes and are known to be able to transmit the coronavirus — deposited genetic signatures in the same place where genetic material from the virus was left," according to the scientists. They noted that the evidence was

"consistent" with a scenario in which the virus had spilled into humans from a wild animal.

"But the genetic data from the market offers some of the most tangible evidence yet of how the virus could have spilled into people from wild animals outside a lab. It also suggests that Chinese scientists have given an incomplete account of evidence that could fill in details about how the virus was spreading at the Huanan market," the report said.

The international team included an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona Michael Worobey; a virologist at the Scripps Research Institute in California Kristian Andersen and a biologist at the University of Sydney Dr Edward Holmes. They started mining the new genetic data last week.

"One sample, in particular, caught their attention. It had been taken from a cart linked to a specific stall at the Huanan market that Holmes had visited in 2014," the report said.

That stall contained "caged raccoon dogs" on top of a separate cage holding birds, "exactly the sort of environment conducive to the transmission of new viruses."

"We were able to figure out relatively quickly that at least in one of these samples, there was a lot of raccoon dog nucleic acid, along with virus nucleic acid," said Stephen Goldstein, a virologist at the University of Utah who worked on the new analysis.

PUBLIC NOTICE
General public is hereby informed that Ashok Kumar Chadha is the owners of Property bearing MPL No. 554A/15N out of Khersa No. 4965/797, built on Plot No. 7/63 (Plot No. 83 and Block-7) measuring 100 sq. yds., Village Chandrawali alias Shahdara, Arjan Gali, Vishwas Nagar, Ilaka Shehdara, Delhi, vide SPA, ATS & Will dated 11.05.1981 and the same is intending to sell Mr. Dhieraj Jain to be financed & mortgaged by Axis Finance Limited. If there are any issues to any person or any authority regarding to the above-mentioned property, their kindly contact the undersigned 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. 830, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi - 110001
Mob.: +91-8078188328

PUBLIC NOTICE
General public is hereby informed that Mr. Ved Prakash S/o Late Mr. Bhem Singh was the owner of the property Freehold Residential Plot area measuring 100 sq. yds. Out of Khersa No. 314, Situated at Village Shikra Pargana, Loni Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh, by virtue of Sale Deed dated 06.10.2009, regd. at doc. No. 7183, and the same is to be financed & mortgaged with my client i.e. Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd and the legal heirs of Late Ved Prakash namely (1) Mr. Munesh Kumar, (2) Mr. Nareesh Kumar, (3) Mrs. Savita Bhatti, (4) Mr. Sunil Kumar, (5) Mrs. Rekha Hani, and (6) Mrs. Sunita, shall have no objection regarding mortgage of aforesaid property by Mr. Govind Bhaswari S/o Late Mr. Hajan Lal. If any person(s) have any objection(s) or claim in this property, then contact the undersigned within 7 days from date of this notice on below address, failing which, it will be assumed that there are no claims or issues in respect of the aforesaid property.
Raghav Tiwari, Advocate
Ch. 830, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi - 110001
Mob.: +91-8078188328

G20
NORTHERN RAILWAY
Tender Notice
Invitation of tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)
N.I.T. No. **50 (A,B) 22-23/WE**
Name of work with its location
(A) Renovation of VIP Toilets, Toilets at CRECHE, RPF Barracks etc, including improvement to Sewerage system and other misc. works at Rail Bhawan in the S/o SSE/W/RB under ADENE/III
(B) Providing Rain water harvesting by cross wave Technology in Railway colony in the so SSE/W/IN/MZ under ADEN E-III
Approx cost of work (A) 10900262.93
(B) 8857789.09
(A) 204500.00
(B) 177200.00
EMD amount (A) 204500.00
(B) 177200.00
Completion period of work (A) 04 Months
(B) 06 Months
Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender Closing date of tender on 11.04.2023 at 15:00 hrs.
Website particular notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc.
128-W/269/OET/22-23/WE/NIT/50(A,B) Dated : 17.03.2023 831/2023
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

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

S. No	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	01231778	STRUCTURE BOND 40MM X 6 MM MS FLAT	8322 NOS	10-04-23
02	08225077A	24-FIBRE ARMoured OPTICAL FIBER CABLE	527 KM	10-04-23
03	072220204	CONTROL ARM ASSEMBLY RIGHT CONSISTING OF 2 ITEMS FOR LHB COACHES.	774 NOS	11-04-23
04	16234508	CERAMIC RESISTOR FOR GOVERNOR [WW]	25 NOS	13-04-23
05	022355008	60 KVA, 750A/15V, 3-PHASE DRY TYPE DISTRIBUTION TRANSFORMER FOR LHB	200 NOS	13-04-23
06	09233057	KIT OF PU PAINTS (TWO PACK) FOR LHB RAJDHANI COACHES.	399 SET	14-04-23
07	072220292A	HEX. HEAD BOLT M 24X150 (H.T) FOR LHB/FIAT BOGIE	30530 NOS	17-04-23
08	07220301A	PREVAILING TORQUE TYPE ALL METAL HEX.NUT M 24	126909 NOS	01-05-23
09	07223456	SECONDARY SPRING (INNER) FOR GENERATOR CAR SIDE 2	158 NOS	10-05-23
10	15225019	SELF PROPELLED TUNNEL RESCUE TRAIN	03 NOS	14-06-23

NOTE -1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.
2. No Manual offer will be entertained.
Tender Notice No. 94/2022-2023 Dated : 17.03.2023 834/2023
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Major relief for Imran Khan

Gets protective bail in 8 terrorism cases, one civil case

PTI ■ LAHORE

In a relief to embattled Imran Khan, a top Pakistani court here granted protective bail to the former prime minister on Friday in eight terrorism cases and a civil case after he appeared before the court, hours after another top court suspended non-bailable arrest warrants against him till March 18 in a corruption case.

Khan, the 70-year-old chief of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, travelled to the Lahore High Court (LHC) in a bulletproof vehicle to seek protective bail in nine cases. A two-member bench of the LHC, comprising Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh and Justice Farooq Haider conducted the hearing on bail pleas filed against the cases that are lodged under terrorism sections, according to Geo TV.

For the five cases in Islamabad, the court granted bail to the PTI chief till March

24 and for the three cases in Lahore, Khan received bail till March 27, the report said. Meanwhile, Justice Saleem also here granted protective bail to Khan filed against the civil case registered against him, it said. Earlier, the Islamabad High Court suspended non-bailable arrest warrants issued against Khan till March 18, providing him with a chance to appear before the district court hearing the Toshakhana case. Ahead of the LHC decision, a tense calm prevailed in Lahore's upscale Zaman Park near Khan's residence, which was the scene of pitched battles for two days between his defiant supporters and Punjab Police.

The clashes ultimately subsided after the courts intervened on Wednesday. Khan has been in the crosshairs for buying gifts, including an expensive Graff wristwatch he had received as the premier at a discounted price from the state depository called Toshakhana,



and selling them for profit. Established in 1974, the Toshakhana is a department under the administrative control of the Cabinet Division and stores precious gifts given to rulers, parliamentarians, bureaucrats, and officials by heads of other governments and states and foreign dignitaries. Khan was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan in October last year for not sharing details of the

sales. The election body later filed a complaint with the district court to punish him, under criminal laws, for selling the gifts he had received as prime minister of the country. Khan has vehemently denied those charges.

According to Khan, he was facing over 80 different cases in various courts across Pakistan. Khan, the cricketer-turned-politician, was ousted from power in April last year after losing a no-confidence vote, which he alleged was part of a US-led conspiracy targeting him because of his independent foreign policy decisions on Russia, China, and Afghanistan. Since his ouster, Khan has been asking for early elections to remove what he termed an "imported government" led by prime minister Shehbaz Sharif. Sharif has maintained that elections will be held later this year once the parliament completes its five-year tenure.

Tribal leader among 7 gunned down in Balochistan province

PTI ■ KARACHI

Seven people, including a tribal leader, were killed in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province after armed men opened fire at the vehicle they were travelling in, police said on Friday.

Levies Forces, a paramilitary gendarmerie in Balochistan province, said the incident took place on Thursday in Murgha Kibzai, situated around 80 kilometres from Zhob town. The seven people who died included tribal leader Ahmed Khan Kibzai and his two brothers, police said. Kibzai, his brothers and four others were travelling in a vehicle, when armed men opened fire at them using automatic weapons, they said. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Police said Kibzai had enmity with locals, which could have been a possible cause for his death. The deteriorating law and order situation in Balochistan province has further complicated the problems for the federal government, which is trying to fix Pakistan's febrile economy.

In recent times, the Balochistan Liberation Army has joined hands with the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in launching a slew of terror attacks across Pakistan. In November last year, the TTP called off an indefinite ceasefire agreed with the government in June 2022 and ordered its militants to carry out attacks on the security forces.

Airlines struggle to repatriate dollars from crisis-hit Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The global airline industry body has warned that debt-ridden Pakistan has become "very challenging" for foreign air carriers as USD 290 million of funds were stuck in the country as of January, a media report has said. Pakistan, currently in the throes of a major economic crisis, is grappling with high external debt, a weak local currency and dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

Analysts believe the country is at risk of default. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said USD 290 million of funds were stuck in the country as of January this year, up nearly a third since December last year, according to the Financial Times newspaper report on Thursday.

Pakistan is holding the second-largest amount of foreign currency from airlines globally, after only Nigeria. "Airlines are facing long delays before they are able to repatriate their funds," Philip Goh, the IATA's Asia-Pacific head was quoted as saying in the report. "Some airlines still have funds stuck in Pakistan from sales in 2022," Goh said. The IATA,

which represents around 300 airlines comprising 83 per cent of global air traffic, said it has become "very challenging" for carriers to serve Pakistan as they struggle to repatriate their dues that are paid in dollars, the report said.

Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) has said it was trying to pay the airlines on time and has been in contact with relevant authorities over the issue. In December 2022, the global aviation body said Pakistan has blocked USD 225 million it owed to international airlines, making it one of the top markets where airline funds were blocked from repatriation.

The development comes at a time when Pakistan is staring at a balance of payment crisis, which is currently standing at an abysmal level of USD 4.3 billion. The ongoing crisis has also hit the aviation industry where airlines sell tickets in local currency, but repatriate dollars to pay for expenses such as fuel costs. The Financial Times, citing data from an aviation analytics company Cirium, reported that foreign airlines were reluctant to return to Pakistan, with fewer flights scheduled for March 2023 compared to 2019.



Protesters stand in a cloud of teargas after a demonstration in Paris. AP/PTI

Macron risks his Government to raise retirement age

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron ordered his prime minister to wield a special constitutional power on Thursday that skirts parliament to force through a highly unpopular bill raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 without a vote.

His calculated risk set off a clamour among lawmakers, who began singing the national anthem even before Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne arrived in the lower chamber. She spoke forcefully over their

shouts, acknowledging that Macron's unilateral move will trigger quick motions of no-confidence in his government.

The fury of opposition lawmakers echoed the anger of citizens and workers' unions. Thousands gathered at the Place de la Concorde facing the National Assembly, lighting a bonfire. As night fell, police charged against the demonstrators in waves to clear the elegant Place, but hundreds remained nearly an hour later.

The unions that have organised strikes and marches

since January, leaving Paris reeking in piles of garbage, announced new rallies and marches in protest. "This retirement reform is brutal, unjust, unjustified for the world of workers," they declared.

Macron has made the proposed pension changes the key priority of his second term, arguing that reform is needed to keep the pension system from diving into deficit as France, like many richer nations, faces lower birth rates and longer life expectancy.

Macron decided to invoke

the special power during a Cabinet meeting at the Elysee presidential palace, just a few minutes before the scheduled vote in France's lower house of parliament because he had no guarantee of a majority.

"Today, uncertainty looms" about whether a majority would have voted for the bill, Borne acknowledged, but she said "We cannot gamble on the future of our pensions. That reform is necessary." Borne prompted boos from the opposition when she said her government is accountable to the

parliament. Lawmakers can try to revoke the changes through no-confidence motions, she said.

"There will actually be a proper vote and therefore the parliamentary democracy will have the last say," Borne said. She said in an interview Thursday night that she was not angry when addressing disrespectful lawmakers but "very shocked."

"Certain (opposition lawmakers) want chaos, at the Assembly and in the streets," she said. Opposition lawmak-

ers demanded the government step down. One Communist lawmaker called the presidential power a political "guillotine." Others called it a "denial of democracy" that signals Macron's lack of legitimacy. Marine Le Pen said her far-right National Rally party would file a no-confidence motion, and Communist lawmaker Fabien Roussel said such a motion is "ready" on the left.

"The mobilisation will continue," Roussel said. "This reform must be suspended."

Japan PM praises SKorea leader; biz groups vow to boost ties

AP ■ TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said hats off to South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for "making a difficult decision and action" by overcoming the troubled history between the two countries, pledging to work with him toward better future relations. "I want to express my heartfelt respect to President Yoon for making a difficult decision and action by overcoming various (troubled) background and history between the neighbours Japan and South Korea," Kishida told a news conference on Friday, one day after the two leaders held talks in their first formal summit hosted by Japan in 12 years. The two sides seek

to turn the page on the long-standing row that has divided the United States allies and form a united front driven by shared concerns over North Korea and Russia. During Thursday's talks, the two leaders agreed to make the Japan-South Korea summit a start in resuming their "shuttle diplomacy" of regular visits, which had stalled since 2011.

They also agreed to resume defense and security dialogues, and Yoon ensured full cooperation in military intelligence sharing, which Seoul had previously threatened to stop.

South Korea announced it was dropping its complaint to the World Trade Organisation alleging Japan's unfair trade

practices, while Tokyo said it will lift the export controls imposed since 2019 on shipments to South Korea of high-tech goods crucial for computer-chips production.

After Thursday's summit, Kishida escorted Yoon out to Tokyo's posh Ginza district to treat him with his favourite dishes, including "sukiyaki" beef stew, over Japanese sake and beer. "Last night I had great time drinking with him," Kishida said, adding they also talked about their private life, which he said would help fostering trust on personal levels.

"I hope we can push forward relations of our countries based on trust between the leaders." On Friday in Tokyo, Yoon told a gathering of busi-

ness leaders from South Korea and Japan that the two sides should collaborate more on advanced technology, climate change and economic security.

"I think there is a lot of room for cooperation between the two countries in future high-tech new industries such as digital transformation, semiconductors, batteries, and electric vehicles," Yoon said. "The governments of the two countries will do everything to help you interact freely and create innovative business opportunities."

Yoon was the guest of honour at the Tokyo business roundtable over a lunch of French cuisine, attended by about a dozen business leaders from both nations.

US to pledge over \$171-mn assistance for Venezuela

Caracas (Venezuela): The US government plans to pledge more than USD 171 million on Friday for humanitarian and development projects to assist Venezuelans experiencing a variety of urgent needs at home and abroad. Some of the money will go for food, water and sanitation efforts within the crisis-wracked country, while other funds are designated for emergency shelter, health care and other services for Venezuelans who have migrated to other South American nations, the US Department of State told The Associated Press ahead of the announcement.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, is expected to announce the

pledged funding during a conference in Brussels. The event is designed to raise awareness of Venezuela's protracted economic and political crisis, which has pushed millions into poverty and driven more than 7 million others to migrate, mostly within Latin America.

The pledge comes almost four months after the government of President Nicolas Maduro and Venezuela's opposition, including the faction backed by the US, reached an agreement to fund social programmes with money drawn from the country's assets frozen abroad. But the fund, expected to be managed by the United Nations and to progressively receive about USD 3 billion, has yet to materialise.

UN nuclear watchdog says 2.5 tonnes of uranium missing

AP ■ DUBAI

Some 2.5 tonnes of natural uranium stored in a site in war-torn Libya have gone missing, the United Nations nuclear watchdog said Thursday, raising safety and proliferation concerns. However, forces allied to a warlord battling the Libyan government based in the capital of Tripoli claimed on Thursday night that they recovered the material. U.N. inspectors said they were trying to confirm that.

Scotland mother gets son's remains after 48 years

London (PTI): A mother from Scotland who has been fighting for more than four decades to find out what happened to her dead baby's remains has finally found closure as she received her son's remains 48 years after he died, a media report said on Friday.

Lydia Reid, 74, from Edinburgh, Scotland has campaigned for years to find out what happened to her son after his death in 1975 as there were no human remains found in his coffin, the BBC reported.

She got to know that her baby was not at his place of burial after a court granted an order for exhumation in September 2017. Reid's baby, Gary, was a week old when he died of Rhesus disease, a condition where antibodies in a pregnant woman's blood destroy her baby's blood cells.

Reid claimed that when she asked the hospital to see her son a few days after he died, she was shown a different child. She also said a postmortem examination of her son's body was conducted against her wishes.

US: Big banks create \$30-billion rescue package for First Republic

New York (AP): Eleven of the biggest banks in the United States announced a USD 30 billion rescue package for First Republic Bank on Thursday, in an effort to prevent the California-based bank from becoming the third bank to fail in less than a week. First Republic serves a similar clientele as Silicon Valley Bank, which failed Friday after depositors withdrew about USD 40 billion.

It appears that First Republic, which had deposits totalling USD 176.4 billion as

of December 31, was facing a similar crisis.

In a statement, the group of banks confirmed that other unnamed banks had seen large amounts of withdrawals of uninsured deposits, which are those that exceed the USD 250,000 level insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. First Republic's shares dropped more than 60 per cent Monday, even after the bank said it had secured additional funding from JPMorgan and the Federal Reserve. Thursday the bank's shares

were down as much as 36 per cent but rallied after reports the rescue package was in the works and closed up nearly 9 per cent.

JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup and Wells Fargo have agreed to each put USD 5 billion in uninsured deposits into the First Republic. Meanwhile, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs would deposit USD 2.5 billion each into the bank. The remaining USD 5 billion would consist of USD 1 billion contributions from BNY Mellon, State Street, PNC Bank, Truist and US Bank.

Prince Harry sues tabloid for defamation

AP ■ LONDON

Lawyers for Prince Harry asked a judge on Friday to rule that a tabloid newspaper libelled the British royal with an article about his quest for police protection when he and his family visit the UK. Harry is suing Mail on Sunday publisher Associated Newspapers Ltd. over an article alleging he tried to hush up his separate legal challenge over the British government's refusal to let him pay for police security. During a hearing at the High Court in London, Harry's lead attorney asked Judge Matthew Nicklin either to strike out the publisher's defense or to deliver a summary judgment, which would be a ruling in the prince's favour without going to trial.

Lawyer Justin Rushbrooke

said the facts did not support the publisher's "substantive pleaded defence" that the article expressed an "honest opinion." Harry was not in court for the hearing. The prince, also known as the Duke of Sussex, and his wife, Meghan, lost their publicly funded UK police protection when they stepped down as senior working royals and moved to North America in 2020.

Harry's lawyers have said the prince is reluctant to bring the couple's children — Prince Archie, who is almost 4, and Princess Lilibet, nearly 2 — to his homeland because it is not safe. The 38-year-old prince wants to pay personally for police security when he comes to Britain, but the government said that wasn't possible. Last year, a judge gave Harry per-



mission to sue the government. That case has yet to come to trial. Harry sued Associated Newspapers over a February 2022 Mail on Sunday article headlined "Exclusive: How Prince Harry tried to keep his legal fight with the government over police bodyguards a

secret... then — just minutes after the story broke — his PR machine tried to put a positive spin on the dispute."

Harry claims that the newspaper libelled him when it suggested that the prince lied in his initial public statements about the suit against the government. In July, Nicklin ruled that the article was defamatory, allowing the case to proceed. The judge has not yet considered issues such as whether the story was accurate or in the public interest.

Harry, the younger son of King Charles III, and the former actress Meghan Markle married at Windsor Castle in 2018 but stepped down as working royals in 2020, citing what they described as the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British

media. Harry's fury at the UK press runs through his memoir "Spare", published in January. He blames an overly aggressive press for the 1997 death of his mother, Princess Diana, and accuses the media of similarly hounding of Meghan. The couple has not hesitated to use the British courts to hit back at what they see as media mistreatment. In December 2021, Meghan won an invasion-of-privacy case against Associated Newspapers over the Mail on Sunday's publication of a letter she wrote to her estranged father. Harry is also among celebrities suing Associated Newspapers over alleged phone hacking, and he has launched a separate hacking suit against the publisher of another tabloid, the Mirror.

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.
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Corporate Identification No. U40109PB2010SGC033813
website: www.pspcl.in

Tender Enquiry No.1508/O&M/PC-2410 Dated: 17-03-2023
Chief Engineer / O&M (P&P Cell-II), GHPT, Lehra Mohabbat, invites E-tender for the Procurement of Spares for XRP-883 Coal Mills Installed at 2 x 250 MW Units of Stage-II, Quantity as per NIT. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 17-03-2023 from 17:00 hrs onwards.
Note: Corrigendum & addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>
76155/12/1496/2022/22252 GHPT-18/23

G20
NORTHERN RAILWAY
1st CORRIGENDUM
Tender No. 30-Elect-55-T-22-23-E3
Name of Work: Electrical work for Energy efficiency & green energy works over delhi division.
The amendments in above said tender are as under:

	Earlier published	Amended
Name of work	Electrical work for Energy efficiency & green energy works over delhi division.	Electrical work for Energy efficiency & green energy works over delhi division.
Approx cost of the works in	Rs. 70.78 lacs	Rs. 70.78 lacs
Address of the office	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/ General, New Delhi.	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/ General, New Delhi.
Bid Security	Rs. 141600.00	Rs. 141600.00
Date & time of submission of tender	13.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.	13.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.
Opening of tender	13.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.	13.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.
Tender No	30-Elect-55-T-22-23-E3	30-Elect-55-T-22-23-E3

The tender document of above mentioned tender has been modified kindly go through the amended documents available on www.reps.gov.in and submit your offer accordingly.
819/2023

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G20
NORTHERN RAILWAY
1st CORRIGENDUM
Tender No. 30-Elect-77-T-2022-23-E3
Name of Work: Electrical work in connection with renovation of toilets at Rail Bhawan
The amendments in above said tender are as under:

	Earlier published	Amended
Name of work	Electrical work in connection with renovation of toilets at Rail Bhawan.	Electrical work in connection with renovation of toilets at Rail Bhawan.
Approx cost of the works in	Rs. 70.89 lacs	Rs. 70.89 lacs
Address of the office	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/ General, New Delhi.	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/ General, New Delhi.
Bid Security	Rs. 141800.00	Rs. 141800.00
Date & time of submission of tender	28.03.2023, 12:00 Hrs.	03.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.
Opening of tender	28.03.2023, 12:00 Hrs.	03.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.

The tender document of above mentioned tender has been modified kindly go through the amended documents available on www.reps.gov.in and submit your offer accordingly.
822/2023

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Corporate Identity Number: U61901MH2008PTCL78270

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Ltd. on 24th March 2023 at Delhi District branch: O-7, 1st Floor, above Look Saloon, Jaipat Nagar 2, New Delhi - 110024, at District : Gautam Budh Nagar : Branch add: Plot No. 5, Ground Floor, Opposite White Castle Hotel Main Dind Road, Salarpur, Ghaziabad, Sector 101, Dist. Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida 201304 (UP), Ghaziabad District : branch add: R2, BASEMENT, RCC RAJ NAGAR, GAZIABAD - 201002, Hapur District : add: First Floor, Above PC Jewellers, Garah Parton, Garah Road, Tehsil & District Hapur 245101, (UP)
The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers which have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to all linked accounts of Customer ID for various customers mentioned below with branch details.
Delhi: AP00019587, AP00153595, AP00191264, AP00196750, AP00248893, AP00256718, AP00273700, AP00301139, AP00310188, AP00331469, AP00331476, AP00321673, AP00326622, AP00328931, AP00330562, AP00338914, AP00340454, AP00352245, AP00355527, AP00355694, AP00362554, AP00364431, AP00377683, AP00391092, AP00393246, AP00395608, AP00398928, AP00400947, AP00406610, AP00406742, AP00413127, AP00420949, AP00421008, AP00421661, AP00424051, AP00424075, AP004303161, AP00431732, AP00433590, AP00437731, AP00437827, AP00437847, AP00438320, AP00447872, AP00448159, AP00448248, AP00461518, AP00466278, AP00466757, AP00466896, AP00468600, AP00472362, AP00475226, AP00475591, AP00476385, AP00476470, AP00476676, AP00486830, AP00490761, AP00496173 GHAZIABAD: AP00329383, AP00357617, AP00372051, AP00377909, AP00391339, AP00430174, AP00430863, AP00431486, AP00455918, AP00458374, AP00470093, AP00476553, AP00476563, AP00476657, AP00476628, AP00467422, AP00480946 HAPUR: AP00363607, AP00476553, AP00476657, AP00476628
For more details, please contact:
SBFC Finance Limited
Contact Person: Mr. Lajpat Nagar (02-2612161 / 02-40935228 / 207,
Ghaziabad branch - 925532872, Hapur branch - 8435761293, Noida branch: 9385859407,
(SBFC Finance Limited reserves the right to alter the number of accounts to be auctioned & postpone / cancel the auction without any prior notice.)

Markets extend gains in see-saw trade

Metal, banking stocks sparkle

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty overcame bouts of volatility to settle in the green for the second straight session on Friday, propped up by robust demand for the metal, banking and financial stocks amid a firm trend in global equities.

Besides, a strengthening rupee and lower crude prices in the international markets also influenced sentiments here, traders said.

In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 355.06 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 57,989.90. During the day, it hit a high of 58,178.94 and a low of 57,503.90.

The broader NSE Nifty gained 114.45 points or 0.67 per cent to end at 17,100.05.

“The Nifty witnessed a volatile day of trade today. It witnessed sharp swings in both directions and ultimately closed in the green for the second consecutive day...We believe that the pullback rally has some more steam left and the Nifty is likely to carry on this positive momentum next week as well,” said Jatin Gedia, Technical Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

HCL Tech led the Sensex gainers’ chart, spurring 3.58 per cent, followed by UltraTech Cement, Nestle India, Tata Steel, Kotak Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel and HDFC twins.

In contrast, ITC, Maruti, NTPC, Asian Paints and Sun Pharma were among the main laggards, shedding up to 1.51 per cent.

In the broader market, the



BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.29 per cent and smallcap index advanced 0.69 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, realty jumped 3.16 per cent, metal 2.42 per cent, bankex (1.22 per cent), IT (1.10 per cent) financial services (1.01 per cent) and commodities (1.37 per cent).

FMCG, auto and healthcare chalked up losses.

After showing high volatility at the swing low of 16,850 levels on Thursday, Nifty showed a sustainable upward move with volatility on Friday and closed the day higher, said Nagaraj Shetti, Technical Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

Markets were volatile and moved with a positive bias as investors resorted to select buying. European indices and other Asian peers accumulated significant gains, which enthused local traders in a big way.

“Following the sharp rebound in the global markets, the domestic indices took a breather in hopes of relief from the global banking turmoil. Global equities reversed their selling streak on reports of a rescue package for the beleaguered First Republic Bank, along with aid provided to Credit Suisse

from the Swiss Central Bank, which would soothe concerns over global financial stability.

“On the other hand, the ECB further raised its rates by 50 bps, indicating its preparedness to provide liquidity to banks upon necessity,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Elsewhere in Asia, equity markets in Shanghai, Tokyo, Seoul and Hong Kong logged gains. Equity exchanges in Europe were trading in the green in mid-session deals. Major indices on Wall Street closed in the positive territory in the overnight trade.

Global equities gained on Friday as government and institutional support to stem a potential banking crisis helped improve sentiments.

On a weekly basis, Nifty declined 1.8 per cent, falling for the second consecutive week, though it recovered partly from the intra-week low, said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude rose 1.16 per cent to USD 75.57 per barrel. The rupee settled 18 paise higher at 82.58 against the US dollar on Friday.

Sebi makes stringent disclosure norms for FPIs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi has made stringent norms for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs), asking them to disclose any material change in their structure and common ownership within seven working days.

With regard to new FPI registrations, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) can ask them for any additional documents which may be required, according to a notification.

Under the new rules, FPIs will inform Sebi and designated depository about any false or misleading information about change in material respect and any change in their structure or control within seven working days in writing.

In addition, FPIs will have to inform in case of any penalty, pending proceedings, findings of investigations for which action may have been taken or is



in the process of being taken by an overseas regulator against them within seven days.

“In case of any direct or indirect change in structure or common ownership or control of the foreign portfolio investor or investor group, it shall, as soon as possible but not later than seven work-

ing days, bring the same to the notice of its designated depository participant,” Sebi said.

In turn, depository participants will submit the information to the markets regulator within two days.

As per the existing regulations, FPIs were required to inform the designated

depository participant “forthwith”, which now has been replaced by “as soon as possible but not later than seven working days”.

Market experts believe that FPIs and custodians used to take a lot of time in disclosing these information as there was no strict timeline prescribed in the rules.

The new rules have become effective from March 14, Sebi said.

In August 2022, Sebi had constituted a committee headed by K V Subramanian, former chief economic adviser to Government of India, to advise it on measures to facilitate ease of doing business by FPIs in India.

In addition, the advisory committee was entrusted with the task of suggesting measures required to encourage FPI participation in the bond market and advise on issues related to investments and operations of such investors in Indian financial markets.

Trouble in Credit Suisse unlikely to impact India’s banking system, say experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



India’s banking system is expected to remain unscathed from the troubles in Credit Suisse as it has a very small presence in the country, experts said.

Although Credit Suisse is more relevant to India’s financial system than Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), it has very limited operations, according to a report by Jefferies India.

The Switzerland-based bank, the report said, “has less than Rs 20,000 crore in assets (12th among foreign banks), presence in the derivatives market and funded 60 per cent of assets from borrowings, of which 96 per cent are up to two months. Still, it’s small for the banking sector with 0.1 per cent share of assets.”

Zurich-headquartered Credit Suisse operates in India with just 1 branch. “Given the relevance of Credit Suisse to India’s banking sector, we see softer

adjustments in assessment of counter-party risks, especially in the derivative market,” it said.

Meanwhile, the RBI is keeping a close tab on the evolving situation caused due to shuttering of a few banks and stress in other global lenders, sources said.

“We expect RBI to keep close watch on liquidity issues, counter-party exposures and intervene as necessary. This may also lead to institutional deposits moving more towards larger/ quality banks,” the report said. According to veteran banker Uday Kotak, who also

managing director of Kotak Mahindra Bank, India’s macro-economic factors are turning better and it can stand out in this global financial turmoil.

“Even as the global turmoil continues in financial markets, the macro factors are turning better for India. Current account deficit looks below 2.5% FY 23, and going below 2% in FY 24. Lower oil helps. If we walk our talk and navigate well, India can stand out in this turbulence,” Kotak said in a tweet.

Foreign banks have a relatively smaller presence in India with 6 per cent share in total

assets, 4 per cent in loans and 5 per cent in deposits. They are more active in the derivative markets (forex and interest rates) where they have 50 per cent share.

Most of them are present as branches of the parent bank with only a few present as wholly-owned subsidiaries.

However, Swiss National Bank (SNB) came to the rescue of Credit Suisse with a USD 54-billion lifeline to shore up its liquidity. In its statement on Thursday, Credit Suisse said it would exercise an option to borrow from the central bank up to 50 billion Swiss francs (\$54 billion).

Credit Suisse is the first major global bank to be given an emergency lifeline since the 2008 global meltdown and its problems have raised doubts over whether central banks will be able to sustain their fight against inflation with aggressive interest rate hikes.

Tata Consumer ends acquisition talks with Bisleri

INS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Consumer Products Ltd said on Friday that it has now ceased negotiations with Bisleri with regard to a potential transaction.

The company has not entered into any definitive agreement or binding commitment on this matter, Tata Consumer said in a stock exchange filing.

Earlier, Tata Consumer had clarified that it evaluates various strategic opportunities for growth and expansion of its business, on an ongoing basis, and pursuant to this, the management of the company remained in discussions with various parties, including Bisleri International Pvt Ltd, India’s largest packaged water company. Ramesh Chauhhan is divesting Bisleri International to Tata Consumer Products Ltd for an estimated Rs 6,000-7,000 crore, Economic Times reported in November.

Rupee rises 18 paise to 82.58 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee reversed its four-day losing streak and rose 18 paise to 82.58 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking positive sentiments in the domestic equity markets.

Traders said a weak dollar overseas also supported the rupee. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened strong at 82.50 against the dollar and traded between 82.50 and 82.75. It finally settled at 82.58 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a gain of 18 paise against its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee settled at 82.76 against the US dollar. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said the movement in the rupee’s favour was triggered as the participants offloaded the dollar following “positive sentiments as Eleven US banks, JP Morgan and others will deposit up to USD 30 billion into First Republic Bank coming to rescue the lender caught up in a crisis triggered by the collapse of two US lenders.”

‘Sugar output falls slightly to 28.18 mn tonne till March 15 of 2022-23 marketing year’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country’s sugar output remained marginally lower at 28.18 million tonne till March 15 of the ongoing marketing year, industry body ISMA said on Friday.

Sugar production stood at 28.45 million tonne in the same period of the 2021-22 marketing year. The sugar marketing year runs from October to September.

According to the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), around 336 sugar factories were in operation in the period under review against 438 factories in the year-ago period.

After diversion for ethanol production, the country’s sugar production was 28.18 million tonne during October-March 15 of the ongoing 2022-23 marketing year, the industry body said in a statement.

The output in Maharashtra -- the country’s leading producer of the sweetener -- remained lower at 10.19 million tonne during October-March 15 of the ongoing marketing year compared to 10.90 million tonne in the year-ago period.

The production in Karnataka too, the country’s third largest sugar-producing state, showed a marginal decline to



5.35 million tonne as against 5.54 million tonne during the comparable period, ISMA said in a statement.

Sugar output in Uttar Pradesh, the country’s second-largest producer of the sweetener, however, remained marginally higher at 7.96 million tonne till March 15 of the ongoing marketing year against 7.83 million tonne in the year-ago period. The production in other states remained slightly higher at 4.68 million tonne compared to 4.18 million tonne.

ISMA said about 3.11 million tonne of sugar has been diverted for ethanol production in the said period.

In January, ISMA revised downwards its sugar production estimate for 2022-23 to 34 million tonne over its earlier estimate of 36.5 million tonne issued in October 2022.

Sugar production stood at 35.8 million tonne in the 2021-22 marketing year.

RBI Guv cautions banks against any build-up of asset-liability mismatches

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday cautioned banks against any build-up of asset-liability mismatches, saying both are detrimental to financial stability and hinted that the ongoing crisis in the US banking system seems to have emanated from such mismatches.

Delivering the annual KP Hormis (Federal Bank founder) commemorative lecture in Kochi this evening, the governor was quick to acknowledge and assure that the domestic financial sector is stable and the worst of inflation is behind us.

Amid the continuing volatility in exchange rates, especially due to the excessive appreciation of the US dollar, and its impact on the external debt servicing ability of nations, Das said, “We have nothing to fear as our external debt is manageable and thus appreciation of the greenback does not pose any problem to us”.

The governor focused most of the speech on India’s G20 presidency and in this context, he called for more coordinated attempts by the group of the world’s 20 largest economies to help those countries with high external debt risks due to the US dollar rise.



He also said the grouping must provide climate change financing to most affected countries on a war footing.

On the US banking crisis where two mid-sized banks (Silicon Valley Bank and First Republic Bank) with over USD 200 billion in balance sheets each went belly up last week, he said the ongoing crisis drives home the importance of robust regulations that focus on sustainable growth and not excessive build-up either on the asset side or liability side.

Das, without naming the US bank, said that on the face of it, one of them had unmanageable deposits in excess of their assets side business.

Das, who has been an open critic of private digital currencies, said the ongoing US banking crisis also clearly shows the risks of private cryptocurrencies to the financial system.

India lacks talent for chip making, says Meity official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There is no skilled talent available to handle chip manufacturing plants in India, and there will be a requirement of 10,000-13,000 human resources to meet industry requirements by 2027, a Meity official said on Friday, citing an internal report.

While speaking at a panel discussion on Electronics Sector Skill Council foundation day, Ministry of Electronics and IT Scientist ‘E’ Prashant Kumar said that India has a big pool of semiconductor design engineers, but to handle semiconductor plants, talents will initially come from overseas, and gradually resources will be developed in the country.

“For semiconductor manufacturing, other than Strategic Works, SCL etc, we do not have skilled manpower readily available in India. There will be around 10,000-13,000 kinds of requirements for semiconductor manufacturing,” he said citing the task force report.



Startup20 Engagement Group to meet on March 18-19 in Sikkim

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Task Force of the Startup20 Engagement Group, which will meet this weekend in Sikkim, will aim to increase access to capital for startups by providing financing and investment platforms, according to an official statement. It further said the task force will also harmonise tax and legal regulations to encourage public investment in start-up funding and interact with the foreign investor ecosystem of G20 nations.

It will create pitching, capacity building and networking opportunities for startups with the global investor community through a best practices document on startup investments, the statement added. The second meeting of the

Startup20 Engagement Group, newly formed under India’s G20 Presidency, will take place in Gangtok, Sikkim on March 18 and 19, 2023.

The Sikkim Sabha will forward the agenda finalised during the inception meeting held in Hyderabad on January 28-29, 2023, with the support of all attendee delegates.

During the inception meeting, the objectives, and deliverables of the three task forces, namely Foundation and Alliances, Finance, and Inclusion and Sustainability were reworked to incorporate suggestions from all the delegates. According to the statement, the Foundation and Alliances Task Force will work to harmonize the global startup ecosystem through consensus-based definitions.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

ATTEND TO DMRC REQUEST: HC TO CENTRE, DELHI GOVT
New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Friday directed the Centre and the city Government to attend to the request of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) for extension of sovereign guarantees or subordinate debt to enable it to make payment of dues of an arbitral award passed in favour of Reliance Infrastructure-owned Delhi Airport Metro Express Private Limited. The high court said the decision has to be taken by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the Delhi government in this regard within two weeks and if the permission is accorded to the DMRC, it will deposit the entire amount payable under the award along with up-to-date interest within a period of one month..

PFC BAGS ICC AWARD
New Delhi: PFC has been awarded the prestigious Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Award in the category of “Operational Excellence” at the 12th PSE Excellence Awards held at Le Meridien, New Delhi, today. The prestigious award was received by Rajiv Ranjan Jha, Director (Projects) and Manoj Sharma, Director (Commercial), of the PFC.

GOLD CLIMBS ₹400; SILVER TUMBLES ₹430
New Delhi: Gold price climbed Rs 400 to Rs 58,040 per 10 gram in the national capital on Friday amid a rise in the precious metal prices globally, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 57,640 per 10 gram in the previous trade. Silver, however, tumbled Rs 430 to Rs 67,600 per kilogram.

‘Cement firms likely to invest ₹1.2L cr to add 145-155 MT capacity by FY27’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The continuing demand for housing, accounting for 60-65 per cent of cement demand, and aggressive government investments in infrastructure will drive demand, nudging cement-makers to add 145-155 MT in fresh capacity at an investment of Rs 1.2 lakh crore by FY27, according to a report.

With 570 million tonne (mt) of installed capacity, India is the world’s second-largest cement producer after China. Between FY12 and FY23, the installed capacity grew by a whopping 61 per cent to 570 MT from 353 MT in FY12 — a net addition of 217 MT from 2013 to 2022 — and FY22 saw the highest capacity addition of 34 MT.



Cement companies are expected to go on an expansion spree, and add 145-155 MT capacity between FY 2023 and 2027. That translates to a 4-5 per cent compound annual growth rate on a high base. A robust 6-7 per cent CAGR expected in demand over these five fiscals will encourage the growth in supply, Crisil said in a note.

The expected 145-155 MT of fresh capacity addition will entail a likely capex of Rs 1.2 lakh crore, with large producers accounting for more than half of the spending. They will be able to fund the capex through interannual accruals, with comfortable gearing, giving them the financial flexibility to raise debt, the report said.

Given the strong demand outlook and acquisition of most of the smaller and financially weak companies, large producers are now focusing on organic growth. The top 5 will drive a lion’s share of incremental capacity addition over the medium term.

Cement makers have been adding substantial capacity in the past too. In the five fiscals through 2017, around 108 MT

were added, while in the next five fiscals through 2022, 109 MT were added despite pandemic-induced disruptions.

On the balance-sheet side, healthy post-pandemic demand recovery and strong profitability helped producers deleverage. Capex plans, which were on hold or delayed due to the pandemic, restarted in the latter half of fiscal 2021.

However, the agency expects the capacity addition drive to peter off fiscal 2023 and moderate to 30-32 MT, inclusive of grinding and integrated units, as higher input cost has hit their profitability, leading to slowing capex. And fiscal 2024 also looks tepid with an addition of only 30-32 MT. That is because policies may change because of general elections.

Airtel offers unlimited 5G data in 4G plans starting from ₹239

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel on Friday said it has rolled out unlimited data offer for 5G users in 4G plans starting from Rs 239 onward. The move from the telecom operator comes to match its rival Jio, which is offering unlimited 5G data access during the beta trials during the network rollout.

“This introductory offer is in line with the philosophy of wanting our customers to be able to surf, stream, chat and enjoy multiple benefits at blazing speeds without having to worry about data limits. We hope our customers enjoy the power of world-class Airtel 5G Plus,” Bharti Airtel, Director Consumer Business, Shashwat

Sharma said in a statement.

The Airtel 5G Plus service is available to customers in over 270 cities in the country. The company has plans to cover every town and key rural areas with 5G services by the end of March 2024.

Airtel has kept no fair usage policy (FUP) for 5G users like it has for 4G plans. Under FUP, telecom operators reduce data speed to 64 kilobit per second after the daily data limit of customers ends.

“Customers will now be able to experience ultrafast, reliable and secure 5G Plus services without having to worry about data exhaustion as the company removes the capping on data usage across all existing plans,” the statement said.

SPORTING SHOOT GUNNERS OUT

AP ■ SEVILLE

Sporting Lisbon sent Arsenal crashing out of the Europa League with a penalty shoot-out triumph after Pedro Goncalves's stunning equaliser, while Manchester United and Juventus eased into the quarter-finals on Thursday.

Sporting trailed when Granit Xhaka put Premier League leaders Arsenal ahead at the Emirates Stadium. But Portugal midfielder Goncalves forced extra-time when he caught out Arsenal goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale with a breathtaking strike from 46 yards out.

With reality television star Kim Kardashian and her Arsenal fan son Saint among the spectators, the match ended level at 1-1 on the night and 3-3 on aggregate, requiring penalties to settle the tie.

Sporting emerged with a shock 5-3 victory in the shoot-out as Gabriel Martinelli's effort was saved by Antonio Adan and Nuno Santos dispatched the winning kick.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said the result was 'a huge blow' and blasted his side for wasting chances.

"There were moments in the first 75 minutes where we weren't at our level. We gave every ball away and we didn't have the capacity to take the game," the Spaniard said.

"There were chances to win it in extra-time. There was a lot of uncertainty with the pens. It was a very difficult game."

It was a far calmer night for Manchester United as Marcus Rashford's swerving strike from distance earned a 1-0 win at Real Betis and a 5-1 aggregate success.

Joaquin hit the post for Betis and Juanmi spurned two clear chances for the hosts as they started well, desperately trying to overturn their three-goal deficit at the lively Benito Villamarin stadium.



However Rashford's brilliant goal early in the second half killed off the tie.

"Once you score the first goal the game is gone, and they don't have the belief anymore," said Manchester United boss Erik ten Hag.

"That is another step (forward) we made mentally, a winning attitude, to deal with that."

JUVENTUS ADVANCE

Three-time champions Juventus earned a 2-0 win over 10-man Freiburg to progress 3-0 on aggregate, with goals from Dusan Vlahovic and Federico Chiesa.

Juventus, leading Freiburg by a goal from the first leg, thought they had

taken the lead when Vlahovic struck from close range, but it was ruled off-side by VAR.

The Serbian forward then broke the deadlock just before the break from the penalty spot after Manuel Gulde handled in the box and was shown his second yellow card.

With Juventus fully in control and Freiburg at a numerical disadvantage, the tie was as good as over and Chiesa wrapped up the win late on.

Sevilla, the record six-time winners of this competition, suffered a nervy 1-0 defeat at Fenerbahce as Enner Valencia netted from the spot, but still qualified 2-1 on aggregate.

Jorge Sampaoli's Sevilla, struggling badly in La Liga, suffered defeat in Turkey but had done enough at home to progress against Fenerbahce and continue their charge.

Michy Batshuayi went off injured for the hosts early on, damaging their comeback bid, but Jorge Jesus's team took the lead when Alex Telles handled in the box.

Veteran Ecuador striker Valencia drilled home his 24th goal of the season for Fenerbahce.

Sevilla held out to progress despite pressure from the hosts in the second half, as they looked for a second goal to force extra-time.

Feyenoord thrashed Shakhtar Donetsk 7-1 on the night at De Kuip

to progress to the last eight 8-2 on aggregate.

Jose Mourinho's Roma drew 0-0 at Real Sociedad to advance 2-0 on aggregate, while Bayer Leverkusen won 2-0 at Ferencváros to clinch a 4-0 aggregate success.

In the UEFA Conference League last 16, Fiorentina thrashed Sivasspor 4-1, triumphing 5-1 on aggregate, but fellow Serie A side Lazio were knocked out, losing 2-1 at AZ Alkmaar on the night and 4-2 on aggregate.

West Ham thrashed AEK Larnaca 4-0 to complete a 6-0 aggregate stroll, with Anderlecht beating Villarreal 2-1 on aggregate after a 1-0 victory in Spain.



Real face Chelsea in CL quarters, Man City meet Bayern

AP ■ PARIS

Holders Real Madrid will play Chelsea in the quarter-finals of the Champions League while Manchester City were paired with Pep Guardiola's former side Bayern Munich in Friday's draw.

Serie A leaders Napoli take on AC Milan in an all-Italian showdown and Inter Milan face Portuguese league leaders Benfica. The winners of Real's tie against Chelsea will go on to face either City or Bayern in the semi-finals, throwing open the possibility of an all-English last-four tie.

That also increases the chances of seeing an Italian team reach the final for the first

time since Juventus in 2017, as Inter will play either Milan or Napoli in the last four should the Nerazzurri beat Benfica.

The quarter-final first legs will be played on April 11 and 12, with Real entertaining Chelsea at the Santiago Bernabeu first before travelling to London for the return a week later, and City at home to Bayern first.

Inter were drawn to play Benfica at home initially but will now travel to Lisbon for the first leg to avoid a clash with AC Milan's meeting with Napoli at San Siro.

The semi-finals will be played in May with the final in Istanbul scheduled for Saturday, June 10.



Crystal Palace sack Vieira

AP ■ LONDON

Crystal Palace sacked manager Patrick Vieira on Friday after a miserable run of one win in 14 Premier League games pulled them into a relegation battle.

The London club, without a win in 2023 under the former Arsenal and France midfielder, are 12th in the table but are just three points above the drop zone.

"It is with enormous regret that this difficult decision has been made," said chairman Steve Parish.

"Ultimately, results in recent months have placed us in a precarious league position and we felt a change is necessary to give us the best chance of retaining Premier League status."

Palace said in a statement that "the process to appoint a new manager is under way".

Three members of Vieira's coaching staff — Osian Roberts,

Kristian Wilson and Said Aigoun — have also left Selhurst Park.

Parish added: "Patrick has given his all to the club, and we all thank him and his team for their service."

Vieira, 46, replaced Roy Hodgson before the start of the 2021/22 season and led Palace to a 12-placed finish.

But this season they have scored just 21 goals in 27 games — only three clubs have scored fewer.

Their 1-0 defeat by Brighton on Wednesday was their third loss in a row.

The Premier League's bottom nine clubs are separated by just five points heading into the final months of the season.

Palace travel to leaders Arsenal on Sunday.

Vieira, who won three Premier League titles as a player with the Gunners, previously managed New York City and Nice.

Treesa-Gayatri enter semifinal of All England C'ships

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

Indian pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand continued their impressive run, dishing out another superlative performance to advance to their second successive semifinals at the All England Championships here on Friday.

The World number 17 Indian pair looked solid in their defence and relentless in attack, claiming 21-14, 18-21, 21-12 win over the newly-formed Chinese pair of Li Wen Mei and Liu Xuan Xuan in a 64-minute quarterfinals.

The only Indians in the fray, Gayatri and Treesa will face either Indonesian combination of eighth seeded Apriyani Rahayu and Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti or Korea's Baek Ha Na and Lee So Hee next.

Gayatri and Treesa had reached the semi-finals in the last edition as well when they were handed a spot in the main draw at the last moment.

But this time they entered the draw with a fair amount of experience, having claimed the Commonwealth Games bronze last year and notching up wins over higher-ranked pairs such as world No. 7 Tan Pearly and Thinnah Muralitharan at the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championship in February.

The Indian duo had shocked seventh seeded Thais Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Ravindra Prajongjai and former world No. 1 pair from Japan Yuki Fukushima and Sayaka Hirota in the previous rounds.

In the quarterfinals, Gayatri, 20, and Treesa, 19, were up against Li, who has been World No 9 in the past, and Liu, a former World No 16.

Taking on the world number 52 pair, Gayatri stood solid at the net while Treesa came up with delectable smashes and drops from the back to dominate the proceedings in the rallies.

With coach Mathias Boe and Arun Vishnu constantly chirping from the sidelines, the Indian pair displayed their



aggressive intent right from the word go and moved to 6-2 early on.

The Chinese pair clawed back at 6-6 but the Indian soon entered the mid-game interval with a healthy 11-8 advantage. Gayatri and Treesa got a measure of their opponent quickly and constructed the points well to move to 18-12 before taking the first game comfortably.

The Indian pair kept a firm grip on the rallies to lead 5-1 and 10-6 at one stage after the change of sides but Li and Liu soon found their bearing and chipped away at the lead. Eventually, a couple of tight serves from Liu helped them cap five straight points and take a 11-10 lead.

It was a down-the-line smash from Gayatri that broke the run of points.

Gayatri seemed more alert near the court, changing defence to attack.

Few flat exchanges ensued next with Treesa's wild forehand landing out and Gayatri rushing onto a shot as the Chinese pair again grabbed the lead.

Li and Liu tried to produce acute angles as Treesa found the net. A couple of errors from the Indians put the Chinese pair three points from levelling the scores.

Li soon set up four game points with a precise on-the-line return. India saved two game points before Li unleashed a smash to take the match to the decider.

In the third game, it was a one-way traffic as the Indian pair reeled off six points on the trot to gallop to 8-1. The Indian duo was charged up as their shot

selection and on court judgements were spot on.

The Chinese tried to slow down the pace but Treesa's relentless attack from the back took the Indian pair to 11-4 at the midgame interval.

Treesa was always aiming for the lines and her precision was rewarded again as they moved to 13-5. Gayatri too complemented her partner, charging towards net to gain another point. Another delightful net play saw India reach 15-8.

The Chinese tried everything but couldn't sustain the pressure as Treesa unleashed another booming smash to reach 18-10. Another forehand smash from Gayatri set up a massive eight match point advantage and the Indian pair sealed it when the Chinese pair went long.

Man Utd bidder Ratcliffe at Old Trafford for takeover talks

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Jim Ratcliffe was at Old Trafford on Friday to attend a presentation held by senior Manchester United management staff as part of his potential takeover of the club.

The British billionaire and Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al Thani have made offers to buy the Premier League club to American merchant bankers Raine, which was brought in to assist in assessing any bids.

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

Ratcliffe, the 70-year-old chairman of chemicals giant INEOS, was joined at Old Trafford by INEOS co-owners Andy Currie and John Reece.

Former British Cycling chief David Brailsford, now director of sport at INEOS, was also part of the delegation.

Sheikh Jassim's representatives were in Manchester on Thursday for a tour of Old Trafford before attending presentations at United's Carrington training complex.

It is understood that Sheikh Jassim's team visited for 10 hours, far longer than expected, and remain committed to buying the club following the substantive talks.

Alcaraz to face Sinner in Indian Wells semis

AP ■ INDIAN WELLS

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz beat Felix Auger-Aliassime for the first time in his career to book a semi-final clash with Jannik Sinner at Indian Wells.

Women's top seed Iga Swiatek lined up a last-four grudge match against Elena Rybakina, who stunned the Polish world number one in the quarter-finals at the Australian Open in January.

Alcaraz posted his first victory over Auger-Aliassime in four meetings with a 6-4, 6-4 win to keep his bid to regain the world number one ranking on track.

"It's wonderful to beat Felix finally, and the way I did it, playing at a great level," said Spain's Alcaraz, 19, who called it perhaps his best match of the season.

Italy's Sinner reached the final four with a 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 victory over defending champion Taylor Fritz and now has a chance to avenge his loss to Alcaraz in an electrifying quarter-final at the US Open last year.

That five-set battle lasted five hours and 15 minutes, its 2:50am finish the latest in US Open history. Alcaraz would go on to lift the trophy and become the youngest world number one in the history of the ATP rankings.



"We've played several times and all the matches have been very tough," Alcaraz said. "I like this kind of challenge, I'm going to enjoy it."

Alcaraz hadn't dropped a set in reaching the quarters, but Auger-Aliassime was the first top-10 player he has faced this year.

This time, Alcaraz was ready for him,

saying his prior defeats to the Canadian had taught him to "stay there."

SWIATEK READY

Swiatek, the defending Indian Wells champion and winner of the French and US Opens last year, swept past 83rd-ranked Romanian Sorana Cirstea 6-2, 6-3.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina, who fell to Aryna Sabalenka in the Australian Open final, out-last 76th-ranked Czech Karolina Muchova 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 6-4.

"She's playing really well and in semi-finals you always are going to play against the top players, so I'll be ready," Swiatek said of taking on Rybakina.

Swiatek, in her 50th week at number one, is vying to become just the second woman after Martina Navratilova in 1990-91 to win back-to-back titles at Indian Wells.

"The most important thing for me is that I came back in the second set to finish it properly," Swiatek said.

Rybakina had all she could handle from the oft-injured Muchova. She needed three match points, wasting two with a pair of backhand errors before sealing it with her sixth ace of the day.

The other semi-final berths were decided on Wednesday, when Daniil Medvedev — chasing a fourth straight ATP title after victories at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai — beat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain to set up a clash with American Frances Tiafoe.

Sabalenka also advanced, blowing away American Coco Gauff to book a meeting with 2022 finalist Maria Sakkari.

ATK Mohun Bagan face Bengaluru FC in ISL final

PTI ■ MARGAO

An exhilarating Indian Super League season will crown its champion as ATK Mohun Bagan take on Bengaluru FC for the silverware at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Saturday.

A win for the Mariners can hand them their maiden ISL title, while the Blues could lift their second one, having last done so in the 2018-19 season.

Atletico Kolkata (ATK) before Mohun Bagan was bought over, had won ISL titles.

ATKMB have been unbeaten in five games leading up to the final, where they have only conceded once in those five games while keeping four clean sheets. The club's defensive prowess has been evident since the league phase, where they conceded just 17 goals all season, making them statistically the second-best defensive team in the league after Hyderabad FC.



A solid defensive backbone with Pritam Kotal and Brendan Hamill enabled the Mariners to achieve this feat.

However, in the last four games, Slavko Damjanovic has replaced Hamill at the heart of defence as ATK Mohun Bagan have kept clean sheets in all those games. Ashish Rai has been a threat down the right flank.

In attack, the only player that head coach Juan Ferrando could be without is Ashique Kuruniyan.

Despite beating League

Shield winners Mumbai City FC on penalties in the semi-final, Bengaluru FC suffered their first regulation-time defeat of the year in the second leg. The Blues were on a 10-game winning run before the Islanders restored parity and eventually lost on penalties.

Head coach Simon Grayson has used Sunil Chhetri as an impact substitute and in the last five games, the 38-year-old Indian skipper has come on to score vital goals on three occasions.

KL, PACERS SHINE IN INDIA'S WIN

PTI ■ MUMBAI

KL Rahul revelled under pressure with a composed 75 after Mohammed Shami's mesmerising spell of seam bowling as India overcame initial jitters with elan in their comfortable five-wicket win against Australia in the opening ODI here on Friday. India now lead the three-match series 1-0.

After being put in to bat, Australia suffered a dramatic collapse, losing six wickets for 19 runs inside eight overs to get bowled out for 188 in 35.4 overs, courtesy 3/17 from Shami. Mitchell Starc then blew away the Indian top-order with some incisive swing bowling as India were left tottering at 39 for 4 just after the end of the Powerplay.

Skipper Hardik Pandya (25) did stem the rot but India weren't out of the woods when he was dismissed with the score-board reading 83 for 5.

But Ravindra Jadeja (45 not out, 69 balls), after having bowled nine tight overs of left-arm spin, gave adequate support in his unbroken 108-run stand with Rahul. India won the game in 39.5 overs.

But Rahul does deserve the credit for anchoring the innings in the face of a storm, and has taken to the role of a No.5 keeper-batter like fish takes to water.

He enjoys the low-scoring scrappy battles and Friday at Wankhede was one such occasion.

The twilight hour, however, did belong to Starc. The Australian quick moved the new ball dangerously in the air as well as off the surface. He pinned Virat Kohli (4) in front of the wickets off the penultimate ball of the fifth over and, with the final delivery of that over, trapped Suryakumar Yadav leg-before for a first-ball duck.



The right-arm pacer Sean Abbott too got the ball to jag back in, trapping Shubman Gill leg-before but the Indian batter reviewed successfully after being adjudged out.

Gill had luck riding in his favour as Australia missed two tough chances behind the wickets, but the Indian could not capitalise. Starc bowled fuller deliveries outside off to get the Indians to drive, hoping to find edges or shots hit in the air.

Deployed on a longer six-over burst, Starc finally succeeded after Gill hit the left-armed for two fours. The bowler had him caught at point for 20 off 31 balls with four fours in all, leaving India in a precarious position at 39/4 in 10.2 overs.

This is when Rahul showed his experience as he didn't take undue risks but, at the same time, punished the loose balls as and when necessary. He hit Adam Zampa into the deep mid-wicket stands. The key was rotation of strike as Rahul and Jadeja ran 56 singles between them. But credit should be given to Pandya for marshalling the resources well on his ODI captaincy debut, albeit as a stand-in one.

The idea to bring in Shami for an early second spell proved to be a masterstroke as Australia from 169/4 just collapsed like a house of cards. He got Jos Inglis to drag one back onto his stumps and then in his next over, the delivery to Cameron Green that

We have big shoes to fill, motivated even more in your absence: Warner says of Rishabh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals newly-appointed skipper David Warner said they "have big shoes to fill" this IPL season with Rishabh Pant indisposed and vowed to put in extra effort to lift the title in the India star's absence.

Named skipper for the upcoming season in Pant's absence, Warner sent out a special message for the Delhi franchise's regular captain, who is currently undergoing rehab and recovery.

"We are motivated every season, but we are motivated even more to lift the title this year in your absence. We are going to be on the journey of your recovery with you. We are going to send some special messages and hopefully, you can come to one of our games," Warner said in a statement issued by the franchise.

"On behalf of the DC family, I would like to wish you all the best and a speedy recovery."

In the wee hours of December 30, Pant, 25, miraculously survived



sent the off-stump cart-wheeling was a real peach.

It pitched on line of off-stump and Green had to commit but there was a shade late movement that beat the batter and knocked back the off-stump.

The veteran pacer helped India pull things back after an attacking 65-ball 81 from Mitchell Marsh set Australia on the course for a competitive total, as his second spell of 3-2-

8-3 broke the back of Australia's resistance after a sparkling start. Shami finished with brilliant figures of 6-2-17-3.

On the other hand, Siraj, who provided an early wicket in the second over, also enjoyed success in his second spell to return with 5-4-1-29-3, snaffling the last two wickets in the Australian innings.

Marsh provided Australia with a rollicking start — crack-

ing 10 fours and five sixes in his first-ever innings as an opener in ODIs — on his comeback to international cricket after a three-month layoff following an ankle surgery.

Marsh's charge in the first half of the game ensured Australia kept moving briskly towards a big total, but India kept making inroads at regular intervals and eventually bundled them out for a below-par score.



Ex-Oz captain Paine retires from cricket

AP ■ HOBART

Former Australia Test captain Tim Paine retired from cricket with little fanfare on Friday, bowing out after playing an inter-state match in Tasmania. Paine led Australia between 2018 and 2021 after Steve Smith was stripped of the captaincy in the wake of the "Sandpaper-gate" ball-tampering incident against South Africa.

He skippered the team in 23 Tests — winning 11, losing eight and drawing four — and was credited with helping rebuild Australian cricket's reputation.

Paine was forced to stand down after it was revealed he had sent lewd messages to a female colleague in 2017.

As the scandal took its toll, he stepped away from cricket for the "foreseeable future", returning to the game almost a year later in October 2022.

The wicketkeeper-batsman, 38, played his final first-class game for state side Tasmania in a domestic fixture against Queensland on Friday, walking off through a guard of honour formed by players.

"An inspiring captain, one of our finest glovesman and a legend of Tasmanian and Australian cricket," the Tasmanian Tigers said in a statement. "Congratulations Tim Paine on a truly wonderful career."

Paine played 35 Tests for Australia, with a top score of 92 and an average of 32.63. He also played 35 ODIs.

Test cricket needs to be more engaging, ODI becoming monotonous too, says Tendulkar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sachin Tendulkar feels in order to Skeep the primacy and attractiveness of Test cricket intact, one shouldn't look at in how many days the match ends, but instead the focus should be on garnering more eyeballs.

The legendary cricketer is also finding current ODI cricket, a bit of a drag and wouldn't mind a change in format.

Three of the Border-Gavaskar Tests between India and Australia recently ended inside two-and-a-half days, leading to a massive criticism of pitches, but Tendulkar said it is part and parcel of cricketer's job to play on different surfaces.

"We need to understand one thing that Test cricket should be engaging and it should not be about how many days it lasts, five days or whatever. We (cricketers) are meant to play on different surfaces; be it a bouncy track, a fast track, slow track, turning track, swinging conditions, seaming conditions with different balls," opined Tendulkar on Sports Tak.

He also said that at a time when the ICC, MCC and other cricketing bodies are talking about making Test cricket entertaining and the the No.1 format, there was no harm in matches ending in three days. Besides, touring teams should not think that they will get featherbeds and they should make thorough preparations.



"When you tour, there are not easy conditions. You need to understand what's happening, assess everything and then start planning things. For me, the most important factor is the kind of surface that we play on because that is the heart of Test cricket. "All the guys, including the ICC, MCC, etc, we are talking about Test cricket. How Test cricket can continue to be the No.1 format. So, if we want that, then we need to have something for the bowlers because bowlers ask a question (off) every ball and the batter has to answer that. So, if that question itself is not

interesting enough, how are you going to have more eyeballs.

He indicated sports should be result-oriented and everyone should go home knowing "who won, who lost".

"We should not be bothered too much about number of days. I feel it should be whether the match was exciting enough or not. Nobody wants to go back home not knowing who has won and who has lost," added Tendulkar.

He also said there was no harm in giving the new ball to a spinner if the surface so demanded.

"Instead of a fast bowler bowling an opening spell, why cannot a spinner be bowling a wonderful spell. It's just a different kind of surface we are playing on and that should also be challenging enough for batters to go out there and express themselves ... If somebody has batted well, he gets runs, simple."

ODI GETTING MONOTONOUS

With former India coach Ravi Shastri wanting ODI cricket to change with the times and be made a 40-over-a-side affair, Tendulkar agreed that the format was getting monotonous and suggested a way to make it entertaining.

"It's getting monotonous, without a doubt. There are two parts to it. One is the current format and the next which I feel that should be played."

"The current format, which has been there for a while now is two new balls (per innings). When you have two new balls, you have kind of eliminated reverse swing. Even though, we are in the 40th over of the game, it's just the 20th over of that ball. And the ball only starts reversing around the 30th over. That element is missing today because of two new balls. The current format, I feel, is heavy on bowlers."

Right now, the game is becoming too predictable. From the 15th to the 40th over its losing its momentum. It's getting boring.

He opined, that while there was no harm in retaining the 50-over format, teams should alternate between batting and bowling after every 25 overs, as that will give the opponents level-playing ground and take toss, dew factor and other conditions out of the equation.

"So, both teams bowl in the first and the second half. Commercially too it more viable as there will be three innings breaks instead of two."

SHOULD SALIVA BE ALLOWED AGAIN?

Tendulkar advocated that with the Covid-19 pandemic history now, the ICC should reverse its rule on disallowing the use of saliva to shine the ball.

"I am no medical expert but I think it should (saliva) be back because it's happened over 100 years. Guys have used saliva and nothing drastic has happened. A couple of years in between were challenging and rightly so that decision (to ban use of saliva to polish the ball) was taken, but now it's (Covid-19) behind us," opned Tendulkar.

Asked if he sees himself becoming a BCCI administrator in the future, Tendulkar said, Maine itni zyada fast bowling nahin ki hai (I have never bowled so fast ever)... Because (ex-BCCI president) Sourav (Ganguly) still considered himself a fast bowler," said Tendulkar in jest.

NZ dig in on opening day against SL

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Devon Conway's blistering 78 helped hosts New Zealand race to 155-2 against Sri Lanka at the end of a rain-delayed opening day of the second Test on Friday in Wellington.

Conway fell short of a hundred as he was caught and bowled by Dhananjaya de Silva, who dived low to his right to get both hands on a superb catch, to end a thrilling 108-ball knock.

First-Test hero Kane Williamson was unbeaten on 26 alongside Henry Nicholls on 18 when bad light stopped play at the Basin Reserve after Sri Lanka won the toss and put New Zealand in to bat in blustery conditions.

"I was gutted to get out when I did, I had put in all the hard work," Conway said.

"Those are the ones you want to kick on and make the most of it on day one... We just have to focus on tomorrow now."

New Zealand started strong, with Conway and Tom Latham putting on an opening partnership of 87, after the 2,500th Test match in cricket history was hit by a damp start.

Heavy overnight rain delayed the toss until after lunch.

Latham fell for 21 around the halfway



point of the day's curtailed proceedings when he spooned a Kasun Rajitha delivery to deep square, into the hands of Prabath Jayasuriya.

Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne opted to give his bowlers an early opportunity to use a green wicket to attack the New Zealand batters.

Conway responded by smashing 13 fours in a fiery knock.

Sri Lanka made one change from the team that lost the first Test on the final ball

in Christchurch, with wicketkeeper Nishan Madushka making his debut in place of Niroshan Dickwella.

New Zealand were forced into a single switch with seamer Doug Bracewell playing his first Test since 2016, replacing Neil Wagner, who tore a hamstring in the first Test.

It is the first time Bracewell has played a Test match alongside his cousin Michael.

New Zealand are chasing a third straight Test win.

Arshdeep joins Kent to play five first-class games

PTI ■ KENT

Talented Indian left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh will play five first-class matches for Kent during the upcoming English County season in order to hone his red-all skills.

The Kent County made the announcement on their website. "Kent Cricket is delighted to announce that India international bowler Arshdeep Singh will be available to play for the county in five LV=Insurance County Championship matches between June & July, subject to regulatory approval," the press release stated.

On signing for Kent for two months this summer, Singh said, "I am excited to play red-ball cricket in England and continue to improve my skills in the first-class game. I look forward to performing in front of Kent's Members and supporters; Rahul



David has already told me it is a Club with a great history."

As the Indian team leaves for the UK post IPL, Arshdeep also will spend the entire month of June and July honing his red-ball skills. Arshdeep made his ODI debut in New Zealand last November and has made 29 international appearances for India till date, including a stand-out ICC T20 World Cup in Australia in 2022.

In his seven career first-class matches so far, he has taken 25 wickets at an average of 23.84 and economy of 2.92.

He will become the fourth Indian player to wear the White Horse competitively after Kanwar Shumshere Singh, current India men's fead coach Rahul Dravid and 2022 overseas bowler, Navdeep Saini.

Kent's Director of Cricket, Paul Downton, said, "We are delighted to have a player of Arshdeep's potential join us for five matches this summer. He has demonstrated that he has world-class skills with the white ball, and I am very confident he will be able to put those skills to good use with the red ball in the County Championship."

A further announcement regarding overseas players for Kent in the LV= Insurance County Championship this season will be made in due course.

India to face Ireland in 3 T20I matches

PTI ■ DUBLIN

The Indian T20 team will take on Ireland in a three-match T20 series in August this year, Cricket Ireland said in a statement on Friday.

"Irish cricket fans will be able to enjoy watching the world's number one T20 International side, India, when the Asian juggernauts return to Malahide for a three-match T20I series this August," Cricket Ireland said in its statement.

Hardik Pandya, the new T20 captain, had led the team during the two-match series at the same venue last year. However, with the 50-over World Cup in sight one wonders if the BCCI would risk playing Hardik in a series that will offer little or no context to India's preparation for the ODI World Cup in India. The series is scheduled to be played from August 18 to 23.