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'LAYOFFS IN US WILL BRING
LOT OF WORK TO INDIA'

NEW DELHI, MONDAY MARCH 20, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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AUS BEAT INDIA
BY 10 WICKETS
IN SECOND ODI
12 SPORT

Rahul questions Delhi Police in 4-page reply

Raises need for urgency, process in preliminary reply on 'sexual assault' remark

PNS/PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Terming the Delhi Police action "unprecedented", Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday questioned the process adopted by authorities and the sudden urgency in taking action 45 days after his "women still being sexually assaulted" remark made during the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Sources said that in the 10-point preliminary reply to the Delhi Police's notice on Sunday, the Congress leader also sought 8-10 days to give a detailed response to the questions posed by the police over his January 30 remarks. Gandhi wondered whether the action had anything to do with his position taken both inside and outside Parliament on the Adani issue, the sources said.

He asked whether campaigns of other political parties, including the ruling BJP, have been subjected to such kind of scrutiny or questioning, they added. The response came hours after the Delhi Police team headed by Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Sagar Preet Hooda arrived at Gandhi's 12, Tughlaq Lane, residence around 10 AM and was able to meet him after two hours. The team left his residence around 1 PM, officials said. The police, the sources said, had earlier gone to his residence to seek the Congress leader's response to the questionnaire on March 15 but could not meet



The Delhi Police on Sunday reached the residence of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in connection with a notice issued to him over his 'women are still being sexually assaulted' remark made during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Ranjan Dimri

him and then again visited him on March 16, when Gandhi sought time of around a week to 10 days to respond.

According to the police, Gandhi stated in Srinagar during the Bharat Jodo Yatra that "I have heard that women are still being sexually assaulted", and since the yatra had passed through Delhi also, they wanted to ascertain if any victim had approached the Congress leader here so that they can initiate a probe into the matter.

"The police had asked him

to give details of these victims so that security could be provided to them," an official said.

On the preliminary reply sent a little before 4 PM, Gandhi termed the police action "unprecedented" and asked whether this had anything to do with his position taken both inside and outside Parliament on the Adani issue, sources said.

"I hope and trust that it has nothing to do of me being the centre of special attention both inside and outside of Parliament, including on Adani issue, by the

ruling dispensation in the last few weeks," Gandhi said.

The reply was sent to the Special Commissioner of Delhi Police, Deputy Commissioner of Police, New Delhi and ACPs of Karol Bagh and Barakhamba Road in New Delhi, who had come calling at Gandhi's residence on Sunday morning.

"What is the urgency of making two visits within a span of two days, after a gap of 45 days of my speech," Gandhi also reportedly said in his response.

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Stung Cong trying to forge Opp unity to take on BJP



Congress leader leaves his house on Sunday afternoon. PTI

DEEPAK JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Stung by the police questioning of Rahul Gandhi on Sunday, the Congress is making attempts to consolidate a large number of Opposition leaders to take the battle in an out of the Parliament, given that now the situation has come when any Opposition leader can be booked for making a political statement at any point of time.

Sources in the party said while most of the like-minded parties are already under one umbrella in their chorus against the Narendra Modi Government in the Adani controversy, unemployment, price

rise etc, parties like the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Samajwadi Party (SP) and the NCP have been playing truant.

Last week, the TMC, SP, NCP raised the same issues but separately, on a different pitch. While the TMC, SP, NCP led their own protests on the same issues they gave a protest led by Congress and 18 political parties like the Shiv Sena, the RJD, the Left and others a clean miss. However, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said on Sunday in an interview to PTI that no Opposition front to take on the BJP is possible without the Congress and if a coalition is formed for the 2024 general elections. Asked whether the TMC and SP's actions could jolt Opposition unity, Ramesh said, "The TMC, Samajwadi, people keep meeting, the Third Front, Fourth Front will continue to be formed, but it is necessary to have the Congress in the Opposition."

Party sources said that a meeting is on the anvil before Parliament resumes on Monday and the Congress is waiting for confirmation from a couple of parties including the TMC. *Contd on Page 2*

No place in democracy for those who don't believe in it: Nadda

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda on Sunday accused Rahul Gandhi of overstepping all bounds of democracy and said he should be sent packing "lock, stock and barrel" in a democratic manner. "Those who do not believe in democracy have no place in democracy," Nadda said in his address after virtually inaugurating the 'National Youth parliament' of his party's youth wing Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, being held in Chennai.

The Congress has become mentally bankrupt, the BJP chief said while alleging that Gandhi "instigated" foreign powers like the US and European countries to interfere in India's internal affairs by claiming that they were "oblivious" while democracy was under threat in India. "Rahul Gandhi has crossed all bounds of democracy," he said.

"Rahul Gandhi not merely insulted the nation by his shameful remarks about the democratic values of India, but also invited the foreign nations to intervene in our country," the BJP president said. He should be sent packing in a democratic manner, Nadda said.

The Congress, however, has rejected the BJP's charge, with Gandhi seeking permission to speak in Parliament to answer the ruling party members' criticism of his comments in Britain. The Congress has claimed that the BJP is "misrepresenting" his remarks to divert attention from the Adani issue.

Parliament's budget session has been a washout since the beginning of its second part on March 13, with the BJP demanding an apology from Gandhi.



Just like Cong, BJP will go for misusing CBI, ED: Akhilesh



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the BJP and said the saffron party would meet a similar fate as the Congress which had been wiped out for misusing the Central agencies the ED and CBI.

Yadav, who was in Kolkata to attend a two-day SP national executive meet, said earlier the Congress used to misuse the Central agencies, and now the BJP is doing the same.

"The Congress is now finished. The BJP, too, will meet a similar fate. They are only sending agencies after those parties who are fighting the BJP," he said. On whether the BJP would step up the alleged misuse of Central agencies in the run up to the 2024 General Elections he

said, "It might be the case but it won't help the saffron camp as preparations for the Lok Sabha polls would start in the next few months."

When reminded about his meeting with Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, he said some kind of Front could not be ruled out ahead of the General Elections. Yadav said the goal is to defeat the BJP.

Currently efforts are on to forge an Opposition front. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababai Naidu are making efforts on their own. Yadav refused to disclose his own party's plans.

When asked whether the Congress would be kept out of such a proposed Opposition front, Yadav said, "The Congress is a national party, so it has to decide its role."

Incidentally on Friday both he and Mamata had said they were for maintaining equidistance from the Congress and the BJP. Speaking on the Delhi Police action against Rahul Gandhi, Yadav wondered whether the BJP did it to help the Congress.

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Single-day rise of 1K Covid cases in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India saw a single-day rise of more than 1,000 fresh Covid-19 cases after 129 days, while the active cases increased to 5,915, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

A total of 1,071 fresh cases were reported in the country in a span of 24 hours, while the death toll increased to 5,30,802 with three latest fatalities — one each reported in Rajasthan and Maharashtra and one reconciled in Kerala. Delhi logged 72 Covid-19 cases with a positivity rate of 3.95 per cent on Sunday.

According to the Ministry data updated at 8 AM, the infection tally stands at 4.46 crore (4,46,95,420).

The active cases now comprise 0.01 per cent of the total cases, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate has been recorded at 98.8 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 4,41,58,703, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.19 per cent, the data said.

According to the Ministry's website, 220.65 crore doses of Covid vaccine have been administered in the country so far under the nationwide coronavirus vaccination drive.

Hunt for Amritpal continues, 4 aides moved to Assam

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

A day after the Khalistani Asympathiser and 'Waris Punjab De' head Amritpal Singh escaped the police dragnet and was declared a "fugitive", the Punjab Police on Sunday continued the hunt for the self-styled radical Sikh preacher for the second day, even as the State Government extended the suspension of mobile, internet, and SMS services in the State for another 24 hours, till 12 noon March 20. The Punjab Police, in a coordinated action with the Centre and the Assam Government against Amritpal, have taken four of his top aides,



Dibrugarh Central Jail where Punjab Police brought four associates of 'Waris Punjab De' founder Amritpal Singh, in Dibrugarh on Sunday. PTI

arrested a day before in Punjab, to Assam's Dibrugarh by a spe-

cial aircraft. The police have also seized the car used by Amritpal

to escape along with his mobile phone. Seven of Amritpal's associates, who were part of his convoy on Saturday and arrested from Jalandhar, were also remanded in police custody by a Beas Court for seven days.

Already facing four cases, Amritpal, and his seven associates, were slapped with two more FIRs - in connection with the recovery of a weapon from a vehicle; and second for breaking through police barricades in Jalandhar. After the police seized one of the vehicles of Amritpal's cavalcade one Kirpan and a .315 bore weapon with 57 live cartridges were recovered from it.

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Terror charges framed against Imran Khan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistani police on Sunday registered a terrorism case against Imran Khan and over a dozen PTI leaders for indulging in vandalism, attacking security personnel and creating unrest outside the judicial complex here ahead of a court hearing in a graft case involving the ousted premier. Clashes erupted outside the Islamabad Judicial Complex on Saturday when Khan arrived in Islamabad from Lahore to attend a much-awaited hearing in the Toshakhana case. During the confrontation between Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers and police, over 25 security personnel were injured, prompting additional District and Sessions Judge Zafar Iqbal to defer the court hearing till March 30.

The case was registered against arrested PTI workers and wanted party leaders. About 17 PTI leaders were named in the FIR lodged by the Islamabad Police. *Details on Page 8*

CAPSULE

UK DIPLOMAT CALLED OVER TRICOLOUR SLIGHT

New Delhi: India on Sunday night summoned the senior-most British diplomat in Delhi over reports of some Khalistani elements pulling down the Indian flag at the Indian high commission in London during a protest, official sources said. The Ministry of External Affairs conveyed a strong message to the diplomat over the alleged incident at the Indian mission, they said. It is learnt that the Deputy Chief of the UK high commission was summoned to the MEA as high commissioner Alex Ellis is out of Delhi. "I condemn the disgraceful acts taken against the people and premises of the @HCL_London - totally unacceptable," Ellis tweeted.

J&K gets 1st FDI post Article-370 repeal

Makers of iconic Burj Khalifa to build mall, tower outside Srinagar

PNS ■ JAMMU

The makers of Burj Khalifa on Sunday marked their formal entry into J&K by performing the groundbreaking ceremony for the first FDI in the Union Territory after the repeal of Article 370 — a shopping mall and a multipurpose tower on the outskirts of Srinagar.

Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) Manoj Sinha performed the groundbreaking ceremony for the Rs 500 crore project that envisages creating over 10,000 jobs in the Valley. The L-G laid



Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha performed the groundbreaking ceremony for the Rs 500 crore project that envisages creating over 10,000 jobs in the valley. PTI

the foundation stone for Mall of Srinagar by Dubai's Emaar Group at Sempora. Congratulating the people of J&K, the L-G said, "Today is a

historic day. With the *Bhoomi Pujan* of 10 lakh sq. ft. Mall of Srinagar by Emaar, the first FDI in J&K has taken shape. Land has been provided to

Emaar for IT towers in Jammu and Srinagar. These projects will be developed at a cost of Rs 500 crore."

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Chinese netizens nickname Indian PM 'Modi the immortal'

PTI ■ BEIJING

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is reverentially called 'Modi Laoxian' meaning 'Modi the immortal' by Chinese netizens, a rare respectful reference to an international leader, notwithstanding the bitter India-China border row, according to an article published in the US-based strategic affairs magazine 'The Diplomat'.

In the article 'How is India viewed in China?', Mu Chunshan, a journalist known for analysing Chinese social media, especially Sina Weibo, (akin to Twitter in China), also said that most Chinese feel that India led by Modi can maintain a balance among major countries in the world. Sina Weibo



has over 582 million active users.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has an unusual nickname on the Chinese internet: Modi Laoxian. Laoxian refers to an elderly immortal with some weird abilities. The nickname implies that Chinese netizens think Modi is different — even more amazing — than other

leaders," he said. They point to both his dress and physical appearance, seen as Laoxian-like, and some of his policies, which are different from India's previous ones, Mu said.

"So the word 'Laoxian' reflects the complex sentiment of Chinese people toward Modi, combining curiosity, astonishment, and perhaps a dash of cynicism," Mu wrote.

"I have been doing international media reports for nearly 20 years and it is rare for Chinese netizens to give a nickname to a foreign leader. Modi's nickname stands out above all others. Clearly, he has made an impression on Chinese public opinion," he said.

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Anti-India forces orchestrating pernicious narratives: Dhankhar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Some “incubators and distributors” of anti-India forces are orchestrating “pernicious narratives” to trim the country’s growth trajectory and taint its functional democracy, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Sunday, stressing the need to neutralise such “misadventures”.

Addressing an event here, Dhankhar’s predecessor M Venkaiah Naidu also flagged the issue and said “certain powers” outside the country are making such efforts as they are not happy with the growth and emergence of India.

Against the backdrop of a logjam in Parliament over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s recent remarks in the UK, the former vice president also called for smooth functioning of the proceedings of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The responsibility to



ensure smooth functioning of Parliament lies with both the ruling party and the opposition, he added. Both Dhankhar and his predecessor Naidu addressed the event organised to release a memoir of former Tamil Nadu governor P S Ramamohan Rao.

“India is on the rise as never before and the rise is unstoppable. Global relevance and recognition of the nation is at a level never seen before.

This rise is with challenges...” Dhankhar said. “It is here that the intelligentsia and people from the media come into picture. We all need to be cognizant of the emergence of incubators and distributors of anti-Indian forces orchestrating pernicious narratives to downsize our growth trajectory and taint our functional democracy and constitutional institutions,” he said.

“It is imperative that we all believe in our nation and nationalism and engage in neutralizing such misadventures,” he added. In a democracy, Dhankhar said, all are “similarly accountable” to law.

“No one can have privileged consideration by law, else democracy will cease to exist...You be as high, the law is always above you. It is known to us all that there can be no such privileges. There can be no enforcement of these privileges,” he said. The rigors of

law must apply to all, he said. “Some people, unfortunately, think they are different or to be dealt with differently,” he added, without naming anyone. India is the most vibrant and functional democracy, he said.

“Equality is something which we can never negotiate. Adherence to law is not optional. Some people have to realize it,” he added. Addressing the event, Naidu said, “Some of the countries, who have a mindset of colonialism and who ruled us, ruined us, looted us and cheated us, they are not able to appreciate the growth and emergence of India.”

The former vice president said India is a vibrant democracy and people have freedom of expression in the country so much so that they can even criticise the prime minister. “I feel Parliament should function. This responsibility does not lie with one party.

Delhi logs 72 Covid cases, positivity up by 3.95%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi logged 72 Covid-19 cases with a positivity rate of 3.95 per cent on Sunday, according to data shared by the Health department.

The city has seen an increase in the number of fresh Covid cases over the last few days, amid a sharp rise in H3N2 influenza cases in the country. The capital had on Saturday recorded 58 Covid cases with a positivity rate of 3.52 per cent.

The city registered 38 cases with a positivity rate of 3.13 per cent on Friday and 32 cases with a positivity rate of 2.25 per cent on Thursday.

The number of fresh cases had dropped to zero on January 16, the first time since the pandemic began ravaging countries.

With the fresh cases, the national capital’s COVID-19

case tally has risen to 2,007,970 while the death toll stands at 26,523.

A total of 1,824 tests were conducted the previous day. Only 14 of the 7,984 beds are occupied in dedicated COVID-19 hospitals while 130 patients are in home isolation. The number of active cases in the national capital currently stands at 209.

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj had on Friday said there are not many influenza cases in Delhi hospitals and the situation is being monitored closely.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has said that the rise in influenza cases is due to the Influenza A subtype H3N2 virus.

The H3N2 virus is leading to more hospitalisations than other subtypes. The symptoms include a runny nose, persistent cough and fever.

News reporters must not become activists with vested interests: Min

PTI ■ JAMMU

The news reporters must not become activists with vested interests, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday as he called for showing the brighter side of the government which had taken many historical decisions for public good.

He also said under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the COVID-19 adversity turned into an opportunity as world’s first DNA vaccine and nasal vaccine for the coronavirus was indigenously developed bolstering India as a vaccine development and manufacturing centre. The Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s office was speaking at two separate functions here.

“The media must show the brighter side of the government like the DoNER model of development in the North-East which has changed the development paradigms of

the region, the ‘StartUp Stand-up’ revolution, historical decision of abolishing interviews for non-gazetted posts and the deep sea mission under the leadership of Modi,” said Singh, a former minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

“The socio-economic reforms made by this government like the family pension to the divorce daughter, family pension to the families of missing government employees especially in J&K and North East and the digital life certificate must be brought to the public by the media so that information is disseminated to the deserving,” he said at the launch of J&K chapter of Public Relations Society of India (PRSI) here.

He said the reporters must not become activists with vested interests as biases can creep in making news not newsworthy.

Stung Cong trying to forge Opp unity to take on BJP

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All parties, except bigger ones like the TMC, have been avoiding participating in the Opposition strategy meeting being held in the chamber of Congress president and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge.

Parliament sources said that the worst affected in all this has been the Rajya Sabha as last week it could function for five minutes only. The Treasury Benches have been pressing the Congress for an apology from Rahul Gandhi for his alleged democracy in peril remarks even though the latter has clarified that given a chance he shall make statements in the Lok Sabha, while the Opposition has been sticking to its demand for a JPC on the Adani Group controversy.

“I think the recent target, intimidation on Rahul Gandhi is a matter of concern for all the Opposition members and they must come to fight the ever-increasing might of the Modi Government,” said a Congress MP who remarked that additional fuel has been pumped in the questioning of Rahul Gandhi and that they shall continue with their protests in and out of Parliament.

Govt begins process for sale of enemy...

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The Home Ministry has already launched a national survey of enemy properties, spread across 20 states and three Union Territories, with a purpose to identify and subsequently monetise all such properties.

The first-of-its-kind national survey by the Directorate General of Defence Estates (DGDE) will assess the present condition and value of the enemy properties identified by the CEPI.

The Government formed a Group of Ministers (GoM), headed by Union Home minister Amit Shah, in 2020 to supervise monetisation of enemy properties. Out of the 12,611 properties vested with the CEPI,

a total of 12,485 were related to Pakistani nationals and 126 to Chinese citizens. The highest number of enemy properties were found in Uttar Pradesh (6,255 properties), followed by West Bengal (4,088 properties), Delhi (659), Goa (295), Maharashtra (208), Telangana (158), Gujarat (151), Tripura (105), Bihar (94), Madhya Pradesh (94), Chhattisgarh (78) and Haryana (71).

There are 71 enemy properties in Kerala, 69 in Uttarakhand, 67 in Tamil Nadu, 57 in Meghalaya, 29 in Assam, 24 in Karnataka, 22 in Rajasthan, 10 in Jharkhand, four in Daman and Diu and one each in Andhra Pradesh and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Chinese netizens...

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Modi is also well known in China as he interacted with the Chinese public through his account on Sina Weibo which he opened in 2015 and had over 2.44 lakh followers.

However, he quit Weibo in July 2020 after the Indian government moved to ban 59 Chinese Apps to send a “strong message at the border, on the economic front and at a personal level too,” according to BJP general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh.

In his article, Mu says Chinese views of India are very complicated - but generally based on a sense of superiority and self-confidence. Significantly, he writes that the Chinese netizens believe China’s attempts to use its “all-weather ally”, Pakistan as “unrealistic” as the gap between the two South Asian

neighbours is “getting wider”, an apparent reference to the political and economic meltdown Pakistan is currently experiencing. “The facts over the past nine years have proved that China and India have more room for cooperation. For example, China’s trade with India is worth \$115 billion a year - far more than China’s trade with Pakistan, which sits at around \$30 billion”, Mu wrote.

He also writes about Chinese apprehension about India’s growing popularity with western countries, especially with the US and New Delhi’s handling of the Ukraine crisis without disrupting its close ties with Russia and America.

“This is just one example of a widespread perception in China: India is the favourite of the West, while China has become target of West.

Just like Cong, BJP...

From Page 1

The Delhi Police on Sunday reached the residence of Rahul in connection with a notice issued to him over his “women are still being sexually assaulted” remark made during the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

“Nobody knows whom the BJP is trying to target. They might take action against someone, but their target might be someone else,” Yadav said.

Mamata on Sunday said in a different context that the BJP is trying to project Rahul as the Opposition face to make the Opposition weaker and unacceptable to the people. Yadav claimed that several political parties are keen on having a caste census in the country as it will help to reach out to various castes. “Social justice is never possible without a caste census. In 2014, the BJP’s slogan was achhe din. In 2019, its slogan was

sabka saath sabka vikas sabka vishwas. So they must conduct it. All political parties want caste census. But the BJP is trying to avoid it,” he said.

Yadav claimed that the Congress during the UPA-2 regime had promised to conduct a caste census but later “backtracked” on it. “Like the Congress, the saffron party is also not keen on conducting it,” he said.

Yadav also dwelt on the rising inflation, unemployment and other issues saying his party would raise these issues up during the polls. The BJP had only thrived on jhumla whether it is on price rise, employment, the so-called achche din and finally it has only worked for the corporate houses, he said. Yadav said his party would leave no stone unturned to stop juggernaut of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh in the next Lok Sabha polls.

Rahul...

From Page 1

He reportedly referred to the conversation he had with the police team during their March 16 visit to his residence and asked that when they had agreed that he will respond after a week to 10 days, what was the need to return within two days.

Meanwhile, an angry Congress condemned the Delhi Police action and attacked the Central Government, calling it the “worst case of harassment and political vendetta”, but the BJP rejected the charge and said the police was “only discharging its lawful duty”. Addressing a joint press conference at AICC headquarters

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh and Rajya Sabha member Abhishek Singhvi criticised the Centre for attempting to intimidate Rahul Gandhi. They also said that the Centre was setting a wrong precedent by registering such cases against political opponents.” The move was a clear case of “vendetta, intimidation and harassment”, they added.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said that the move by the police was to divert the attention from the Adani issue. “It is to divert from the Adani issue, they (BJP) are asking all these questions by sending the police. Rahul Gandhi and Congress will not get scared. No matter how much they try to

save Adani, we will continue to question them,” Kharge said in a tweet message. Gehlot, who arrived at Rahul’s residence, also said that it is impossible to believe that without direction of the ruling Government the Delhi Police can take such actions. If Union Ministers make similar comments in Opposition-ruled states during elections, they may face the same action as done by the Delhi Police, he added.

Singhvi said that the statements in question were made by Rahul Gandhi in Srinagar on January 30 and thus the same does not fall under the Delhi Police jurisdiction. Singhvi also said that why the city police is showing so much interest after 45 days of the remarks.

J&K gets 1st FDI...

From Page 1

This is the first FDI project in Jammu and Kashmir after Article 370 was repealed by the Centre in 2019. He said, “The Mall of Srinagar & allied projects with the Government of Dubai will fuel the economic growth of J&K and bring us closer to achieving the shared vision of strengthening bilateral trade and investment ties between India and UAE.”

Sinha asked the EMAAR group -- the makers of Dubai Mall and Burj Khalifa, to look at the possibility of completing the project ahead of the three-year deadline. If the Parliament complex can be completed within

in 1.5 years, we can certainly expect this to be completed earlier,” Sinha said.

Jain said his company’s investments in Jammu and Kashmir will have a ripple effect. He said every rupee invested will bring in nine rupees of more investments. This Rs 500 crore investment should lead to Rs 5,000 crore investments.

The Lieutenant Governor also addressed the India-UAE Investment Summit and interacted with the business delegates from UAE and across the country. This is a new dawn of limitless possibilities. We are taking forward PM Narendra Modi’s vision for development of J&K, he said

Highlighting the scope for private and foreign investments in various sectors in J&K, the Lt Governor said the UT has made impressive progress with structural reforms in recent years & growth trajectory makes J&K an attractive investment destination.

The Lt Governor invited the business leaders from UAE to become partners in development of J&K and move together towards creating a more prosperous, equitable and vibrant UT. We will ensure the investors receive every kind of assistance, facilitation and support from the administration, he said.

The Lt Governor assured the investors that the land will be allocated within 15 days from the submission of the proposal. The constructive discussion held on various sectors, particularly agriculture & allied sectors, hospitality, education, tourism and other industry sectors, will explore and ground investment opportunities which will further strengthen our long-term partnership with UAE and rest of the Gulf countries, added the Lt Governor.

It is pertinent to mention that foreign as well as Indian companies at the Investment summit have shown keen interest to launch projects related to residential school, hotels, IT park, ITES units and hospital. It was also decided to constitute a joint group for speedy clearance of proposals and to ensure faster implementation.

Hunt for Amritpal continues, 4 aides moved to Assam

From Page 1

The police also recovered six 12 bore rifles and 196 cartridges in a massive crackdown against his outfit ‘Waris Punjab De’ across the State.

After preliminary investigations, the Punjab Police claimed that Amritpal was trying to set up a private army, by the name of ‘Anandpur Khalsa Force’. Police officials maintained that they have found the initials ‘AKF’ on many weapons seized during the operation.

In the wake of the inputs from the Central agencies highlighting Amritpal’s links with the Pak spy agency, the Punjab Police has also initiated investigating Amritpal’s alleged links with the ISI.

Meanwhile, the police have also nabbed actor-producer Daljeet Singh Kalsi - who handles Amritpal’s finance - from Haryana’s Gurugram.

“Amritpal has been declared a fugitive. His two cars were seized and gunmen nabbed. The legality of their weapons is being checked. Further probe is on,” said Jalandhar Police Commissioner Kuldeep Singh Chahal.

With Amritpal still out of bounds, the Punjab Police maintained that there was no lapse in the chase. “Amritpal managed to escape dodging the team by changing vehicles and he had the advantage as he was moving ahead of the police,” said Chahal.

Jalandhar DIG Swapan Sharma, revealing the details of Saturday’s chase, said Amritpal changed his routes several times during the chase and reached a one-lane link road of 12 to 13 km.” There were six-seven motorbikes into which Amritpal’s car crashed, probably helping him to escape. Some riders were to

divert the cops. Four people, including Amritpal, were there in the car. All four are still untraceable,” he said. DIG Sharma said Amritpal was first seen in the Shahkot area. “When his cavalcade was first intercepted at Harike, he took a U-turn and drove under a flyover and entered the Doaba region leading to the one-lane link road,” he added.

Responding to a query whether Amritpal is hiding in Punjab or already left the State, DIG Sharma said it is an intelligence-based operation and he could not share this information. At the same time, he said there is a possibility that Amritpal too was planning to escape to Canada via Nepal which “needs to be investigated”.

The crackdown came a day before the radical Sikh preacher was all set to resume ‘Khalsa Vaheer’ - a religious procession meant to cover all of Punjab - in Malwa region from Sunday, starting from Muktsar. Making an appeal to the people to maintain peace and stay calm, the Punjab Police also issued a warning against social media handles spreading fake news while making it clear that strict action will be taken against all propagating false rumours.

The police, along with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), also conducted flag marches in various towns and cities, including the districts of Tarn Taran, Gurdaspur, Batala, among others.

Also making an appeal to the people to maintain peace and harmony, the Akal Takht Jathedar (head priest) Giani Harpreet Singh has urged the powers-that-be to not perpetuate an atmosphere of fear by unduly picking up youth, while also calling upon the youngsters to avoid the path of confrontation.

Public Notice
To be known to all that I, Shri Nareesh Singhal son of Shri L. M. Singhal resident of A-86, Vivek Vihar Phase 1, Delhi- 110095 owner (Mutatee) of Commercial Plot No. 8, situated at Shopping Centre no. 1, Jhilmil Tahsilpur Phase-1, Delhi-110092 has applied for conversion of the aforesaid plot from leasehold to freehold vide application no. LD27350CL/CON/02032023 dated 02.03.2023 in DDA. That the original documents i.e. Demand cum Allotment Letter, Possession Letter, Site possession Slip and Completion Certificate of the above property have been lost. A FIR dated 18.03.2023 bearing LR no 253458/2023 against this effect has been lodged at Crime Branch Delhi. Any persons claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents may write contact with above named person at above address/ phone No. 7838898766 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally write to Dy. Director (CI), A-Block, 1st Floor, Vivas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This notice is issued in respect of below mentioned Allottee(s) :-
‘SHOURYAPURAM’ PROJECT situated at **VILLAGE SHAHPUR BAMHETA, NEAR LAL KUAI, NH-24, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201001**
the company do hereby inform the following Allottee(s) and public at large that due to non-payment of dues/EMI's to FUN N FOOD PVT LTD (NBFC) by the following Allottee(s) the company & NBFC has decided to terminate their Allotment for flat with company:-
DETAILS Of Allottee(s)
Name - SACHIN YADAV S/O RAKESH YADAV R/O : HOUSE NO 755, VILLAGE SHAHPUR BAMHETA, NH-24, LAL KUAI, GHAZIABAD-U.P.-201002 Flat No. - F-145 Ground FLOOR, In Shouryapuram STPL Project Shahrpur Bhamehta Village, NH-24, LAL KUAI, GHAZIABAD-U.P.-201002
Name - MR. HAKAM SINGH S/O BHEEM SINGH MISS DEEPAI D/O HAKAM SINGH R/O : C.No-20, Harjan Basti, Valmiki Mohalla, Dallapura Village, East Delhi-110098 Flat No. - D-69, Second Floor, In Shouryapuram STPL Project Shahrpur Bhamehta Village, NH-24, LAL KUAI, GHAZIABAD-U.P.-201002
The company & NBFC has already sent the repeated notices to the aforesaid Allottee(s) as per the address available in record and furnished by the Allottee, however till date the aforesaid Allottee(s) has not made their due EMI's payment and default of their due payments. In view of above breach of agreement/ Receipts/ Deeds etc. entered between the Allottee(s) and company on expiry of aforesaid 3rd day shall stand terminated and revoked and any person dealing with aforesaid person shall be dealing at its own risk and consequences.
The company at its sole discretion shall sell/re-sell etc the flat to any other Buyer/ Allottee of its choice to the complete exclusion of the Allottee(s).
Date :- March 20, 2023
For and behalf of:
SHOURYAPURAM-STPL (AOP) Corp. Address:- B-111, Sector 5, Noida, U.P. -201301
Contact :- 9910481613

AU SMALL FINANCE BANK LIMITED (A SCHEDULED COMMERCIAL BANK)
Regd. Office: 19-A, Dhuleshwar Garden, Ajmer Road, Jaipur-302001, Rajasthan (India) CIN: L36911RJ1996PLC011381

APPENDIX-IV-A
[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower / Co-Borrower/ Mortgagee(s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of AU Small Finance Bank Limited (A Scheduled Commercial Bank), the same shall be referred herein after as AUSFB . The Secured Assets, will be sold on “As is where is”, “As is what is”, “Whatever there is” basis through E-Auction for recovery of amount mentioned in the table below along with further interest, cost, charges and expenses being due to AUSFB viz. Secured Creditor. It is hereby informed you that we are going to conduct public E-Auction through website https://sarfaesi.auctiontiger.net

Account No. and Name of borrower/ Co-borrower/ Mortgagees/ Guarantor	Date & Amount as per Demand Notice U/s 13(2) & Date of Physical Possession and amount as on (Date)	Descriptions of the Property/Properties	Reserve Price, Earnest Money Deposit & Bid Increment Amount (Amount in Rs.)	E-Auction Date and Time, EMD Submission Last Date, Place of Submission of Bids and Documents, Inspection Date
2121244634647791 M/S. SHER SINGH NAVEEN KUMAR AND CO. THROUGH ITS PROPRIETOR MR. NAVEEN KUMAR (Borrower) MR. NAVEEN KUMAR S/O MR. SHER SINGH SAINI (Guarantor) MRS. KAVITA W/O MR. NAVEEN KUMAR (Guarantor/Mortgagor)	13(2) Notice Issue Date 09-June-2022 For Loan Account No. 2121244634647791 is Rs. 1,23,81,953.25 (Rupees One Crore Twenty Three Lakh Eighty One Thousand Nine Hundred Fifty Three and Twenty Five paise Only) as on date 04 June 2022 Physical Possession done on 19 November 2022 For Loan Account No. 2121244634647791 is Rs. 1,39,43,436/- (Rupees One Crore Thirty Nine Lakh Forty Three Thousand Four Hundred Thirty Six Only) as on date 14 March 2023 plus Future interest & charges extra.	All that part and parcel of Property Situated at Built up Ground Floor without roof rights (said floor) built on property Bearing No. A-169, in Block A, area measuring 180.00 Sq. Yards out of Kharsa No. 6/2 situated in the area of village bharola colony Known as majlis park, Delhi-110033, Property Owned by Mrs. Kavita w/o Mr. Naveen Kumar . East: Property No. A-168 West: Property No. A-170 North: Road 25 feet South: Lane 10 feet Total built-up area on Ground Floor is 1620.00 Sq. Feet.	Reserve Price Rs. 95,00,000/- (Rupees Ninety Five Lakh Only) EMD Price Rs. 9,50,000/- (Rupees Nine Lakh Fifty Thousand Only) Bid Incremental Amount Rs. 25,000/- (Rupees Twenty Five Thousand only)	26-April-2023 From 02:00 PM to 04:00 PM With unlimited extension of Five Minutes Last Date of Bid Submission 25-April-2023 Upto 06:00 PM AU Small Finance Bank Ltd., Au Bank Branch Office: A8, Patparganj Rd, Priyadarshini Vihar, Laxmi Nagar, New Delhi, Delhi 110092 Email ID: rakesh.jain1@aubank.in Inspection Date 19-20 April 2023

All Interested participants / bidders are requested to visit the website https://sarfaesi.auctiontiger.net & https://www.aubank.in/bank-auction for further details including Terms & Conditions, to take part in e-auction sale proceeding and are also advised to contact Mr. Rakesh Jain, Contact Number 9116181827 and e-mail of rakesh.jain1@aubank.in.

THIS IS ALSO A STATUTORY 30 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER RULE 8(6) OF SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002
STATUTORY 30 DAYS SALE NOTICE TO BORROWER / MORTGAGORS

The terms and conditions of e-auction sale are:-
1. The E-Auction sale of Secured Asset is on “as is where is”, “as is what is”, “whatever there is” and “no recourse” basis for and on behalf of the Secured Creditor viz. AUSFB and there is no known encumbrance, which exists on the said property. **2.** For participating in online e-auction sale, Bid document, copies of PAN Card, Board Resolution in case of Company and photo ID, address proof are required to be submitted along with EMD, which is payable by way of RTGS/NEFT in the name of MSME AUCTION POOL ACCOUNT OF AU Small Finance Bank Limited, Current account No. 392120112171599 AU SMALL FINANCE BANK LIMITED Fifth and Sixth Floor Sunjay Big Junction STC Kharsa No. 6/4 to 67, Gram Sukhaipura New Atish Market Jaipur. 302020, IFSC Code: AU8L0002011, once an Online Bid is submitted, same cannot be withdrawn. Further any EMD submitted by bidder will be required to send the UTR/Ref no of the RTGS/NEFT with a copy of cancelled cheque on the following email ID's i.e. rakesh.jain1@aubank.in. All interested participants / bidders are requested to visit the website https://sarfaesi.auctiontiger.net & https://www.aubank.in/bank-auction for further details including Terms & Conditions, to take part in e-auction sale proceeding and are also advised to contact Mr. Rakesh Jain, Contact Number 9116181827 and e-mail of rakesh.jain1@aubank.in.

Place : Delhi Date : 18/03/2023
Authorised Officer AU Small Finance Bank Limited

Education, health to get highest allocation in Budget: Officials

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Education and health sector will get the highest allocation in the annual budget of the Arvind Kejriwal Government for the 2023-24 financial year, officials said on Sunday. In the 2022-23 Delhi Budget, the education sector received the highest allocation of Rs 16,278 crore, a slight decline from the previous fiscal budgetary outlay of Rs 16,377 crore.

The health was allocated Rs 9,769 crore in the 2022-23 budget while it was Rs 9,934 crore in the previous budget.

According to government officials, new tablets will be provided to all teachers, including regular, guest and contractual, vice principals and principals of Delhi government schools.

"Dr Ambedkar Schools of Specialized Excellence (SoSE) started with 20 institutes in 2021. This will be



increased to 37 in the coming financial year with a capacity of about 10,000 children," said an official.

The official said Delhi government schools will work closely with their feeder schools in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to improve the foundational skills of children.

About ramping up health

facilities, free diagnostic tests at Mohalla Clinics will increase from 250 to 450 tests. There are plans to massively increase the number of beds in Delhi government hospitals from 14,200 to 30,000, the official said, adding "Construction of nine new Delhi government hospitals is underway while four will be inaugurated next year."

"Expansion of 15 existing hospitals, including Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya, will also be taken up in mission mode," he said.

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" allocation for capital expenditure would be for infrastructure projects, sources said on Thursday.

The Delhi government's budget size for 2022-23 was Rs 75,800 crore and Rs 69,000 crore in the previous year.

This time, the budget will be presented on March 21 by Finance Minister Kailash Gahlot and it will be preceded by an Outcome Budget of the government.

Gahlot was given charge of the finance department after the resignation of deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia who was arrested by the CBI in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case.

Kisan Mahapanchayat: Delhi Police to deploy 2,000 personnel

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police will deploy over 2,000 security personnel at Ramlila Maidan where thousands of farmers will gather for Monday's 'Kisan Mahapanchayat', officials said.

Elaborate security arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the event goes smoothly, the police said on Sunday.

"We have made elaborate security arrangements for the Kisan Mahapanchayat. We will ensure the safety and security of people..."

"We have deployed more than 2,000 security personnel to ensure that the event goes peacefully and law and order is maintained," a senior police official said.

Police personnel will be deployed for crowd management and to ensure that no unauthorised person gains



entry and disrupts law and order, he added.

According to an advisory by the Delhi Traffic Police, around 15,000-20,000 people are likely to participate in the Mahapanchayat.

They are expected to start arriving at Ramlila Maidan from Sunday night. The public and motorists have been advised to avoid roads around

the Ramlila Maidan, especially JLN Marg from Delhi Gate to Ajmeri Gate Chowk, a traffic police official said.

The Kisan Mahapanchayat will be held to press for a legal guarantee on the Minimum Support Price (MSP), the Samyukt Kisan Morcha — an umbrella body of farmers' unions — said in a statement on Sunday.

Cops record statements of man, woman after scuffle video goes viral

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police recorded the statements of a man and a woman who were seen in a video on social media getting into a scuffle, a senior officer said on Sunday.

The video that was shared widely showed a man beating a woman and forcing her to get inside the cab.

The incident took place Saturday around 9.45 pm near Mangolpuri flyover in outer Delhi, he said, adding that the cab was traced first to Gurugram.

The car which had a

Haryana registration number is from Gurugram's Ratan Vihar area where a team of police personnel were also sent in connection with the incident, the official said, adding the vehicle and its driver were also traced.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Harendra Kumar Singh said after receiving information about the incident, a case under section 365 (kidnapping or abducting with intent secretly and wrongfully to confine a person) of the Indian Penal Code was registered and the investigation was initiated. Based on the number of the vehicle, the owner was



traced to a man named Deepak, a resident of Gurugram where multiple teams were also sent, he said.

After reaching Deepak's residence, police found that he had sold the vehicle to Lakhani who in turn sold it to Vinod.

Vinod had then sold the vehicle to Harish who then sold it to Shailender who presently owns the car, police said.

"When Shailender, a cab driver, was traced this morning, he told police that on Saturday, a woman and her two male friends had booked the car from Rohini for Vikaspuri."

"On the way, an argument took place between the woman and her friends over some personal matter due to which at Mangolpuri traffic signal, the woman got down the car. Immediately, her male friend also got down and physically assaulted her and pushed her

inside the car as seen in the video," the officer said.

Based on the transaction made through Paytm and details of vehicle booking, the mobile number of the woman and one of the two men were traced, he said.

"During inquiry, the duo said an argument broke out between them over some personal matter which escalated and so she got down the car and he forcefully pushed her inside the vehicle," he added.

Their statements have been recorded. The woman's statement has also been recorded with a counsellor and medical

assistance has been provided, the DCP said.

The woman works as an accountant and her male friend has a flour mill.

Delhi Commission for Women chief Swati Maliwal took cognisance of the video and assured strict action.

Terming it a serious matter, the DCW has issued the notice to DCP Outer seeking copy of FIR, details of accused arrested in the matter and detailed action taken report.

The women panel has asked the police to submit the asked details latest by March 22.

Stray dog attack: NGO holds awareness drive at Vasant Kunj

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A campaign to spread awareness about stray dogs and their behaviour was conducted on Sunday by an animal activist at Vasant Kunj's Sindhi Basti, where two children were killed allegedly after being attacked by canines.

Founder of Noida-based NGO House of Stray Animals (HSA) Sanjay Mohapatra who organised the campaign, said around 100 people participated in the two-hour programme and spoke about their fears surrounding stray animals.

He claimed that parents in the area were "scared" after the death of two children and had "stopped allowing" their children to step out of their home alone. "Children in the area are scared after the death of two siblings here. Parents have been accompanying their children everywhere and not letting them step out alone."

"We conducted a two-hour sensitisation class teaching them about safety rules as well as dog behaviour," Mohapatra said. Pointing that the children in Vasant Kunj were killed after they went to defecate in the open, Mohapatra further added that the government



"should build more toilets" in the area.

Earlier, Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi had raised doubts over the death of two siblings in Vasant Kunj allegedly in the stray dog attacks, saying only post mortem will clarify "whether they were murdered or attacked by dogs."

Two minor brothers were found dead in a span of two days in southwest Delhi's Vasant Kunj area. Seven-year-old Anand and five-year-old Aditya, his brother, lived with their parents in a slum cluster in Sindhi Basti. Anand had reportedly gone missing on March 10.

On March 12, Aditya too went to the same jungle area, along with his cousin Chandan, 24, to defecate. Chandan left Aditya for some time and returned to find him injured and surrounded by stray dogs, police had said. Aditya then, succumbed to injuries.

At Delhi shopping centres AAP Govt may provide relief on conversion charges, parking fees

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government could soon provide relief on conversion and parking charges imposed by the MCD at local shopping centres, according to a statement issued on Sunday.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal met owners of nearly 500 shops that were sealed at Local Shopping Centres (LSC) for non-payment of conversion charges and parking fees, it said.

Conversion charges are paid by property owners if the status of the area on which it is located changes from residential to commercial.

During the meeting, the traders raised the issue of nearly 500 shops being sealed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) for non-payment of "illegal" conversion and parking charges.

Kejriwal said a solution would be found and instructed Urban Development Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj and Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi to resolve the issue at



the earliest.

He also assured that a solution would be promptly found for the markets currently undergoing sealing.

The MCD has been serving notices to markets for conversion and parking charges amounting to lakhs of rupees for a few years, Bhardwaj said, adding that consequently, many shops were sealed.

LSC Federation chief Rajesh Goyal said it had bought commercial space that was many times more expensive to avoid conducting business from home. The shopowners were first charged a hefty conversion fee and, even after the BJP — which headed the civic body

at the time — promised that the charge would not have to be paid by commercial shops, the battle continued.

Vishal Ohri, the federation's general secretary, mentioned that around 500 shops had been sealed in five years and alleged that the traders suffered a loss of Rs 5,000 crore due to the previous BJP regime in the MCD.

After hearing the traders' concerns, Kejriwal assured them that a decision would be taken within a few days.

He added that a solution for the ongoing sealing of markets would also be found in due time and it would be ensured that the shops could obtain legal status by paying reasonable rates. This will

prevent them from being exploited in the future and the MCD will not be able to harass them for conversion and parking charges.

Bhardwaj said the MCD started serving notices a few years ago to markets for conversion and parking charges that ran into lakhs of rupees.

There are big markets in Delhi, including the ones in Greater Kailash, South Extension, Defence Colony, Kirti Nagar, Green Park and Priya Cinema Market -- called Local Shopping Centres.

The MCD sealed several shops in 2018 with videos and pictures emerging of shopkeepers in tears. Even today, most shops in Defence Colony are sealed, according to the statement. Sharing details about the meeting, Kejriwal tweeted, "For the last several years, more than 500 shops of all these traders have been sealed; I have instructed Urban Development Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj and MCD Mayor Shelly Oberoi to solve the problems of all these traders as soon as possible."

2 former DJB officials sent to 3 years in jail in money laundering case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A court here has sentenced two former Delhi Jal Board officials to three years of rigorous imprisonment in a money laundering case registered by the Enforcement Directorate, saying it was taking a "lenient view" in the matter.

Special Judge Ashwani Kumar Sarpal was hearing the case against Raj Kumar Sharma and Ramesh Chand Chaturvedi, who were sentenced to five years and four years imprisonment, respectively by a CBI court in December 2012 for misappropriating around Rs 47.76 lakh from the DJB and against whom the ED had registered a case in December 2009.

The anti-money laundering agency, however, filed the complaint in the present court in March 2021 after a delay of more than 11 years and around four years after the accused completed their sentence in the CBI case.

"The accused persons, after realising that they have no defence in this present prevention of money laundering Act (PMLA) matter after conviction in scheduled offences



by the CBI court which was upheld by the Supreme Court, have pleaded guilty voluntarily," Special Judge Sarpal said in an order passed on Saturday.

"They have already undergone sentences of five and four years respectively in scheduled offences as well as have already spent the misappropriated or cheated money for their defence in the CBI case and other circumstances... So taking a lenient view, both the accused persons are hereby sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment of three years and also liable to pay a fine of Rs 5,000 each," the judge added.

Special Public Prosecutor Atul Tripathi appeared for the ED in the case.

NGT forms panel to verify claim of air pollution around AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has formed a panel to verify the allegations of severe air pollution in and around the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here.

The NGT was hearing a plea which claimed that air pollution was jeopardising the health of the indoor as well as OPD patients, doctors and other staffers of AIIMS-Delhi.

The petition claimed statutory and administrative authorities failed to control air pollution around AIIMS.

"We are satisfied that the matter needs consideration and facts need to be verified by an independent expert committee... Accordingly, we constitute a seven-member joint committee to be headed by the member



secretary, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), deputy commissioner of police (Traffic), area divisional or district forest officer (DFO) and the municipal corporation of Delhi (MCD)," a bench comprising NGT chairperson Justice A K Goel said.

The bench, also comprising judicial member Justice Sudhir Agarwal and expert member A Senthil Vel, said other members of the committee would be the Delhi pollution control com-

mittee (DPCC), the AIIMS director or his nominee and a nominee of the Vardhman Mahavir Medical College and Safdarjung Hospital.

"The committee may consider the allegations noted, including traffic or parking status and deliberate upon plan for mitigation measures to control air pollution in the area such as regulation of traffic, shifting to battery-operated vehicles in specified areas, no vehicle zones, removal of encroachments and hawkers, dense plantations, noise and dust control measures at strategic locations, and water sprinkling," the bench said.

The green panel said the member secretary of DPCC and the AIIMS director or his nominee will jointly be the nodal agency for coordination and compliance.

Dentist booked for false bomb threat at Noida hospital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A mentally challenged dentist has been booked for allegedly making a phone call to police falsely informing them about a bomb threat at a district hospital here, officials said on Sunday.

On Saturday morning, the emergency helpline received a call alerting them about a bomb being placed in the combined district hospital in Sector 30, said sub-inspector Balvir Singh, in-charge of the Sector 29 police post. "The information was immediately relayed to the local police post in-charge and a police team reached the hospital for checking," he said.

"Upon inspection at the hospital, it was ascertained that the information about the presence of a bomb was false,"



said Singh, on whose complaint the FIR was lodged against the dentist.

He claimed that the woman had spread a rumour and misused public service (police).

The 53-year-old accused, who is a Bachelor in Dental Surgery, lives in an apartment with her mother and sister in the Sector 20 police station area and is currently undergoing rehabilitation for the illness, a local official said.

City records 15.4 degrees min temp; light rain predicted



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The minimum temperature in the national Capital on Sunday settled at 15.4 degrees Celsius, a notch below the season's average, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The relative humidity was recorded to be 94 per cent, they said.

The weather department has predicted a generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle while the maximum temperature is expected to reach around 27 degrees Celsius.

Conservation efforts offer hope for sparrows' return

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

House sparrows, small fuzzy birds recognisable by their distinct chirping and black, brown and white wings, went all but extinct from Delhi's urban areas around 2012, prompting the then chief minister and avid bird lover Sheila Dikshit to declare it the state bird and initiate a slew of conservation measures.

Eleven years since, sparrows are once again showing themselves to those with patience and keen eyes, fluttering between trees, sitting on ledges and hopping from one window sill to another.

Despite their growing numbers in the national capital, experts said on Sunday, the eve of World Sparrow Day, that the road to recovery is long and riddled with obstacles endemic

to the modern urban landscape.

"Since 2012, there has been a great improvement in sparrow numbers, largely due to people's participation and increased awareness. However, the modern lifestyle and infrastructure do not support house sparrows. Hence, the sightings are limited to areas like Old Delhi, JNU campus and forests," Surya Prakash, a retired zoologist from Jawaharlal Nehru University's School of Life Sciences, told PTI.

Buildings without balconies and windows, fewer crevices for sparrows to build nests in, use of pesticides that to eradicate insects and depletion of native plantations are some of the major reasons behind the sparrow's disappearance.

‘Delhi Police has all right to gather info’

BJP on action against Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Justifying police enquiry into Rahul Gandhi's statement during his 'Bharat jodo yatra' on the purported rape cases of some women, the BJP on Sunday questioned Congress criticism and the allegation that it has 'endangered democracy' in the country.

"A woman is raped & if Rahul Gandhi said this in front of the nation as an MP, then police have right to know this information", said BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra.

The BJP leader said, "Today police went to his home to deliver a notice & requested him to tell about



those women. Now, Cong says democracy is in danger'.

The Delhi Police has taken cognisance of Rahul's account of the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' that he interacted with some women who were raped and sent a questionnaire to the Congress MP seeking more details on the issue. Police said it took cognisance

of the social media posts on Rahul's account.

In another counter to the Congress criticism of the police action on the information, another BJP leader and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said here that the step was needed to deliver "justice" in the purported cases.

"If Rahul will not give the names of the victim women (of alleged sexual harassment) then how will they get justice? He had also said he had met militants, then shouldn't he inform the police?", said Sarma in the national Capital.

The Congress has described the police approaching Rahul in the case as a "vendetta politics".

Rahul owes apology to Parliament, country for his remarks in UK: Naqvi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Sunday condemned Rahul Gandhi's recent remarks in the UK, saying the Congress leader owed an apology to Parliament and the entire country.

In a statement, the former Union minister also hit out at the Congress and its leaders, accusing them of running a "deliberate drive" to denigrate the country's Parliament, Constitutional institutions and democratic values.

The Congress is suffering from "feudal frenzy" in its efforts to become "chieftain" of the Opposition ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Naqvi charged, demanding that they come out of their "feudal arrogance" in view of the "changed atmosphere and mood of the country".

During his interactions in the UK recently, Gandhi



alleged that the structures of Indian democracy are under attack and there is a "full-scale assault" on the country's institutions.

Gandhi's remarks has triggered a massive political row, with the BJP accusing him of maligning India on foreign soil and seeking foreign interventions and the Congress hitting back, citing instances of Prime Minister Modi raising internal politics abroad.

"Former Union Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi today strongly condemned Rahul Gandhi's remarks on Indian

Parliament and democracy in a foreign country and said that the Congress leader owed an apology to Parliament and the entire country," the statement released by the senior BJP leader's office said.

"While talking to reporters in UP's Rampur today, Naqvi said the Congress and its leaders should come out of the feudal arrogance and must understand the changed atmosphere and mood of the country," the statement said.

They should express regret for "their deliberate drive" to denigrate the Indian Parliament, Constitutional institutions and democratic values, he added.

"Naqvi said the Congress is suffering from feudal frenzy in its efforts to become chieftain of the Opposition ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections," the statement said.

However, the Congress' "craze for conspiracy" against the Indian Parliament and the

Constitutional values is totally unacceptable in a democracy, the statement quoting the senior BJP leader said.

"Naqvi said even the Congress leaders have realised that its idiocy has turned the grand old party into a non-performing asset, which has neither any value outside nor inside, and that is why the queue at the exit gate is larger than the entry gate of the Congress," the statement said.

"Naqvi also said the democratically defeated dynasty, who considered them as the proprietor of politics, are unable to digest India's rising global stature under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the statement said.

The Congress will not succeed in its conspiracy to "hijack" the country's Parliament and Constitutional and democratic values through their "arrogance and anarchy", the statement quoting Naqvi said.

Remarks against PM: SC to hear Cong leader Khera's plea

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of Congress leader Pawan Khera seeking transfer and clubbing of FIRs lodged against him in Assam and Uttar Pradesh for allegedly making objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud on Friday deferred the hearing on Khera's plea to March 20 after taking note of submissions that senior advocate A M Singhvi, appearing for the Congress leader, was unavailable.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Uttar Pradesh and Assam, urged the bench that the matter can be taken up for hearing on Monday instead of Friday.

"Ok, we will take it up on Monday," said the bench, which also comprises justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala.

The apex court had earlier extended the interim bail of Khera, who was arrested by Assam Police in the case, till March 17.

Earlier, Assam and Uttar Pradesh governments, in their separate affidavits, opposed Khera's plea seeking clubbing of FIRs lodged against him, claiming that his party was still continuing with the "very same low level" on their social media accounts.

The Uttar Pradesh government sought dismissal of the plea with a cost by terming it "misconceived" and "an attempt to leapfrogging the routine procedure available under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)".

"It is submitted that the leaders of the political party (Congress) to which the petitioner (Khera) belongs have, even after this honourable court taking cognisance of the matter, continued the very same low level in their official Twitter handles and other social media accounts," the Assam government said.

No Opp front possible without Cong: Ramesh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

No Opposition front to take on the BJP is possible without the Congress and if a coalition is formed for the 2024 general elections, the party will have a central role in it, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said.

In an interview with PTI, Ramesh, however, said it was too early to talk about all this right now as the Congress' first priority was the upcoming elections in Karnataka and the string of state polls this year.

Ramesh's remarks come after both Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Uttar Pradesh's Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party (SP) saying the two parties would stay away from both the Congress and the BJP, and indicating possible talks with other regional players ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.



Asked whether the TMC and SP's actions could jolt Opposition unity, Ramesh said, "The TMC, Samajwadi, people keep meeting, the Third Front, Fourth Front will continue to be formed, but it is necessary to have the Congress in the Opposition."

"If an Opposition coalition is formed, the Congress will play a central role in it. No front is possible without the Congress. But it is too early to talk about

this," he told PTI.

First there is an election in Karnataka, after that there are elections in Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram, he noted.

"This year, we will be completely busy with state elections, we will see about 2024 elections later," the former Union minister said.

"Right now meetings will continue, positioning will con-

tinue... I will form a third front, I will form a fourth front, I will form a fifth front, all this will continue," he added.

Ramesh asserted that a strengthened Congress is necessary for any opposition alliance, but the party's priority at the moment was the Karnataka elections, followed by the elections in other states.

"Our (party) president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leaders will work on whatever strategy has to be prepared and carry out talks with parties regarding the 2024 elections," he said.

Asked whether the TMC staying away from protests by the Opposition on the Adani issue and the NCP not coming all out in support has dented the Opposition unity, he said, "No, I do not think so. The TMC may have its own logic, I do not want to say anything more than that." He said 16 political parties

are united on the demand for a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into the Adani issue.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) did not sign the letter to the director of the Enforcement Directorate, but they were with us in spirit if not in body, he said.

"There are 16 parties and let me say one thing very categorically that the Supreme Court committee is no substitute for a JPC. The terms of reference of the Supreme Court committee are limited in scope, it is only a JPC that can unravel the full dimensions of this politico-economic scam," he said on the Adani issue.

"Whatever Mr Adani has done in India and abroad, he has done with the full blessings, support and patronage of the prime minister. The Supreme Court-monitored inquiry is not going into any of these issues," he said.

So far, the Congress party has raised 93 questions, soon we will be reaching 100, Ramesh noted, talking about the party's 'Hum Adani ke Hain Kaun' series under which it has been asking questions to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the Adani issue.

"We have raised 93 questions so far. Those types of questions which are highly minute, pointed, granular, specific, they go beyond the terms of reference of a Supreme court-monitored inquiry. So this JPC is absolutely essential. The Supreme Court inquiry is no substitute, it is only an attempt at legitimisation and exoneration," Ramesh alleged.

Asked if attempts of a third front would undermine the fight against the BJP, Ramesh said right now the Congress is focused that its demand for JPC is met.

"Right now efforts are on to

ensure that our voices get heard and this false propaganda and canards that are being spread, this intimidation, this harassment that is being attempted against Mr Gandhi particularly, we are able to counter. All other issues can wait," he said.

Asked whether the Adani issue will resonate with the people at the ground, Ramesh said, "We have to do what we have to do."

The party has held press conferences across the country, raised three questions daily over the last about 31 days and will continue to raise them, the Congress general secretary said. "Mr Gandhi has spoken extensively on this in the Lok Sabha, Mr Kharge raised these issues extensively in the Rajya Sabha, although their remarks were subsequently expunged. So we will continue to do what we have to do. We believe these are fundamental issues," he said.

India, EU conclude another round of talks for proposed trade agreement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and the European Union (EU) has concluded the fourth round of talks for a comprehensive free trade agreement in Brussels, a move aimed at further strengthening economic ties between the two sides.

The next round of the talks is planned for 12-16 June here, India and the 27-nation bloc resumed negotiations on June 17 last year after a gap of over eight years on the proposed agreements on trade, investments and Geographical Indications (GI).

"Round 4 of India EU-FTA negotiations held at Brussels," Nidhi Mani Tripathi, Joint Secretary in the Department of Commerce has said in a tweet. She is



India's chief negotiator for the agreement.

India had started negotiations for a trade pact with the EU in 2007 but the talks stalled in 2013 as both sides failed to reach an agreement on key issues, including customs duties on automobiles and spirits and the movement of professionals.

India's merchandise exports to EU member countries stood at about USD 65

billion in 2021-22, while imports aggregated USD 51.4 billion.

A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory. Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

NIA arrests 13th accused in Phulwarisharif PFI case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday said it has arrested the 13th accused in the Phulwarisharif, Patna (Bihar) PFI case.

"Close on the heels of unearthing the hawala network in South India and arrest of 5 PFI operatives on 6th March 2023, the National Investigation Agency has arrested an accused, Md. Irshad Alam of Mehshi, East Champaran, Bihar yesterday (18.03.2023) in Phulwarisharif Bihar PFI case with the support of the Bihar Police," the NIA said in a statement.

Pursuing investigational leads, the NIA found that despite the ban on the PFI imposed on September 27, PFI leaders/cadres continued to propagate the ideology of vio-



lent extremism and were also arranging arms and ammunition to commit crimes, the agency said.

This case was registered in July 2022 when four accused persons were arrested as they gathered in the Phulwarisharif area of Patna for training and to carry out acts of terror and violence. Later, three more suspects were arrested in February this year.

PFI cadres in Phulwarisharif and Motihari had vowed to continue PFI activities in a clandestine man-

ner in Bihar and had also arranged a firearm and ammunition recently to eliminate a youth of a particular community in Bihar's East Champaran District, the NIA said.

Md. Irshad Alam who was arrested on Saturday, was in close association with accused Yakub Khan alias Usman, a Physical Education Trainer of PFI.

Accused Yakub Khan had posted incriminating videos on social media to spread communal flare-up. Subsequently Yakub, along with Md Irshad Alam and other associates, had planned to execute a targeted killing. Reece was conducted with the help of Irshad to carry out the attack. A firearm and ammunition were also arranged by Yakub Khan with the help of other arrested accused, it said.

Vedic Heritage portal to help researchers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will inaugurate the Vedic Heritage portal on Thursday with the twin agenda of helping researchers in deeper understanding of the Vedic knowledge tradition and help the common people to have a general understanding of the ancient scriptures.

The portal hosted by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts will be launched during the weeklong IGNCA Foundation Day celebrations that began on Sunday.

The IGNCA is celebrating its 36th Foundation Day from March 19 to 24 during which different cultural programmes, discussions and classical performances will be organized at its campus here. Member Secretary, IGNCA, Dr

Sachchidanand Joshi said Union Home Minister Amit Shah will inaugurate the Vedic Heritage Portal and the event will be attended by Culture Minister G. Kishan Reddy.

"This portal will not only help researchers to develop a deeper understanding about our Vedic knowledge tradition, but also help common people to have a general understanding about the Vedas. Vedas and Indian Knowledge system is not static but contemporary," Dr Joshi said.

He also informed that IGNCA is working on a project "Vrihatar Bharat" wherein the cultural linkages of India with 40 other countries is being compiled. Some of the countries of this project are SouthEast Asian Nations like Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia and others.

Govt making every effort for 360-deg development of dairy sector, says Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is making every possible effort for 360-degree development of the high-revenue earning dairy sector to ensure that it's not only the world's largest milk producer, but must also become the biggest dairy exporter.

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah's observations made at the Indian Dairy Summit, organised on the third and final day of the Indian Dairy Association's (IDA) 49th Dairy Industry Conference in Gandhinagar come in the backdrop of various schemes launched in the past few years to accelerate the dairy sector which has a huge potential.

Presently, our milk processing capacity is about 126 million liters per day, which is the highest in the world. We process 22 percent of our total milk production, which benefits the farmer in the form of increased income.



Shah was of the opinion that after the formation of 2 lakh primary milk production societies in the country, 33 percent of the world's milk production is likely to happen in India by 2033-34 and that for this the Central and State Governments along with cooperative movement need to work together.

"We have to move forward with the goal that by 2033-34 India should produce 33 percent of the world's milk with about 330 million metric tonnes milk production every year," he said.

"Today India's share in milk production has gone up to 21 percent and the Amul model has contributed a lot to this.

...Our dairy sector has progressed at an annual rate of 6.6 percent in the last decade," he said. Plans are afoot to establish rural dairies in 2 lakh panchayats in the country and then the growth rate of the dairy sector will reach 13.80 percent. Shah said that in the export of dairy products also products like milk powder, butter and ghee have a major share and there is immense potential in this while a

Multistate Cooperative Society set up for exports to be linked with these 2 lakh rural dairies, there is a possibility of increasing exports by 5 times.

In fact, to give a push to the dairies in the sector, Shah in 2021 had launched a scheme 'Dairy Sahakar', with an outlay of Rs 5,000 crore, wherein the dairy sector would get loans through National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC). Dairy Sahakar is a first ever and the only dairy focused comprehensive framework leveraging different schemes of the Centre.

Shah also pointed out that looking at the dairy scenario of the world, in 1970 India produced about 6 crore litres of milk per day and it was a milk deficient country. But now, he said, that this production has increased to 58 Crore litres per day in 2022 and the dairy sector has played a huge role in it.

He said that from 1970 to 2022 India's population has increased 4 times whereas milk production has increased more than 10 times.

G'gram fast emerging as favourite hub for medical tourism: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Millennium city, Gurugram is not only known for proliferating start-up firms, multinational giants and enterprising unicorns, it is fast emerging as a favourite hub for medical tourism as well, as per a study conducted by TR Life Sciences. It noted that the city's medical value tourism (MVT) market is estimated to be nearly Rs 900 crore, about 40 per cent of the entire Delhi-NCR market.

As per the study, the Indian MVT market stands at over Rs 27,000 crores and Delhi-NCR's share is around Rs 2,400 crore with Gurugram topping the list.

Orthopaedics, neuro and spine surgeries, oncology, cardiac surgeries, and transplants are the top five preferred segments by overseas patients.

"The city has emerged as



a favourite destination for medical tourism and patients from the Middle East, Africa, CIS, and SAARC countries, among others, have been visiting major super specialty hospitals located here.

With the increase in corporate hospitals, MVT has seen a boom and Gurugram has emerged as a major hub for it. Our team of researchers found that the big five specialties - orthopaedics, neuro and spine surgeries, oncology, cardiac surgeries, and transplants undertake nearly 80 per cent of overseas patients," said Raj Sehgal, Director-

Business Development, TR Life Sciences.

Gurugram has emerged as a preferred destination for quaternary care too. Quaternary care is an extension of tertiary care and cases require even more specialization, says the study. Trauma care is another segment where Gurugram has excelled. Super specialty hospitals in Gurugram perform over 500 trauma surgeries every month.

According to the study, strong community engagement and the state government's support with the campaign - "Haryana Vision

Zero" - had led to the city's excellence in trauma care.

Anurag Kashyap, Director-Finance & Strategy, TR Life Sciences, said leading private hospitals in Gurugram are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and advanced medical technologies and have highly qualified and experienced medical professionals.

"Apart from hospitals, Gurugram also has a vast network of private clinics and diagnostic centers that offer specialised medical services. Gurugram's hospitals have dedicated centers of excellence for key specialties. These factors attract a large number of domestic as well as overseas patients to the city.

Overall, the private healthcare sector in Gurugram is a significant contributor to the city's economy and a vital component of the healthcare system in the region," Kashyap said.

BJP raises poll pitch in Old Mysuru

Key to its dream to regain power in Karnataka

PTI ■ BENGALURU

With Assembly elections round the corner, the BJP is focused on the Old Mysuru region, where significant electoral gains are seen to be crucial for the party to come back to power in Karnataka on its own. For decades, the BJP has struggled to spread its wings in the Vokkaliga community-dominated Old Mysuru region, with the well entrenched JD(S) and Congress holding sway. The region comprises Ramanagara, Mandya, Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Kodagu, Kolar, Tumakuru and Hassan



districts. JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy and President of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) D K Shivakumar belong to this community.

Among the 58 Assembly seats in these districts, JD(S) represents 24, Congress 18 and BJP 15.

The BJP also has the backing of expelled BSP MLA N Mahesh, who represents Kollegal in Chamarajanagar district. In the Vokkaliga heartland of Mandya district, the JD(S) has six out of seven

MLAs, three of four MLAs in Ramanagara and six of the seven seats in Hassan. The JD(S) has four out of 11 seats in Mysuru, whereas the Congress has four and BJP three in this district.

The regional party also has three seats in Tumakuru but the party is wary about the Gubbi MLA S R Srinivas who allegedly voted in favour of the BJP candidate during the Rajya Sabha elections in June last year. The BJP top brass has acknowledged that improving the electoral tally in this region is key to regaining power on its

own steam. The party came to power in Karnataka four times and every time it emerged as the single largest party but fell short of the majority mark.

Twice, the party had to allegedly resort to 'Operation Lotus' to woo disgruntled opposition members and form a majority government.

The BJP, however, put up an impressive show in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, winning 25 of 28 seats. Shivakumar's brother D K Suresh won from Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency and JD(S) supreme and former prime minister H D Deve Gowda's grandson Prajwal Revanna emerged victorious in Hassan. To BJP's comfort, the party backed independent candidate Sumalatha Ambareesh won from Mandya constituency, which had always been a JD(S) citadel. The actor-turned-politician Sumalatha who defeated Deve Gowda's

grandson and former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil Kumaraswamy in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, extended her 'full support' to the BJP on March 11, a day ahead of Prime Minister's visit to Mandya to launch a slew of projects including the most ambitious one — Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway.

The inauguration could have been done either in Mysuru or Bengaluru, but the Prime Minister opted for Mandya. "The voters of Mandya hardly get carried away by emotional issues," a political analyst said.

The JD(S) suffered a blow when the KR Pet MLA K C Narayana Gowda ditched party during the "Operation Lotus" in 2019 and was among MLAs who resigned from Assembly, joined BJP and successfully contested by-election on a BJP ticket and became a minister.

Rahul to start Cong's poll campaign today

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will embark on a day's visit to poll-bound Karnataka on Monday to attend the 'Yuvakranti Samavesh' in Belagavi, the party said.

In view of the Assembly elections due by May, the former Congress president will participate in the event at Belagavi in northern Karnataka, a party release said on Sunday.

As per his itinerary, Rahul will arrive at Belagavi airport around 11 am and he will fly back to Delhi after the pro-



gramme.

The Wayanad MP will also hold a meeting with Congress leaders during the 'Yuvakranti Samavesh' in Belagavi, which is scheduled on Monday afternoon.

Besides, Karnataka Congress president D K

Shivakumar will participate in the 'Yuvakranti Samavesh' in Belagavi. The Congress leader will then travel to Kunigal on Tuesday where he will attend 'Praja Dhvani' event.

The Congress has announced three poll 'guarantees' — 200 units of free power to all households (Gruha Jyoti), Rs 2,000 monthly assistance to the woman head of every family (Gruha Lakshmi) and 10 kg of rice free to every member of a BPL household (Anna Bhagya). Party leaders have claimed that they will win about 140 to 150 seats in the 224-member Assembly in the forthcoming polls.

None can defeat BJP if Rahul is Opp face: Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee whose party has for long been projecting her as a Prime Ministerial candidate on Sunday renewed her attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for failing the hopes of Opposition unity saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi would remain undefeatable if Gandhi stood opposite him.

Banerjee who was addressing her party men said that "Rahul Gandhi is the biggest TRP for the BJP" and "till he projects himself as the face of the Opposition ... nothing can defeat Narendra Modi."

This was the reason why Gandhi was always in the Centre of saffron attack, she said. The BJP was forever trying to target Rahul Gandhi because "he is their biggest bet and they want him to remain in the leadership.

Still licking her wounds from her party's defeat in the minority-dominated Sagardighi Assembly by-elections where the Congress backed by the Left wrested back the seat from TMC which has in 2021 elections won the seat by a whopping 53,000 votes Banerjee trained her guns at Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury too saying he was in the payroll of the RSS.

"Adhir Chowdhury is an RSS pointsman who along with



the Left is misleading the minorities to help the BJP ... in this dirty game a lot of money is changing hands," she said.

Sagardighi, in Murshidabad district which accounts for about 65 percent of Muslim votes — otherwise regarded as Banerjee's mainstay in Bengal — seemed to have given the TMC the biggest jolt in its 12-year rule sending a message that its minority vote base was on the decline.

In an apparent effort to play on the minority feelings Banerjee also raised the Citizenship Amendment Act saying her party would never allow the CAA to happen in Bengal. She told her party men to go to the people with the message that "Didi will never allow CAA to take place in Bengal." PCC president Adhir Chowdhury immediately hit back at the Chief Minister slamming her for running a thoroughly corrupt government. "Her big leaders

including MLAs and even the former number two in her Cabinet is in jail on corruption charges," Chowdhury said adding "the minorities who had supported her wholeheartedly all these years have not understood that she is in reality a friend of the RSS."

"Speaking about her comments on Janpath he said, "she, like the BJP is nervous about the kind of support the Congress is getting these days and the kind of response the Bharat Jodo Yatra got and the kind of defeat that was handed out to her party at Sagardighi and so she is trying to break the opposition unity by attacking Rahul Gandhi."

Meanwhile in a parallel development an Asansol city court on Sunday sent senior state BJP leader and former Asansol Mayor Jitendra Tewari to 8-days police custody leading the saffron outfit to bring out a massive city in the second city of Bengal.

He was on Saturday arrested by Bengal Police from Noida. Tewari is facing charges in a stampede case where three persons died during a blanket distribution programme arranged by the BJP allegedly defying police objections. "I have been victimised and being sent to jail ... now you will see how many TMC men go to jail in the subsequent months," Tewari said.

Rijiju's 'anti-India gang' remarks attempt to threaten judges: Raut

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Ssanjay Raut on Sunday alleged that Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju's remarks that a few retired judges are part of an 'anti-India gang' are an attempt to pressure the judiciary and threaten judges.

Speaking at the India Today Conclave in the national capital on Saturday, Rijiju had claimed that a few retired judges and some activists who are "part of the anti-India gang" are trying to make the Indian judiciary play the role of the opposition party.

Reacting to the remarks while talking to reporters here, Raut said, "What kind of democracy is this? Does it suit a law minister to threaten the judiciary? It is a threat to judges who refuse to bow down to the government and it's an attempt to pressure the judiciary." Criticising the government doesn't mean being against the nation, Raut said.

The Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) MP also said that after Rahul Gandhi spoke about the threats to democracy in the country, there is now a move to get the Congress leader suspended from the Lok Sabha. To a ques-



tion on the demand that Gandhi should apologise for his comments, Raut said, "Rahul Gandhi will not apologise and why should he?" "Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders have in fact spoken against the country and its political leaders on foreign soil," he charged.

The BJP has been demanding an apology from Rahul Gandhi over his recent remarks he made in London, in which he 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 him 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.

Magisterial probe initiated into policeman's death in J&K's Kathua

Kathua/Jammu: A magisterial inquiry was started on Sunday into the death of a policeman shortly after his arrest by the Central Bureau of Investigation on corruption charges in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, officials said.

Head Constable Mushtaq Ahmad, a resident of Billawar, was allegedly caught red-handed on Saturday while taking a bribe of Rs 3000 at women police station in Kathua, a few hours before his death.

"On directions of deputy commissioner, Kathua, we have started magisterial probe into death of policeman and will submit our report in shortest possible time," Additional Deputy Commissioner, Vishav Partap Singh said.

Singh, who was tasked to conduct magisterial inquiry, supervised postmortem of deceased by a board of doctors at Government Medical College (GMC) hospital on Sunday. The body of deceased was handed over to his family for last rites after completion of formalities, officials said.

The relatives and neighbours of deceased policeman, including his wife and two children, were also present and demanded registration of an FIR against CBI in connection with his death. PTI

Why should you not be evicted, Visva Bharati asks Amartya

Land issue

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Visva-Bharati university has issued a notice to Nobel laureate Amartya Sen asking him to show cause why an eviction order will not be issued against him for not vacating a 13 decimal plot he is allegedly occupying illegally.

The noted economist was asked to reply to the notice by March 24 and appear before Ashok Mahato, the Joint Registrar and Estate Officer of the central university, personally or through a representative by March 29 along with evidence in support of Sen's assertion that he is not occupying any plot unauthorisedly. "In case you and your authorised representative fail to appear on the said date, the case may be decided ex-parte," the notice said.

The 89-year-old Sen, who is now abroad, or his family members could not be contacted for reaction. The university has been claiming that Sen is in possession of 1.38 acres of land on the Santiniketan campus, which is in excess of his legal entitlement of 1.25 acres. The economist has earlier asserted that



most of the land he is holding in the Santiniketan campus was purchased from the market by his father while some other plots were taken on lease.

"I hereby call upon you to show cause on or before March 24, 2023, why an order of eviction should not be made against you..." the estate officer said in the notice dated March 17, a copy of which was made available to the media on Sunday.

Visva-Bharati had in past two months sent three other missives to him reiterating that he has been occupying public premises illegally. "I call upon you to appear before me in person or through a duly authorised representative capable to answer all material questions connected with the matter, along with the evidence which you intend to produce in support of cause shown, on March 29, 2023, at 4:45 pm for a personal hearing," Mahato said in the university's latest communication.

Restoration scheme for pvt heritage properties finds few takers

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Seven years after the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) launched a scheme offering incentives for restoration and renovation of 2,692 privately-owned and institutional buildings recognised for their heritage value in the walled city, the owners of only 76 such structures have come forward to avail of it so far, an official said.

The administration says this tepid response could be due to lack of awareness and the time taken for the completion of paperwork required for the process.

These structures, a majority of which are residential buildings, give a distinct character to Ahmedabad as an urban settlement that has survived continuously for six centuries, and helped the city gain



recognition by UNESCO in 2017.

The old walled city of Ahmedabad is the first city in the country to be inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage City list for 2017. "The AMC conducted a survey between 2011-14 to select locally significant social and architectural buildings. Its purpose was to help retain and nourish the cul-

tural values in the old city and help Ahmedabad find a place in tentative world heritage nomination," said Ashish Trambadia, Director of the civic body's Heritage Department.

It was also the first time in India that private buildings were identified to be protected by building regulations, and mechanisms were created for

their protection, he said. These 2,692 structures, including 449 institutional and the remaining privately-owned ones, were identified and graded on the basis of their "heritage value" and a decision was taken to offer transferable development rights (TDR) to the owners as an incentive for retention of the heritage value of the structure and make the process viable for them, he said.

"Since the TDR policy came out in 2015-2016, and a single-window system came into being in 2019, the AMC received 76 applications from the owners of these structures," he said. He attributed the lower turnout to various factors, including lack of awareness, time taken in completing paperwork of ownership of properties transferred from generation to generation, and reaching out to the actual owners who have rented them, or

those who have retained the buildings but moved elsewhere to live. To address the issue of lack of awareness, the AMC installed round plaques outside the buildings, identifying them on the basis of their grades and giving the owners the pride that they are residents of the world heritage city, Trambadia said. "Restoration is not the kind of activity which everybody envisages every year.

There has to be a time gap of 15-20 years for any major restoration work," he said. To avail of the TDR, the private owners have to approach the AMC for permission for restoration. The experts of the city civic body guide them on what they can and cannot do as per the heritage value of the structure. "We don't want the buildings to be frozen in time.

There has to be a certain upgrade, there has to be better

toilets, kitchens, but without losing the heritage value. So we do a balance while the permission process is going on," he said.

The financial incentive offered is 50 per cent of the land value of the total built-up area of the building for grade-1 and 2A structures. For other grades, it is 30 per cent, little less based on their architectural values, he said.

While not many have been forthcoming to avail of the incentive, there are people who are passionate about the heritage buildings they own and took up the restoration work in earnest. Eighty nine-year-old Suresh Shah moved into his property three months after India gained Independence. Two years ago, he invested lakhs of rupees to get it renovated without compromising on its heritage value.

No one will be spared: J&K police on case of conman posing as PMO officer

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir Police on Sunday said action will be taken against everyone involved in providing perks and security cover to the conman who posed as a PMO official.

Kiran Bhai Patel from Gujarat has been arrested by police from a five-star hotel in Srinagar for posing as an 'additional secretary' in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and enjoying security cover besides other hospitality. He had three cases registered against him in his home state. Interacting with

reporters on the sidelines of an event here, the additional director general of police (ADGP), Kashmir, Vijay Kumar, said a case has been registered in the matter and investigations are being conducted.

"When the Srinagar Police got the information on March 2, the hotel was raided and the man was caught red-handed. Fake visiting cards were seized from him and he was arrested the same day after registration of a case," Kumar said. He said Patel was in police remand for 14 days during which "a rigor-

ous interrogation was done, and investigations were conducted". The Kashmir Police chief said the force is also taking help from Gujarat police.

"He (Patel) is now in judicial custody. Investigations are being conducted professionally. We are taking help from the Gujarat police also. No one will be spared," Kumar added. Asked how wasperson provided security on verbal orders when there were directions from MHA contrary to that, the ADGP said police is investigating the lapse. PTI

Visitors throng Tulip garden in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Hundreds of visitors on Sunday evening flocked Asia's largest Tulip garden overlooking the world famous Dal Lake after it was thrown open by the Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

Around 1.6 million tulips of 68 varieties have been planted in the garden this year to attract visitors. Lt-Governor Manoj Sinha personally invited tourists from all over the world to make a plan to witness the sublime beauty of nature.

Addressing the gathering of special invitees including investors from UAE during the



opening ceremony LG Manoj Sinha said, "I invite people from all over the world to visit J&K and discover the mesmerising beauty of 16 Lakh tulip flowers & enjoy the warm hospitality of our people."

He also directed the Vice Chancellor of SKUAST Kashmir to make arrangements for growing Tulip's planting material in J&K instead of relying on imports. The effort will ensure that J&K is able to tap the Rs 400 crores market of Tulips in the country, he added.

Sinha also patted the back of gardeners and all others who worked laboriously behind the scene to decorate the 30

hectares of Tulip garden.

The Tourism department is already expecting a heavy tourist influx this year as compared to last year. Last year, as many as 3.66 lakh tourists thronged the garden, which was the highest ever.

1.2 lakh tourists visited the kashmir valley in the month of February this year raising hopes of hoteliers and all other stakeholders of a buoyant tourism season ahead. The floriculture department has expanded the channel to the top of the garden. In addition, some fountains have been set up in the garden to make it more attractive.

Wrong portrayal

Norwegian Ambassador has rightly slammed Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway

It is not very often that ambassadors respond to a Hindi movie. But Norwegian Ambassador to India Hans Jacob Frydenlund did that last week when he slammed the Rani Mukerji-starrer Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway for “factual inaccuracies” and portraying “Norway as an uncaring country.” The movie is based on a real incident in 2011 when two children were removed from an Indian immigrant couple by the Norwegian foster system, supposedly due to differences in culture. Frydenlund made it clear that this doesn’t happen in his country. He went on to “categorically deny that feeding with hands and sleeping in the same bed would be the reason for placing children in alternative care.” In a newspaper article, he wrote that he himself fed his kids with his own hands and slept in the same bed. The Norwegian Embassy also said in a statement, “Children will never be taken 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.” At the heart of the issue are Indians’ excessive and unreasonable expectations from Western nations—and only from Western nations. For instance, non-Muslims are not allowed to worship in public in Saudi Arabia. Which filmmaker has been agitated by this fact?



A couple of points need to be highlighted here. A country has every right to preserve its conventions and traditions, customs and culture. How many Indians would relish the sight of immigrant Norwegians, Germans, etc., sunbathing in Haridwar, Varanasi, or Rishikesh? Or, for that matter, would Pakistanis tolerate similar spectacles at the Karachi beach? If the authorities in India and Pakistan enforce certain dress codes at beaches, they cannot be accused of being ‘xenophobic.’ Similarly, if European nations object to the night-long Bhagwati jagrans, with loudspeakers keeping the entire locality awake with bhajans, or ban azaan on loudspeakers, they should not be condemned as ‘racist’, intolerant, bigoted, etc. The second point to be made here is that there is always a price to be paid for any facility. Indians often laud the excellent social security system, especially in Scandinavian countries. They must also realise that all this comes at a cost—both financial and otherwise. A variety of freebies means that a lot of people have to be taxed highly, concomitantly, the role of the State increases; the result is stagnation. Sweden faced it in 1994, after which there was a paradigm shift in its economic policy. Then there are other costs: big State means big intervention not just in the economy but also in the lives of people. As former US president Gerald R Ford said, “A government big enough to give you everything you want is a government big enough to take from you everything you have.” Indians should never lose sight of these facts.

PICTALK



Tourists take shikara rides in the middle of Dal Lake during rains and clouds, in Srinagar

PTI

Digital devices are affecting sleep patterns

Overuse of digital devices causes sleep deprivation. It can play havoc with one’s health and can lead to anxiety and depression

Do you fall asleep with your smartphone or laptop? Or if you are having trouble sleeping, is it your smartphone that comes first in mind that you look forward to scrolling social media or binge-watching movies? Or do you depend on caffeine to get you through the day? ... if the answer to the questions stated is a clear Yes, then it’s high time to look into the matter as not getting enough sleep or having poor sleep quality has been linked to several health problems such as diabetes, blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and other health conditions.

As an individual, we have all grown up listening to the famous Irish proverb “A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor’s book.” But when it comes to today’s fast-moving technologically digitally advanced world, do we really adhere?

Today, technological devices such as computers, laptops, smartphones, notebooks and many more have become a crucial element in an individual’s daily life in terms of work and play but at



the same time, the time spent on these devices is harming sleep. According to the National Sleep Foundation, about 90 per cent of Americans regularly use their electronic devices in the hour before they go to bed. There is no denying the fact that technology has helped in facilitating education, communication, and entertainment but excessive and regular usage of these devices has interrupted the sleeping patterns of an individual. The devices used, emit short wavelength artificial blue light, overexposure of which results in difficulty to fall and remain asleep. Moreover, the blue light suppresses the body’s release of natural melatonin — a hormone that induces drowsiness. Delaying its release means spending more time awake, daytime sleepiness,

poor performance at work, anxiety, behavioural problems and above all greater difficulty in getting sleepy at night which might even lead to various diseases one being Insomnia. Also, the use of devices in the evening results in delayed Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep—the stage of sleep most critical for recovery, restoration of the mind, creativity and problem-solving skills.

Researchers from around the world have studied that sleep is an intricate and complex mechanism. Duration, Continuity and Depth of sleep are the key elements for good quality sleep. Adults need at least 7 hours of sleep while teens and young children might need even more as it helps them in their growth and development. What matters the most for the individual is to have quality sleep over quantity sleep. An individual might get seven-eight-hour of sleep but if that sleep is not proper and sound sleep then it will not only affect the mood but might even have a negative impact on mental health and physical well-being. Consistent sleep deprivation acts on the

body’s physical metabolism resulting in weight gain.

Sleep is the golden chain that connects the physical and mental well-being of an individual. It helps the body to repair itself, strengthens the immune system, consolidates memories, improves cognitive function and even regulates hormones, unlike irregular sleep which causes negative impacts on health and well-being.

Adopting healthy measures such as turning off electronic devices at least an hour before going to bed, reading a book (no Kindle) or a magazine, stretching in the evening before going to sleep, not drinking alcohol before going to bed, doing meditation, spending family time are a few ways through which an individual can minimize its screen time and feel much relaxed.

Only when an individual gets adequate sleep will the body be able to repair itself to promote training adaptations thereby impacting the motivation and work ethics that form the critical components for an individual.

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



SAKSHI SETHI

national dailies have reported that the Hindu community in Sind (Pakistan) are going to organise rallies that would converge on the Sind Assembly building by the end of the month. The objective is to protest against the rising incidence of forced religious conversions, abductions and child marriages of Hindus. The umbrella organisation under whose auspices this protest rally is to be held in the Darawer Ittehad, whose leader is Faqir Shiva Kuchi. That such protest and rallies have to be held clearly show that the Pakistanis have not yet learnt their lesson even after the acute economic crisis they are undergoing. Years ago, they could have discovered that landless they changed their ways, they would be headed towards such a crisis.



Arguably, this is one clue that a mainstream Muslim is not a natural businessman.

In the subcontinent, Muslim wealth was more in the land much less in business for the same reason. But not many Muslims notice this lacuna, except the likes of Prof. Timur Koran, an American scholar of Turkish origin. But before we come to him and his explanations, one factor of taqlid (orthodoxy) and its associated effects needs to be factored in. Education was not sufficiently encouraged in the community and certainly not among its womenfolk. An uneducated mother is often unlikely to realize the value of education. And a less educated society is unlikely to appreciate the value of economic education. This, in turn, causes a relative lack of awareness of the importance of business and industry.

Prof. Timur Kuran, a scholar of Turkish origin and professor of economics and political science at Duke University, in his book The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East, tells us that in the year 1000, the economy of the Middle East was at least as advanced as that of Europe. But by 1800, the region had fallen dramatically behind in living standards, technology, and economic institutions.

ONE OF THE MOST FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES OF PAKISTAN’S WARS WITH INDIA IN ITS FUTILE QUEST TO WREST KASHMIR HAS BEEN THE WIDE-SCALE ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN IN THAT COUNTRY

In short, the Middle East had failed to modernize economically as the West surged ahead. Prof. Kuran cites, the factors of frozen waqf assets which carry prohibitions of any change in their inheritance, a dominant medieval legal system, the failure to surmount weaknesses and transformations that were happening elsewhere and of course, the mechanisms that fuelled the ascent of the West, as among the chief reasons that kept the Middle East in a state of political and economic backwardness, and still continue to do so, the region’s oil wealth notwithstanding, as its flourishing was made possible only with Western technological and managerial assistance. Prof. Kuran’s analysis concludes that several self-enforcing elements of Islamic law-contracting provisions, inheritance system, and marriage regulations—jointly contributed to the stagnation of the Middle East’s commercial infrastructure.

Pakistani physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy in his article in Physics Today, published in 2007, laid out the stark reality of education, particularly science education in the world of his faith. Islamic countries (statistics of that year, though things are qualitatively no better

today) have nine scientists, engineers, and technicians per thousand people, compared with a world average of forty-one. Of the (roughly) 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, only two scientists have won Nobel Prizes in science (one for physics in 1979, the other for chemistry in 1999). Let us also take Pakistan’s case, which is in dire economic straits today. From 1951 to the 2020s, the country received over \$80 billion from the United States alone, with aid from other countries/agencies in the West and its Middle Eastern patrons being excluded. One would naturally ask: where did all that aid disappear, given the parlous condition in which Pakistan today is?

One of the most far-reaching consequences of Pakistan’s wars with India in its futile quest to wrest Kashmir has been the wide-scale economic slowdown in that country. The 1965 war ended whatever economic growth Pakistan had experienced during the early 60s. Its defence spending has risen to nearly 80% of its GDP, leaving nothing for development.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CALL FOR OPPOSITION N UNITY

Sir — With the 2024-Parliamentary Election in the offing, a ritualistic clarion call for yet another Third Front of the like-minded opposition parties, those thinking of taking on the formidable BJP, is in the air again even as a three-way scramble is on among the Congress-led group, the group led by the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her Telangana counterpart K Chandrasekhara Rao and the third group comprising Bihar CM Nitish Kumar with

Andhra Pradesh CM MK Stalin is on board as they are separately working in this regard. Being on the same page notwithstanding, this group trio harbours reservations over the Congress’s presence in the proposed Grand Alliance or the Third Front.

On the sidelines of his party’s two-day national executive meet in Kolkata, former UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav along with his uncle Shivpal Yadav also visited Trinamool Congress president Mamata Banerjee at her Kolkata residence on Friday where he cleared the air that the SP would have no truck with the Congress and, simultaneously, promised that his party’s friendship with them would continue.

WB Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also complained that on the one hand, the grand old party leaders say that TMC has links with the BJP and Adani while on the other, they expect the TMC to join hands with the Congress. At the end of the day, one will have to wait and watch as to which way this political cookie of the much-hyped Third Front crumbles this time around!

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

SC’S OBSERVATIONS IN SENA CASE

Sir — The arguments in the Constitution bench were completed by both factions of Shiv Sena and the decision is reserved without getting into the merits of the case I.

I would like to mention here the comments made by Justice P.S.Narasimha Justice Narasimha remarked that such an argument could sometimes be dangerous

Arrest warrant against Putin



The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued an arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin holding him responsible for the alleged war crimes in Ukraine. The accusation against Putin is the forced transfer of children from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

An arrest warrant has also been issued by the ICC against Russia’s Commissioner for Children Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for her “individual criminal responsibility” for the crimes.

War itself is a crime. War is a crime when any country goes offensive. War is a duty to defend the nation against external aggression. The ICC action does not follow the extradition of Putin and Lvova-Belova since the court does not have the power to arrest suspects. The action of the ICC is limited to exercising jurisdiction within countries that are signatories to the Rome Statute, the agreement that set up ICC. The arrest warrant clips the wing of Putin and he can be

technically arrested if he travels to ICC member states. Enforcement of arrest warrants is left to the international community. It means the warrant issued is not binding but left to the discretion of the international community. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and ICC have been reduced to just a showpiece.

They are paper tigers or snakes without teeth. Sarabjith Singh was tortured to death in Pakistan on cooked-up charges. Kulbhushan Jadhav has been languishing in Pakistan jail. UNSC has done precious little to get him released at least by conducting the formal enquiries in the International Court of Justice, Hague. The court’s president Piotr Hofmanski has washed off its hands by saying “the ICC is doing its part of work as a court of law”.

The ICC is not having a police force. If it can be hoped that the arrest threat can stall the ongoing war, it could have been done at the inception time of the war itself. Effectiveness can be seen only in veto power in UNSC. Taking advantage of the veto power, China has been consistently vetoing permanent seats to India in UNSC. Its demand of India for permanent membership in the UNSC does not get fulfilled so long as China continues to exercise its veto power against India.

KV Seetharmaiah | Bengalauru

observing there are many regional parties that are run by one family and there is absolutely no freedom in the party except for one leader. Justice Narasimha said that there is no scope for anyone else to come into the frame and the lawyer is interpreting the constitution to say that it’s just not possible for any legislator.

Yash pal ralhan | Jalandhar

EUTROPHICATION IS A SERIOUS THREAT

Sir — Eutrophication is an ailment of the ecosystem, a response to the addition of artificial or natural nutrients such as nitrates, potassium and phosphates through fertilizer (sewage, industrial wastes etc) that fertilize the aquatic ecosystem. It

is predominantly caused by the leaching of phosphate and nitrates containing fertilizers from agricultural lands and industries into lakes or rivers. The growth of green algae on the lake surface layer is the physical identification of eutrophication which not only makes aquatic plants and animals perish but also makes water unfit for drinking therefore awareness and prevention of eutrophication is important and imperative therefore the awareness program on eutrophication has to be carried out by concerned regime swiftly.

Vijaykumar HK | Raichur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

SOCIAL FESTIVALS BOOST CONFIDENCE

Social festivals and cultural programs help build children's confidence



POOJA HARLALKA

Social festivals and inter-school cultural programs serve as wonderful opportunities to support building children's confidence and interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills include the ability to communicate and interact effectively with others and confidence is the belief in our own self and our own abilities, both of which are essential for building positive relationships with others. In this article, we will look at a few ways these events lend themselves to helping build children's confidence and interpersonal skills.

Collaboration: Social festivals and inter-school cultural programs often require teamwork and collaboration between children. During these events, children are required to collaborate with several people and teams, including their own and from different schools and backgrounds. The collaboration occurs in different and over a period of time, while planning for the events and then during the event too. By working together towards a common goal, children learn to communicate effectively, share ideas, and resolve conflicts in a constructive manner. Developing these interpersonal skills also leads to children feeling successful and building their confidence.

Cultural Representation and Social Awareness: Social festivals and inter-school cultural programs provide children with exposure to different cultures, languages, and traditions, which can broaden their horizons and help them develop empathy and understanding towards others. Children may make new friends and connections, which can help them feel more connected to their community and develop a sense of belonging. These events are a great way of developing this as they bring a lot of children together, from different schools and backgrounds in a fun, relatable way, working together and thereby creating a sense of unity and camaraderie. These special interactions and experiences teach children to be more appreciative of diversity and differences and be more accepting, tolerant and inclusive, towards people from different walks of life. These events bring with them the potential for children to be representatives of their culture, sharing it with others and teaching them about it.



Creativity and Skills: Social festivals and inter-school cultural programs provide children with a platform to harness, grow and showcase their skills and talents beyond their daily classrooms. These typically range on a wide spectrum of different categories of creative expression and more, including and not limited to public speaking, dance, music, and trivia, performed in front of an audience. This experience can be incredibly empowering for children, as it helps them develop a sense of pride and accomplishment in their abilities. Performing in front of others also requires and builds courage, confidence and self-esteem. Being recognized for their effort, skills and talents will help children feel valued and appreciated. Receiving positive feedback can boost their self-esteem and help them feel more confident in themselves and their abilities and also encourage them to keep building on them further. In these social interactions, children not only learn the important skills of receiving positive feedback, but it also sets the stage for them to be able to appreciate others and generously give positive feedback.

These social festivals and inter-school cultural programs provide children with a unique platform where they have the ability to collaborate with, meet and socialise with peers from their own school and different schools, showcase their talents, and teach and learn about different cultures and traditions. It is important for schools and communities to support and encourage as much participation in these events as possible, as they can have a significant impact on a child's development and well-being. These skills are an essential part of our lives and often at the core of almost all aspects of our lives. Therefore, empowering our children by creating spaces to shape them, will serve them well throughout their lives.

(The writer is Head of Counselling/ Socio-Emotional Learning, at The Acres Foundation)

India's fundamentals are strong

Oscars for an Indian film and the best performance of Indian banks in a decade buttress the confidence in the Indian story

About a month back the Hindenburg story led to a series of reports expressing concerns and apprehensions about Indian Banks' exposure to a particular business house. The strong framework and resilience and of course the recent gains of the Indian Banking sector came under the radar. In no time the regulator made a statement saying that the size and robustness of the Indian banking system are too large and strong to be affected by a one-up incident. The banking sector in India is stable, and the various key parameters of banks such as capital adequacy, asset quality, liquidity, Provision coverage and profitability are healthy, the RBI added.

The entire nation heaved a sigh of relief, our banks are safe! But hardly the dust had settled something goes seriously wrong 8000 km away in Silicon Valley. The 40 years old Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), the 16th largest in the US, collapses. And subsequently, one more the Signature Bank (SB) too. As if this was not enough, we have another crisis. Credit Suisse, a global investment bank and financial services firm based in Zurich Switzerland is in news. Their shares closed lower by over 30 per cent on 15th March.

How do we read these developments? Let us start with SVB.

The fact remains that both SVB and SB failed at an enormous speed. Their failure in US banking history is two of the three biggest, the third being collapse of Washington Mutual in 2008. How could this happen? Although there are 08 types of core risks in banks viz Credit, Interest Market, Liquidity, Operational, Compliance/Governance and Reputational. SVB's failure had much to do with the Interest and Liquidity risk.

Interest Risk: A bank faces interest risk when the rates increase rapidly within a short period. This is what has happened in the US since March 2022. The Federal Reserve has been aggressively raising the rates. It has already done that by 4.5 per cent and it is likely the rate, which is now at 4.75 per cent, may reach 6 per cent soon to curb high inflation in the country. As a natural corollary, the yield on debt goes up commensurately. As the yield on security goes up the prices come down. SVB had a massive share of its assets, 55 per cent, invested in fixed-income securities.

Of course, interest rate risk leading to a drop in the market value of bonds is not a cause of concern as long as the owner can afford to hold on to it until maturity, hold till maturity (HTM). At that point, it can well collect the original face value without realizing any loss. The unrealized loss stays hidden in the bank's balance sheet and disappears over time. But if the owner has to sell the security before its maturity at a time when the market value is less the unrealized loss becomes an actual loss.

The SVB was forced to be in the latter situation. As there was mounting pressure from its customers to withdraw their deposits to meet their cash shortfalls SVB had to sell a substantial amount of its bond portfolio at a heavy loss. This brings us to a liquidity risk which is an after-effect of interest rate risk.

Liquidity Risk is the risk that a bank will not be able to meet its obligations when they become due without incurring losses. Customers of SVB were withdrawing their deposits beyond what it could pay using its cash reserves. So, to help meet its obligations the bank decided to sell \$21 billion

“THE ENTIRE NATION HEAVED A SIGH OF RELIEF; OUR BANKS ARE SAFE! BUT HARDLY THE DUST HAD SETTLED SOMETHING GOES SERIOUSLY WRONG 8000 KM AWAY IN SILICON VALLEY

(The Author is a former Banker and Senior Advisor with Indian Banks Association. Views expressed are personal)



of its securities at a loss of @1.8 billion. The drain on equity capital led the lender to raise over \$2 billion in new capital. The call to raise equity capital sent shock waves and led to a loss of confidence in the bank. This triggered more withdrawal.

A bank run like this can cause even a healthy bank to go bankrupt. This has happened in India also on a couple of occasions. In the digital age, it is even more possible because people can well withdraw money from their homes also. The Signature bank too faced a similar problem, as the SVB collapse prompted many of its customers to withdraw their deposits out of a similar concern over liquidity risk. The deposits of SVB and SB were uninsured to the extent of approx 90 per cent adds another dangerous dimension to the whole issue.

Even as the business model of SVB was different from that of Indian Banks in as much as the former's resources came more from the corporate sector whereas in India it is the retail/household who contribute to the deposits of the banking system to the extent of 63 per cent. These deposits are stickier with a duration from 6 months to five years and people do not move to G-sec quickly. On the assets, side loans are approx. 65 per cent of assets and investments 25 per cent. Besides, G-Secs from 18 per cent of total assets for private sector banks (PVBs) and 22 per cent for Public Sector Banks (PSBs). The investment pattern is also different. In India, out of every 100 rupees invested by banks, 65 rupees go to loans and 25 rupees towards bonds and other debt instruments. SVB had invested heavily in bonds/long-term securities to the extent of 55 per cent.

Credit Suisse: The shares of Credit Suisse hit an all-time low on 15th March leaving financial markets all over the world feeling distinctly uneasy. However, following the throwing of a lifeline by Swiss National Bank a \$54.5 billion life line to credit Suisse the shares have bounced back.

The move from the Swiss Central Bank comes just days after the US regulators had to take control of SVB and SB. HSBC took over the UK Arm of SVB for a nominal value. So, these are signs of turbulence in the global financial system. Cracks have indeed appeared in the financial pipes and will they burst as they did fifteen years ago?

The famous economist Nouriel Roubini, nicknamed "Dr Doom" for his usually pessimistic and sometimes correct predictions argues Credit Suisse could be another Lehman Brothers; too big to fail, too big to save. Larry Fink, the founder of the world's biggest asset manager, BlackRock, says we may be in for a "slow-rolling crisis which could see hundreds of small banks go bust in the US, like the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s. But one thing is clear international regulators have learned from the last crisis that speed is of the essence, which is just

as well. The US federal and Bank of England have indeed acted swiftly to find a solution.

These outbreaks of instability make it clear that when you reverse nearly 15 years of close to zero interest rate, as has happened in US and UK too suddenly things can break and we had an SVB and SB collapse. But it will not be a reality that the central bank ambulance will always arrive and will arrive in time whether in the West or the East.

SVB collapse is a textbook case of Asset-Liability mismatch- where short-term money is put to long-term use. This is reminiscent of what happened to the Indian mutual fund industry soon after the IL&FS crisis when various debt schemes invested short-term money into illiquid papers. The Global Trust Bank which failed and was merged with one of the PSBs in 2004 enthusiastically played in the capital market much beyond the statutory levels set by the regulators. It was involved in the stock market scam of 2001. Against the backdrop of Oscar awards after a long gap and at a time when the banks in India are gaining traction & about to end up with the best performance in a decade this fiscal and also when our governor has been awarded the "Governor of the Year" award for 2023 by the international publication Central Banking what is the Mantra. It is time for the continuation of quick action by the regulator and time for liberalization mixed with more regulations.

When Rheumatoid Arthritis affects your lungs

Rheumatoid Arthritis is more than just a joint disease. The inflammatory process also affects several other parts of the body

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a common inflammatory disease of the joints. It affects multiple joints, mainly small joints of the hands and wrists but also larger ones. It causes painful joints with stiffness that is typically more in the morning and progresses with time causing joint deformities and, ultimately, a crippling state. Effective treatments are available and therefore, early diagnosis and regular treatment with monitoring of disease activity are important to limit or prevent permanent damage.

Can Rheumatoid Arthritis cause lung disease?

RA is more than just a joint disease. The inflammatory process also affects several other parts of the body. The most frequently affected are



SK CHABRA

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the lungs, besides skin, eyes, digestive system, heart, and blood vessels. The lung conditions that occur in patients with RA are of several types. More than 25% of patients with RA will eventually develop lung conditions and diseases in their lifetime. If all patients with RA are screened for lung disease, even when there are no lung symptoms, more than half are found to have evidence of lung involvement.

Lung disease is next only to cardiac disease and cancer as the cause of death in patients with RA. Lung disease due to RA is a major contributor to a poorer quality of life besides mortality. Most often, lung disease follows joint involvement but rarely, RA may start as a lung disease and joint manifestations may follow later.

Lung diseases caused RA

The most common lung disease caused by rheumatoid arthritis is a shrinkage of the lungs, called Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD). Other lung conditions and diseases that can occur in RA include pulmonary nodules (one or more rounded masses of tissue, of various sizes, confusing the possibility of lung cancer), pleural effusion (protein-rich fluid in the sac around the lungs), pleural thickening, bronchiectasis (dilatation of lung airways causing pooling of secretions and lung infections), bronchiolitis (narrowing of airways deep in the lung), pulmonary hypertension (high blood pressure in lung arteries) and increased tendency for lung infections

like pneumonia. The drugs that are used to treat RA in general suppress immunity increasing the risk of lung infections.

What is an Interstitial Lung Disease?

ILDs are a group of conditions with diverse causations having in common a reduction in lung size due to fibrosis that usually worsens with time. RA is one of the more common causes of an ILD. There are several types of ILD patterns and treatment, prognosis and natural history differ according to the ILD pattern.

A patient with ILD develops breathlessness on exertion, initially on running or walking fast, especially up an incline. It progresses with time and, ultimately, even activities of daily living such as dressing, taking

a bath, or even taking food cause breathlessness. The oxygen levels in the blood decrease, in the early stages of exertion, and later, even at rest. These patients require home oxygen to keep their oxygen in the normal range. Dry cough is the other major symptom. Males, smokers, those with a long history of joint disease, more active joint disease, and older age are more prone to develop ILD but many patients of RA with none of these risk factors can also develop ILD.

ILD is diagnosed by features on chest examination, breathing tests called spirometry and diffusion capacity, and imaging including a plain chest radiograph and a high-resolution computed tomogram (HRCT) of the chest that provides the clue to the pattern of ILD.

The treatments for other lung diseases due to RA

Management of a large pleural effusion would require drainage with a chest tube or a video-assisted thoracoscopy which is a minimal-access surgery. Treatment of lung infections requires appropriate antibiotics. Narrowing of lung airways requires inhaled medicines.

Apart from drugs, breathing exercises, and nutritional supplementation as required are given as part of what is called pulmonary rehabilitation. This reduces breathlessness and improves exercise tolerance. The last resort for extensively scarred lungs is lung transplantation, a highly specialized and expensive surgery, now increasingly

available in different cities in India.

It is very important to give up smoking as well as avoid passive exposure and avoid exposure to air pollution. These patients are advised to get timely vaccination against influenza and pneumonia. Patients are encouraged to talk with their physician to make sure that the medications are optimal for their joint symptoms, side effects are managed, and that their lung health is monitored for early diagnosis and prompt action. Once you are diagnosed to have RA, an assessment for the presence of lung disease is advisable as early lung disease may not produce any symptoms. Early diagnosis holds the best promise for a good response.

Police register terrorism case against Imran, PTI leaders

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistani police on Sunday registered a terrorism case against Imran Khan and over a dozen PTI leaders for indulging in vandalism, attacking security personnel and creating unrest outside the judicial complex here ahead of a court hearing in a graft case involving the ousted premier.

Clashes erupted outside the Islamabad Judicial Complex on Saturday when Khan arrived in Islamabad from Lahore to attend a much-awaited hearing in the Toshakhana case. During the confrontation between Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers and police, over 25 security personnel were injured, prompting Additional District and Sessions Judge Zafar Iqbal to defer the court hearing till March 30. The case was registered against arrested PTI workers and wanted party leaders. About 17 PTI leaders were named in the FIR lodged by the Islamabad Police, Geo News reported.

The FIR states that the workers damaged the police check post and the main gate of the judicial complex, it said. As many as 18 people were arrested for arson, pelting stones and breaking the judicial complex's building, said the FIR. "About two police vehicles and seven motorcycles were burned, and the official vehicle of the station house officer (SHO) was damaged," it added.

Khan, 70, arrived in Islamabad from Lahore to appear before the court. He was accompanied by his supporters in a convoy. Soon after he departed for Islamabad to attend the hearing, over 10,000 armed Punjab police personnel stormed Khan's Zaman Park residence in Lahore and arrested dozens of his party workers.

The police personnel, using a power shovel, removed the



Supporters of former Prime Minister Imran Khan gather outside of the Khan house in Lahore, Pakistan, Sunday

PTI

Pak ex-PM vows legal action against cops

Lahore (PTI): Pakistan's ousted prime minister Imran Khan has vowed to take legal action against the security officials involved in a raid on his Zaman Park residence here and brutal beating of his party workers during the search operation.

While Khan was in Islamabad to mark his presence at a court on Saturday, over 10,000 armed Punjab police personnel launched a major operation at his Zaman Park residence and arrested dozens of his supporters. Police claimed to have seized weapons and petrol bombs

from Khan's house. Khan's supporters managed to take control of his residence late Saturday night when the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman returned from Islamabad after attending the hearing in the Toshakhana case. Heavy machinery was used by the Punjab police to break into Khan's residence. Khan's wife - Bushra Bibi - was present in the house during the police raid.

The 70-year-old former prime minister said that he would take legal action against the violation of the sanctity of the veil and the household.

barricades and tents at the entrance of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party chief's residence and evicted hundreds of his supporters camping there to prevent Khan's arrest in the Toshakhana case. They conducted a search at the house after demolishing

its main gate and walls. Punjab Police, whose action ended later, were reportedly met with resistance from PTI workers from inside, resulting in violence. About 10 workers were reportedly injured in the police operation in Lahore.

PTI leader Fawad

Chaudhry said on Sunday said the party will get cases registered against police officers involved in the "illegal operations" and violence at Khan's residence. "Today, a meeting of the legal team has been called. The way in which the police defied the Lahore High Court's decision entering Imran Khan's residence has trampled every rule of the home's sanctity. [things were] stolen. [They] also took away juice boxes. Innocent people were subjected to torture," he tweeted.

"Defying court order is unforgivable. The high court should guard its judgment. Cases are being registered on all police officers who conducted illegal operations and were involved in violence," he said. Earlier, Khan appeared before Lahore High Court on Friday and assured that he was ready to present himself on Saturday before Additional District and Sessions Judge (ADSI) Iqbal handling the corruption case against him. The PTI chief has been in the dock 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.

The cricketer-turned-politician was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in October last year for not sharing details of the sales. The top electoral 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.

Prachanda confident of winning vote of confidence

Kathmandu (PTI): Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Sunday exuded confidence that he will comfortably win a vote of confidence in the House of Representatives on Monday. Prachanda requires to seek a vote of confidence as two parties in the seven-party alliance - Rastriya Prajatantra Party and CPN-UML - withdrew support to the government. They refused to endorse Prachanda's proposal to back Nepali Congress leader Ramchandra Paudel for the post of president.

Prachanda comfortably passed the floor test on January 10 with 268 votes in the 275-member House of Representatives (HoR), after all parties except the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party and the Rastriya Janamorchha voted in favour of the government. Talking to reporters after coming out of Parliament building, Prime Minister Prachanda said that he hopes to get all the votes on Monday. "Last time, I received support from 99 per cent members of the House of Representatives, and I hope, this time I will get one hundred per cent votes," he said. Earlier, the prime minister told the alliance partners that he would go for a floor test on March 20.

The partners of the 10-party alliance are CPN-Maoist Centre, Nepali Congress, CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajwadi Party-Nepal, Janamat Party, Rastriya Jan Morcha, Nagarik Unmukti Party, Janata Samajwadi Party-Nepal, Loktantrik Samajwadi Party-Nepal, Nepal Samajwadi Party and Aam Janata Party. The Nepali Congress, the largest party in the HoR, has decided to vote in favour of Prachanda on Monday and join the government after the vote of confidence is passed.

19 killed, 30 injured in B'desh bus accident



PTI ■ DHAKA

At least 19 people were killed and 30 others injured on Sunday when a speeding bus crashed into a ditch in Bangladesh, officials said.

The Dhaka-bound bus operated by Emad Paribahan veered out of control on the Bangabandhu Expressway at 7.45 am in Madaripur's Shibchar, Police Superintendent Md Masud Alam said. The bodies of 14 people have been recovered from the spot, according to Madaripur Deputy Commissioner Rahima Khatun. She said that three others died on their way to hospitals. The injured, many in critical condition, were shifted to Shibchar Upazila Health Complex and Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment, she said.

The on-duty doctor at the DMCH declared two more dead. Many of the victims were from Madaripur as the bus from Khulna took passengers aboard in Madaripur.

"It is believed that the bus went out of control after one of its tyres was punctured. The front to mid portions of the bus sustained severe damage after the vehicle fell into the ditch,"

said Shiplu Ahmed, deputy assistant director of the Fire Service and Civil Defence in Faridpur.

"The accident tumbled the bus some 30 feet into the ditch," a local journalist told PTI from Shibchar, the scene of the accident which is nearly 80 kilometres from Dhaka.

SP Md Masud Alam said it was the gravest accident on the expressway since the launch of the Padma Bridge. "The bus accident is believed to have been caused by technical issues and speeding,"

The official said the process of handing over dead bodies was underway. A committee has been formed to investigate the incident and it will submit its report within two days, Khatun said.

The families of the dead will get Tk 25,000 each from the government to meet burial and other costs and the injured will receive Tk 5,000 each, she added. According to a report in the Daily Star, the bus was operating without any clearance for three months.

The fitness clearance of the vehicle — Dhaka Metro B-15-3348 — expired in January this year, sources at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) told the paper.

The bus, however, had a valid route permit and tax token, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the Highway Police suspected that speeding may have been one of the reasons behind the accident.

"We think the bus was speeding and the driver could not control the bus after one of its tyres leaked," said Taimur Islam, officer-in-charge of Bhanga Highway Police Station, who rushed to the spot after the accident.

"Everything will be revealed after investigation," he said, adding that speeding was rampant on this expressway, particularly in the area where the accident took place.

Md Sabuj Khan, the counter man of the Shonadanga bus counter, told the newspaper that the Emad Paribahan bus left for Dhaka with more than 43 passengers.

Road accidents are common in Bangladesh due to old and badly maintained vehicles and roads, as well as poorly trained drivers. The South Asian country is one of the countries having worst road crash records. According to Bangladeshi Passengers' Welfare Association, a record 9,951 people were killed in road accidents last year.

West Bank attack casts shadow over Israel-Palestinian talks

AP ■ CAIRO

Israeli and Palestinian officials were meeting on Sunday in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh in a bid to ease tensions between the sides and rein in a spiral of violence ahead of a sensitive holiday period beginning this week.

But as the talks continued, Israeli officials said two people were wounded, one seriously, in a West Bank shooting attack that immediately raised questions about the prospects for the new talks. The meeting was the second attempt by the sides, shepherded by regional allies Egypt and Jordan as well as the US, to end a year-long spasm of violence that has seen more than 200 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire and more than 40 Israelis or foreigners killed in Palestinian attacks.

Whatever progress emerged out of the previous meeting in Jordan late last month, which ended with pledges to de-escalate tensions, was quickly derailed when a new burst of violence erupted on the same day. A Palestinian

gunman shot and killed two Israelis in the occupied West Bank and Jewish settlers in response rampaged in a Palestinian town, destroying property and leading to the death of one Palestinian.

Sunday's shooting occurred in the same town — Hawara — as last month's violence. Israeli medics said a car was hit by gunfire — seriously wounding an Israeli man and lightly wounding his wife. The Israeli army said it shot a suspected Palestinian gunman, though his condition wasn't immediately known.

Bloodshed has been surging since last month's meeting in Jordan, making expectations for the second installment low. Sunday's shooting further lowered those expectations. Still, mediators want to ease tensions ahead of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins this week and which coincides next month with the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Ahmed Abu Zaid, a spokesman for the Egyptian foreign ministry, said Sunday's meeting would be attended by "high-level political and secu-

rity officials" from each side, as well as from Egypt, Jordan and the US. He wrote on Twitter that the talks are part of efforts to achieve and support calm between Israel and the Palestinians. Abu Zaid said regional and international participation in the meeting aims at establishing "mechanisms" to follow and activate what the parties agree on, but provided no additional details.

Sunday's talks are part of efforts to support "dialogue between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to work towards ceasing unilateral measures and escalation, and to break the existing cycle of violence and achieve calm," he said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made no mention of the summit in his weekly Cabinet meeting. Palestinian official Hussein al-Sheikh tweeted that the meeting was meant to "demand an end to this continuous Israeli aggression against us."

There was no immediate comment from Israel on the meeting, but Israeli media said senior security officials were set to attend.

Long-serving Montenegro President seeks re-election

Podgorica (AP): Voters in Montenegro are casting ballots on Sunday in a presidential election marked by political turmoil and uncertainty over whether the small NATO member state in the Balkans will unblock its bid to join the European Union or instead seek to improve ties with Serbia and Russia. Analysts predict that the first round of Montenegro's presidential election will not produce a clear winner and that incumbent Milo Djukanovic, 61, will face one of several challengers in a runoff vote in two weeks.

Though the presidency is largely ceremonial in Montenegro, the ballot is seen as a key indicator of popular sentiment ahead of a parliamentary election set for June 11. "I don't plan to lose this election and it can be expected that I lead my party at the parliamentary vote," Djukanovic said after casting his ballot.

"I believe there will be a runoff ... and that we will have a fair duel. I am convinced of my superiority," Djukanovic's opponents include a leader of

the staunchly pro-Serbia and pro-Russia Popular Front party, Andrija Mandic, economist Jakov Milatovic of the newly formed Europe Now group and former parliament speaker Aleksa Becic.

Observers say Milatovic, who served in the government elected after the 2020 parliamentary vote but later split from the ruling coalition, may stand the best chance of making it into the runoff against Djukanovic.

Milatovic said after he case his ballot that Djukanovic symbolizes "divisive policies of the past," and that the vote is crucial for a future Montenegro that will be "richer, more just, more beautiful and more equal."

Mandic said Djukanovic's removal from the presidency is the last step toward a full change of power. Djukanovic and his Democratic Party of Socialists led Montenegro to independence from Serbia in 2006, and defied Russia to join NATO in 2017. An alliance dominated by parties seeking closer ties with Serbia and Russia ousted DPS from power in 2020.

Oil pipeline with India vital in ensuring fuel security: Hasina

PTI ■ DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that her country's first cross-border oil pipeline with India will play a vital role in ensuring fuel security in Bangladesh at a time when the world was facing a serious energy crisis due to the Ukraine war. Hasina said this while virtually inaugurating with her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi the 131.5-km Bangladesh-India Friendship Pipeline on Saturday.

Terming India a "true friend" of Bangladesh, Hasina said she wanted this friendship to remain intact. The pipeline costing Rs 377 crore is part of energy sector cooperation between the two neighbouring countries through which Bangladesh will import petroleum, especially diesel from India. "When many countries across the world are on the verge of a fuel crisis due to the Russia-Ukraine war at that time this pipeline will play a vital role in ensuring the fuel security of our people," Hasina said. "The friendship pipeline is a milestone achievement in cooperation for



the development between the two friendly countries," she said. "Apart from ensuring fuel security, the pipeline will increase economic growth," she said. Hasina said the time and expenditure for importing diesel from India will be reduced significantly by this pipeline. "We have settled all our bilateral problems one by one... We are getting cooperation for our development from India," she was quoted as saying by the state-run United News of Bangladesh.

"We're importing 1160MW of power from India. Some more regional and bilateral initiatives in the power sector are under implementation. Our

cooperation to this end will be deep-rooted in the days to come," she added. "We will work jointly in the national and international arena. The historic and geographical bond will further consolidate the relations between Bangladesh and India," she said. Hasina also invited Indian investors to invest in her country. Modi also spoke at the event joining from his office. He said the pipeline will start a new chapter in India-Bangladesh relations. "The pipeline will aid faster development of Bangladesh and will be an excellent example of increasing connectivity between the two countries," he said.

The pipeline will run from the Siliguri-based marketing terminal of the Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) to the Parbatipur depot of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).

According to the deal, India will send 200,000 tonnes of oil annually in the first three years, 300,000 tonnes per annum in the next three years, 500,000 tonnes annually in the next four years and 1 million tonnes annually afterwards, bdnews24.com reported.

Netanyahu urges military chief to contain protest

Tel Aviv: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged the military's chief of staff on Sunday to contain a wave of protest from within the ranks over a contentious government plan to overhaul the judiciary.

Netanyahu's remarks come as Israel is embroiled in a major crisis that has sent tens of thousands of people into the streets protesting every week for the last two months.

The divide over Netanyahu's plans to change the legal system has not spared the country's military, its most trusted institution, where many reservists have pledged not to show up for duty under what they see as impending regime change.

Starting Sunday, more than 700 elite officers from the Air Force, special forces, and Mossad said they would stop volunteering for duty. The typ-

ically taboo talk of refusal to serve in a military that is compulsory for most Jews and is highly respected by the Jewish majority underlines how deeply the overhaul plan has divided Israel.

Netanyahu has rejected a compromise plan proposed by the country's ceremonial president meant to defuse the crisis.

He made no mention of reaching an agreement with opponents during the remarks to his Cabinet, instead saying he would not accept "anarchy," listing off demands that his security chiefs rein in road blockages by protesters, incitement against him and his ministers and the refusal to serve by a growing number of reservists.

"I expect from the military chief of staff and the heads of the branches of the security services to aggressively combat the refusal to serve.

Mysterious streaks of light seen in the sky over Calif

California: Mysterious streaks of light were seen in the sky in the Sacramento area on Friday night, shocking St. Patrick's Day revellers who then posted videos on social media of the surprising sight. Jaime Hernandez was at the King Cong Brewing Company in Sacramento for a St. Patrick's Day celebration when some among the group noticed the lights. Hernandez quickly began filming. It was over in about 40 seconds, he said on Saturday.

"Mainly, we were in shock, but amazed that we got to witness it," Hernandez said in an email. "None of us had ever seen anything like it."

The brewery owner posted Hernandez's video to Instagram, asking if anyone could solve the mystery. Jonathan McDowell says he can. McDowell is an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics. McDowell said

Saturday in an interview with The Associated Press that he's 99.9 per cent confident the streaks of light were from burning space debris.

McDowell said that a Japanese communications package that relayed information from the International Space Station to a communications satellite and then back to Earth became obsolete in 2017 when the satellite was retired.

The equipment, weighing 310 kilograms (683 pounds), was jettisoned from the space station in 2020 because it was taking up valuable space and would burn up completely upon reentry, McDowell added.

The flaming bits of wreckage created a "spectacular light show in the sky", McDowell said.

He estimated the debris was about 40 miles high, going thousands of miles per hour. AP

French pension protests mostly calm, uncollected trash grows

Paris (AP): A smattering of protests against President Emmanuel Macron's plan to raise France's retirement age from 62 to 64 took place Saturday in Paris and beyond, as uncollected garbage continued to reek in the streets of the French capital amid a strike by sanitation workers. Largely non-violent protests were held in various cities, including Nantes and Marseille, where protesters got past police to occupy the main train station for around 15 minutes. In the eastern city of Besancon, hundreds of demonstrators lit a brazier and burned voter cards. In Paris, an eerie calm returned to most of the French capital after two consecutive nights of unrest. Police banned gatherings on the Champs-Élysées avenue where protesters tossed an effigy of Macron into a bonfire as a crowd cheered Friday night.

Millions of dead fish wash up amid heat wave in Australia

AP ■ CANBERRA



Millions of fish have washed up dead in southeastern Australia in a die-off that authorities and scientists say is caused by floods and hot weather. The Department of Primary Industries in New South Wales state said the fish deaths coincided with a heat wave that put stress on a system that has experienced extreme conditions from wide-scale flooding. The deaths were likely caused by low oxygen levels as floods recede, a situation made worse by fish needing more oxygen because of the warmer weather, the department said.

Residents of the Outback town of Menindee complained of a terrible smell from the dead fish. "We've just sort of started to clean up, and then this has happened, and that's sort of you're walking around in a dried-up mess and then

you're smelling this putrid smell.

It's a terrible smell and horrible to see all those dead fish," said Jan Denning, a local.

Nature photographer Geoff Looney found huge clusters of dead fish near the main weir in Menindee on Thursday evening. "The stink was terrible. I nearly had to put a mask on," Looney said.

"I was worried about my own health. That water right in the top comes down to our pumping station for the town. People north of Menindee say there's cod and perch floating

drown the river everywhere." Mass kills have been reported on the Darling-Baaka River in recent weeks.

Tens of thousands of fish were found at the same spot in late February, while there have been several reports of dead fish downstream toward Pooncarie, near the borders of South Australia and Victoria states.

Enormous fish kills occurred on the river at Menindee during severe drought conditions in late 2018 and early 2019, with locals estimating millions of deaths.

Putin visits Mariupol

AP ■ KYIV

Russian President Vladimir Putin has visited the occupied port city of Mariupol, his first trip to the Ukrainian territory that Moscow illegally annexed in September. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Putin arrived in Mariupol late Saturday after visiting Crimea, a short distance southwest of Mariupol, to mark the ninth anniversary of the Black Sea peninsula's annexation from Ukraine. Mariupol became a worldwide symbol of defiance after outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian forces held out in a steel mill there for nearly three months before Moscow finally took control of it in May.

The visits, during which Putin was shown chatting with local residents in Mariupol and visiting an art school and a children's center in Crimea, were a show of defiance by the Russian leader two days after a court issued a warrant for his arrest on war crimes charges. Putin has not commented on the arrest warrant, which deepened his international isolation despite the unlikelihood of him facing trial anytime soon. The Kremlin has rejected the move by the International Criminal Court as "legally null and void."

The trip also came ahead of a planned visit to Moscow by Chinese President Xi Jinping this week, expected to provide a major diplomatic boost to Putin

in his confrontation with the West. Putin arrived in Mariupol by helicopter and then drove himself around the city's "memorial sites," concert hall and coastline, Russian news reports said. The state Rossiya 24 channel on Sunday showed Putin chatting with locals outside what looked like a newly built residential complex, and being shown around one of the apartments. Following his trip to Mariupol, Putin met with Russian military leaders and troops at a command post in Rostov-on-Don, a southern Russian city some 180 kilometers further east, and conferred with Gen. Valery Gerasimov who is in charge of the Russian military operations in Ukraine. Peskov said.

Peskov told reporters that the trip had been unannounced, and that Putin intended to "inspect the work of the (command) post in its ordinary mode of operation." Speaking to the state RIA agency Sunday, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin made clear that Russia was in Mariupol to stay. He said the government hoped to finish the reconstruction of its blasted downtown by the end of the year.

"People have started to return. When they saw that reconstruction is under way, people started actively returning," Khusnullin told RIA.

When Moscow fully captured the city in May, an estimated 100,000 people remained,

out of a prewar population of 450,000. Many were trapped without food, water, heat or electricity. Relentless bombardment left rows upon rows of shattered or hollowed-out buildings.

Mariupol's plight first came into international focus with a Russian airstrike on a maternity hospital on March 9 last year, less than two weeks after Russian troops moved into Ukraine.

A week later, about 300 people were reported killed in the bombing of a theater that was serving as the city's largest bomb shelter. Evidence obtained by the AP last spring suggested that the real death toll could be closer to 600.

A small group of Ukrainian fighters held out for 83 days in the sprawling Azovstal steel works in eastern Mariupol before surrendering, their dogged defense tying down Russian forces and coming to symbolize Ukrainian tenacity in the face of Moscow's aggression.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, a move that most of the world denounced as illegal, and moved on last September to officially claim four regions in Ukraine's south and east as Russian territory, following referendums that Kyiv and the West described as a sham.

The ICC on Friday accused Putin of bearing personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.



Russian President Vladimir Putin, center, Governor of Sevastopol Mikhail Razvozhayev, left, and Metropolitan of Pskov and Porkhov Tikhon Shevkunov, right, visit the Children's Art and Aesthetic center in Sevastopol, Crimea on Saturday. AP/PTI

Vucic plays ICC arrest warrant against Putin

Belgrade (Serbia): Issuing an international arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin will have negative consequences and will only prolong the war in Ukraine, Serbia's president said on Sunday.

The International Criminal Court issued the warrant for the Russian leader on Friday, accusing him of war crimes. The ICC accused him of bearing personal responsibility for the abductions

of children from Ukraine during Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour that started almost 13 months ago. But Serbian populist President Aleksandar Vucic, who had in the past boasted about his personal relation with the Russian leader, criticised the court's decision. "I think issuing an arrest warrant for Putin, not to go into legal matters, will have bad political consequences and it says that

there is a great reluctance to talk about peace (and) about truce" in Ukraine, Vucic told reporters in Belgrade.

"My question is now that you have accused him of the biggest war crimes, who are you going to talk to now?" Vucic said.

"Do you really think that it is possible to defeat Russia in a month, three months or a year?" he asked, adding: "There is no

doubt that the goal of those who did this is to make it difficult for Putin to communicate, so that everyone who talks to him is aware that he is accused of war crimes."

Asked if Putin would be arrested if he comes to Serbia, Vucic said that it is "a pointless question, because it is clear that as long as the conflict (in Ukraine) continues, Putin has nowhere to go." AP

Ecuador-Peru earthquake: At least 15 killed

AP ■ QUITO (ECUADOR) /VATICAN CITY

Juan Vera lost three relatives when a strong earthquake that shook parts of Ecuador and Peru on Saturday brought down his niece's home. The government has offered to pay for the woman's funeral and those of her baby and her partner, but Vera wonders why local authorities allowed his relatives to live in such an old home to begin with.

"Because of its age, that building should have been demolished already," Vera said outside the morgue in Ecuador's community of Machala, where he was waiting for the three bodies to be released. "... I'm sorry, the mayor's office is the entity that has to regulate these things through its planning departments so that the buildings are in good condition to be rented out or inhabited." The earthquake with about 6.8 magnitude, as reported by the US Geological Survey, killed at least 15 people and brought down homes and buildings in vastly different communities, from coastal areas to the highlands. But in Ecuador, regard-



A police officer looks up next to a car crushed by debris after an earthquake shook Cuenca, Ecuador, Saturday. AP/PTI

less of geography, many of the homes that crumbled had a lot in common:

They housed the poor, were old and did not meet building standards in the earthquake-prone country. By Sunday, the number of people injured in Ecuador was reported to be at least 446. The earthquake centred just off the Pacific Coast, about 50 miles (80 kilometres) south of

Guayaquil, Ecuador's second-largest city. One of the victims died in Peru, while 14 others died in Ecuador, where authorities also reported more than 300 damaged homes, schools, health care centers and other buildings.

The office of Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso reported that 12 of the victims died in the coastal state of El Oro and two in the highlands

state of Azuay. One of the victims in Azuay was a passenger in a vehicle crushed by rubble from a house in the Andean community of Cuenca, according to the Risk Management Secretariat, Ecuador's emergency response agency. In El Oro, the agency also reported that several people were trapped under rubble.

POPE OFFERS PRAYER FOR QUAKE VICTIMS

Pope Francis offered prayers on Sunday for the victims of an earthquake that shook vast swaths of territory in Ecuador and parts of Peru. During his weekly Sunday noon blessing, Francis recalled that the 6.8-magnitude temblor caused "death, injuries and heavy damage".

"I'm close to the Ecuadorean people and assure them of my prayers for the dead and suffering," Francis said. Saturday's quake killed at least 15 people, injured hundreds and brought down homes and buildings in vastly different communities, from coastal areas to the highlands. At least one of the deaths was in Peru.

Seoul (AP): North Korea launched a short-range ballistic missile toward the sea on Sunday, its neighbors said, ramping up testing activities in response to ongoing U.S.-South Korean military drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal.

The North's continuation of missile tests showed its determination not to back down, despite the U.S.-South Korea exercises, which are the biggest of their kind in years. But many experts say the tests are also part of North Korea's bigger objective to expand its weapons arsenal, win international recognition as a nuclear state and get international sanctions lifted. The missile launched from the North's northwestern Tongchangri area flew across the country before it landed in the waters off its east coast, according to South Korean and Japanese assessments. They said the missile traveled a distance of about 800 kilometers (500 miles), a range that suggests the weapon could target South Korea.

The chief nuclear envoys from South Korea, Japan and the U.S. discussed the launch on the phone and strongly



condemned it as a provocation that threatens peace on the Korean Peninsula and in the region. They agreed to strengthen their coordination to issue a firm international response to the North's action, according to Seoul's Foreign Ministry. South Korea's military said it will proceed with the drills, the U.S. on Sunday flew at least one long-range B-1B bomber for joint aerial training with South Korean warplanes, according to South Korea's Defense Ministry.

North Korea is highly sen-

sitive to the deployment of B-1Bs, which are capable of carrying a huge conventional weapons payload.

It responded to the February flights of B-1Bs by test-launching missiles, whose ranges showed they can reach some military airbases in South Korea. Japanese Vice Defense Minister Toshiro Ino said the missile landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone and that there were no reports of damage to vessels or aircraft in the area. He said the missile likely showed an irregular trajectory, a possible reference to North Korea's highly maneuverable, nuclear-capable KN-23 missile that was modeled on Russia's Iskander missile.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the latest launch doesn't pose an immediate threat to the U.S. territory or its allies.

But it said the North's recent launches highlight "the destabilizing impact of its unlawful" weapons programs and that the U.S. security commitment to South Korea and Japan remains "ironclad." The launch was the North's third round of weapons tests since

Kuwait court annuls 2022 parliamentary election

Dubai: A Kuwaiti court on Sunday annulled the results of a parliamentary election held last year, saying it would reinstate the previous slate of lawmakers elected in 2020. The decision by Kuwait's Constitutional Court, reported by the state-run KUNA news agency, threw more chaos into the politics of this small, oil-rich nation on the Persian Gulf. In its decision, the court cited "discrepancies" in the decree dissolving the 2020 parliament for its ruling. Authorities did not immediately explain what this meant for Kuwait's parliament. Kuwait has the freest and most active assembly among the Gulf Arab states, but political power is still largely concentrated in the hands of the ruling Al Sabah family, which appoints the prime minister and Cabinet, and can dissolve the assembly at any time.

In September, voters sent conservative Islamist figures and two women to the assembly in the second election in less than two years. The election results were seen as a mandate for change amid a prolonged period of gridlock between the Cabinet and the 50-member assembly. AP

N Korea launches missile into sea

Syrian Prez in UAE to mark ongoing thaw in relations

Beirut: Syrian President Bashar Assad arrived in the United Arab Emirates on Sunday, his first visit to the wealthy Gulf country since the devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria last month. Assad, who arrived with his wife, Asma, and a delegation of Syrian officials, was received by UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, according to a statement from Assad's office.

Sheikh Mohammed said in a statement on Twitter that the two "held constructive talks aimed at developing relations between our two countries." The visit marks a continuation in the ongoing thaw of relations between Syria and other Arab countries, more than a decade after the 22-member Arab League suspended Damascus' membership over Assad's brutal

crackdown on protesters and later on civilians during the war.

International sympathy following the quake appears to have sped up the regional rapprochement that had been brewing for years. Before the tragedy, the UAE had already reestablished ties with Damascus. Assad's first visit to the UAE since the 2011 outbreak of the Syrian civil war was last year, followed by another visit in January of this year. After the earthquake, the UAE's foreign minister visited Damascus, and the Gulf country sent dozens of aid shipments to Syria.

Damascus hopes that the regional reconciliation will unlock long-awaited funds to rebuild the battered country. However, analysts said it is unlikely to happen on any large scale for now. AP

Silicon Valley Bank collapse concerns founders of colour

Silicone Valley: In the hours after some of Silicon Valley Bank's biggest customers started pulling out their money, a WhatsApp group of startup founders who are immigrants of colour ballooned to more than 1,000 members. Questions flowed as the bank's financial status worsened. Some desperately sought advice: Could they open an account at a larger bank without a Social Security Number?

Others questioned whether they had to physically be at a bank to open an account, because they're visiting parents overseas. One clear theme emerged: a deep concern about the broader impact on startups led by people of colour.

While Wall Street struggles to contain the banking crisis after the swift demise of SVB —

the nation's 16th largest bank and the biggest to fail since the 2008 financial meltdown — industry experts predict it could become even harder for people of colour to secure funding or a financial home supporting their startups. SVB had opened its doors to such entrepreneurs, offering opportunities to form crucial relationships in the technology and financial communities that had been out of reach within larger financial institutions.

But smaller players have fewer means of surviving a collapse, reflecting the perilous journey minority entrepreneurs face while attempting to navigate industries historically rife with racism. "All these folks that have very special circumstances based on their identity, it's not something that

they can just change about themselves and that makes them unbankable by the top four (large banks)," said Asya Bradley, a board member of numerous startups who has watched the WhatsApp group grapple with SVB's demise. Bradley said some investors have implored startups to switch to larger financial institutions to stymie future financial risks, but that's not an easy transition.

"The reason why we're going to regional and community banks is because these (large) banks don't want our business," Bradley said. Banking expert Aaron Klein, a senior fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution, said SVB's collapse could exacerbate racial disparities.

Mexico Prez holds rally ahead of polls

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador held a massive rally in Mexico City's main plaza attended by tens of thousands of people Saturday. Though it was called to commemorate Mexico's 1938 expropriation of the oil industry, many of those attending the Saturday rally agreed that it was the de-facto opening salvo to the 2024 elections that will choose the president's successor.

It may be one of the last rallies that will be headed by López Obrador, who is known for his folksy style and charisma. The process to nominate a presidential candidate for his Morena party will begin later this year. After that, the party's candidate is likely to take cen-

tre stage. But most agree that few of the presidential hopefuls can match the popularity of a president whose approval ratings are routinely above 60 per cent. That is especially true for the Morena party, which was largely built around López Obrador.

Alberto Martínez, 59, said he hoped Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum would be the party's nominee.

"We like her education, her prudence," Martínez said. But he would settle for anyone Morena choose. Most polls show Sheinbaum as the front-runner in the race, followed by Foreign Relations Secretary Marcelo Ebrard.

"The important thing is for the ideology of López Obrador to continue," Martínez said.

Fight over science holds up UN climate report

Berlin: A Publication of a major new United Nations report on climate change is being held up by a battle between rich and developing countries over emissions targets and financial aid to vulnerable nations. The report by hundreds of the world's top scientists was supposed to be approved by government delegations Friday at the end of a weeklong meeting in the Swiss town of Interlaken.

The deadline was repeatedly extended as officials from big nations such as China, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, as well as the United Nations and the

European Union haggled through the weekend over the wording of key phrases in the text.

The report by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is meant to cap a series of digests vast amounts of research on global warming compiled since the Paris climate accord was agreed in 2015.

A summary of the report was approved early Sunday, but three sources close to the talks have told The Associated Press that there is a risk that agreement on the main text

may need to be postponed to a later meeting. They spoke on condition of anonymity due to the confidential nature of the talks.

The unusual process of having countries sign off on a scientific report is intended to ensure that governments accept its findings as authoritative advice on which to base their actions. At the start of the meeting U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on delegates to provide "cold, hard facts" to drive home the message that there's little time left for the world to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees

Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) compared with pre-industrial times.

While average global temperatures have already increased by 1.1 Celsius since the 19th century, Guterres insisted that the 1.5-degree target limit remains possible "with rapid and deep emissions reductions across all sectors of the global economy."

Observers said the IPCC meetings have increasingly become politicised as the stakes for curbing global warming increase, mirroring the annual U.N. climate talks that usually take place at the end of the year. AP



People carry models of Gods during the Melasti, a purification ceremony at a sunset in Kuta beach, Bali, Indonesia on Sunday. The ritual, which is performed ahead of the Balinese Hindu's Day of Silence, is held to purify the universe from bad influences, bad deeds and bad thoughts. AP/PTI

GST dept to scrutinise I-T, MCA data to identify entities not paying taxes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST department will soon begin analysing ITRs filed by businesses and professionals and also MCA filings to ascertain if the entities are adequately discharging their GST liability and widening the taxpayer base.

Currently, there are 1.38 crore registered businesses and professionals under the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which was launched on July 1, 2017. Businesses in manufacturing and services sectors with annual turnover of more than Rs 40 lakh and Rs 20 lakh, respectively are required to register themselves under the GST and file tax returns.

"We will be doing data triangulation based on the information available with the I-T department. If as per the analysis, the entities which should be paying taxes under GST are not doing so, then initially we will be sending a gentle inquiry," an official told PTI.

The data analysis will focus on those entities which are not exempt and are required to register under the GST and file returns, either monthly or quarterly. After identifying the entities which are not complying with the GST law, the GST department will communicate to them at their registered place of business asking them the reasons for non-compliance.

The official further said that the data analysis wing will also sift through the quarterly and annual data filed by businesses with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to find out if any GST evasion is taking place.

Matching of the I-T department and



GST data would be the first phase, followed by MCA filing matching, the official said. "We will soon start with matching the Income Tax data," the official said.

Several services sectors, including recognised educational institutions, agriculturists, electricity transmission or distribution companies, medical services by clinics are exempt from GST.

Total number of Goods and Services Tax (GST) evasion cases has gone up this fiscal with 13,492 cases detected till February, up from 12,574 cases last fiscal and 12,596 cases in 2020-21, as per data disclosed by the Finance Ministry to Parliament.

The total evasion detected between July 2017 to February 2023 stood at close to Rs 3.08 lakh crore, of which over Rs 1.03 lakh crore has been realised. GST authorities have arrested 1,402 persons for evading taxes in the last five-and-a-half years.

The tax department has been using robust data analytics and artificial intelligence to identify and track risky taxpayers and detect tax evasion; sharing of data with

partner law enforcement agencies for more targeted interventions; and mandatory Aadhaar-based authentication for new GST registrations as well as centralised suspension of registrations of registered persons who default in timely filing of returns.

With the anti-evasion measures and improved compliance, the monthly GST revenues have come in more than Rs 1.4 lakh crore for 12 months straight in a row. GST revenues were over Rs 1.49 lakh crore in February.

A nationwide GST, which subsumed 17 local levies like excise, service tax and VAT and 13 cesses, was rolled out on July 1, 2017.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said connecting GST numbers with the filings under income tax law and corporate laws will bump up the data points available for big data analytics. This will help in swifter identification of the short payment of taxes. "Government agencies are scurrying towards converging different data sources to enhance compliance levels across all platforms," Mohan said.

Hindenburg fallout: Adani suspends work on ₹34,900 cr petchem project

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Group has suspended work on a Rs 34,900 crore petrochemical project at Mundra in Gujarat as it focuses on resources to consolidate operations and address investor concerns following a damning report by a US-based short seller, sources said.

The group's flagship Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL) had in 2021 incorporated a wholly-owned subsidiary, Mundra Petrochem Ltd for setting up a greenfield coal-to-PVC plant at Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) land in Kutch district of Gujarat.

But after Hindenburg Research's January 24 report alleging accounting fraud, stock manipulations and other corporate governance lapses chopped off about USD 140 billion from the market value of Gautam Adani's empire, the apples-to-airport group is hoping to claw back and calm jittery investors and lenders through a comeback strategy.

The comeback strategy is based on addressing investor concerns around debt by repaying some loans, consolidating operations, and fighting off allegations. The group has denied all allegations levelled by Hindenburg. As part of this, projects are being re-evaluated based on cashflow and finance



available. And of the projects the group has decided not to pursue for the time being is the 1 million tonne per annum Green PVC project, two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

The group has shot off mails to vendors and suppliers to "suspend all activities" on immediate basis.

In the mails, seen by PTI, the group has asked them to "suspend all activities of the scope of work and performance of all obligations" for Mundra Petrochem Ltd's Green PVC project "till further notice."

This is the following "unforeseen scenario". The management, it said, was "re-evaluating various project/s being implemented at group level in different business verticals. Based on future cashflow and finance, some of the project/s are being re-evaluated for its continuation and revision in timeline."

Reached for comments, a group spokesperson said AEL

will be evaluating the status of growth projects in primary industry vertical over the coming months.

"The balance sheet of each of our independent portfolio companies is very strong. We have industry-leading project development and execution capabilities, strong corporate governance, secure assets, strong cashflows, and our business plan is fully funded. We remain focused on executing our previously outlined strategy to create value for our stakeholders," the spokesperson said.

"AEL will be evaluating the status of growth projects in the primary industry vertical over the coming months".

The unit was to have a poly-vinyl-chloride (PVC) production capacity of 2,000 KTPA (kilo tonne per annum) requiring 3.1 million tonne per annum (MTPA) of coal that was to be imported from Australia, Russia and other countries.



Top 10 most valued firms lose ₹2.09L cr in m-cap

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Market capitalisation (m-cap) of the top-10 most valued companies eroded by over Rs 2.09 lakh crore last week, with Reliance Industries and TCS taking the biggest hit amid an overall weak trend in equities.

On a weekly basis, domestic equity benchmarks witnessed heavy selling. The 30-share BSE Sensex plummeted 1,145.23 points or 1.93 per cent.

Corporate major Reliance Industries' m-cap plunged Rs 67,722.33 crore to Rs 15,04,001.93 crore.

IT bellwethers TCS' market valuation tumbled Rs 55,654.17 crore to Rs 11,63,194.14 crore and that of Infosys nosedived Rs 21,250.8 crore to Rs 5,97,905.17 crore.

The valuation of State Bank of India (SBI) diminished by Rs 16,108.93 crore to Rs 4,72,290.46 crore and that of ITC tanked Rs 15,226.12 crore to Rs 4,66,696.21 crore.

M-cap of telecom major Bharti Airtel slumped by Rs 9,053.44 crore to Rs 4,22,177.07 crore and that of HDFC Bank declined by Rs 9,882.11 crore to Rs 8,77,318.09 crore.

HDFC also witnessed a dip of Rs 8,063.79 crore in its market valuation, which stood at Rs 4,69,460.45 crore.

Private sector lender ICICI Bank's m-cap declined Rs 4,396.91 crore to Rs 5,83,983.07 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) slipped by Rs 3,465.65 crore to Rs 5,75,273.92 crore.

In the ranking of top-10 firms, Reliance Industries retained the title of the most-valued firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Infosys, ICICI Bank, HUL, SBI, HDFC, ITC and Bharti Airtel.



India's power consumption rises 10% in Apr-Feb

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's power consumption surged 10 per cent to 1375.57 billion units (BU) during April-February this fiscal year and has already surpassed the level of electricity supplied in entire 2021-22.

The government data showed that power consumption in April-February 2021-22 was 1245.54 BU.

In entire fiscal year 2021-22, power consumption was 1374.02 BU, which is less than 1375.57 BU recorded during April 2022 to February 2023 period.

Experts say power consumption is expected to grow in double digits in the coming months in view of forecasts of unprecedented high demand, especially in summer.

The power ministry has estimated peak power demand in the country at 229 GW during April this year, which is higher

than 215.88 GW recorded in the same month a year ago.

The ministry has taken many steps to meet high power demand and also asked state utilities to not go for power cuts or load shedding.

The ministry has also asked all imported coal-based power plants to run on full capacity from March 16, 2023, to June 15, 2023. Besides, it has asked other thermal power generators to import coal for blending with domestic dry fuel.

Experts say higher economic activities would boost commercial and industrial demand in the coming months.

Besides, they opined that scorching heat during summer would result in higher consumption of power for running air conditioners and other cooling appliances. They are of the view that it would be a challenge to meet unprecedented high demand of electricity in India April onwards.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid an uncertain global macro environment, top IT firms are also dealing with change of guard and senior level transitions involving some of the most high-profile faces in their companies.

While attrition at lower level has made headlines in the past, this time around it is the senior leadership churn in companies such as TCS and Infosys that is in the spotlight.

Infosys has seen two president-level exits in a matter of months, with Ravi Kumar and Mohit Joshi leaving the company to join top tier IT firms

Cognizant and Tech Mahindra, respectively.

Last week, Tech Mahindra announced the appointment of Joshi as MD and CEO-designate, who will take over the charge from CP Gurnani after his retirement on December 19 this year.

On Thursday, the country's largest software services firm Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in a sudden announcement said Rajesh Gopinathan, its CEO for more than six years with over four years left to his second five-year term, has decided to move on from September 15.

The USD 25-billion software giant announced that K



Krithivasan, president of its BFSI vertical which contributes 31.5 per cent of its top-line, will head the company as the CEO-designate with immediate effect.

Overall, the churn in many companies is a culmination of a lot of factors coming together at

Govt invites application for RBI Deputy Governor post

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry has initiated the process to appoint a new Reserve Bank deputy governor in place of MK Jain, whose extended term is coming to an end in June.

The applicant should have an experience of 15 years in banking and financial market operations, said a public notice, indicating that candidates from the private sector will also be considered for the appointment.

Traditionally, one of the four deputy governors is from the public sector banking indus-

try. If the government decides to appoint someone from the private sector, it would be a first for the Reserve Bank of India.

Jain, a senior public sector banker, was appointed deputy governor for an initial period of three years in 2018 and extended by another two years in 2021. The central bank has four deputy governors — two from within the ranks and one commercial banker and an economist to head the monetary policy department.

"It may be noted that the Financial Sector Regulatory Appointments Search Commit-

tee (FSRASC) is free to identify and recommend any other person also, based on merit, who has not applied for the post. The committee may also recommend relaxation in the eligibility and qualifications/experience criteria, in respect of outstanding candidates," the notice said.

According to the notice, applicants should have extensive experience as a full-time director or board member and possess an understanding, at a very senior level, of supervision and compliance in the financial sector.

FSIB to soon start selection process for new LIC chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB), the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions, may select a new chairman of insurance behemoth LIC this month. The chairman will be selected from the four managing directors of the company, sources said.

According to sources, the bureau may conduct an interview for the position towards the end of next week if all members of the committee are available.

FSIB is likely to make a selection this month, subject to the availability of members due to Parliament's Budget session, sources said. The final decision on the FSIB recommendation will be taken by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It can be noted that one of the managing directors BC Patnaik retires on March 31. The government has already appointed Tablesh Pandey as his replacement.

Layoffs in US will bring lot of work to India, says GlobalLogic CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Layoffs by Big Tech in the US are expected to bring a lot of work to India and the country's IT sector is poised to gain significantly during the slowdown, a top official of the US-based firm GlobalLogic said.

In an interview to PTI, GlobalLogic President and CEO Nitesh Banga said the company is looking to acquire talents in India and plans to grow its employee base by 25-35 per cent every year.

He said India is not going to see much of a slowdown even as there are a lot of layoffs happening in the US.

"If Google, Twitter or Facebook or any of these customers actually lay off people in the US, it's not that they don't need to build products. They still need to continue to do their work and I believe that a lot of that work will come to India, because they will still need the talent to keep doing the work, although they will look for cost efficiencies," Banga said.

The Hitachi group IT company has close to 15,000 or



approximately 50 per cent of its global employee base, in India.

"We hire close to 1,000 people a month. Out of that, 50 per cent is in India. So, we are hiring close to 500 people at any given point in time in India. Every year, the number will continue to go up by 25-35 per cent," Banga said.

The company hires IT and IT-enabled service segment engineers with 2-3 years of experience and then upskills them to become digital engineers.

"The kind of work that we do is very cutting edge, deep product development, be it embedded technologies, cloud,

network or apps. What we do is very different from a traditional IT services company," Banga said.

He said that a premium luxury carmaker designed its gesture-based car experience system in Bengaluru, and 80 to 90 per cent of aircraft engine design and new generation efficient engines design is being done in India.

Banga said there is a conversation that international firms are planning to set up 500 new GCC (global capability centres) or engineering centres in India in the next three years.

"So, the equation is no longer about cost arbitrage, but it is about value arbitrage and skill and talent capabilities. There is a temporary slowdown in the war for talent. We do see this war for talent continuing to scale up for India," he said.

The company was acquired by Hitachi for USD 9.6 billion in July 2021.

Banga said that integration with Hitachi has added new industry verticals to GlobalLogic like energy, railways, mobility and connected industry.

Special steel production under PLI schemes to save forex outgo: Faggan Kulaste

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic production of special steel under PLI schemes for specialty steel will help cut down imports of value-added products and save forex outgo, Union Minister Faggan Singh Kulaste said.

As many as 27 companies have signed 57 agreements with the government under the first edition of the production-linked incentive (PLI 1.0) scheme for specialty steel.

To promote the production of special types of steel in the country and to imbibe the concept of self-reliant India, "Our government launched PLI scheme for Specialty Steel to become Atmanirbhar in specialty steel output and increase its capacity," Kulaste told PTI.

The domestic production of special grades of steel will not only reduce the country's dependence on imports but also save forex outgo worth thousands of crores, he said.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After the Paytm's IPO fiasco, Sebi has turned cautious while giving clearance to the initial share sales as it has returned the preliminary papers of half a dozen companies, including Oravel Stays, which operates hospitality chain OYO, in over two months.

These companies have been asked to re-file their draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) with certain updates.

Apart from OYO, the firms whose draft papers have been returned by the regulator are -- Go Digit General Insurance Ltd, a firm backed by Canada-based Fairfax Group; home-grown mobile maker Lava International; B2B payments and services provider Paymate India; Fincare Small Finance Bank India and integrated services company BVG India, according to an analysis of data with Sebi.

The six companies had filed their preliminary initial public offering (IPO) papers with Sebi between September 2021 and May 2022 and their papers were returned during January-March (till March 10).

Together, these companies were hoping to raise at least Rs 12,500 crore.

Sebi has become stricter in its approach while giving its go-ahead to IPOs after investors lost their money in some of the high-profile initial shares in 2021 and according to data compiled by Primedatabase.Com, the average time taken by the markets regulator in approving an IPO in 2022 was 115 days. "After the IPO fiasco following the listing of new age digital companies like Paytm, Zomato and Nykaa in which investors lost heavily, Sebi has tightened the approval norms for IPOs. This is welcome and is in the interest of investors," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

However, ultimately investors have to apply their minds while applying for IPOs and avoid high-priced issues, he added.



while applying for IPOs and avoid high-priced issues, he added.

One97 Communications, the parent entity of digital payments firm Paytm, made a disappointing debut on the bourses in November 2021. The company's Rs 18,300-crore IPO was the biggest on Dalal Street after Coal India. The digital payment firm stock was still trading 72 per cent lower from its issue price.

Prakhar Pandey, Founder and CEO of Moolaaah, believes that the recent move by Sebi gives a strong message to merchant bankers to fully comply with the set of information required to furnish the draft prospectus, and disclose all material information required well in advance, rather than a complete back and forth between the bankers, IPO-bound firms and regulators.

Earlier, Sebi continued to give grace periods to most firms, to file their full set of compliant documents, which used to lead to a high gestation period, as high as four months as of last year. This could lead to a big distortion in terms of the IPO price band, he added.

So far this year, only nine companies have approached Sebi with their draft IPO papers amid extremely volatile market conditions and jittery investors' sentiments.

Moreover, only two companies -- Divgi Torqtransfer Systems and Global Surfaces -- have floated their initial share sales to raise Rs 730 crore since the beginning of the year, while Udayshivkumar's Rs 66 crore-

IPO is slated to open next week. This came after 38 companies collectively garnered close to Rs 59,000 crore through IPOs in 2022, which was much lower than Rs 1.2 lakh crore mopped up by 63 companies in 2021, which was the IPO year in a decade.

The overall collection in 2022 would have been much lower had it not been for the Rs 20,557 crore-LIC public offer, which constituted as much as 35 per cent of the total amount raised during the year.

Investors remained jittery throughout 2022 on recessionary fears and rising interest rates amid soaring inflation.

Experts believe that some activity on the IPO front could only be seen in the second half of financial year 2023-24.

"A host of factors like rising interest rates, a global banking crisis, FPI outflows, slow economic growth, taming inflation, and certain governance issues across large corporations with low earnings and high valuation multiples, are driving factors for the correction in the market."

"These challenges, once fully tackled, is when we might see private companies hitting public markets, probably in the second half of FY24, and existing IPO applications at Sebi might want to wait out this period of lull, to derail these pessimistic market sentiments," Pandey said.

Considering the turbulence in the market now, only attractively priced good companies will get a good response from investors, Geojit's Vijayakumar said.

BOPANNA BECOMES OLDEST INDIAN WELLS CHAMPION

PTI ■ INDIAN WELLS

India's Rohan Bopanna became the oldest ATP Masters 1000 champion when he and his Australian partner Matt Ebden claimed the men's doubles crown at the BNP Paribas Open here.

The 43-year-old Bopanna and Ebden, 35, defeated top-seeded Wesley Koolhof of the Netherlands and Neil Skupski of Britain 6-3, 2-6, 10-8 in the final on Saturday.

"Truly special. It's called Tennis Paradise for a reason," said Bopanna, who was playing in his 10th ATP Masters 1000 final.

"I've been, over the years, coming here and seeing all these guys win for so many years. I'm really happy that Matt and I were able to do this and get this title here.

"It's been some tough matches, close matches. Today we played against one of the best teams out there. Really happy that we got the trophy."

Bopanna thus surpassed Daniel Nestor of Canada, who had claimed the 2015 Cincinnati Masters to become the oldest champion at the age of 42.

"I spoke to Danny Nestor and I told him sorry I'm going to beat his record," he joked. "Winning the title, that stays with me, so really happy with that."

It was the 43-year-old's fifth Masters 1000 doubles title and first since he won in Monte Carlo in 2017. This was the third final of the year for the Indo-Australian duo. He now holds 24 tour-level trophies in his cabinet.

The Indo-Australian pair stunned defending and two-time desert titlists John Isner and Jack Sock in the semi-finals, while getting the better off Canadian singles stars Felix Auger-Aliassime and Denis Shapovalov in the quarters.

Bopanna and Ebden had defeated Rafael Matos and David Vega Hernandez in their opening match.

A former World No. 3, Bopanna jumped four places to No. 11 in the Pepperstone ATP Live Doubles Rankings.



Alcaraz sets desert duel with Medvedev

AP ■ INDIAN WELLS

Former world number ones Carlos Alcaraz and Daniil Medvedev will battle for a first Indian Wells ATP Masters 1000 title after straight sets semi-final victories on Saturday.

Spain's second-ranked Alcaraz, the top seed who can return to the summit with a third Masters 1000 title on Sunday, defeated 13th-ranked Italian Jannik Sinner 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 to reach his third final of

2023. After a season start delayed by injury, Alcaraz has won the title in Buenos Aires and reached the final in Rio de Janeiro last month.

Meanwhile, Medvedev is riding a 19-match ATP win streak and seeking his fourth title in as many tournaments after victories in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai.

The sixth-ranked Russian - who had never made it past the fourth round at Indian Wells -- survived a late surge from Frances Tiafoe for a 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) victory

over the 16th-ranked American.

In control for most of the match, Medvedev needed eight match points to finally put it away with an ace on his final opportunity. "I'm just really happy that I managed not to lose this match and not to have regrets, nightmares, whatever," Medvedev said.

Alcaraz, who beat Sinner in an epic five-setter on the way to the US Open title last year, had gained the upper hand on the Italian with an early first-set break, but he gave it



back with a sloppy game that featured four unforced errors and allowed Sinner to level the set at 4-4. With Alcaraz suddenly struggling, Sinner held for 5-4 and piled on the pressure with a set point at 6-5 that Alcaraz saved with a with a drop shot followed by a textbook volley winner.

A reinvigorated Alcaraz powered through the tiebreaker, sealing the set with a backhand cross court winner, and broke Sinner in the second game of the second set -- seal-

ing the break with a dazzling lob.

Up 4-2, Alcaraz got out of a 0-30 jam with the aid of three straight unreturnable serves, and he closed it out with a confident game that he opened with an ace and finished with a thundering forehand winner.

"Playing against Jannik is never easy," Alcaraz said. "I knew that I had to increase my level. It was really close the first set.

"On the second I calm down the nerves, played more relaxed and (that) was the key of everything."



Rybakina takes aim at Sabalenka again

AP ■ INDIAN WELLS

Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina will be out to turn the tables on Aryna Sabalenka on Sunday when they clash for the Indian Wells title in a rematch of the Australian Open final won by the Belarusian.

Reigning Wimbledon champion Rybakina has lost all four career meetings against Sabalenka -- but all four have gone the distance with Sabalenka closing strong in a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory in Melbourne to seize her first Grand Slam title.

Rybakina, ranked 10th in the world, knows precisely the challenge she's facing -- and what she needs to do to meet it.

"I lost the last four times and it was always three sets," she said. "I think just to play better in these important moments and hold the serve, because I think few times it was just because of one break.

"It's not going to be an easy

match and it's going to be in these clutch moments I just need to play better."

As in Melbourne, Rybakina is through to the final after an upset victory over world number one Iga Swiatek.

Swiatek, whose eight 2022 titles included the French and US Opens, was the defending Indian Wells champion, but Rybakina beat her convincingly, winning the majority of Swiatek's first serve points as she converted all five of her break opportunities.



Milan fall at Udinese despite Ibrahimovic's goal record

AP ■ MILAN

Zlatan Ibrahimovic became the oldest goalscorer in the history of Serie A on Saturday but couldn't stop AC Milan from falling to a 3-1 defeat at Udinese.

Ibrahimovic, 41, was in Milan's starting line-up for the first time since January last year and smashed home a penalty at the second attempt in first-half stoppage time to make the score 1-1 following Roberto Pereyra's ninth-minute opener.

But it wasn't enough to stop fourth-placed Milan from losing their fourth match away from home in their last five and miss the chance to move provisionally second in Italy's top flight. Stefano Pioli's team stay fourth, two points behind local rivals Inter Milan in second in the race for the Champions League.

They will drop out of the top four if Roma win the Rome derby with Lazio on Sunday evening while Inter face fierce rivals Juventus hoping to steal a

march on their rivals for Europe's top club competition.

"When a team plays like this it means the coach hasn't done his job. We played way below our standard," Pioli told Sky.

"We not in a good position in the league and getting into the top four is so important for us... We've not done enough over the last few weeks."

Wearing the captain's armband Ibrahimovic missed his first spot-kick but was given a second chance when Beto was penalised for encroachment, and thumped his shot down the middle of the goal.

At 41 years and 166 days old Ibrahimovic overtook former AC Milan defender Alessandro Costacurta -- who also netted against Udinese in 2007 aged 41 -- as the oldest scorer in Italy's top flight.

He had previously made three substitute appearances this season after being sidelined since May last year, following reconstructive surgery on the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

AP ■ MADRID

Antoine Griezmann pulled the strings for Atletico Madrid as they shredded Ruben Baraja's helpless Valencia 3-0 in La Liga on Saturday.

The French forward opened the scoring for the hosts at the Metropolitano and continued his own superb form with another fine display at the heart of Diego Simeone's side.

Yannick Carrasco doubled Atletico's lead early in the second half and Thomas Lemar sealed the win, with the Rojiblancos, third, moving six points clear of fourth-placed Real Sociedad, having played a game more.

The defeat leaves the trou-

bled Los Che 17th, level on 26 points with Getafe, 18th, who host Sevilla on Sunday.

Atletico recorded a fifth win in six La Liga games and tightened their hold on third place with a confident display, the kind they could not find in the first half of the campaign.

"Before the World Cup nothing was going for us, and now everything is," Atletico midfielder Marcos Llorente told DAZN.

"The team is happy, and looking forward to keep on winning games, and the objective is to finish as high as we can.

"We know all we have left is La Liga so we will try to climb ranks. Above us we have big teams, why not try and catch



Everton earn valuable draw at Chelsea

AP ■ LONDON

Ellis Simms grabbed a last-gasp equaliser as struggling Everton boosted their fight for Premier League survival with a dramatic 2-2 draw against Chelsea on Saturday.

Sean Dyche's side were moments away from a damaging defeat until Simms scored his first goal for the club to stun Stamford Bridge into silence.

Everton's show of defiance came after they twice trailed in west London.

Joao Felix had put Chelsea ahead early in the second half with his second goal since joining on loan from Atletico Madrid in January.

Abdoulaye Doucoure's equaliser was followed by Kai Havertz's third goal in his last three appearances as the German converted penalty in the closing stages.

Simms was on loan at Championship side Sunderland earlier this season, but the 22-year-old showed he could be Everton's saviour



in the relegation battle with his crucial leveller.

Everton are now two points clear of the relegation zone after extending their unbeaten run to three games.

"We threw Ellis in against Liverpool and he struggled a bit but he's maturing into it. He's got pace and power and it was a nice finish," Dyche said.

"A lot has been made of lacking strikers here but I've said all along it's a team mentality. There is certainly talent. We're laying down a base to work from."

It was a bitter pill for Chelsea to swallow as Graham Potter's team squandered the chance to clinch a fourth successive win in all competitions.

"We thought we played well enough to get the three points but ultimately if you don't defend well, you don't get the result," Potter said.

"We lost duels in the box and when you lose the duels, there is danger. We have to do better."

Haaland hits another hat-trick as Man City beat Kompany's Burnley

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Burnley manager Vincent Kompany endured a nightmare return to Manchester City on Saturday as Erling Haaland scored his sixth hat-trick of the season in a 6-0 rout that sent Pep Guardiola's men into the FA Cup semi-finals.

Kompany, who won four Premier League titles in an 11-year career at City as a player, was given a hero's reception at the Etihad.

But on the pitch City showed no mercy towards their former captain as Haaland took his tally for the season to 42 goals.

Julian Alvarez also scored twice and Cole Palmer netted the other goal as City remained on course for a treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup.

were put to the sword in a 7-0 thrashing in the Champions League in mid-week.

The Norwegian has now scored at least a hat-trick in six of his 19 appearances at the Etihad this season.

"It's been a good couple of games -- important games. (To win) 7-0 and 6-0 before the national team break is impressive. I'm really happy," said Haaland.

"I think we're in the part of the season where we should be at our best." Burnley are storming towards a return to the Premier League in Kompany's first season in charge.

But the Championship leaders were shown the gulf they have to bridge next season by a clinical City display.

"It is always a place I am proud to come back but I was also proud to come here with Burnley," said Kompany.



The visitors had started the brighter of the two sides but were undone once Haaland opened the scoring by prodding home Alvarez's pass on 32 minutes.

Moments later it was 2-0 as Phil Foden was released down the left to square for Haaland to stroke home.

City's number nine completed his hat-trick on the rebound after Foden's shot came back off the post.

His remarkable form has overshadowed Alvarez's excellent start to his City career.

The Argentine World Cup winner signed an extended contract at the Etihad this week celebrated with a double of his own from two Kevin De Bruyne assists.

In between times, Palmer scored City's fifth with a simple tap-in after Bailey Peacock-Farrell parried Foden's cross.

Reus hints at Dortmund contract extension



AP ■ DORTMUND

Borussia Dortmund captain Marco Reus, whose contract expires in the summer, on Saturday suggested he will extend the deal at his boyhood club.

Speaking after scoring twice in Dortmund's 6-1 home win

over Cologne which sent the home side top of the Bundesliga table, Reus hinted an announcement was forthcoming.

"I've said it regularly that I want to end my career here. I feel really good," Reus told Sky.

"It took a while for me to get back (from injury), but I feel good and we will see.

"We're in talks and everything else will become clear in the coming weeks."

Asked if he as captain could encourage some of the club's other stars, including English teenager Jude Bellingham, to stay past the summer, Reus said "you need to ask Sebastian (Kehl)", Dortmund's sporting director.

"I don't have any influence over that unfortunately."

HISTORIC HUMILIATION

Michelin-star performance by Australia's two Mitchells as India suffer 10-wicket defeat

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Australian pace ace Mitchell Starc's devastating bowling (5/53) and openers Mitchell Marsh (66 not out) and Travis Head's (51 not out) smashing unbeaten 121-run opening partnership helped the visitors thrash India by 10 wickets to level the three-match ODI series 1-1 here on Sunday.

The Australians, set a lowly 118-run target to win the match, completed the job with 234 balls to spare, making it India's worst-ever defeat in the 50-over format in terms of number of deliveries.

After recording their fourth-lowest total at home and overall third lowest against Australia in ODIs, Indian bowlers were in for an uphill task. They, however, couldn't do much on a pitch assisting seam and swing bowling, where Starc and Co. Had earlier looked virtually unplayable.

Questions will be asked about India's preparations for the ODI World Cup, to be held in the country later this year, following the morale-shattering loss. But for now, it was all about how quickly Marsh and Head could end India's misery on Sunday.

Marsh turned out to be the lead aggressor, smashing six boundaries and as many maximums off just 36 balls, while Head wasn't too far behind, scoring his 51 off just 30 deliveries with 10 boundaries to complete India's misery.

This was Australia's second 10-wicket win over India in ODIs.

If Starc and Co. Picked up the frailties in India's batting line-up on seaming wickets quite fast, Marsh continued from where he had left off in the first ODI at Mumbai, bringing up his second consecutive fifty of the series.

The ultra-aggressive approach from Marsh and Head saw Australia race to 66 in the first six overs bowled by Mohammad Shami and Mohammed Siraj. The Indian quicks failed to find similar assistance from the surface and conditions that had earlier glad-



dened the Australian bowlers' hearts.

The fate of the series will now be decided in the third ODI, to be played in Chennai on March 22.

It was Starc laid who laid the platform for the morale-boosting win by destroying India's batting. The tall left-arm bowler once again turned out to be tormentor-in-chief as his five-wicket haul blew away India in just 26 overs.

Starc, who had three wickets in the previous game, took 5/53 in eight overs -- including four in his first spell -- as India found themselves in hot waters as soon as the match started.

With nip off the surface providing a lot of help, Starc bowled ideal back-of-the-length deliveries with a couple angled across the right-handers and a few which came in after pitching.

While the decisive damage was done by Starc, Sean Abbott

(3/23) and Nathan Ellis (2/13) then bowled hard lengths to run through the lower-middle order in what turned out to be a disastrous day for the hosts.

Virat Kohli did hold one end up for a while with a 35-ball 31 and Axar Patel scored an entertaining unbeaten 29 studied with two sixes off Starc.

Their innings were the only bright spots for India with their batting exposed once again by swing and pace.

Australia pace spearhead Starc claimed four wickets in his opening spell of 6-1-31-4, removing Shubman Gill (0), Rohit Sharma (13), Suryakumar Yadav (0) and KL Rahul (9) to leave India in tatters, and their extended batting line-up consisting of Ravindra Jadeja (16) and Patel could not trouble the scorers much.

On what appeared to be a flight deck here, for the second time in the series, India were off

to a poor start with Starc causing the maximum damage inside the first five overs, finding swing but no seam movement with overcast conditions and strong wind blowing across throughout the first innings.

After getting Shubman Gill (0) caught at point in the first over, he ended Kohli and Sharma's rebuilding act in the fifth over.

Sharma flashed hard but was caught at first slip by Smith, who grabbed the moving ball in more than one attempt, and Starc struck again on the next delivery, trapping Yadav leg-before for a second consecutive first-ball duck in this series.

The left-arm pacer continued making inroads into the Indian batting line-up, striking once again in the ninth over to trap KL Rahul (9) leg-before.

The batsman, after consultation with Kohli went upstairs, but DRS confirmed the field

umpire's call and India were left reeling at 48/4 inside nine overs.

There was no respite for India with Australia right-arm pacer Abbott producing an outside edge off the first ball in the 10th over, and Smith took a stunning one-handed diving catch on his right to make Hardik Pandya's (1) trip to the middle a very short one.

Kohli and Jadeja did stop the procession for a while with their 22-run sixth-wicket stand, but the introduction of Nathan Ellis brought more gains for Australia. The right-arm fast bowler, playing only his fourth ODI, got the key wicket of Kohli, pinning him in front of the wickets for a 35-ball 31 with four hits to the fence.

Jadeja was caught behind off Ellis and the Indian tailender didn't last long as Starc bowled an unplayable delivery to Mohammed Siraj to clip the off-bail.

We kept falling to Starc's 'strength': Rohit to his batters



PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A disappointed India captain Rohit Sharma on Sunday rued that his side's formidable batting line-up "kept falling to the strength" of Australia pacer Mitchell Starc instead of playing their natural game in the second ODI, which the hosts lost by 10 wickets here.

Australia won the match to level the series 1-1 and will now head to Chennai for the deciding third ODI on March 22.

Starc (5/53), who completed his ninth five-wicket haul in 109 ODI innings, wreaked havoc as Australia bundled out the home side for 117 in 26 overs after India were invited to bat first.

Australia completed the run chase in just 11 overs without losing any wicket.

Sharma said Indian batters didn't apply themselves properly, and added that it was certainly not a low-scoring pitch.

"Starc is a quality bowler. He's been doing it for years for Australia with the new ball. He

kept bowling to his strength and we kept falling to his strength. That's something that we need to understand and play accordingly," Sharma said at the post-match presentation.

Sharma minced no words about the batting failure, saying that 117 was not at all a challenging total.

"It is disappointing. No doubt about that. We didn't play to our potential. We didn't apply ourselves with the bat. We always knew that was not enough runs. It was not a 117 pitch at all. By no means. We just didn't apply ourselves," said Sharma, who himself contributed 13 runs from 15 balls.

Sharma, who missed India's five-wicket win in the first ODI due to family commitments, said all the Australians bowled really well and put the home side under pressure.

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"When you're chasing 118 really quickly, you can break the back of it really quickly."

"Man of the match" Starc said, "I feel like my rhythm has been good for a few weeks now and I guess the last couple of nights I've got the ball to shape in the air and do a little bit off the wicket. So, it's feeling in a good place and hopefully it continues."

Hope hits 128 in 1st game as captain, WI beat South Africa

AP ■ EAST LONDON

Shai Hope made 128 not out in his first game as West Indies ODI captain to set up a 48-run win over South Africa.

Proteas skipper Temba Bavuma replied with a century of his own in the second ODI at Buffalo Park but his 144 from 118 balls wasn't enough as the other South African batters failed around him.

Hope's century inspired West Indies to 335-8 and South Africa was all out for 287 in 41.4 overs despite Bavuma's best efforts.

South Africa appeared on course to challenge the big total at 184-2 in the 25th over. Left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein then turned the game in West Indies' favor.

He removed Tony de Zorzi for 27 to start South Africa's slide, claimed another two wickets and created a run out, as West Indies took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

The first ODI was abandoned because of rain.

Hosein finished with 3-59 and West Indies took eight wickets for just 103 runs to fin-



ish off South Africa after its bright start. West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph had 3-53. Hope hit five fours and seven sixes in his 115-ball knock after winning the toss and choosing to bat first. He marked the start of his captaincy with his 14th ODI hundred.

He had support from Nicholas Pooran (39) in an 86-run stand and Rovman Powell (46) in an 80-run stand. Hope's unbroken partnership of 42 with Joseph at the end took West Indies to its highest ODI total against South Africa.

Bavuma and Quinton de Kock (48 off 26 balls) put South

Africa on course straight away with their 76-run opening stand.

But there was little support for Bavuma after de Kock fell lbw to Kyle Mayers and his career-best ODI score came in a loss.

Bavuma and No. 10 Lungi Ngidi gave South Africa a glimpse of hope as they scrambled for a 49-run stand right near the end. South Africa's chances went with Bavuma when he attempted a hook shot off Joseph and gloved a catch to wicketkeeper Hope.

Joseph removed last man Tabraiz Shamsi for a duck two balls later to seal victory.

Nikhat, Manisha advance to last 16 of Women's Boxing World C'ships

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star Indian boxer Nikhat Zareen out-punched Algeria's Boualam Roumaysa to secure a pre-quarterfinal berth in the Women's World Championships here on Sunday.

Last edition's bronze medalist Manisha Maun (57kg) too advanced to the round of 16 with a 5-0 win against Rahimi Tina of Australia.

Competing in the 50kg event, Nikhat beat the reigning African champion by a similar margin to notch her second win in the tournament.

Both boxers held themselves back initially and maintained a safe distance. Nikhat, who won gold in the last edition, drew first blood. The Algerian followed suit as the two pugilists tried to get the better of each another.

If Nikhat landed a few combination punches, Roumaysa capitalised on the Indian boxer's open stance to land several blows.

However, the first round went in Nikhat's favour and the Indian began the next round by going all out. Roumaysa too



looked set to come forward and attack.

Both boxers played with aggression and resorted to a lot of body clinching but in the end, much to delight of the Indian fans at the KD Jadhav Stadium, Nikhat emerged victorious.

"My strategy for today was to dominate the round as she (Roumaysa) was the top seed. There is an advantage of seed-

ing. I did not get a seeding. If I beat the top seeds, it sets an impression on the judges," Nikhat said after the bout.

"I have seen her bouts before. She gets very aggressive if you are in close range. So, I had aimed to play from far but there was clinching and a bit of dirty game," she added.

New Zealand close on series sweep of Sri Lanka

AP ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand maintained their dominance over Sri Lanka in the second Test on Sunday, enforcing a follow-on and setting up the likelihood of a series clean sweep with two days to play.

The tourists reached 113-2 in their second innings at stumps on day three but still trailed by 303 runs at Wellington's Basin Reserve.

They need a massive turnaround to avoid defeat after being skittled out for 164 in their first innings in response to the Black Caps' 580-4 declared.

Starting off with a deficit of 416 runs, they showed more fight in their second turn at bat.

Captain Dimuth Karunaratne posted his second half-century of the day before being dismissed by counterpart Tim Southee for 51, caught in the deep after fellow-opener Oshada Fernando had been removed cheaply.

Kusal Mendis was at the crease on 50 and Angelo Mathews unbeaten on one off 40 balls, with the pair seeing off the last 11.5 overs in stoic fashion.

Sri Lanka's best hopes of saving the Test could rest with the weather.

Rain is forecast for the final day, meaning they could force a stalemate if they can successfully bat through Monday, when cold, blustery conditions are expected and may make life



uncomfortable for New Zealand in the field.

The tourists' slim hope of winning to square the two-match series was effectively ended by a slew of rash shots which derailed their first innings.

The tail succumbed rapidly during a chaotic second session, with the last six wickets tumbling for 50 runs in the space of 15.1 overs despite the wicket playing relatively true.

Only three batters reached double figures in the first innings, including Karunaratne, who was the ninth man out for 89.

The gritty opener had looked to be digging the visitors out of a deep hole when he and

Dinesh Chandimal put on 80 for the fifth wicket after the loss of two wickets in the day's opening half-hour reduced them to 34-4.

However, Chandimal was stumped for 34 off Michael Bracewell after charging down the track soon after tea, sparking the slump.

Offspinner Bracewell then removed Dhananjaya de Silva in his next over and later dismissed Karunaratne when he hit out, to finish with 3-50.

New Zealand are chasing their third Test victory in a row, following their dramatic two-wicket defeat of Sri Lanka in the first Test at Christchurch, which was sealed on the final ball.



Lahore Qalandars defend PSL title with one-run win

AP ■ LAHORE

Lahore Qalandars became the first team to win back-to-back Pakistan Super League titles on Saturday, beating Multan Sultans by one run in a thrilling final.

Captain Shaheen Shah Afridi took 4-51 after smashing a rapid 44 not out but had to effect a run out at the bowler's end as Multan's Khushdil Shah tried to make a third run to force a super over.

Qalandars had scored 200-6 in their 20 overs before a packed 25,000 Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore and Sultans finished on 199-8.

Qalandars had also defeated Sultans in last year's final. Shaheen conceded 34 runs in his opening two overs as Sultans raced to 101-1 in 10 overs, with Rilee Rossouw (52) and Mohammad Rizwan (34) adding 64 for the second wicket.

Rossouw smashed seven fours and two sixes off just 32 balls. But Shaheen returned for his second spell to dismiss Kieron Pollard (19), Tim David (20), Anwar Ali (one) and Usama Mir (nought).

With 35 needed in the last two overs, Shah and Abbas Afridi took 22 from Haris Rauf's 19th over but failed to get 13 in the last.

"We reached the final again and won the title for a second time so that's a reward for teamwork," said Shaheen.

"We played well in the final but it was a tense win."

Earlier, Qalandars were lifted by a rampaging Shaheen who clobbered a 15-ball 44 not out with five towering sixes and two fours, helping his team smash 85 runs in the last five overs.

Abdullah Shafique top-scored with a 40-ball 65.

Shafique and Fakhar Zaman (39) took Qalandars to 95-1 after their team won the toss and batted and opener Mirza Baig hammered an 18-ball 30.

But once Zaman was dismissed, Qalandars lost four wickets in the space of 18 balls, slumping to 112-5.

Shaheen promoted himself to number seven and instantly made an impact, as he and Shafique hit 24 runs in the 17th over from pacer Ihsanullah.

Leg-spinner Usama Mir was the pick of Sultans' bowlers with 3-24.

said.

"I thought our bowlers were outstanding. Mitchell Starc, in particular, with that new ball swinging it back down the line and putting them (under) early pressure and he complemented really well with the rest of our bowling group."

"I didn't know how the wicket was going to play and how much it was going to swing."

On his run chase and the unbeaten 121-run partnership by the Australian openers, Smith said, "The way that Mitch and Heady went out and went after them was impressive. Putting them (Indian bowlers) under pressure."

"When you're chasing 118 really quickly, you can break the back of it really quickly."

"Man of the match" Starc said, "I feel like my rhythm has been good for a few weeks now and I guess the last couple of nights I've got the ball to shape in the air and do a little bit off the wicket. So, it's feeling in a good place and hopefully it continues."