

WORLD 5

4 KILLED WHILE COLLECTING
FREE FLOUR IN PAK

MONEY 6

PARL PANEL TO GOVT: FRAME
POLICY ON E-VEHICLES

SPORT 8

I HAVE PLANNED SPL
DELIVERY FOR IPL: SHIVAM

NEW DELHI, SUNDAY MARCH 26, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹4



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Even if jailed, will fight on: Rahul

‘I am not scared of threats, disqualifications, allegations, prison sentences’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Addressing his first Press conference after his disqualification from the Lok Sabha, a combative Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said he would continue to defend democracy in the country even if he is disqualified from Parliament for life or jailed and claimed that a “panic-stricken” Government has handed the Opposition a “big weapon” by disqualifying him.

He claimed that the action against him was taken because Prime Minister Narendra Modi was “scared” of his next speech in Parliament on the Adani issue and alleged that the “whole game” is to distract people from the issue and the panic the Government is feeling over the matter.

Rahul was disqualified from the Lok Sabha on Friday, a day after a Surat court convicted him in a defamation case for his “all thieves have Modi as the common surname” remark in 2019. The disqualification will bar the four-time MP from contesting polls for eight years unless a higher court stays his conviction.

He said he would continue to ask questions on the Adani issue, adding the moot questions remain who invested ₹20,000 crore in Adani shell firms and what is the businessman’s relationship with the PM. He vowed he will keep raising these questions.

Asserting that “democracy has finished in this country”, the former Congress chief claimed he never sought foreign intervention in his remarks made in the UK and accused Union Ministers of “lying” in Parliament.

He also said the BJP is trying to divert the issue by alleging that he had insulted OBCs with his “all thieves have Modi as the common surname” remark.

“I am here defending the democratic voice of the Indian people, I will continue to do that. I am not scared of these threats, of these disqualifications, allegations, prison sentences. I am not scared of them. These people don’t



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses a press conference at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Saturday

PTI

understand me yet, I am not scared of them,” he said.

“Disqualify me for life, put me inside jail, I will keep going. I will not stop,” he said.

“I have been disqualified because the Prime Minister is scared of my next speech. I have seen it in his eyes. So he is terrified of the next speech that is going to come and does not want that speech to be in Parliament,” Rahul alleged at the 30-minute Press conference, flanked by Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel and party general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal.

He claimed his attack on Adani was the reason for distraction through allegations and disqualification. Rahul, when asked if he was worried, quipped, “Do I look worried. I am excited, I am happy that they have given me the best gift that they could give me.”

He said when somebody is guilty of something, they want to distract everybody’s attention. “If you catch a thief, the first thing he says is ‘I didn’t do it’, the second thing he says is ‘look there, look there...’ That is what the BJP is doing.”

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Rahul lies, defames PM: BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP spokesperson Ravishankar Prasad on Saturday alleged that the Congress did not press into service its battery of lawyers to immediately obtain a stay on Rahul Gandhi’s conviction by a court in Surat with a view to portray the Congress leader as “martyr” and “encashing” the issue in the upcoming Assembly polls in Karnataka.

Talking to reporters here soon after Rahul’s Press conference alleging that he has been targeted by the BJP to divert attention from the “Modi-Adani” row, Prasad accused the former Congress president of “lying” and “defaming” Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The BJP leader gave a list of projects which the business tycoon Gautam Adani had signed in many countries, including in Australia and Indonesia, “when the Congress under Manohan Singh was in power at the Centre”.

Reminding Rahul that he and his mother are on bail in the National Herald case, Prasad alleged that Rahul is trying to tarnish the fair name of the Prime Minister.

“Doesn’t he feels ashamed?”, the BJP said.

Prasad said Rahul has been accusing businessman Adani “without any proof”. He was, though, also quick to add “we are not defending Adani”.

He said Adani “has bagged ₹65,000 crore projects in the Congress-ruled Rajasthan and that of ₹15,000 crore in West Bengal”.

Prasad said Rahul has become “frustrated” as “people are not voting for his party”. “He is not respecting peoples mandate,” said Prasad.

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Nitu, Saweety world boxing champions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) and the seasoned Saweety Boora (81kg) etched their names in Indian boxing history as they were crowned world champions after notching contrasting wins at the marquee tournament here on Saturday.

Commonwealth Games gold medallist Nitu put up a stupendous performance to see off Mongolia’s Lutsaikhana Altansetseg 5-0 and claim the title in the minimum weight category in front of a packed crowd, with Beijing Olympics bronze medallist and Nitu’s idol Vijender Singh also present.

Saweety made it two out of two for the hosts as she warded off a challenge from two-time medallist China’s Wang Lina. In the first bout, Nitu started off aggressively and used her combination of punches to land jabs and hooks effectively.

The 22-year-old Bhiwani boxer was able to take the first round 5-0. She began the second round with a series of straight jabs.

When Altansetseg attacked, the Indian south-paw countered with right hooks. The two boxers played from a close range and indulged in a lot of holding in a fast-paced bout with Nitu being given a penalty deduction for clinching towards the end of the second round.

Despite Altansetseg’s strong comeback in the round, Nitu managed to take it 3-2. In the final three minutes, Nitu started from afar but soon ditched the strategy and reverted to playing from a close range, as Altansetseg was also given a point deduction for clinching.

Nitu has been in indomitable form in the tournament, winning her first three bouts by RSC (referee stops contest).

Against Alua Balkibekova, who knocked her out in the last edition in the quarterfinal stage, she skilfully adapted to negate the Kazakh’s strong suit.

“I had decided to play aggressively today before the bout and I feel very happy (after the victory). I am proud of myself and my family and would like to thank my coaches, especially my head coach Bhaskar sir,” Nitu said.

“This medal means a lot to me. I have worked for this for 12 years. My family’s financial problems will be solved after this victory. We will use the prize money to pay off our loans,” added Nitu, whose father took three years leave from work to support his daughter.

Fighting the last bout of the day, Saweety, the 2014 silver medallist, was able to change the colour of her medal.

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Saweety Boora celebrates her win over China’s Wang Lina during the final match in 81 kg category at the 2023 IBA Women’s Boxing World Championships, in New Delhi on Saturday. (Bottom) India’s Nitu Ghanghas poses with Gold medal during award ceremony, after winning the final match over Mongolia’s Lutsaikhana Altansetseg in 48 kg category at the 2023 IBA Women’s Boxing World Championships, in New Delhi on Saturday

PTI

CAPSULE

23 PEOPLE KILLED BY MISSISSIPPI TORNADES

Rolling Fork (US): Emergency officials in Mississippi said 23 people have been killed by tornadoes that tore through the state on Friday night, destroying buildings and knocking out power as severe weather that produced hail the size of golf balls moved through several southern states. The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency confirmed 23 deaths with dozens of injuries and four people missing.

ADVISORY ON INFLUENZA, RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

New Delhi: Amid rising cases of Covid-19 across the country, the Centre on Saturday issued a joint advisory underlining to keep a close watch on the evolving causes of diseases such as Influenza Like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) cases.

1 KILLED, 4 INJURED IN J&K FACTORY BLAST

Samba (Jammu): A person was killed and four others were injured in a blast that took place in a scrap factory in Jammu & Kashmir’s Samba district on Saturday, official sources said. The factory was located in the Baribrahmana area, they said. Those injured have been hospitalised.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

PTI

crisis in Credit Suisse.

The meeting was also attended by Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi and other senior officials, an official statement said. She also discussed the developing and immediate external global financial stress from both short and long-term perspectives.

During the PSB review meeting, she emphasised that the banks should undertake due diligence and adhere to the regulatory framework by focusing on risk management and diversification of deposits and assets base.

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FM reviews PSBs' financial health amid US banking failure

Asks bankers to be vigilant of rate risks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday reviewed the performance of public sector banks (PSBs) on various financial health parameters and their resilience in the wake of the current global financial scenario emanating from the failure of some international banks in the US and Europe.

She urged the banks to remain vigilant about the interest rate risks and regularly undertake stress tests.

During the two hours meeting with MDs and CEOs of PSBs, an open discussion was held on the global scenario amid the failure of the Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank (SB), along with the issues leading to the



RJD leader Misa Bharti arrives at the ED office for questioning in connection with the land-for-jobs case, in New Delhi on Saturday

PTI

Land-for-jobs: CBI quizzes Tejashwi, ED grills Misa

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investigation agencies on Saturday questioned Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav and his MP sister Misa Bharti in connection with the railways land-for-jobs case here, officials said.

While Tejashwi was quizzed by the CBI for more than eight hours, the ED questioned Bharti for over six hours, they said.

Slamming the BJP over the questioning of the two RJD leaders, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleged the ruling party wants to finish off the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes metro ride in Bengaluru on Saturday

PTI

Cong sees K'taka as ATM to fill its leaders' coffers: Modi

PTI ■ CHIKKABALLAPURA/DAVANGERE/BENGALURU

In poll-bound Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday made a strong pitch for the return of the ruling BJP, and lashed out at politics of manipulation and addressed a public rally at Davanagere after getting yet another rousing reception in his seventh visit to the State.

The PM wrapped up a busy day of public engagements that also included a tribute to the legendary Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya and a Metro rail ride on a new route that Modi inaugurated.

In yet another stinging attack on the Congress, he said it looks at Karnataka as an

“ATM” to fill the coffers of its leaders.

Seeking a resounding mandate for a successive stint for the BJP in Karnataka, Modi said a stable government led by the saffron party was the need of the hour for the State’s fast paced development.

Stressing that Karnataka should be brought out of the “politics of manipulation”, he said BJP wants to make the State a driving force of developed India, while the Congress looks at it as “an ATM that fills the treasury of its leaders”.

This visit of the Prime Minister — his seventh to Karnataka this year — gains significance as the Election Commission is expected to announce the poll schedule

for Assembly elections, due by May, in the next few days.

On Saturday, the PM also inaugurated Sri Madhusudan Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research in Chikkaballapura district, and Whitefield (Kadugodi) to Krishnarajapura Metro Line of Bangalore Metro in Bengaluru. He took a Metro ride after buying a ticket.

“Karnataka has seen a long period of opportunistic and selfish coalition governments, Karnataka has faced losses due to such governments So, for the fast paced development of Karnataka, BJP’s full majority, stable government is needed,” Modi told a mega rally in Davangere headquarters.

Continued on Page 2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE / AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI / SAN FRANCISCO

Putting up a show of solidarity against Khalistan extremists, several Indian Americans carried a support march and waved the tricolour. The march late on Friday was undertaken to condemn the attack on the Indian consulate in San Francisco. The alleged Khalistani supporters had vandalised the consulate last Sunday.

Regretting the violence, many Indian-American community members attended the support march outside its consulate in San Francisco for



India's unity against Khalistan movement.

A huge crowd of Indian Americans turned up for the peace rally. Criticising the destructive elements of Sikh separatism, the Indian-American community chanted “Vande Mataram” and other slogans while dancing and holding the US flag along with tricolour. Local police ensured there were no incidents of violence as few Khalistani supporters were also in the crowd

chanting separatist slogans.

On Sunday last, Khalistani sympathisers vandalised the consulate building and installed flags in support of the separatist movement, which were later removed by the consulate staff. The incident evoked sharp reactions from the NRIs who called for strict action against the guilty.

The Indian diaspora in London, too, had registered a strong protest against the pulling down of tri colour by the Khalistan supporters at the Indian High Commission in UK by gathering outside the office demanding strict action on Tuesday.

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Usha, Mithali, Rawat's daughters to witness Agniveers' passout

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Queen of Indian track and field PT Usha, former Indian women team captain Mithali Raj and daughters of late General Bipin Rawat, the first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) will be present on the historic day on March 28 when the first ever batch of Agniveers pass out from Navy’s training institute INS Chilka.

As first reported in *The Pioneer* on Friday, the Passing Out Parade (POP) of the first batch of Agniveers is scheduled at INS Chilka on March 28.

The POP marks the successful completion of training of close to 2,600 Agniveers

including 273 women. In another first, the parade will take place post sunset unlike in the morning as done earlier.

Navy chief Admiral Hari Kumar will be the chief guest and the Reviewing Officer of the Passing out Parade, navy officials said here on Saturday. The successful trainees would be deployed on frontline warships for their sea training.

The Agnipath recruitment scheme to transform the armed forces to fight modern day war was launched on June 14 last year. The Navy selected 2,600 Agniveers and their training commenced in November last year.

Continued on Page 2

‘SC has played important role in protection of human rights’

PTI ■ PUNE

The apex court has played a very important role in the protection and promotion of human rights in India, Supreme Court judge Hima Kohli said here on Saturday.

She was speaking at the 11th Justice P N Bhagwati International Moot Court Competition on Human Rights at New Law College, Bharati Vidyapeeth University. “The Supreme Court of India, being the highest court of the land, has played a vital role in pre-serving, protecting and pro-moting human rights in India.

Over the years, several landmark judgments have been pronounced to strengthen and amplify the very definition of human rights,” Justice Kohli said. Speaking about some such impactful decisions, she mentioned the case of Maneka Gandhi Vs Union of India (1978) where the petitioner



had challenged the denial of passport to her. “The seven-judge constitution bench declared that the right to travel abroad is an element of the right to life and personal liberty, and this right could not be cur-tailed without following the due process of law,” the judge noted.

In recent years, the judi-ciary has been at the forefront of protecting citizens’ rights, particularly in cases relating to civil liberties, environmental protection and gender justice,

Justice Kohli said. “Just last month, on February 2, in the case of P Vs Union of India & Anr. (2023), the Supreme Court exercised its extraordi-nary constitutional powers to help a young woman who wanted to abort her late-stage pregnancy, by arranging for the delivery of the baby at AIIMS, Delhi, and with the consent of the mother, directed that the child be given for adoption to a couple registered with the government-run Central Adoption Resources Agency (CARA),” she said.

The judgment brought to the fore the importance of protecting the human rights of women and their reproductive rights, and also that of recog-nizing the rights of unborn foet-uses, Justice Kohli said.

Human rights violations take place in many forms including arbitrary detention, torture, extra-judicial killings and discrimination, and these

rights are of utmost importance in times of crises such as armed conflict, natural disasters and pandemics, she said. Such crises often lead to the dis-placement of large sections of the population, increased vio-lence and violation of human rights, she noted.

The present century has witnessed the rise of authori-tarianism, global threat of ter-rorism and rapid technological advances that have all posed challenges to the protection and promotion of human rights, Justice Kohli said.

“Though technological advancements are meant to promote, rather than under-mine human rights, misuse of artificial intelligence, facial recognition and unauthorized collection of biometric data, exploitation of social media platforms have raised serious concerns about privacy, sur-veillance and discrimination,” she added.

G20 delegates reach Arunachal, likely to visit Tawang today

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Over 50 international dele-gates reached Arunachal Pradesh on Saturday to partici-pate in a G20 meeting. After landing at the Hollongi airport, they travelled to Itanagar where they visited an exhibition in which various tribal arts and cultures were showcased, besides budding innovators of the state exhibiting their inno-vations.

After attending a meeting, the delegates visited Thupten Gatseling Monastery. After enjoying a cultural musical performance at the monastery, the delegates visited the Jawaharlal Nehru State Museum where they were briefed about the history and rich culture of the northeastern state. In the evening, the dele-gates witnessed a cultural pro-gramme at the state assembly. The delegates, which include

representatives of the member countries and international organisations, are likely to visit Tawang, bordering China, on Sunday but it depends on the weather condition, sources said. From there, they would travel to Guwahati in Assam.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the G20 meeting in the state is a geo-political and diplomatic event that is a testimony to the spirit of broth-erhood encompassed by the mantra of ‘One Earth, One Family and One Future’. For centuries the people of Arunachal Pradesh are living with nature, he said.

While the world has come together to find a solution to climate change, Arunachal Pradesh being the carbon-neg-ative state of India has taken up various initiatives to fight the situation by adopting the Pakke Declaration-2047, he said.

NCR PULSE

EVENTS FOR DIVYANGS ORGANISED

NEW DELHI: In keeping with its revised definition ‘open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability,’ the National Gallery of Modern Arts (NGMA) , has been in the forefront in organising events and exclusively curated shows for the differently abled children. On World Down Syndrome Awareness Day on Tuesday, it organised a painting and pottery workshop for them which was guided by Gurugram based Shaurya Mehrotra, potter and artist with Down Syndrome. Director NGMA, Temsunaro Jamir Tripathi said that “NGMA is actively involving civil society for public awareness and establishing a voice for people with special needs. . . The workshops aim to give a platform to express themselves creatively and showcase their abilities and ideas,” she added.

50TH ANNIV OF INDIA-KOREA TIES: EVENT HELD

NEW DELHI: The Embassy of the Republic of Korea and Korean Cultural Centre India, together with the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, organised a cultural exchange event in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Korea and India. The opening ceremony of the special exhibition titled “An Encounter with Korean Traditional Buddhist Culture in India, the Land of Buddha” was held at National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA). The exhibition which will remain open till 30th April 2023, showcases the media art of international acclaim Buddhist painting scrolls called ‘Gwae Bul’, a symbol of traditional Korean Buddhist rituals .Korean traditional lanterns of ‘Yeondeunghoe’, a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and various photo works with the theme of temple stay.

ISRAEL DONATES INDIA DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEM

NEW DELHI: On World Water Day on Wednesday, the Embassy of Israel in India donated an Israeli-invented technology and Made-in-India drip irrigation system to the Children’s Park near India Gate in the national capital. Naor Gilon, Ambassador of Israel to India said that “We are looking forward to collaborating with NDMC to transform this park into a water-efficient park.” The initiative aimed to encourage water efficiency and teach young children about water conservation.



A combination of pictures shows the Akshardham Temple during Earth Hour and before observing the Earth Hour in New Delhi on Saturday

PTI

Rahul lying, defaming PM, says Prasad

From Page1

The former Union Minister also charged Rahul with having been “abusive, not critical” in his utterances about the Modi surname which led to the defamation suit. Prasad said it is not only Rahul but 32 people in the past have been disqualified under the same law.

“You will not have another law and be treated differently,” said the BJP leader. Prasad alleged that Rahul is trying to “portray himself a martyr and use it in the Karnataka Assembly poll”.

Prasad also wondered as why the Congress is not appeal-ing in the court against Rahul’s conviction as they did in the case of their spokesperson Pawan Khara despite having a battery of legal eagles in the party.

Legal recourse or paint Rahul as martyr? Cong mulls cash-in-on plan

From Page1

Sibal was a Union Minister during the Manmohan Singh led UPA Governments and on two occasions he has recently come out in support of Rahul including the Delhi Police turning at Rahul’s residence for details regarding the “sexual harassment victims” speech made during the ‘Bharat Jodo Yatra’.

“The legal battle will need to be fought in Gujarat alone, as is the requirement, and that may take quite a long time,” sources said. A party leader said the Election Commission may announce a by-election in Waynad next month to fill the vacancy arising out of the disqualification of Rahul and thus it could set Priyanka to take a plunge into electoral politics. Currently, she is the AICC national general secretary and

she has been credited for the Congress win in Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections.

Soon after disqualification of her brother, Priyanka launched a sharp attack on the BJP and Modi Government dispensation for the kind of slur thrown at the Nehru-Gandhi family ever since Modi team is at the Centre.

Within the Congress, Priyanka is being keenly watched out for her “sharp articulation and unapologetic counterattack”. As of now speculation are rife that Priyanka would take a plunge into elections from Rae Bareli in Uttar Pradesh, a Lok Sabha constituency represented by her mother and longest serving president of the Congress Sonia Gandhi. Sonia is not likely to contest the next Parliamentary elections, and Priyanka is

expected to inherit the family legacy, as the seat was once represented by Feroze Gandhi, her grandfather. The Congress may be keen to get the Gandhi family member to retain the seat in Kerala, as the BJP is stepping up efforts to wean away the Christian vote base to enter the State politics. Kerala remains one of the few strong-holds of Congress.

A large number of Congress leaders are exploring that if Priyanka theory works then she would lead in Parliament while Rahul who just concluded his four-month Bharat Jodo Yatra will work for the Opposition.

Several Opposition leaders have rallied behind Rahul after his disqualification and hit out at the Government, accusing it of targeting political oppo-nents.

Nitu, Saweety world...

From Page1

The Haryana boxer looked to attack as soon as the match started but couldn’t connect any of her punches as Wang used her sharp reflexes to dodge. But then Saweety connected a strong straight jab to the delight of the crowd. She continued to attack to edge out her opponent 3-2 in the first two rounds. It was an ugly bout as both boxers were clinching and trying to throw each other on the canvas.

In the third, Saweety mixed attack with defence. She ducked, dodged and sidestepped, avoiding Wang’s punches to take the round 4-1. The bout was sent for a review with Saweety emerg-ing on top. “I am thrilled after fulfilling my dream of becoming the world champion. The bout went well and I was able to exe-cute my planning perfectly. My performance in the tournament got better as the bouts progressed, with my body also respond-ing well,” the triumphant Saweety said.

This title can be considered Saweety’s revival because, after winning the Worlds and Asian silver in 2014 and 2015, she fell off the radar. She missed out on a chance to compete at the Tokyo Olympics as well. She then went on to win the Asian Championships bronze in 2021 followed by the gold in 2022.

The two join an elite list that includes six-time champion Mary Kom (2002, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2018), Sarita Devi (2006), Jenny RL (2006), Lekha KC (2006) and Nikhat Zareen (2022). Hosts India are on course to match their best-ever per-formance in terms of gold medals won with reigning champi-on Nikhat Zareen and Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain set to take the ring on Sunday. India had won four golds in the 2006 edition which they had hosted in Delhi. It was also their best per-formance in terms of total medals (8).

Usha, Mithali, Rawat’s daughters to witness Agniveers’ passout

From Page1

As part of their transformation to Sea Warriors, the Agniveers underwent 16 weeks of ab-initio training at INS Chilka.

The training encompassed academic, service and outdoor training.

During the POP, deserving Agniveers will be presented awards by the Chief Guest in various categories. This year onwards, acknowledging the contribution of the first Chief of Defence Staff, the Late General Bipin Rawat towards the trans-formational Agnipath scheme, the Indian Navy has instituted the General Bipin Rawat Rolling Trophy for the ‘Woman Agniveer Trainee Standing First in Overall Order of Merit’. This trophy will be presented General Rawat’s daughters.

P T Usha, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), popularly known as the ‘Queen of Indian Track and Field’ and ‘Payyoli Express’ is a recipient of the Padma Shri award and President of the Indian Olympics Association(IOA).

Mithali Raj, former captain of the Indian women’s Cricket team is the recipient of Padma Shri, Arjuna Award and Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna awards The eminent Veterans who would be present to motivate the Passing Out Agniveers include Chiman Singh, a war hero of the 1971 Indo-Pak War who was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra.

Cong sees K’taka as ATM to fill its leaders coffers: Modi

From Page1

“When no one gets full majority, will Karnataka be in bad shape or not? Do you want a strong and stable government or not? Do you want a govern-ment with full majority or not? The first job should be to bring Karnataka out of the politics of manipulation and take it for-ward at a fast pace,” Modi said.

“The need of the hour for Karnataka is BJP’s full majori-ty, strong and stable govern-ment, it is a necessity for the bright future of Karnataka,” he said at the public meeting which marked the culmination of BJP’s state-wide ‘Vijay Sankapla Yatre’ ahead of Assembly polls.

“Vijaya Sankapla Yatre’ had begun earlier this month from four different directions across the state, in specially designed vehicles or “rathas” and have covered all 224 Assembly seg-

ments. Asking people if they want him to serve them and Karnataka, Modi said. “If I have to serve you and do something for you, I will need BJP’s strong government in Karnataka, and you will have to make BJP win and bring in its strong govern-ment.” Cautioning that Congress leaders start wan-dering with a “bag of false guarantees” ahead of elections, he said they made false promi-ses ahead of polls in Himachal Pradesh, but the assurances did not find a mention in their recent budget there.

“Can we trust Congress that makes false promises? Should they be allowed to step inside Karnataka or should they be thrown out?” he asked, adding the people of Karnataka should be cautious and should not give the party an opportu-nity “to play their game”. Alleging that Congress does not

have any positive agenda for the country and Karnataka, Modi said, so, Congress is dreaming and even publicly say “Modi teri kabr kudegi” (Modi, your grave will be dug), but they don’t know people of Karnataka are saying “Modi tera Kamal khilega” (Modi your lotus will bloom), a reference to BJP’s symbol.

At Davangere, Modi entered the rally venue in a specially designed vehicle, which made its way to the stage, pass-ing through the pathway made amidst the crowd gathered under the huge pandal.

People showered flower petals on the Prime Minister, who was accompa-nied by Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, BJP veter-an leader B S Yediyurappa and BJP state unit President Nalin Kumar Kateel, on the vehicle, as it passed near them.

FM reviews PSBs’ financial health amid US banking failure

From Page1

The finance minister underlined that PSBs must look at business models closely to identify stress points, including concentration risks and adverse exposures, the statement said, adding that she also exhorted PSBs to use this opportunity to frame detailed crisis management and com-munication strategies.

The chiefs of PSBs apprised Sitharaman that they follow the best corporate governance prac-tices, adhere to regulatory norms, ensure prudent liquidity management and continue to focus on having robust asset-liability and risk management.

Further, she was also informed by the PSBs that they are vigilant of developments in the glob-al banking sector and are taking all possible steps to safeguard themselves from any potential finan-cial shock.

All the major financial parameters indicate stable and resilient PSBs with robust financial health, it added.

The minister also stressed that PSBs must leverage the full potential of branches opened in International Financial Services Centres in GIFT City Gujarat to identify international oppor-tunities, including prospects related to Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs).

She asked banks to take focused measures to attract deposits, given the steps taken by the government to reduce the tax arbitrage in some debt instruments and pivot their strengthened financial position to support the credit needs of the growing economy.

The minister asked banks to focus on credit outreach in states where the credit offtake is lower than the national average, particularly in the northeast and eastern parts of the country, and enhance business presence in new and emerging areas like One District One Product (ODOP), e-NAM and drones. She said PSBs should promote the Mahila Samman Bachat Patra, announced in the Budget, through special drives and campaigns and also focus on increasing brick-and-mortar bank-ing presence in border and coastal areas.

Indian-Americans march against Khalistani vandals

From Page1

A statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Canada was spray painted with pro-Khalistan and anti-India graffiti on Thursday, the lat-est in a string of such incidents.

The vandalism occurred near the City Hall in the town of Hamilton, in the province of Ontario. Meanwhile in Canberra, Khalistan supporters gathered outside Australian parliament to protest against police crackdown on radical preacher Amritpal Singh and his associates in Punjab.

On Monday, India lodged a strong protest with the US Charge d’Affaires in Delhi over the consulate attack. The US government was also asked to take necessary steps to avoid the occurrence of similar incidents in future, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Under the instructions from and on behalf of my client Hans Raj Madan S/o Late Sh. Lal Chand Resident of 1/10, 3rd Floor, Indira Vikas, Near Nirankari School, Delhi

This is to inform that general public that my client is the owner of property bearing No. G-120, consisting of ground floor, with its roof rights upto sky built on land measuring area 150 sq. yds. Out of khasra No.727, situated in the area of Village Bhausa, Janghri Puri, Gali No.4, Shradhanand Colony, Delhi-110042 and same was purchased by my client from K.S. Munthar S/o Bhuni Singh through relevant documents on dated 11/03/1993 and out of which 25 sq. yds has been sold out by my client.

My client has not entered into any type of sale, transfer, Will, mortgage etc. regarding the above said property. If anybody claim the above mentioned property of my client through any attested or registered claim to be executed by me in near future, the same shall be treated as null and void. Moreover, after my death, my family member i.e. my wife Vinita Madan and my two sons namely Paras Madan and Chirag Madan, shall be the owner of my all properties including the above mentioned property.

If any person deals with the above said property same will be illegal and shall be treated as null and void as my client have never given any consent for any kind of dealing with the above mentioned property. If any person deal or fail to comply the above said condition for the above mentioned property then he/she will be liable to face the consequences at his/her own risk and my client will not be responsible for any such claim or illegal activity.

DUSHYANT NAYAK (ADVOCATE)
CHAMBER NO-M-8 & 9, NEAR SBI
WESTERN WING TIS HAZARI COURT
DELHI-110054, MOB-9811053561

Even if jailed, will fight on: Rahul

From Page1

He said when somebody is



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Rajesh Kishanlal Sharma,
S/o Kishanlal Sharma, R/o
E3 -2604 Cleo County,
Sector-121, Noida, Gautam
Buddha Nagar, Uttar
Pradesh, 201301, have
Changed my name to **Rajesh
Sharma** for all future
purposes.

PD(90305)A

guilty of something, they want to distract everybody’s atten-tion. “If you catch a thief, the first thing he says is ‘I didn’t do it’, the second thing he says is ‘look there, look there...’ That is what the BJP is doing.” Asking where the money into Adani group has come as Adani does not generate this type of money and that money has come from some-one,” he said all this drama - OBC, disqualification, anti-national, is being orchestrat-ed to distract from the panic that prime minister is feeling that his relationship with Adani is going to be exposed.

“That relationship is going to be exposed. Nobody is going to stop that. It is going to happen, because the Opposition is going to find that answer,” he said. Asked if

he was hopeful that his mem-bership would be restored, Rahul said, “I am not interest-ed in hope. (Whether) I get my membership back or not, I will do my job. Even if they per-manently disqualify me I will do my job, if they reinstate me, I will do my job. It does not matter to me whether I am in Parliament or outside it. I have to do my ‘tapasya’ and I will keep doing it,” he said.

The Congress leader also thanked Opposition parties for extending support to him and asserted that going forward, all of them will work together.

Asked about the conse-quences of his disqualifica-tion, Rahul said the Opposition will benefit the most from this “panic reaction of Prime Minister Modi”. “They got into panic mode that the truth will

come out. They have handed over the biggest weapon to the Opposition because people have a question on their mind... And question is why is the prime minister saving this cor-rupt person,” Rahul alleged. He said he will continue to fight for the truth in the country and to defend the democratic nature of this country.

“I will do whatever I have to do to defend the democrat-ic nature of the country. What does that mean? It means defending the institutions of the country, defending the voice of the poor people of the country, it means telling the people of this country the truth about people like Mr Adani who are basically exploiting the relationship with the Prime Minister,” Rahul said. He alleged that for the BJP-led

Government, “country is Adani and Adani is country”. Asked about the BJP’s charge that his 2019 remarks that were the centre of the defamation case were an insult to OBCs, Rahul said he has always talked about brotherhood and the issue was not about OBCs but about Adani and his ties the Government.

In response to another question, Rahul said, “My name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi, Gandhi does not offer apology to anyone.” Asked about the defamation case in which he was convicted, Rahul said it is a legal matter he will not comment on it.

He also said attacks are being made on democracy in the country and examples of it keep manifesting from time to time.

Labour Welfare Board new flashpoint between LG, CM

LG asks city Govt to send names for labour welfare board, or explain why it can't

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another flashpoint between the two, Delhi LG VK Saxena has asked the AAP Government to reconstitute the Labour Welfare Board appointing suitable members or communicate opinion on the matter so that it could be referred to the President, sources said.

No immediate reaction could be had from the AAP on the matter.

The LG and AAP government have had many rows in the past several months including the one over probes



ordered by Saxena on complaints of corruption and the issue of sending teachers for training to Finland.

The labour welfare body remains without an executive board even after two years due to an impasse over eligibility criteria for appointment of the members.

"The LG has asked for the Board to be constituted with members who have

domain expertise in labour welfare or send the file to him for expressing difference of opinion," sources at LG office said. The AAP government sat on a file meant for re-constitution of the Delhi Labour Welfare Board (DLWB) for more than 14 months, between June, 2021 and September, 2022 and finally sent the proposal with names for approval of the Lt Governor on September 12, 2022, they claimed.

The names proposed by the then labour minister, Manish Sisodia, and approved by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal were not as per the criteria for selection of such members, sources at LG Office said.

The members nominated to the Board, instead of being domain experts in labour welfare, were picked from among vaccination camp organisers, RWA presidents and individuals distributing food during Covid pandemic, they claimed.

The Lt Governor returned the file to the Chief Minister on November 21, 2022, with observations advising the Labour department to submit a panel of names for appointment after a thorough background check on their suitability and experience in related fields.

"Members of this Board perform important functions of welfare of labourers and therefore, it is important that such members must possess sufficient experience in the field of labour welfare. "Such nominated members must demonstrate skill and expertise which reveal their capabilities to contribute to the cause of labour welfare," the LG had observed.

In the proposed list, most of the nominees, especially nine of the 17 do not have appropriate experience or domain knowledge to effectively contribute for welfare activities and also it is difficult to ascertain if nominations of others are commensurate with the spirit of the law, the LG said in a note.

Spl meeting for civic budget to be held on Mar 28: MCD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A special meeting has been convened at the MCD headquarters on March 28 to discuss and deliberate on the civic budget, officials said on Saturday. As required by norms, the civic budget is to be cleared by March 31.

The MCD passed the "schedule of taxes" in the civic budget for 2023-24 on February 15.

But, the remaining budget process was stalled as the standing committee of the civic body is yet to be elected.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi is "exploring options" to have the remainder of the civic budget cleared by March 31, official sources said on Friday.

The MCD on Saturday said in a statement, the special budget meeting" of MCD for budget proposals for the revised estimates for the year 2022-2023 and 2023-2024



would be held on Tuesday at Aruna Asaf Ali Meeting Hall at 2 pm.

Earlier, the MCD had also written to the Delhi government to seek permission to call a special session for clearing the budget before March end.

If the entire budget doesn't get passed by March 31, things may "get into a limbo", a source said on Friday.

The allocations made to various departments in a civic budget is key to proper civic functioning.

The "schedule of taxes" was passed by the special officer of the MCD, whose office ceased to exist after the election of the Delhi mayor.

Excise policy case: Court defers Sisodia's bail plea hearing till April 5

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A court on Saturday adjourned till April 5 the hearing on the bail plea of AAP leader Manish Sisodia, who has been arrested by the ED in a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in implementing the now-scrapped excise policy in Delhi.

Special Judge MK Nagpal adjourned the hearing after Sisodia's counsel sought more time to prepare a detailed response to ED's submission on the bail plea.

Sisodia moved the bail plea on Tuesday and the court sought the Enforcement Directorate's response by March 25.

On Wednesday, after seven days of questioning by the ED, the court sent him to 14-day judicial custody.

Chirag Dilli flyover may open to public by April 1, rain delayed repair work

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing repair work on Chirag Dilli flyover was delayed by a couple of days due to recent rain in the city, an official said on Saturday.

Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Atishi have directed officials to ensure opening it for traffic by April 1.

The minister in her second visit of the flyover on Saturday, second in last one week, also directed them to keep one lane of the flyover open for traffic during repair work.

She observed during the visit that maintenance work was running 2 days behind the scheduled date of completion



due to unexpected rains in the past few days.

"The PWD minister instructed the officials to expedite the maintenance work on the first part of the flyover and prepare to open it for traffic by

April 1," said a Delhi government statement. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is closely monitoring the maintenance work of the Chirag Dilli flyover, Atishi said. "Our priority is to get the people of Delhi traffic-

free. PWD is working on a war footing in this direction and will complete the maintenance work of the Chirag Dilli flyover soon so that people can get relief from traffic," she stated.

During the joint inspection with the officials of PWD and Delhi Police, she instructed the officials to make an action plan for better traffic management during the maintenance of both phases of work.

Maintenance work is going on at the Chirag Dilli flyover and a part of the flyover has been closed for traffic, leading to an increase in traffic jams.

According to PWD officials, the maintenance work was supposed to be completed in 50 days.

Cop found dead with bullet wound in chest in Vikaspuri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A head constable was found dead Saturday with a bullet wound at the third battalion campus in Vikaspuri area, police said.

According to them, Abhay, a head constable of Delhi police, was found with a bullet injury in his chest around 3.15 pm. The bullet was fired from his service weapon, they said. Proceeding under section 174 of CrPC has been initiated to ascertain whether it was an accidental death or a suicide.

City received highest single-day rain in March in 3 years: IMD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi received 12.2 mm of rainfall in a 24-hour period ending at 8.30 am on Saturday, the highest in a day in March in three years, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The city's maximum temperature settled at 30.4 degrees Celsius, normal during the season.

The Safdarjung observatory, Delhi's primary weather station, recorded 12.2 mm rainfall between 8.30 am on Friday and 8.30 am on Saturday. The air quality of the national capital improved to satisfactory level as the Air Quality Index (AQI) at 6 pm was recorded at 80.



An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".The city recorded a minimum temperature of 15.3 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, the IMD said.

The relative humidity oscillated between 85 per cent and 54 per cent, it added.

The weatherman has forecast a partly cloudy sky for Monday and the maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to settle around 31 and 15 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Heavy rain lashed parts of the national capital on Friday evening.

Covid cases: Mock drill at city Govt hospitals today to check preparedness

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi government-run hospitals will conduct a mock drill on Sunday to assess their preparedness to deal with any eventuality in view of rising COVID-19 and seasonal influenza cases.

A senior official said an order to this effect was issued to medical superintendents, medical directors and chief district medical officers (CDMOs) by the Delhi health department on Friday.

"All the MS/MDs and CDMOs of all the hospitals of Delhi government are hereby requested to hold a mock drill on 26.03.2023 (Sunday) to check the preparedness of health, infrastructure, and logistics including availability of oxygen, so as to prepare for any eventuality, especially in view of increasing COVID-19 and influenza type cases," according to the order.

The mock drill must be conducted by all the hospitals of the Delhi government and a report be submitted by



March 26 evening or March 27 morning, furnishing details on a list of parameters mentioned in an earlier order dated March 23, it says.

Sources said the drill is expected to begin in the morning.

Delhi has seen an increase in the number of Covid cases over the last few days amid a sharp rise in H3N2 influenza cases in the country.

The national capital recorded 152 coronavirus cases with an increased positivity rate of 6.66 per cent on Friday.

Delhi had logged 117 Covid cases with a positivity rate of 4.95 per cent on

Thursday. According to the March 23 order, in view of the daily upsurge in COVID-19 cases being witnessed in Delhi since the last few weeks, medical directors, medical superintendents, administrators of all government and private hospitals must ensure that all equipment such as ventilators, bi-pap, oxygen concentrators, PSA, etc. Are in functional condition.

All severe acute respiratory illness (SARI) and five per cent of influenza like illness (ILI) patients should be tested for COVID-19 as well as seasonal influenza H1N1/H3N2, the March 23 order stated.

Case filed against people for circulating message to remove Indian flag from Pragati Maidan

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has registered a case against unidentified people for recording and circulating an audio message containing the threat to remove the Indian flag from Pragati Maidan, the venue for high profile G-20 meet in September.

The case was registered at the complaint of a man who received the pre-recorded message on his phone when he arrived at the Delhi airport.

In the message, the alleged Khalistan supporter was talking about taking over Pragati Maidan and removing the Indian flag. Later, the person also allegedly talked about 'Waris Punjab De' chief Amritpal Singh, they said.

A case under sections 153 (provocation with intent to cause riot), 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion etc) and 505 (statements conducing to public mischief) of



the Indian Penal Code was registered at IGI Airport Police Station, they said.

The case has been transferred to the Special Cell unit of the Delhi Police, they added. Singh, the radical preacher, is on the run after the Punjab Police arrested several of his supporters in a major crackdown that began weeks after the group stormed the Ajnala Police Station near Amritsar to secure the release of an arrested associate.

The episode had raised fears over the possibility of the return of Khalistani militancy to the state that borders Pakistan.

Won't let conspiracy to stop power subsidy succeed, says Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday asserted that his Government would not let the "conspiracy" to stop the power subsidy scheme in the national Capital succeed and said he would defend like a rock the rights of the people of Delhi.

A day after Power Minister Atishi alleged in the Delhi Assembly that officials were trying to stop the power subsidy scheme at the behest of Lietenant-Governor VK Saxena, Kejriwal warned him not to complain later about "dignities" being breached.

Earlier this week, Saxena - in an apparent reference to his relationship with the AAP dispensation that has been aggressively attacking him over a range of issues - had said that the "dignity of speech" was breached in recent times. While alleging that there is conspiracy to stop the power subsidy scheme introduced by his Government in Delhi, Kejriwal



tweeted in Hindi, "Still they say Kejriwal fights a lot."

"Conspiracies are being hatched to stop (the) free electricity (scheme) in Delhi. But we will not allow their conspiracy to succeed. Kejriwal will be found standing like a rock for the rights of the people of Delhi. LG saheb, please do not say later that dignities are being breached," Kejriwal said.

Amid allegations of officials obstructing the Delhi government's electricity subsidy scheme at the behest of Saxena, Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel on Friday referred the matter to the Standing Committee on Public Facilities.

Laxmi Nagar spa raided for prostitution



The Delhi Police has busted a prostitution racket being run from a spa and massage centre in east Delhi's Laxmi Nagar with the arrest of two people, a senior officer said on Saturday. Police raided a place called True Bliss Spa in V3S Mall on Friday sending a decoy customer.

The spa operators charged Rs 1,000 from him after bargaining and showed him nine women and asked him to choose one of them. The customer was charged Rs 2,000 extra for sex, police said.

A team raided the place after the decoy gave them a missed call and apprehended a 24-year-old Ram Sagar, a resident of Jhilmil Colony, and a 20-year-old Deepak, who lives in Vishwas Nagar, a senior police officer said.

Farmhouse in Chhattarpur sealed for non-payment of ₹1.09 crore property tax



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi on Saturday said it has "sealed" a farmhouse in the Chhattarpur area for alleged non-payment of property tax amounting to nearly Rs 1.09 crore.

The taxpayer "failed to pay the outstanding tax dues since 2004-05, despite being given ample opportunities by the MCD to pay outstanding dues", the civic body said in a statement.

The MCD is taking similar action against big tax defaulters for "sealing/attachment of farm houses/other properties in various areas", it said.

The MCD in the ongoing drive to crackdown on property tax defaulters has "sealed/attached one farm house today in DLF Chhattarpur area located in south Delhi. Approximately Rs 1.09 crore of property tax is outstanding against the property", it said.

Conman Suresh writes mushy letter to Jacqueline from jail

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Suresh Chandrashekhar, who is lodged in Mandoli jail here in connection with several frauds, wrote a letter to Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez on his birthday and confessed his love for her.

He said that he was missing her on his birthday and referred to her as a "beautiful doll."

"My Bomma, I miss you a ton on this day of my birthday, I miss your energy around me, I have no words, but I know your love for me is never ending, is all over me. I know what is in your beautiful heart. I don't need proof and that's all that matters to me, baby. But I must admit, I am missing you, you know how much I love you my botta bomma," he wrote in the letter.

The letter further said, "You and your love is the bestest gift which is priceless in



my life, you know I am here for you standing by you come what may. Love you my baby, thank you for giving me your heart. I also thank all my supporters and friends for all your wishes on my birthday. I have received hundreds of letters, greetings. I feel blessed, thank you."

Chandrashekhar is accused of cheating many people, including high-profile individuals such as former Fortis Healthcare promoter Shivinder Mohan Singh's wife Aditi Singh.

Two held for duping people on promise of high returns in Bitcoins



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two men were arrested for allegedly duping people on the pretext of high returns in Bitcoins, police said on Saturday.

The accused have been identified as Jatin Kumar Dhall (28), a resident of Rohini Sector-28, and Anshul Arora (33), a resident of Noida Extension, Uttar Pradesh, they said.

The accused came in con-

tact with each other through a Telegram group, police said.

A complaint was received from the wealth manager of a private bank alleging that in September 2022, an unidentified person contact him on Instagram and asked him to invest money in Bitcoin which would yield very high returns, police said. The complainant transferred Rs 90,000 on the assurance that he would get Rs 2,50,000 within three hours, they said.

Cabbie murders woman for not marrying him

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 34-year-old cab driver was arrested for allegedly killing a woman for not agreeing to marry him, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place in east Delhi's New Ashok Nagar area.

Identified as Shiv Shankar Mukhiya, the accused is a resident of Madhubani in Bihar and works as a cab driver.

He is married and has four children, police said, adding that Mukhiya presently lives in Chirag Delhi with his family and his wife works as a maid.

Police received information about the murder on February 26 and reached the spot where the body of a 30-year-old woman was found lying on the floor, a senior police officer said.

The autopsy report revealed that the victim had suffered head injuries along

with a few others in her inner mouth, suggesting smothering, the officer said.

During the investigation, a friend of the victim informed police that a taxi driver was forcing her to marry him. The friend of the victim had neither met the person nor seen his picture, the officer said.

On checking the CCTV footage of the nearby area, police spotted a man behaving suspiciously. He was seen entering the lane at 7.13 pm and coming out at 7.27 pm, Deputy Commissioner of Police (east) Amrutha Guguloth said.

The husband of the victim told police that he had received a call around a month ago where the caller threatened him to leave his wife, they said, adding that the caller had also affixed some pamphlets mentioning his and her wife's phone number with derogatory remarks on them.

Covid surge: Centre raises concern at low testing by States, UTs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Even as the Covid cases are climbing up gradually in some parts of the country, States and UTs seem to have lowered their guard with the Centre on Saturday raising concern at low level and insufficient testing by States and UTs compared to the standards prescribed by WHO ie 140 tests per million. It also asked them to keep a close watch on the evolving etiologies (causes of diseases) of Influenza Like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) cases.

In an advisory issued jointly by DG, Indian Council of Medical Research, Dr Rajiv Bahl and Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan, the Centre pointed out that India usually sees a seasonal rise in influenza cases from January to March & again from August to October. Presently, the most



prominent subtypes of influenza in circulation in the country seem to be influenza A (H1N1) and influenza A (H3N2). “The States must keep a watch on these causes of diseases.”

“A gradual but sustained increase in the trajectory of Covid-19 cases in the country has been witnessed since mid-February 2023. As on date, most of the active cases in the country are largely being reported by a few states like Kerala (26.4 per cent), Maharashtra (21.7 per cent),

Gujarat (13.9 per cent), Karnataka (8.6 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (6.3 per cent).

“While the rates of hospitalisation and death due to the disease remains low, largely because of the significant coverage achieved in terms of Covid-19 vaccination rates by all states/UTs, this gradual rise in cases needs reinvigorated public health actions to contain the surge,” said the advisory. The states have been told that Covid and influenza share a number of similarities in terms of mode of transmis-

sion, high risk population, clinical signs and symptoms. While this may present a clinical dilemma for the attending doctors in terms of diagnosis, this also renders both these diseases easily preventable by following simple public health measures like avoiding overcrowded and poorly ventilated settings, wearing a mask in crowded & closed settings, advisory reads.

The States have also been advised to take a stock of hospital preparedness including drugs, beds including ICU beds; medical equipment, medical oxygen, capacity building of human resource on existing guidelines as well as vaccination coverage.

“Testing at the level of districts & blocks also varies, with some states heavily relying on the less sensitive rapid antigen tests. Hence it is critical to maintain optimum testing for Covid-19, equitably distributed across the states,” said the advisory.

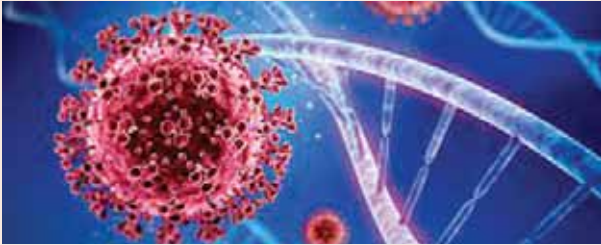
‘Virus may alter DNA in infected patients’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The virus that causes Covid-19, may alter DNA in the patients it infects. This not only explains immunological symptoms after infection, but also potentially links to long Covid, researchers have said.

In a study published in the Nature Microbiology, they said that the genetic materials in the cells of the human body are stored in a structure called chromatin. Some viruses of other categories have been reported to hijack or change our chromatin so that they can successfully reproduce in our cells.

But SARS-CoV-2’s effect on chromatin was not known. “This particular finding is quite unique and has not been seen



in other coronaviruses before. “What we found here is a unique mechanism of SARS-CoV-2 that is associated with its severe impacts on human health,” said Wenbo Li, Associate Professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of the McGovern Medical School at University of Texas-Houston.

In this study, researchers used leading-edge methods and comprehensively characterised the chromatin archi-

ture in human cells after a Covid-19 infection. They found that many well-formed chromatin architectures of a normal cell become de-organised after infection.

For example, there is one type of chromatin architecture termed A/B compartments that can be analogous to the yin and yang portions of our chromatin. “After SARS-CoV-2 infection, we found that the yin and yang portions of the chromatin lose their nor-

mal shapes and start to mix together. Such mixing may be a reason for some key genes to change in infected cells, including a crucial inflammation gene, interleukin-6, that can cause cytokine storm in severe Covid-19 patients,” Li said.

In addition, the study published in the journal found that chemical modifications on chromatin were also altered by SARS-CoV-2. “The changes of chemical modifications of chromatin were known to exert long-term effects on gene expression and phenotypes. Therefore, our finding may provide an unrealised new perspective to understand the viral impacts on host chromatin that can be associated with long Covid,” added Xiaoyi Yuan, from the McGovern Medical School.

Army Chief presents ‘President’s Standards’ to 4 Armoured Regiments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Saturday presented the prestigious ‘President’s Standards’ or ‘Nishan’ to four Armoured Regiments of the Indian Army, namely 49 Armoured Regiment, 51 Armoured Regiment, 53 Armoured Regiment and 54 Armoured Regiment during an impressive Standards Presentation Parade held at Suratgarh Military Station in Rajasthan.

The Armoured Corps is one of the premier combat arms of the Indian Army. Since Independence, the valour, courage and fortitude shown by the Armoured Regiments during the wars have been exceptional, officials said here.

Pande reviewed the Standard presentation parade and appreciated the rich lega-



cy of valour, sacrifice and traditions displayed by the Armoured Corps in war and in peace.

The Army Chief in his address commended the Regiments who received the prestigious President’s Standards, for their exemplary

service and conveyed his best wishes to the ranks and families. He also brought out that the modern and professional Indian Mechanised Forces are always ready to meet the future challenges and stand committed to guard the nation against all threats.

India, US will boost ties, says Indian envoy to US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■
NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

India and US will work towards further strengthening their bilateral ties, Indian Ambassador to Washington Taranjit Singh Sandhu said soon after meeting the new US ambassador to New Delhi Eric Garcetti. He was sworn in as the next envoy to India late Friday.

The meeting between the two envoys took place hours after Garcetti’s oath taking ceremony in Washington. Garcetti, President Joe Biden’s close aide, was officially sworn in as the US Ambassador to India by Vice President Kamala Harris, ending over two years of delay to fill one of Washington’s most critical diplomatic positions.

“Congratulated @eric-garcetti on his swearing-in as



the Ambassador of America to India,” Sandhu tweeted after the meeting.

“As he prepares to depart for India, we discussed some immediate priorities in deepening the bilateral partnership, in line with our Leaders’ vision,” Sandhu said. He said he looked forward to working with Garcetti.

The US Embassy in India has been without an ambassador since January 2021, the longest stretch in the history of US-India relations that the

post has sat vacant, since Kenneth Juster, the last US envoy in New Delhi, stepped down after the change of government in America.

The US Senate confirmed Garcetti’s nomination earlier this month, ending a protracted hiatus of over two years to fill the key diplomatic position. Garcetti’s nomination was pending before the US Congress since July 2021 when he was nominated by President Joe Biden.

Garcetti’s daughter Maya held the Hebrew Bible during the swearing-in ceremony. The ceremony was attended by his close family members, including wife Amy Wakeland, father Gil Garcetti, mother Sukey Garcetti and mother-in-law Dee Wakeland.

“I cannot wait to serve,” Garcetti said, when asked about his new diplomatic assignment.

Misa questioned by ED, Tejashwi by CBI in land-for-jobs case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

While the CBI on Saturday questioned Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav at its headquarters here for eight hours in the land-for-jobs ‘scam’, the Enforcement Directorate grilled his sister and MP Misa Bharti in the connected money laundering case for seven hours.

Earlier, Yadav had skipped summons thrice.

Yadav arrived at the agency’s office at around 10:30 AM and left at 8 PM. He also took a break for lunch for nearly 90 minutes.

Bharti reached the ED office at around 11 AM and left around 7 PM with an hour-long lunch break.

During Yadav’s questioning, the investigators pointed questions relating to his financial transactions, including his purported links to AB Exports Private Limited and AK Infosystems Pvt Ltd. Both these companies are alleged to be beneficial companies in the alleged scam.

Last week, the CBI assured the Delhi High Court that Yadav would not be arrested this month. On March 15, a special CBI court had granted bail to Yadav’s father Lalu Prasad Yadav, mother Rabri Devi, sister Misa Bharti and others in the case.

The CBI’s probe is part of an ongoing investigation into documents and evidence that emerged after the initial charge sheet was submitted, as well as the alleged involvement of accused persons that could



not be completed by the time the initial chargesheet was filed.

The CBI has alleged that during Lalu Prasad’s tenure as railway Minister from 2004 to 2009, favourite candidates were appointed in violation of norms and procedures without any advertisement or public notice.

The agency further claimed that substitutes from Patna were appointed in various zonal railways in Mumbai, Jabalpur, Kolkata, Jaipur, and Hajipur. In return, the candidates, directly or through their family members, allegedly sold land to Prasad’s family and its associates at highly-discounted rates.

Likewise, the ED quizzed Bharti, 46, is a Rajya Sabha MP of the Rashtriya Janta Dal after she reached the agency headquarters at around 11 AM following which her statement was recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Both the agencies recently initiated action in the case, with the CBI questioning Lalu Prasad Yadav and his wife and former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi and the ED carrying out raids against the RJD chief’s family under PMLA.

USBRL project will be completed by Jan-Feb, says Vaishnav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
JAMMU

Union Minister of Railways, Communications, Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnav Saturday announced the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Line (USBRL) project will be completed by Jan-Feb 2024.

The Union Minister also said after connecting with the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla train service, a specially built Vande Bharat train will be introduced in the rail section.

Addressing media persons



at Srinagar Railway Station the Union Minister said that the budget allocation for USBRL was about Rs 800 crore per year before 2014, which has been increased to Rs 6,000 crore in the year 2022-23.

The Minister also visited Budgam Railway Station and inquired about various procedures related to the maintenance of trains at Carriage & Wagon Depot, Budgam.

Ashwini Vaishnav also undertook a journey from Budgam Railway Station to Baramulla Railway Station by special inspection car. He also made a detailed overview of the safety and security of

the railway section and took stock of the passenger amenities at Baramulla Railway Station. The Minister discussed with the concerned railway officers the development works to be done at Baramulla Railway Station. He also interacted with Railway employees and inspected the dry fruit stall of “One Station One Product”. He appreciated the local dry fruits of Baramulla and purchased them using the digital mode of payment.

The Parcel Office was also inaugurated at Srinagar Railway Station in the presence of the Union Minister.

India pushing for TB vaccines to eliminate infection by 2025

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Faced with the target to achieve Tuberculosis (TB) elimination by 2025, India is pushing for expediting, manufacturing and introduction of potential TB vaccines at the UN High Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) slated September this year.

“TB vaccine is needed urgently”, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said while highlighting the crucial importance of TB vaccine in the global fight against the disease. Speaking at the 36th Board Meeting of STOP TB Partnership on Saturday, he urged its officials to take up the matter of need for TB vaccines at the UN High Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage in September this year.

“We have seen the unwavering commitment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to end TB in India. We are ready to lead from the front and be the voice of the Global South in the collaborative fight against TB,” said Mandaviya.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Mandaviya stated that “India has identified 3 impor-

tant health priorities under the G20 Presidency. All of these are focused on universal health coverage and relevant to our response for TB elimination”.

Dr Mandaviya emphasized that effort is on not only to rebound from Covid but also bring innovative strategies like the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan which has become a one-of-a-kind movement in the world.

Executive Director of the Stop TB Partnership Dr Lucia Ditiu emphasized that “India has a pivotal role in eliminating TB because India’s progress will drive the world.”

She also praised India for “doing very sophisticated modelling with their Ni-kshay data.”

“Their innovations, ideas and strategies for bringing healthcare closer to people is something that the whole world can emulate”, she stated. The Stop TB Partnership Board also appreciated India’s estimation of TB burden developed with in-country evidence.

An “Accountability Report of TB-affected Communities & Civil Society: Priorities to Close the Deadly Divide” was also launched at the event.

Septuagenarian’s odyssey in law knows no bound

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■
KOCHI

While the youth of the country study for earning a livelihood, S D Parameswaran, the septuagenarian from Ernakulam is engaged in studies for the sake of studying. Seventy two year old Parameswaran did his college, Government Law College, Thrissur, proud by passing out in the three-year LLB course with all As and enrolling as a lawyer in Kerala High Court early this week. The fact that all his classmates were young enough to be his grandchildren did not deter him from waking up at 3 in the morning, complete his studies and homework for the day and travel 80 km to Thrissur by train to attend daily classes.

For Parameswaran, who had retired from the Department of Atomic Energy as General Manager of Indian Rare Earths Ltd, life itself was a challenge. Though he passed out of the matriculation class with top honors, his poor parents could not afford to send him for higher education.

“Those were the days when typists and stenographers were very much in demand. I managed to excel in stenography and with the meagre income from that job, joined in the higher secondary class and then in Regional Engineering College, Kozhikode.

Secrets of beetles’ survival revealed

ARCHANA JYOTI ■
NEW DELHI

Ever wondered how beetles, commonly found pests like grain weevil and red flour beetles which eat their way through thousands of tons of food globally, manage to survive even in extremely dry environments? Scientists have now found that secrets lie in their rear ends as they have the ability to open their rectums and take up water from food and moist air and convert it into fluid.

“Besides being able to suck water out of the air, beetles are also extremely effective at extracting liquid from food. Even dry grain, which may consist of 1-2 percent water, can contribute to a beetle’s fluid balance,” said the researchers after investigating the molecular and physiological processes underlying the ability of beetles to survive their entire lives without drinking any liquid water whatsoever.

The new collaborative study by researchers from the University of Copenhagen and the University of Edinburgh explains just how. Beyond helping to explain how beetles thrive in environments where few other animals can survive, the knowledge could eventually be used for more target-



ed and delicate control of global pests such as the grain weevil and red flour beetle.

Insect pests eat their way through thousands of tons of food around the world every year. Food security in developing nations is particularly affected by animal species like the grain weevil and red flour beetle which have specialized in surviving in extremely dry environments, granaries included, for thousands of years.

“We have shed new light on the molecular mechanisms that allow beetles to absorb water rectally. Insects are particularly sensitive to changes in their water balance. As such, this knowledge can be used to develop more targeted methods to combat beetle species which destroy our food production, without killing other animals or harming humans and nature,” says Associate Professor Kenneth Veland Halberg of the Department of Biology, who led the research.

Differences between Govt, judiciary doesn’t mean confrontation: Rijiju

PTI ■ MADURAI

Denying any clash between the government and judiciary as speculated in the media, Union Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijiju on Saturday contended that differences were inevitable in a democracy but they should not be construed as confrontation.

The Minister inaugurated the Chief Judicial Magistrate court, Mayiladuthurai, in the presence of Chief Justice of India Justice D Y Chandrachud, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin and Acting Chief Justice of Madras High Court Justice T Raja here.

“We have differences, but it doesn’t mean there is confrontation. It sends a wrong message across the world.

“I want to make it clear that there is no problem between different organs of the State. There are signs of robust democratic actions, which are not a crisis,” he emphasised.

Pointing to some media reports of alleged differences between the government and the Supreme Court or the legislature and judiciary, the Union Minister said, “we must understand that we are in a democracy. There are bound to be certain differences in terms of some outlook but you can’t have conflicting posi-



tions. This doesn’t mean confrontation. We are the largest democracy in the world.”

The Centre would support the Indian judiciary to be independent, he said, and called upon the bench and the bar — being two sides of the same coin — to work together to ensure that the court complex is not divided. “One can’t exist without the other. Court must have proper decorum and conducive atmosphere.”

He further said, “everybody can’t think alike.”

“We are not ruled by a dictatorial king, so the difference of opinion can’t be termed as a crisis in Indian democracy. We can criticise each other but when it comes to national interest we must be one,” he stressed.

His Ministry was involved in developing a common core vocabulary where Indian languages will have certain common usages, purely technical in nature, soon, to ensure that common people receive orders

in their respective languages.

Lauding the courts in Tamil Nadu for their excellent performance during the pandemic in delivering justice to the people, he said judicial infrastructure in Tamil Nadu was comparatively better than in many States in India.

Recently, he visited Puducherry and found that the kind of work being done to improve the judicial infrastructure was possible only when the judiciary and government worked together in understanding the issues and tried to solve them.

Talking about fund allocations, he said last year the government had allotted Rs 9,000 crore for district and other courts in the State, and his department was pushing hard for utilisation of funds so that more could be sought.

“In some States, I realised that requirement of court and understanding of government has some shortcomings,” Rijiju said.

Pro-Khalistan groups protest at London’s Parliament Square

PTI ■ LONDON

A small group of protesters carrying pro-Khalistan flags and banners in support of Khalistani leader Amritpal Singh gathered at Parliament Square here on Saturday, as part of similar protests in Canada and the US.

Banners for the so-called “Protest against the discriminatory actions by Indian police forces against Bhai Amritpal Singh and other innocent Sikhs” had been circulating on social media, along with similar protests called in the cities of Toronto, Vancouver, Indianapolis and Fresno.

The protest in London comes days after a planned demonstration outside the Indian High Commission in London on Wednesday when protesters hurled coloured flares and water bottles towards the mission.

They have since taken to social media to allege that the objects were hurled by the Indian mission instead, allegations which have been countered by India House. It comes in the wake of violent disorder at the Indian mission last Sunday, when pro-Khalistan extremists smashed windows and also attempted to pull down the Tricolour from its flagpole at the mission. India has registered a strong protest with the UK government and the issue was also raised in the House of Commons earlier this week.

“We strongly condemn the vandalism and violent acts that took place outside the Indian High Commission in London. It was a completely unacceptable action against the High Commission and its staff,” Leader of the Commons Penny Mordaunt told MPs.

“There is ongoing work with the Metropolitan Police to review the protection measures around the High

‘Canada closely following developments in Punjab’

PTI ■ TORONTO

Canada is “very closely” following the developments in Punjab and will continue to address the concerns of the community, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly has said amid Punjab Police’s crackdown on radical preacher Amritpal Singh.

Joly was answering a question from Indo-Canadian MP Iqinder S Gaheer in the House of Commons on Thursday.

“We are aware of the evolving situation in Punjab, and we are following it very closely. We look forward to a return to a more stable situation,” she said.

“Canadians can always count on the Government of Canada to make sure that we will continue to address the concerns of many members of the community,” she added. Gaheer said he had heard about the ongoing mass suspension of Internet services in Punjab and asked Joly to update the House about the situation in India.

Responding to questions about foreign leaders and parliamentarians commenting on the action against Amritpal Singh, External Affairs Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi urged people residing abroad not to believe “inaccurate and motivated narratives” that are being circulated by some elements on

social media.

“Authorities in Punjab are undertaking operations to nab a fugitive. Information regarding that operation is being shared by authorities concerned on a regular basis,” the spokesman said in New Delhi. Authorities in Punjab last week suspended internet and SMS services in the state following the police crackdown against elements of ‘Waris Punjab De’; headed by the radical preacher. Police in Punjab are still searching for Amritpal Singh.

Earlier on Wednesday Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in the House of Commons: “We are looking forward to a swift return to a more stable situation.” Canada has also seen a rise in anti-India activities recently by Khalistan supporters who have vandalised some Hindu temples. A Ram Mandir in Mississauga was defaced by ‘Khalistani extremists’ with anti-India graffiti on February 13, drawing a strong reaction from the Indian Consulate in Toronto.

“We strongly condemn the defacing of Ram Mandir in Mississauga with anti-India graffiti. We have requested Canadian authorities to investigate the incident and take prompt action on perpetrators,” India’s Consulate in Toronto had tweeted.

Commission, and any changes will be made to ensure the safety and security of its staff so that they can go about their business, serving both this country and India,” she said.

It followed UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly’s statement to condemn the unacceptable acts of violence and an assurance to conduct a security review at the Indian mission in London.

Four killed while collecting free flour in Pak

PTI ■ LAHORE

At least four elderly people have died in the last few days while trying to collect free flour from the government distribution points in Pakistan’s Punjab province, officials said on Saturday.

The deaths were reported after several people flocked to the government distribution points after the cash-strapped Pakistani government introduced a free flour scheme for the poor especially in Punjab province to beat the sky-rocketing inflation.

Four elderly people died and several fainted in a bid to

collect free wheat flour in Multan, Muzaffargarh and Faisalabad cities during the last few days,” a Punjab government senior officer told PTI.

He said the incidents occurred due to the huge rush of people and lack of facilities at the distribution points set up by the government to distribute free flour among the citizens.

“Two of them died due to stampede and the other two died after getting exhausted while standing in queue for long hours,” he said.

Police on the other hand also baton-charged the people

seeking free flour to force them to stand in the queue.

The people have criticised the lack of proper arrangements by the district administration at these distribution points and the short supply of flour.

Most of them arrive at the flour points early in the morning and have to wait for a long time in queues.

Former prime minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has condemned the deaths and criticised the policy.

“This is today’s Pakistan where the people are losing their lives to get free flour.

And this is because of the bad policies of this government of looters and thieves,” PTI Punjab president Dr Yasmin Rashid told PTI.

Seeing the gross mismanagement at the free distribution of flour points, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has started visiting such points.

On Saturday he visited Sargodha city and inspected the free flour points.

Sharif checked the quality and weight of the flour bags and talked to people.

He also directed the district administration to facilitate especially elderly people at the flour distribution points.

GLOBE TROTTING

GAEKWAD REAPPOINTED FLORIDA UNIV TRUSTEE

WASHINGTON: A prominent Indian American businessman and community leader was on Friday reappointed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to the board of trustees of the prestigious University of Florida. “Today, Governor Ron DeSantis announced the reappointment of Digvijay ‘Danny’ Gaekwad to the University of Central Florida Board of Trustees,” the Governor’s office said in a statement.

MAN ATTACKS THREE WITH GRENADE, KNIFE IN BERLIN

BERLIN: German police said on Saturday that they have arrested a 61-year-old man after three people were wounded in a hand grenade and knife attack in Berlin. Police said the attacker detonated the grenade in the entrance of an apartment building in the Reinickendorf neighborhood of the German capital on Friday night, wounding two women, aged 42 and 48, and a 61-year-old man.

KING CHARLES HONOURS QUEEN’S PALLBEARERS

LONDON: Britain’s King Charles III on Saturday recognised in a special Demise honours list the eight pallbearers who carried the late Queen Elizabeth II’s coffin at her funeral last year. The British soldiers, who were selected to be pallbearers from the King’s Company of 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards – known as the Queen’s Company previously – have been awarded the silver Royal Victorian Medal.

INTEL CO-FOUNDER MOORE DIES AT 94

SAN FRANCISCO: Gordon Moore, the Intel Corp. co-founder who set the breakneck pace of progress in the digital age with a simple 1965 prediction of how quickly engineers would boost the capacity of computer chips, has died. He was 94. Moore died on Friday at his home in Hawaii, according to Intel and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

Biden: Will protect our personnel in Syria

AP ■ OTTAWA

President Joe Biden said Friday that the US would respond “forcefully” to protect its personnel after U.S. forces retaliated with airstrikes on sites in Syria used by groups affiliated with Iran’s Revolutionary Guard following a suspected Iranian-linked attack Thursday that killed a US contractor and wounded seven other Americans in northeast Syria.

“The United States does not, does not seek conflict with Iran,” Biden said in Ottawa, Canada, where he is on a state visit. But he said Iran and its proxies should be prepared for the US “to act forcefully to protect our people. That’s exactly what happened last night.” Activists said the US bombing killed at least four people.

While it’s not the first time

the US and Iran have traded strikes in Syria, the attacks and the US response threaten to upend recent efforts to deescalate tensions across the wider Middle East, whose rival powers have made steps toward détente in recent days after years of turmoil.

The Pentagon said a drone attack on a US base Thursday killed a contractor and injured five US troops and another contractor. That was followed by two simultaneous attacks on US forces in Syria on Friday, according to US officials.

The officials said that based on preliminary information, there was a rocket attack Friday at a Conoco plant, and one US service member was injured but is in stable condition. At about the same time, several drones were launched at Green Village, where US troops are also based. One official said all but one of the

drones were shot down, and there were no US injuries there. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

Two Syrian opposition activist groups reported a new wave of airstrikes on eastern Syria that hit positions of Iran-backed militias after rockets were fired at a Conoco gas plant that has a base housing American troops. Several US officials, however, said the US did not launch any attacks late Friday, and it wasn’t clear if the activists were referring to the attack on US forces at Green Village. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the American intelligence community had determined the drone in Thursday’s attack on was of Iranian origin.

US officials said that conclusion was based on recovered debris and intelligence threat streams.

Eric Garcetti sworn in as US Ambassador to India

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Eric Garcetti, President Joe Biden’s close aide, was officially sworn in as the US Ambassador to India by Vice President Kamala Harris, ending over two years of delay to fill one of Washington’s most critical diplomatic positions.

Garcetti’s daughter Maya held the Hebrew Bible during the swearing-in ceremony on Friday, which was presided by Vice President Harris.

Garcetti raised his right hand while Harris performed the ceremony, and family members cheered when the two longtime friends shook hands.

The ceremony was attended by his close family members, including wife Amy Wakeland, father Gil Garcetti, mother Sukey Garcetti and mother-in-law Dee Wakeland.

“It feels great. Can’t wait to serve,” Garcetti, 52, said when asked about his new diplomatic assignment.

“I’m so honoured the vice

Indian envoy talks partnership

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

India’s envoy here Taranjit Singh Sandhu met the newly-appointed US Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, and discussed with him immediate priorities in deepening the bilateral strategic partnership. The meeting took place soon after Garcetti was sworn on Friday in as the next US envoy to India.

Garcetti, President Joe Biden’s close aide, was officially sworn in as the US Ambassador to India by Vice President Kamala Harris, ending over two years of delay to fill one of Washington’s most critical diplomatic positions.

president did this,” he said.

Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff also attended the event.

Former Mayor of Los Angeles Garcetti’s nomination was pending before the US



“Congratulated @eric-garcetti on his swearing-in as the Ambassador of America to India,” Indian Ambassador to Washington Sandhu tweeted after the meeting on Friday. “As he prepares to depart for India, we discussed some immediate priorities in deepening the bilateral partnership, in line with our Leaders’ vision,” Sandhu said.

He said he looked forward to working with Garcetti.

The US Embassy in India has been without an ambassador since January 2021, the longest stretch in the history of US-India relations that the post has sat vacant, since Kenneth Juster, the last US envoy in New Delhi, stepped down after the change of government in America.

Tornadoes kill 23 in Mississippi

AP ■ ROLLING FORK

Emergency officials in Mississippi said 23 people have been killed by tornadoes that tore through the state on Friday night, destroying buildings and knocking out power as severe weather that produced hail the size of golf balls moved through several southern states.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency confirmed there had been 23 deaths as of 6:20 am on Saturday with dozens of injuries and four people missing throughout the state.

The agency said in a Twitter post that search and rescue teams from numerous local and state agencies were deployed along with personnel to assist those impacted by the tornadoes. The National Weather Service confirmed a tornado caused damage about 60 miles (96 kilometers) northeast of Jackson, Mississippi.

The rural towns of Silver City and Rolling Fork reported destruction as the tornado swept northeast at 70 mph (113 kph) without weakening, racing towards Alabama through towns including Winona and Amory into the night.

Pennsylvania chocolate plant blast kills five, six missing



Smoke rises from an explosion at the RM Palmer Co. plant in West Reading

WEST READING: An explosion at a chocolate factory in Pennsylvania on Friday killed five people and left six people missing, authorities said.

Several other people were injured by the explosion at the RM Palmer Co. plant, said West Reading Borough Police Department Chief of Police Wayne Holben, who did not confirm the exact number of injured.

The explosion just before 5 pm sent a plume of black smoke into the air, destroying one building and damaging a neighbouring building that included apartments.

“It’s pretty levelled,” West Reading Borough Mayor Samantha Kaag said of the explosion site. “The building in the front, with the church and

the apartments, the explosion was so big that it moved that building four feet forward.”

The cause of the blast in the community about 60 miles (96 kilometers) northwest of Philadelphia was under investigation, Holden told reporters.

Eight people were taken to Reading Hospital Friday evening, Tower Health spokeswoman Jessica Bezler said.

Two people were admitted in fair condition and five were being treated and would be released, she said in an email. One patient was transferred to another facility, but Bezler provided no further details.

Kaag said people were asked to move back about a block in each direction from the site of the explosion but no evacuations were ordered. (AP)

NZ voices concern to China over aid to Russia

AP ■ BEIJING

New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta has expressed concern to China over any provision of lethal aid to support Russia in its war against Ukraine during a meeting with her Chinese counterpart.

Her press office on Saturday detailed Mahuta’s cautionary remarks in Beijing, days after Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded his trip to Moscow, a

warm affair in which Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin praised each other and spoke of a profound friendship.

Mahuta’s four-day trip, which began Wednesday, was the first made by a New Zealand foreign minister to Beijing since 2018 but it came at an awkward time as Xi visited Moscow the same week to give Putin a diplomatic boost after the International Criminal Court said it wants to put him on trial for alleged war crimes.

On the Ukraine war, Mahuta reiterated her government’s condemnation of Moscow’s “illegal invasion” to her counterpart Qin Gang.

She also told Qin’s predecessor Wang Yi, now the Chinese Communist Party’s most senior foreign policy official, that peace and prosperity are the expectations of all parties, according to China’s official news agency Xinhua. New Zealand supports political settlement of disputes through dialogue, she was quoted

saying in the report.

Wang said the pressing task is to achieve a ceasefire and resume peace talks, and that China would continue to play a constructive role to promote a political settlement, the agency added. During the meeting with Qin, Mahuta also raised concerns over the human rights situation in Xinjiang, the erosion of freedoms in Hong Kong, disputes in the South China Sea and increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait, her press office said.

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, केन्द्रीय भण्डार, उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान, जल भवन, 'डी' ब्लॉक, नेहरू कालोनी, देहरादून									
पत्रांक:-1197 / ई-निविदा / 2022-23									
ई-निविदा सूचना									
निविदा क्र.	कार्य विवरण	घरोघर घनराशि रु.	ई-निविदा प्रपत्र सफलतापूर्वक करने की तिथि एवं समय	ई-निविदा प्रपत्र सफलतापूर्वक करने की तिथि एवं समय	ई-निविदा सूचना क्र.सं. 7 अनुसार मूल प्रपत्र विवरण में उल्लेख करने की तिथि एवं समय	तकनीकी बिड खोले जाने की तिथि एवं समय	निविदा की वेबसाइट	बि-बिड खोलने की तिथि एवं समय	
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वाणिज्यिक दूर अनुबंध पर, Tamper proof water meters (inferential type) as per standard conforming to IS:779-1994/IS:2373-1981/ISO: 4064 with ISI or EEC/MID certification mark shall be with protection class of IP68 with 2 years warranty anywhere in Uttarakhand की आपूर्ति।									
26/22-23		26,000,000.00	28.03.2023 from 11:00 a.m. to 10.04.2023 upto 5:00 p.m.	06.04.2023 from 11:00 a.m. to 10.04.2023 upto 5:00 p.m.	10.04.2023 upto 5:00 p.m.	11.04.2023 upto 11:00 a.m.	120 days	03.04.2023 at 11:00 a.m.	
अर्हता:- 1. ISI or EEC/MID certification mark license for water meters and factory as per standard conforming to IS:779-1994/IS:2373-1981/ISO: 4064 certificate holder or dealers authorized by the manufacturer are allowed to participate in this tender. The Joint Venture are also allowed in this tender. 2. Authorised dealer should have MOU with manufacturer with assured minimum quantity. 3. The preference will be given to the water meter manufacturers. Manufacturer must have supplied minimum 50,000 water meters to government/semi gov/PSU in last seven years ie 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22. 4. Production unit of the manufacturer should be established in India.									
27/22-23		5,000,000.00	28.03.2023 from 11:00 a.m. to 10.04.2023 upto 5:00 p.m.	06.04.2023 from 11:00 a.m. to 10.04.2023 upto 5:00 p.m.	10.04.2023 upto 5:00 p.m.	11.04.2023 upto 11:00 a.m.	120 days	03.04.2023 at 11:00 a.m.	
अर्हता:- 1. ISI or EEC/MID certification mark license for water meters and factory as per standard conforming to IS:779-1994/IS:2373-1981/ISO: 4064 certificate holder or dealers authorized by the manufacturer are allowed to participate in this tender. The Joint Venture are also allowed in this tender. 2. Authorised dealer should have MOU with manufacturer with assured minimum quantity. 3. The preference will be given to the water meter manufacturers. Manufacturer must have supplied minimum 50,000 water meters to government/semi gov/PSU in last seven years ie 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22. 4. Production unit of the manufacturer should be established in India.									
ई-निविदा से सम्बन्धित समस्त जानकारीयों व शर्तें उत्तराखण्ड की वेबसाइट www.uktenders.gov.in एवं विभागीय वेबसाइट http://ujs.uk.gov.in पर ऑन लाइन देखी / प्राप्त की जा सकती हैं। अधिशासी अभियन्ता									

Edelweiss

Edelweiss ASSET RECONSTRUCTION CO. LTD.

CIN - U67100MH2007PLC174759

Registered Office : Edelweiss House, Off CST Road, Kalina, Mumbai 400098

+91 22 4088 6090 / 6620 3149

APPENDIX IV-A [See proviso to rule 8(6) r/w proviso to Rule 9(1)] E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Public Notice for E-auction sale of immovable property under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to rule 8(6) r/w proviso to Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and Borrower & guarantor in particular that the immovable property described herein below ("Secured Asset"), mortgaged to Edelweiss Asset Reconstruction Company Limited acting in its capacity as Trustee of EARC Trust SC- 30, ("EARC"), the physical possession of which has been taken by Authorised Officer of EARC on October 31, 2022, will be sold by way of E-Auction on **April 13, 2023 at 12:00 Noon** with unlimited extension of 5 Minutes each through e-Auction Agency M/s e-Procurement Technologies Limited (Auction Tiger) on the website/portal <https://edelweissarc.auctiontiger.net> on "As is where is", "As is what is", "Whatever there is" and "No Recourse" basis for recovery of aggregate dues of **Rs. 505,29,95,872.25/- (Rupees Five Hundred Five Crores Twenty Nine Lac Ninety Five Thousand Eight Hundred Seventy Two and Twenty Five Paise Only)** being due as on August 23,2022, together with interest at contractual rates and other costs and expenses thereon to EARC from **KLG SYSTEL LIMITED (in Liquidation) ("Borrower")** and **Mr. Kumud Goel and Ms. Pushpa Lata Goel ("Guarantors")**. The Description of Secured Asset, Reserve Price and Earnest Money Deposit for the Secured Assets shall be as follows:

Description of Secured Asset	
All that piece and parcel of Industrial plot of land being Plot No. 24, admeasuring 1000 sq. mtr. in Sector 18, Electronics City, Gurgaon, Haryana along with all the building/structures being thereon (total built-up structure - 15,750 Sq. Ft.) and bounded as follows (North: Access Road, South: Plot No.22, East: Access Road West: Plot No. 23	
Reserve Price	Rs.11,47,50,000/-
Earnest Money Deposit	Rs.1,14,75,000/-
OTHER IMPORTANT DETAILS	
Site Inspection	29/03/2023 to 10/04/2023, between 11:00 am to 4:00 pm
Document Verification	On working days between 03/04/2023 to 10/04/2023.
Bid Document Purchase	On working days between 10/04/2023 and 11/04/2023.
EMD amount payment	By 2pm on 12/04/2023
Last Date of submission of bid document	By 5pm on 12/04/2023
Commencement of e-auction sale	12 Noon on 13/04/2023
Bank details	Ac No. 0004103000054719, IFSC No. IBKL00000004, IDBI Bank, Mittal Court, Nariman Point, Mumbai.
Officer contact details	7506642534 Meghraj.deshmukh@edelweissarc.in

For detailed terms and conditions of the auction sale, please refer to the link provided in the Secured Creditor's website i.e. www.edelweissarc.in/Propertiesale

Date: 26.03.2023 Place: Mumbai Sd/ Authorized Officer

Frame policy on e-vehicles, Parliament panel tells Govt

■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel has urged the government to frame a comprehensive national policy on electric vehicles (EV) by incorporating the elements of successful state models and international best practices.

These best practices should be based on charging infrastructure, battery swapping, battery waste management and recycling, public awareness in addition to the demand and supply side incentives such as lower GST, waiving road tax, registration fee, hire-purchase scheme at discounted interest rates by financial institutions for buying EVs, it said.

This would serve as a guiding policy to all states and ensure a comprehensive and uniform growth of the EV sector. It has also recommended that a roadmap for setting up of solar charging stations should be prepared in a time-bound manner to reduce the dependence on electricity generated by using coal, to remain true to the green mobility objective. The Committee on Estimates, in its report on "Evaluation of Electric Vehicles Policy", which was tabled in Parliament on Friday, further noted that the "Removal of



government support would result in price escalation of EVs significantly.

"The committee finds that a large number of start-ups are also involved in this field, which may have to shut down once the FAME II (second part of the scheme on promotion of electric vehicles called Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) is closed.

It is therefore recommended that the government should extend the FAME-II scheme beyond its current March 31, 2024 timeline by an

additional two years to allow more time to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme and to make necessary adjustments/modifications to promote the electric vehicles (EVs)."

The high level panel further suggested to the Heavy Industries Ministry (the nodal department for electric vehicles' promotion) that along with EVs and hybrid vehicles, it should also promote other technologies like flex fuel vehicles, hydrogen ICE, and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles among others with greater emphasis for mobility transition. The

committee has also recommended that the ministry should coordinate with other ministries and charging infrastructure operators, to frame a comprehensive plan for rollout of a nationwide public charging network.

It also urged upon the ministry to consider offering purchase subsidies and cash-incentive schemes for scrapping or exchanging petrol and diesel vehicles for electric vehicles, as it would not only lead to faster adoption of EVs but also have a major impact on controlling CO2 emissions.

Jio installs 1 lakh towers to roll out India's fastest, deepest penetration of 5G network

■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio has installed close to 1 lakh telecom towers, nearly 5 times of its nearest competition, to roll out India's fastest and deepest penetration 5G telecom network to provide ultra-high speed internet, according to latest DoT data.

The latest daily status report from Department of Telecommunications' (DoT) National EMF Portal shows Jio has installed 99,897 BTS (base transceiver station) across 2 frequencies it owns (700 MHz and 3,500 MHz). In comparison, Bharti Airtel has 22,219 BTS.

Additionally, for every base station, Jio has 3 cell sites while Airtel has 2, the March 23 report said.

The more tower and cell sites means faster speed. According to the February 28 report of Ookla, the global leader in network intelligence and connectivity insights, Jio's top median speed is 506 Mbps (megabytes per second) as compared to 268 Mbps of Airtel. "5G has been in place in India for over four months and already it's having a tremendous impact on the state of mobile in the country," Ookla said in the report.

"Speedtest Intelligence data shows that median download speeds across India increased



by 115 per cent since before the 5G launch, from a 13.87 Mbps median download speed in September 2022 to 29.85 Mbps in January 2023."

5G performance has increased across early 5G adopters in most of the telecom circles, Kolkata achieved the fastest median 5G download speeds in January 2023 at above 500 Mbps.

"Jio experienced a top median 5G download speed of 506.25 Mbps in Kolkata, while Airtel of 268.89 Mbps in Delhi," it said. Airtel and Jio have ambitious targets in terms of 5G network rollout. "From 5G

networks' inception, 5G availability across 5G-capable devices has steadily increased, reaching 8.0 per cent for Airtel and 5.1 per cent for Jio," it said.

India has over half a billion internet users, making it the second-largest online market worldwide, just behind China. 5G telecom services were launched in October 2022. "Jio's USD 25 billion investment seems to be paying off.

In January 2023 Jio achieved median 5G download speeds above 400 Mbps across ten telecom circles. Jio's True 5G network is based on a 5G Standalone (5G SA), which

doesn't rely on a 4G LTE network.

"While Jio's initial 5G speeds fluctuated massively - from low single-digit to speeds well above 800 Mbps, which pointed to the operator recalibrating its networks, Jio's 5G performance has stabilized over the past four months.

In January 2023, Jio's 5G early adopters experienced speeds ranging from 246.49 Mbps median download speed in Himachal Pradesh to 506.25 Mbps in Kolkata," Ookla said.

In comparison, "Airtel's 5G early adopters experienced speeds ranging from a 78.13 Mbps median download speed in Kolkata to 268.89 Mbps in Delhi," it added.

Last month, Akash Ambani, chairman of Reliance Jio, had at a post budget webinar of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology stated that India's largest telecom company will undertake the fastest 5G rollout in the world.

Reliance Jio is a step-down subsidiary of Reliance Industries which is helmed by his father, Mukesh Ambani. Bharti Airtel had on Friday stated that its ultra-fast 5G service is available to customers in 500 cities in the country. "Airtel added 235 cities to its network, making it one of the largest rollouts to date."

Climate change threatening tea sector globally: ITA

■ KOLKATA

Leading planters body Indian Tea Association (ITA) said climate change is threatening the industry globally which is resulting in lower yields and rise in production costs.

A spokesman of ITA said climate change is also threatening the long-term viability of tea industry, which is also causing increasing pest infestations making pesticide residue management surfacing as a major challenge.

To mitigate this, ITA said that the industry needs to adopt a multi-faceted to address the climate change issue by way of sustainable farming practices and reduc-

tion in carbon footprint. In this context, the association maintained the industry involving all the stakeholders to invest in research to come out with mitigating solutions. There has also been a decline in rainfall and increase in temperature in the tea cultivating regions for the last several years, ITA said.

According to the association, future projections indicate a substantial reduction in suitability in tea cultivation in areas where the crop is grown.

The other major area where work is needed to be done by the industry is that optimisation in the use of chemical fertilisers and greater use of renewable energy. In the latest data compiled by Tea



Board, production in January 2023 in the country was 13.43

million kilogramme as against 16.22 million kilogramme in

the same month of last calendar year.

Cabinet approves MSP for raw jute for FY 2023-24

■ NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for raw jute for 2023-24 season, based on recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).

The MSP of raw jute (TD-3 equivalent to earlier TD-5 grade) has been fixed at Rs 5,050 per quintal for 2023-24 season. This would ensure a return of 63.20 per cent over the all India weighted average cost of production. The announced MSP of raw jute for



production as announced by the government in the Budget 2018-19. It assures a minimum of 50 per cent as margin of profit. It is one of the important and progressive steps towards ensuring better remunerative returns to the jute growers and to incentivise quality jute fibre, said officials.

The Jute Corporation of India (JCI) will continue as Central government nodal agency to undertake price support operations and the losses incurred, if any, in such operations, will be fully reimbursed by the Central government.

Speed up PDS staff selection for quality food grains: Parl Panel

■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel has desired the Food and Public Distribution Department to expedite the process of revival of posts and new recruitments to raise the number of inspection and sample analysis to ensure delivery of good quality foodgrains to the ultimate beneficiaries.

"The Committee, while reiterating their original recommendation, desire the Department to expedite the process of revival of posts and new recruitments to raise the number of inspection and sample analysis thereby ensuring delivery of good quality foodgrains to ultimate beneficiaries and preventing storage losses of foodgrains," said a Action Taken report by the Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

Earlier, in their original report, it had observed that the



number of inspection and sample analysis should be increased to ensure good quality of foodgrains to beneficiaries and to prevent storage losses. "The Department in their Action Taken Reply has stated that increasing the frequency of inspections visits and sample analysis is subjected to availability of adequate staff. To achieve this, the Division is in the process of revival of posts, promotion and new recruitment on priority basis.

The Department has also informed that they have already formulated a SOP for storage loss/gain for stored goods. The Committee feel that raising

the number of inspections and sample analysis will have a significant effect on the quality of food grains," said the report. As per the report, the Ministry in its action taken reply has said: "The Storage & Research Division, D/o Food and Public Distribution has a mandate to ensure good quality foodgrains provided to the beneficiaries through various social security programmes.

"In pursuance to this, officer/official of QCC of S&R Division conducts inspection of various Food Storage Depots (FSDs) of FCI/state agencies, Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC), State Warehousing Corporations (SWC), Rice Mills (RMs) Fair Price Shops (FPS), Rail Heads & Truck Heads, etc. Prior to 2018, the inspections of FPS were conducted only after receipt of any references/complaints. Presently, FPS inspections were included under targeted activities during 2020."

23K techies laid off in 82 desi startups

■ NEW DELHI

As layoffs continue to deepen amid recession fears, more than 23,000 employees have been laid off by at least 82 startups in India, and the list is only growing, the media reported.

According to a report in Inc42, 19 edtech startups, including four unicorns, have alone sacked more than 8,460 employees to date. The startups that lead the layoff tally include BYJU'S, Ola, OYO, Meesho, MPL, LivSpace, Innovaccer, Udaan, Unacademy and Vedantu, among others.

Home interiors and renovation platform Livspace this week laid off at least 100 employees as part of cost-cutting measures. Last week, SaaS platform for online stores Dukaan laid off nearly 30 per cent of its workforce, or around 60 employees — its second lay-off in about six months.

BPCL opens 19 EV fast-charging corridors in Karnataka, Kerala, TN

■ KOCHI

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has announced that it has launched 19 EV fast-charging corridors along 15 highways in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

At approximately every 100 km on the corridors, one can find an EV fast-charging station, a top BPCL official said at an event here on Friday. "The fast-charging stations have been installed between 110 fuel stations which have been divided into various electric corridors."

BPCL Executive Director Incharge (Retail) P S Ravi said the company had launched three corridors with 19 fuel stations in Kerala, six corridors with 33 fuel stations in Karnataka and 10 corridors with 58 fuel stations in Tamil Nadu. "It takes just 30 minutes to charge an EV, giving a driving range of up to 125 km at our fuel stations. Therefore we have maintained a distance of

100 km between two charging stations," Pushp Kumar Nayar, Head of Retail in the South, said at the launch.

Ravi said the fast chargers were easy to use and could be self-operated without any manual assistance, even though support staff would be available if needed.

"BPCL has digitised the entire EV charger locator, charger operations and transaction process through the HelloBPCL app for an online hassle-free and transparent user experience," Ravi added.

The company has launched EV corridors connecting important religious and tourist destinations with cities, such as Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh and Bandipur National Park in Karnataka, Guruvayoor and Kadampuzha temples in Kerala, Vallarpadam National shrine of Basilica at Kochi, Koratty and Markaz Knowledge City in Thrissur, Kanyakumari and Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai among others.

ChatGPT has power to change healthcare: Report

■ NEW DELHI

OpenAI's ChatGPT, which can write original prose and chat with human fluency, holds the potential to completely change healthcare, according to a report on Thursday.

The report by GlobalData, a data and analytics company, said that the revolutionary technology is coming faster than most people in the industry currently recognise.

It estimates the total Artificial Intelligence (AI) market will be worth \$383.3 billion in 2030, with a robust 21 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2022 to 2030. "ChatGPT can be used to assist doctors with bureaucrati-



ic tasks such as writing patient letters so doctors can spend more time on patient interaction. More importantly, chatbots have the potential to increase the effectiveness and accuracy of the processes for preventive care, symptom iden-

tification, and post-recovery care," said Tina Deng, Principal Medical Devices Analyst at GlobalData, in a statement. AI integration into chatbots and virtual assistants can motivate and interact with patients. It can review a patient's symp-

toms and then recommend diagnostic advice and different options like virtual check-ins or face-to-face visits with a healthcare professional.

This can reduce the workload for hospital staff, increase the efficiency of patient flow, and save healthcare costs. During the Covid-19 pandemic, chatbots have been developed for contactless screening of Covid-19 symptoms in healthcare institutions and to help answer questions from the public.

Chatbots can answer patient queries about medical products and share brand news with customers. Pharmaceutical and medical device companies can benefit from using AI-enabled virtual

agents to automate customer service processes and give patients round-the-clock attention.

Additionally, chatbots can be used for social purposes, increasing patient engagement. Chatbots offer advice on how to maintain health after treatment. They send automated reminders to take medications and re-visit information.

Meanwhile, a recent study in the Journal of The National Cancer Institute Cancer Spectrum, showed that when it comes to answering people's questions about cancer, especially regarding myths and misconceptions, ChatGPT was found 97 per cent accurate in providing the correct information. The AI was so accurate

that the test subjects were unaware whether the answers came from ChatGPT or the National Cancer Institute. However, the usage of chatbots in patient care and medical research raises several ethical concerns.

As massive patient data is fed into machine learning to improve the accuracy of chatbots, patient information is vulnerable. The information provided by chatbots might be more inaccurate and misleading, depending on the sources fed into the chatbots. "Regardless of the risks, AI-powered chatbots will be used widely in the healthcare industry. More regulations are expected to govern the health uses of chatbots," Deng said.

BUSINESS BRIEF

AIIMS TO GET WAITING HALL, BHOOMI POOJAN HELD

New Delhi: In a major relief to lakhs of patients and their attendees, a Waiting Hall will soon come up in the premises of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi. The hall will be built by Dhanuka Group as a part of its corporate social responsibility initiatives. The Bhoomi Poojan of the hall was performed today in the



august presence of Dr. M. Sreenivas, Director, AIIMS; Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel, Chairman, National Green Tribunal (NGT) and RG. Agarwal, Chairman, Dhanuka Group. The 80x80 meter size facility is being built near Community Centre in the AIIMS premises and expected to bring major relief to waiting patients and accompanying relatives and well-wishers. It is likely to be completed in four months and will have an attached washroom, drinking water facility and a canteen facility for refreshment. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Sreenivas said, "It's a model example of a corporate helping a public institution in bringing facilities for our people. AIIMS is known worldwide for its excellent medical treatment and healthcare. This facility (waiting room) will bring major respite for waiting patients and accompanying relatives/well-wishers."

Murgappa, Premji to acquire Lotus Surgicals for ₹348 cr

Chennai: Murugappa Group's engineering firm Tube Investments of India and (TII) Azim Premji's private equity fund Premji Invest announced on Saturday that together they would be acquiring Lotus Surgicals, a maker of wound closure products, for a sum of Rs 348 crore. Tube Investments will invest Rs 233 crore for 67 per cent stake, while Premji Invest will pick up the remaining 33 per cent at Rs 115 crore from the existing shareholders of Lotus Surgicals.

"Tube Investments and Premji Invest on Saturday signed a share purchase agreement to acquire 100 per cent equity capital of Lotus Surgicals Pvt Ltd from India Medical Consumables Holdings Ltd, a Samara Capital entity, and other shareholders," a statement released here said. The two companies are partnering for the acquisition with the objective of setting up a medical



technology platform, which aspires to become a global platform to design, manufacture and distribute innovative world-class medical products at affordable price points, the statement added. Plans for scaling up the platform include organic and inorganic acquisitions.

"The acquisition of Lotus Surgicals Pvt Ltd marks our entry into the med-tech business. We believe that the Indian medical industry is expected to be one of the fastest growing sectors driven by both demand and supply side factors," TII executive chairman M A M Arunachalam said. **PTI**

Shooter Manu wins India's 7th medal

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Olympian shooter Manu Bhaker clinched the 25m pistol bronze medal at the ISSF Pistol/Rifle World Cup to take India's medal tally to seven, including a gold, here on Saturday.

Bhaker, the multiple World Cup medal winner, had shot 290 in the precision round on Friday and entered the second day of the competition well placed for the rapid round.

In the rapid round on Saturday, she again shot three superb series of 98, 99 and 97 to aggregate 294 and advance to the ranking round placed third.

Another Indian, Esha Singh, who had shot 292 in precision, scored 289 in rapid to aggregate 581 and advance to the ranking round placed eighth. In the ranking match 1, Bhaker qualified for the medal round as the third qualifier with an aggregate of 14 points, along with Germany's Doreen Vennekamp (14 points), while Esha was eliminated.

Two shooters from ranking match — China's Ziyue Du and Yaxuan Xiong — qualified for the medal round with 12



points each, to make up the quartet vying for the top position.

In a tough medal match, Bhaker was no match for Doreen (30 points) and Ziyue Du (29 points) who won the

gold and silver, while the Indian could aggregate only 20 points to finish her campaign with a bronze.

This is the first medal in the ongoing World Cup for Bhaker, who had failed to impress in her

favourite event, air pistol, on the opening day of the competition, finishing 16th with 568 points.

China continued their domination in the tournament, winning a sixth gold medal out of the eight decided so far. The

final competition day comes up on Sunday with two more finals left to be played -- the women's 3P and the men's 25m rapid fire pistol.

Aishwary finishes fourth

Om's rear-guard action propels him into tied second

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Om Prakash Chouhan fired a 66 to zoom 11 spots to tied second with a card of 13-under 203 while emerging as the highest-placed Indian at the USD 300,000 Duncan Taylor Black Bull Challenge here on Saturday. Italy's Lorenzo Scalise shot the third day's best score of seven-under 65 to take a two-shot lead at 15-under 201 at the Karnataka Golf Association (KGA) course.

Chouhan was in a four-way tie for the second spot along with Spain's Victor Pastor (67), England's Ashley Chesters (68) and Sweden's Rikard Karlberg (69). Aman Raj (71) was the second Indian in the top-10. He was placed tied ninth at 10-under 206.

Lorenzo Scalise (68-68-65), on his first trip to India, has posted only one bogey in his last 54 holes. The 27-year-old from Monza, who currently sits in 10th position on the Road to Mallorca Rankings, was pleased with every part of his game as he went error-free.

Scalise said, "I hit it great off the tee and put myself into some great positions. My putting was very good, and I only left myself short sided once."

"I've started the season well and my aim is to be in contention every week because you



have to play consistently throughout the year if you want to finish in the top 20 and get your DP World Tour card."

Chouhan (70-67-66), a seven-time winner on the PGTI, had a quiet start with just one birdie on the front-nine. The Mhow-based Chouhan then began to gather steam with birdie-eagle on the 10th and 11th making a 16-foot conversion on the latter.

Chouhan then stumbled with a double-bogey on the 12th where he found the hazard. He then came up with a fantastic rear-guard action by sinking long-distance birdie putts on the 14th, 16th, 17th and 18th to rise into contention.

The 36-year-old Chouhan said, "After a good start, the double-bogey on the 12th was quite disappointing but fortunately I didn't let that affect my game. I was pleased with the very strong finish. "I've been working on the mental aspect of my game as errors on the course used to affect me a lot in the past."

Satwik-Chirag duo enters semi-final of Swiss Open

PTI ■ BASEL

Dynamic Indian doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty has entered the semi-finals of the Swiss Open Super Series 300 badminton event defeating the Danish pair of Jeppe Bay and Lasse Molhede in three hard-fought games.

On Friday night, the Indian pair fought off the challenge in 54 minutes, winning 15-21, 21-11, 21-14.

The victory came after a hard-fought 84-minute quarter-final battle and now they will face the Malaysian pair of Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi late on Saturday night.

Satwik-Chirag are the only Indian contenders left in a tournament where the likes of PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen suffered early defeats.

The Indian pair didn't have a great start as they lost the first game easily at 15-21. The duo did pull things up in the middle of the game, reducing the deficit to just one point as they trailed 15-16.



However, the Danish pair won six consecutive points to wrap up the first game with ease.

The Indian pair picked up the tempo in the second game as they quickly got a seven-point cushion of 11-4 at the halfway break. They extended the lead to 10 points by the time parity was restored.

The third game started on an even keel but the Indians were fantastic at the net as they first got an 11-7 lead and then maintained a seven-point advantage till the end of the match to enter the last-four in style.

A tournament win will be a good comeback for the pair after a disappointing early round exit at the All England Championships.

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Former India star Renedy Singh is hoping that his football-crazy home state of Manipur gets to host more national team matches in the near future.

Manipur, which has been providing footballers to the national team for the longest time, is hosting its first international competition in the form of the ongoing tri-nation tournament involving India, Myanmar and Kyrgyzstan.

The seven Manipuris in the current Indian team are lucky to experience something that one of the state's greatest players, Renedy couldn't while representing the Blue Tigers.

"I was part of the national team for 12 years, but I never got to play even one match over here," said Renedy, the former midfielder who donned the India jersey 66 times between 1998 and 2011. Renedy was the star performer in many of India's memorable triumphs, including the LG Cup in Vietnam, the AFC Challenge Cup and twice in the Nehru Cup, but never had the opportunity to play for the national team in front of his home crowd in Manipur.

"I feel 25-30 thousand people turning up for India's first

I hope Manipur gets more national team matches in future: Renedy



match in Manipur is a big thing. I'm really happy for the current Manipuri players, and I hope we get more matches in the future," Renedy said. "In this state, football has always been number one. It's not cricket here in the northeast," he said.

"As we all know, we're one of the states which produces the most number of footballers, and we are still working hard to produce more. In every locality and community, you will see kids playing football. If the academies in Manipur keep

working, I'm sure we'll continue to provide good players in the future."

Speaking of academies, Renedy himself is a coach at the Classic Football Academy, one of Manipur's best, and one which is increasingly making its

mark at the national level.

CFA started as Renedy Football School in 2018 before being renamed three years ago.

"We just became the Hero U-17 Youth Cup champions. Our U-21 squad qualified for the Manipur state league and won the Shaheed Manoranjan Singh Memorial Tournament, beating former champions Sagolband United 7-0," Renedy said proudly. Rigorous competition at the youth level is a big reason why Manipur stands out in terms of churning out national team players. "There are many academies in Manipur with former players as coaches who are also working hard. Our rivalry and competition will only help Indian football," he claimed.

As a coach, Renedy spends a lot of time analysing his team's matches. So in attendance at the India-Myanmar game, it was natural for him to make some assessments. "Our players are fit, fast and well-built, but the only thing I want to see is them being more comfortable with the ball," he said.



Jeev, Chikka, Ahlawat tied 11th in rain-hit match

PTI ■ HONG KONG

Jeev Milkha Singh showed that he remains a force to reckon with and was the leading Indian alongside two youngsters — Veer Ahlawat and S Chikkarangappa — on the third day of World City Championship which has now been reduced to 54 holes.

Lightning and rain stopped the third round at 11.48 local time at the Hong Kong Golf Club and play was unable to restart again as the inclement weather persisted.

Jeev, who now plays on the Senior Tours in Japan and Europe, followed his second round 4-under 66 with another strong display as he was 2-under through eight holes in the third round.

With four Open slots available at the event, Jeev may well fancy his chances. At 5-under he is tied 11th with Ahlawat and Chikka.

Bidding to become the first player from Hong Kong to win an Asian Tour event and qualify for The Open, Taichi Kho was 1-under through two holes and was 13-under and last week's winner in DGC Open Miguel Tabuena (1-over through two) was 9-under.

Four other players are at 7-under and another four at 6-under, while the three top Indians with six others are at 5-under.

Other Indians are Gaganjeet Bhullar (66) who is among the few who have completed their third round. He is 4-under and tied 20th. He is alongside SSP Chawrasia at 1-under through eight holes. Chawrasia has a total of 4-under.

Shiv Kapur has a total of 3-under with six holes to play, while Karandeep Kochhar has a 1-under total with two holes to play. Honey Baisoya is 3-over with four holes to play.

Manika, Sreeja move up with other seeds

PTI ■ JAMMU

Top-seeded Manika Batra and second-seeded Sreeja Akula, also the defending champion, made short work of their respective opponents in women's singles to enter the Round of 32 in the 84th Senior National Table Tennis Championships here on Saturday.

Other seeded players, including Reeth Rishya, Diya Chitale, Sutirtha Mukherjee, Anusha Kutumbale, Swastika Ghosh and Prapti Sen scored easy wins to join the leaders in the race for the crown and the top prize purse.

But what aroused interest were the matches that went down to the wire, including the one between former national champion Ankita Das from PSPB and Pelf from Chandigarh and between Shamini Kumareshan, also a former national champion, and Deshna Vanshika from Karnataka.

Though Ankita advanced, Shamini could not.

Ankita did not begin well and conceded two of the first three games to the Chandigarh qualifier. But the inexperienced Pelf, too, suffered in the next and allowed the Olympian to restore parity.

Yet, Pelf made another desperate attempt to go ahead of her known rival before succumbing to the pressure and yielded.

AP ■ MUNICH

New Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel acknowledged on Saturday that he faces a challenging start to his new job after his surprise hiring on Friday to replace Julian Nagelsmann.

Tuchel goes straight into crucial games, starting with German title rival - and Tuchel's former club - Borussia Dortmund on April 1.

"The challenge can't be any greater," Tuchel said.

Ten days later, Bayern plays Manchester City in the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

There will be little time to rest or practice new tactics, with many Bayern players currently away with their national teams and then seven games in the first 22 days of April.

"I was relatively naive in the first conversation (with Bayern). In the first 30 seconds I didn't know what we were discussing or what it was about," Tuchel said.

Once it became clear

Tuchel ready for tough start at Bayern after surprise move



Bayern wanted him to take charge immediately, "it occurred to me that it actually begins right away with Dortmund with an international break beforehand."

Bayern against Dortmund is "the" game in German soccer, he added. Tuchel said the

move came as a surprise and that as recently as on Tuesday he had no contact with Bayern. He imagined his next job would be outside of Germany, he added, but that he had been following Bayern's season with interest.

Tuchel hasn't worked in

Germany since 2017. When he left, the only major trophy he'd won was the German Cup with Dortmund. He returns having won two French titles at Paris Saint-Germain and the Champions League and Club World Cup with Chelsea.

Bayern can still win three titles this season - the Bundesliga, the German Cup and the Champions League.

Consistency is a concern after Bayern chief executive Oliver Kahn highlighted that as a reason for getting rid of Nagelsmann.

Bayern is likely to be looking for Tuchel to get the best out of players like Leroy Sané and Serge Gnabry, whose form has dropped off this season, and Sadio Mané, who has rarely been at his best in an injury-disrupted season since joining from Liverpool.



Mexico hopes to host Summer Olympics in 2036 or 2040

AP ■ LAUSANNE

Mexico has declared its desire to host the Summer Olympics in 2036 or 2040 and says it already has most of the sports infrastructure required. Interest in hosting the 2036 Olympics had earlier been expressed by officials in countries including Egypt, England, India, Indonesia, Qatar and South Korea.

Mexico City hosted the Summer Games in 1968.

Mexican Foreign Relations Secretary Marcelo Ebrard and

Mexican Olympic Committee president Maria José Alcalá met Friday with IOC president Thomas Bach. Ebrard delivered a letter of intent to Bach.

A city or region wasn't specified but Ebrard and Alcalá said a committee would be formed to support the initiative. Last October, International Olympic Committee director general Christophe De Kepper said they were talking to "10 interested NOCs and regions across four continents" regarding potential candidacies for future Summer Games.

Diallo eventually delivered one. Salah took his goal with a first-time shot from a cross in the 20th minute to give Egypt the lead against Malawi in Cairo. Omar Marmoush was credited with the second but his low shot took a wicked deflection off a Malawi defender and looped over goalkeeper Charles Thom.

Egypt had 21 shots to Malawi's five and 75% possession, and the win revived the record seven-time African champion's qualifying campaign after it lost to Ethiopia in the last round to slip to the bottom of Group D on goal difference.

Mané scores on return to action with Senegal

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

Sadio Mané put his World Cup disappointment behind him by scoring on his return to international action as Senegal swept past Mozambique 5-1 in African Cup of Nations qualifying.

Mané dashed behind the defense to poke home a pass by Youssouf Sabaly with his left foot for the reigning African champion's second goal in Dakar on Friday.

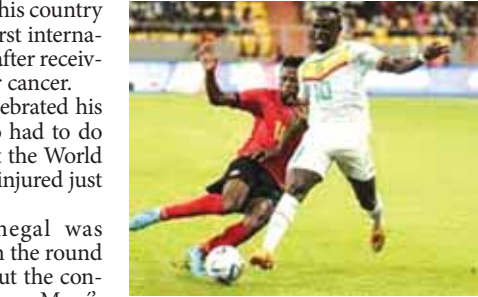
Mohamed Salah netted Egypt's opener in a 2-0 win over Malawi.

And there was also a successful return for Ivory Coast striker Sébastien

Haller, who scored to help his country beat Comoros 3-1 in his first international since his comeback after receiving treatment for testicular cancer.

Mané smiled as he celebrated his goal with teammates, who had to do without their star player at the World Cup last year after he was injured just before the tournament.

Without Mané, Senegal was knocked out by England in the round of 16 at the World Cup. But the convincing win over Mozambique, Mané's first game for Senegal since before the World Cup, kept the Cup of Nations titleholder at the top of Group L with



three wins from three and on course to qualify for the continental championship next year in Ivory Coast.

Sabaly scored the first goal in the ninth minute, Mané made it two in the 16th, and Iliman Ndiaye and Boulaye Dia ensured Senegal led 4-0 at halftime. Habib Diallo sent a diving header in for the fifth with two minutes to go.

Gildo Vilanculos got Mozambique's only goal when he headed a parry by Alfred Gomis straight back past the Senegal goalkeeper to make it 4-1 early in the second half.

Senegal didn't allow that to threaten its dominance and controlled the rest of the game, with Mané at one point urging his team not to settle for 4-1 and go forward in search of more goals.

I HAVE PLANNED A SPECIAL DELIVERY FOR THIS IPL, SAYS SHIVAM

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Gujarat Titans fast bowler Shivam Mavi says he is developing a “special delivery” for the upcoming IPL. There is still some work left on it before it is executed. “I have planned a special delivery for this IPL, will not mention here what it is but hopefully I am able to execute it and then I will talk about it. I am at 99 per cent with it, the work is still in progress,” he said. Mavi also said the defending champions have overcome the challenge of having a weak bench strength in their maiden season last year, and is confident of a strong show with the bat late in the order. “You would have witnessed that (lower order) batting has become very important for all teams in the last 1-2 years, irrespective of the teams whether it is your country or IPL or any domestic side. “If you are able to execute 2-3 hits then it is very beneficial to your side. I am backing myself to score say 30-35 runs towards



the end with the tail-end batters,” Mavi told media during an interaction on Saturday evening. The 24-year-old right-arm fast bowler Mavi, who was ear-

lier a part of the Kolkata Knight Riders camp, said Gujarat Titans have worked hard to bolster their bench strength this season. “Honestly there is no pres-

sure (on Gujarat Titans). The kind of cricket we played last year wherein everyone played their respective roles, similarly, this year too we would want to

play our roles. But this year we also have bolstered our bench strength, we felt we lacked on this front so we worked on it,” he said. Mavi added that the fringe bowlers along with youngsters will look to impress in the IPL to earn a place in the national side. “The bowlers aim to try and perform here and get a berth with the national side. My aim is to do whatever I can for the team in terms of my performance. I do not think of things too far ahead. I just focus on whatever is ahead of me,” he said. Mavi said he has worked hard on his fitness to overcome some major issues, and his overall game has improved having played domestic cricket regularly. “I have focussed a lot on my batting over the last two years, I have improved a lot as well. I am trying to work as hard as possible to be useful to my team. I have focussed on managing my workload. Since I am able to maintain that, I am

playing cricket regularly,” he said. He added, “I have worked on my hitting. I always used to bat well but could not hit those sixes easily. I have worked very hard on that and have got some good returns too. I have also put in a lot of work on my fitness. My glutes and core were weak, but now I am feeling very strong.” Heaping praise on his franchise and India T20I captain Hardik Pandya, Mavi said, “Hardik bhai never pressurises young players; he only backs them. There is a very light environment in the Gujarat camp and whenever a youngster comes in, he experiences a free setup. When the atmosphere is good then players are naturally able to perform.” Mavi also praised Gujarat Titans coach and former India player Ashish Nehra for his policy of players-first. “He gives you a free hand, you are required to go to the field and utilise your time well. If you want to rest then you take a rest. He is like a friend.



All-rounders will play big part because of ‘Impact Player’ rule: RCB’s Hesson

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore's director of cricket Mike Hesson likes the newly-introduced 'Impact Player' rule and feels all-rounders will have a bigger role to play this IPL because of the innovation. Under the 'Impact Player' rule, a batter or bowler can be replaced in the middle of the game as per match situation, in order to make it more exciting. “I think we heard about the Impact Player before the auction, so obviously we looked at it and thought about how can we maximise it. Potential for the all-rounder to play a big part. So actually there is some strategy involved in it,” Hesson said in a video posted on RCB's twitter handle. “I quite like it... I actually thought it brought a little intrigue. You could introduce the player anytime. So whether the batter is being dismissed or not... It was a nice development.” The Kiwi, however, was of the view that two different team sheets at the toss is set to negate the Impact Player rule quite a bit. “It's a substitute rule. So you name at the toss whether you have a batting eleven which will obviously be stronger,” Hesson said. “And if you bat first you will swap out a batter and bring in an extra bowler so vice versa and the other way around. So after the toss, you give them your bat-

ting 11 and bowling 11. So it's not an impact rule now it's a substitute rule.” Teams can also review wide and no balls in the upcoming IPL, and Hesson said it's a welcome move. “It is already being used in WPL. I think the more people become used to it the more instinctively they will look to challenge I think it's a good rule. “I guess what you don't want is (for it to) be the umpire's decision to be the highlight of the game,” he said. “It removes that (confusion) of whether it's a waist-high no ball or whether it's called a wide when flicked pads or vice versa actually. All the players and spectators want is as many decisions right as possible to take a bit of pressure off the umpire which I think is a good thing.” Talking about other rules to be introduced in this year's IPL, Hesson said: “So if you don't complete your 19th over by the time you have to bring an extra fielder inside the circle.” “That rule has been in place in other tournaments around the world and will be here for the first time in the IPL. There won't be as many discussions between the batter and the bowler. It is a good rule.” RCB will open their campaign against five-time champions Mumbai Indians at the Chinnaswamy Stadium here on April 2.

My left leg has healed but will take months to be fit: Maxwell

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Asce Australia and Royal Challengers Bangalore all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has said that while the injury to his left leg had healed, it'll take a “number of months” before he is back to full fitness as he prepares for the upcoming edition of the IPL. The RCB player had suffered a broken left fibula in a horrific mishap during a friend's birthday party days after Australia were knocked out of the T20 World Cup at home in November last year. The grievous injuries required urgent surgery and a long period of rehabilitation. Maxwell returned to the ODI side, which won the three-match series against India 2-1 recently, and the cricketer is now looking forward to playing for RCB on its home turf, the Chinnaswamy Stadium, after nearly two years.

Players did not put boundary ropes, says Harmanpreet on short WPL boundary limits

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India and Mumbai Indians captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Saturday declined to comment on the issue of short boundary in the Women's Premier League (WPL), saying that administrators and not players should be deciding on such limits. The inaugural WPL began earlier this month on the directive from the BCCI that the boundary limits should be brought in, five metres lesser than last month's T20 World Cup to a maximum 60 metres. The decision was to facilitate more high-scoring games and entertainment for crowds in the stadiums and watching elsewhere in terms of more boundaries and sixes.

However, both the venues of WPL 2023 -- the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai and the Brabourne Stadium -- witnessed boundaries being brought in as close as 42-44 metres, with plenty of batters making most of the opportunity and scores in excess of 200 being notched up with ease at the start. While the high scores did dry up as the pitches tired out gradually, becoming slow and assisting spin bowlers, batters still enjoyed success on shorter boundary limits. At one stage, New Zealand and Royal Challengers Bangalore all-rounder Sophie Devine even made a plea for pushing back the boundary limits. Ahead of the final on



Sunday here at the Brabourne Stadium, Mumbai Indians captain Kaur shot back when the topic came up, although in jest, saying that players are not the ones to decide if boundary limits should be increased from next season onwards. “Ham logo ne thodi na

rope lagaya hai. Jinhone rope lagaya hai aap unko poocho na. (We did not put the boundary ropes in place. You can ask whoever has done that),” Kaur replied laughing during her joint media conference with Delhi Capitals' Meg Lanning ahead of the WPL final on

Sunday. “It is not in our hands no?”, she continued. “It is in the hands of the officials. You can talk to them,” Kaur added. Both the captains who have led their respective teams into the final of the five-team tournament after 20 league games hoped that the WPL is a start of something special in Indian cricket. Lanning said Australia's WBBL has played a big role in the success of national side and hoped the same for WPL. “WBBL has played a massive role in the development of cricket in Australia and around the world as well. It provides great opportunities to players and exposes everybody to pressure situations in big games, the need to perform when it really matters,” Lanning said.

Ex-Australia skipper Paine hints at coaching role post retirement

PTI ■ HOBART

Former Australia Test skipper Tim Paine has indicated that he is likely to take up a coaching job following his retirement from all forms of cricket recently. Paine, who captained Australia in 23 Tests following his elevation to the post in the wake of the 2018 ball-tampering saga in Cape Town, had stepped down as skipper days before the start of the 2021-22 Ashes series at home when he was accused of sending lewd text messages to a Cricket Tasmania official earlier on in his career. Paine, 38, played his last domestic career game for Tasmania against Queensland in Sheffield Shield here last week. “It's an emotional time when you move on from something that you love doing and you care deeply about, but I'll still be involved in the game of cricket,” Paine was quoted as say-



ing by cricket.Com.Au, hinting he would explore possibilities of making a career in coaching. The wicketkeeper-batter, who had retreated into a shell for more than a year following the sexting scandal, had returned to play for Tasmania last year despite not having a state contract. “I just wanted to have one more year with Tassie (Tasmania) and finish on a positive note with some good memories,” said Paine, who played 35 Tests and an equal number of ODIs for Australia.

New Zealand beat Sri Lanka by 198 runs in 1st one-day match

AP ■ AUCKLAND

Harry Shipley took 5-31 as Sri Lanka was bowled out for 76 on Saturday to lose the first one-day international against New Zealand by 198 runs. New Zealand made 274 batting first on a drop-in pitch at Eden Park and Sri Lanka was dismissed for its lowest-ever ODI total against New Zealand, its fifth-lowest in all one-day internationals. Sri Lanka lost its first two wickets at 14, its third at 20 and its fourth and fifth at 31 as its innings unraveled inside the first 10 overs. When a break was taken after 14.2 overs to honor victims, rescuers and recovery workers involved in Cyclone Gabrielle which battered New Zealand's North Island on Feb. 14, Sri Lanka was 49-7. Wickets continued to fall steadily and when Sri Lanka was all out after only 19.5 overs, it was for the second lowest one-



day international total at Eden Park. Angelo Mathews, who was playing his first ODI in two years, was one of only three Sri Lanka batsmen to reach double figures. Sri Lanka's first wicket fell to a runout in the sixth over. Shipley took his first wicket in spectacular style when his angled delivery to opener

Pathum Nissanka jagged back through the batter's shot and uprooted his leg stump. He also dismissed Kusal Mendis (0), Charith Asalanka (9), Chamika Karunaratne 11 and captain Dasun Shanaka for a first-ball duck. Shipley was playing his first match for New Zealand in New Zealand after making his debut in India late

last year. “It was pretty cool, not what I was expecting to do when I came to the ground,” Shipley said. “The batters said there was enough there and the score we had on the board was going to be tricky so that gave us confidence to go out there and do that.” Shanaka said his team went

out to bat confident that New Zealand's total was “chaseable” at Eden Park which is noted for its short boundaries. “The way we started, I thought it was going to be a very good game,” he said. “The way Shipley bowled, the movement he got and the bounce was responsible for the things that happened tonight so credit should be given to him.” New Zealand wouldn't have been confident when its innings ended at 274, not a massive score by Eden Park standards. Finn Allen top-scored with 51 and Rachin Ravindra made 49 on debut as New Zealand posted what seemed a moderate total. South Africa-born opener Chad Bowes, on debut at 30, struck the first ball of the match and his international career for four to announce that intention. But after reaching 108-2 in the 19th over, New Zealand lost three wickets for 44 runs, its momentum slowed and couldn't be entirely recovered.

UP Warriorz rue Sciver-Brunt’s dropped catch after loss to Mumbai Indians

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Warriorz captain Alyssa Healy on Friday rued all-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt's dropped catch early on in her innings as the batter went on to score an unbeaten 38-ball 72 to power Mumbai Indians to a 72-run win in the Women's Premier League Eliminator game. Sophie Ecclestone spilled a regulation catch at mid-on when Sciver-Brunt was just starting out. The Mumbai Indians all-rounder made the most of the reprieve by striking nine fours and two sixes to guide her team to 182 for 4. UP Warriors were then dismissed for 110 in 17.4 overs, with Isabelle Wong taking a stunning hat-trick. “We dropped her (Nat) on

six and she went on to make a 20-ball 50. I will back our decision to bowl first, it is something that we have done really well this whole tournament. I will back our ability in that regard,” Healy said after Mumbai Indians advance to the final. “We have got a lot of spinners, it (wicket) was taking a lot of turn. So, I think defending on that wicket would have been even harder. I still back our decision there, it got a little bit away from us. At the end, I thought 170-odd was a par score, we just needed to bat well but we quite did not do that,” said the Australian. Healy admitted the UP Warriorz needed to work on their fielding, which was an area of concern during the inau-



gural WPL season. She also pointed out inconsistency in the top order during their campaign. “It has probably been the tale of our season, losing early wickets in clumps, you cannot get any momentum in your chase. They (MI) bowled pretty well and had better execution as a batting group. We will reflect on that, probably, as a top three or four. We were not consistently great throughout the whole tournament. If you are going to win a tournament you are going to bank on your top-three to make the heap of runs, and we were not able to do that,” Healy said. The UP Warriorz captain said it was a difficult decision exclude a world-class fast bowler like Shabnim Ismail from the XI,

adding the team was hoping the spinners would get the job done. “T-Mag (Tahlia McGrath) was probably a (pace bowling) option but I backed our spinners to do the job nine times out of 10. We probably did not execute quite as much at the back end. It is really hard to have someone like Shabnim Ismail sitting on the bench for us, but, at the moment, the way we are set up, we need the extra batting. I bet the six bowlers that we used tonight (Friday) to get the job done more often than not. They executed for 15 out of 20 overs and it got away from us towards the end,” Healy said. Wong, who returned figures of 4-0-15-4 including the first WPL hat-trick, said it was crucial for her to execute her plans well.

“It (hat-trick) will be up there (among the best),” Wong said. “When I'm not out bowling well, I look back at my 24 balls (and see) which ones I want to have a go at again. How many did I not execute and want to have a go at again? In terms of those balls, it (hat-trick) will be right up there,” she said. “I made a conscious effort to execute it. There have been a few moments in the past when I have been in similar situations where I am too much in the moment or like you said, hyperactivity, to actually focus on it and execute. I was trying to become quite clear at the end of my bowling mark. I wanted to bowl a yorker and nail it, but missed it a little bit,” she said about her hat-trick.

The predator wants
your silence. It feeds
their power, entitlement,
and they want it to feed
your shame
— Viola Davis



ROBOTS & RITUALS

Robots are performing rituals — some devotees fear they’ll replace worshippers, writes HOLLY WALTERS.

It isn’t just artists and teachers who are losing sleep over advances in automation and artificial intelligence. Robots are being brought into Hinduism’s holiest rituals – and not all worshippers are happy about it. In 2017, a technology firm in India introduced a robotic arm to perform “aarti,” a ritual in which a devotee offers an oil lamp to the deity to symbolise the removal of darkness. This particular robot was unveiled at the Ganpati festival, a yearly gathering of millions of people in which an icon of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, is taken out in a procession and immersed in the Mula-Mutha river in Pune in central India. Ever since, that robotic aarti arm has inspired several prototypes, a few of which continue to regularly perform the ritual across India today, along with a variety of other religious robots throughout East Asia and South Asia. Robotic rituals even now include an animatronic temple elephant in Kerala on India’s southern coast. Yet this kind of religious robotic usage has led to increasing debates about the use of AI and robotic technology in devotion and worship. Some devotees and priests feel that this represents a new horizon in human innovation that will lead to the betterment of society, while others worry that using robots to replace practitioners is a bad omen for the future. As an anthropologist who specialises in religion, however, I focus less on the theology of robotics and more on what people actually say and do when it comes to their spiritual practices. My current work on religious robots primarily centers on the notion of “divine object-persons,” where otherwise inanimate things are viewed as having a living, conscious essence.

My work also looks at the uneasiness Hindus and Buddhists express about ritual-performing automatons replacing people and whether those automatons actually might make better devotees. **TRITUAL AUTOMATION IS NOT NEW** Ritual automation, or at least the idea of robotic spiritual practice, isn’t new in South Asian religions. Historically, this has included anything from special pots that drip water continuously for bathing rituals that Hindus routinely perform for their deity icons, called abhisheka, to wind-powered Buddhist prayer wheels — the kinds often seen in yoga studios and supply stores. While the contemporary version of automated ritual might look like downloading a phone app that chants mantras without the need for any prayer object at all, such as a mala or rosary, these new versions of ritual-performing robots have prompted complicated conversations. Thaneswar Sarmah, a Sanskrit scholar and literary critic, argues that the first Hindu robot appeared in the stories of King Manu, the first king of the human race in Hindu belief. Manu’s mother, Saranyu – herself the daughter of a great architect – built an animate statue to perfectly perform all of her household chores and ritual obligations. Folklorist Adrienne Mayor remarks similarly that religious stories about mechanized icons from Hindu epics, such as the mechanical war chariots of the Hindu engineer god Visvakarman, are often viewed as the progenitors of religious robots today. Furthermore, these stories are sometimes interpreted by modern-day nationalists as evidence that ancient India has previously invented everything from spacecraft to missiles.

“DEBATES OVER USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND ROBOTIC TECHNOLOGY IN DEVOTION AND WORSHIP ARE INCREASING. SOME DEVOTEES AND PRIESTS FEEL THAT THIS REPRESENTS A NEW HORIZON IN HUMAN INNOVATION THAT WILL LEAD TO BETTERMENT OF SOCIETY, WHILE OTHERS WORRY THAT USING ROBOTS TO REPLACE PRACTITIONERS IS A BAD OMEN FOR THE FUTURE.”



MODERN TRADITIONS OR TRADITIONALLY MODERN? However, the recent use of AI and robotics in religious practice is leading to concerns among Hindus and Buddhists about the kind of future to which automation could lead. In some instances, the debate among Hindus is about whether automated religion promises the arrival of humanity into a bright, new, technological future or if it is simply evidence of the coming apocalypse. In other cases, there are concerns that the proliferation of robots might lead to greater numbers of people leaving religious practice as temples begin to rely more on automation than on practitioners to care for their deities. Some of these concerns stem from the fact that many religions, both in South Asia and globally, have seen significant decreases in the number of young people willing to dedicate their lives to spiritual education and practice over the past few decades. Furthermore, with many families living in a diaspora scattered across the world, priests or “pandits” are often serving smaller and smaller communities. But if the answer to the problem of fewer ritual specialists is more robots, people still question whether ritual automation will benefit them. They also question the concurrent use of robotic deities to embody and personify the divine, since these icons are programmed by people and therefore reflect the religious views of their engineers. **DOING RIGHT BY RELIGION** Scholars often note that these concerns all tend to reflect one pervasive theme — an underlying anxiety that, somehow, the robots are better at worshipping gods than humans are. They can also raise inner conflicts about the meaning of life and one’s place in the universe. For Hindus and Buddhists, the rise of ritual automation is especially concerning because their traditions emphasise what religion scholars refer to as orthopraxy, where greater importance is placed on correct ethical and liturgical behaviour than on specific beliefs in religious doctrines. In other words, perfecting what you do in terms of your religious practice is viewed as more necessary to spiritual advancement than whatever it is you personally believe. This also means that automated rituals appear on a spectrum that

progresses from human ritual fallibility to robotic ritual perfection. In short, the robot can do your religion better than you can because robots, unlike people, are spiritually incorruptible. This not only makes robots attractive replacements for dwindling priesthoods but also explains their increasing use in everyday contexts: People use them because no one worries about the robot getting it wrong, and they are often better than nothing when the options for ritual performance are limited. **SAVED BY A ROBOT** In the end, turning to a robot for religious restoration in modern Hinduism or Buddhism might seem futuristic, but it belongs very much to the present moment. It tells us that Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions in South Asia are increasingly being imagined as post- or transhuman: deploying technological ingenuity to transcend human weaknesses because robots don’t get tired, forget what they’re supposed to say, fall asleep or leave. More specifically, this means that robotic automation is being used to perfect ritual practices in East Asia and South Asia – especially in India and Japan – beyond what would be possible for a human devotee, by linking impossibly consistent and flawless ritual accomplishment with an idea of better religion. Modern robotics might then feel like a particular kind of cultural paradox, where the best kind of religion is the one that eventually involves no humans at all. But in this circularity of humans creating robots, robots becoming gods, and gods becoming human, we’ve only managed to, once again, re-imagine ourselves. (AP/The Conversation)

Given the degree of resistance in India, we have to be sure that BPaL results can be sustained and reinfections won't happen. Hence, ICMR is waiting for the trials to be completed

Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, is facing an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC), based in The Hague. The primary purpose of the ICC order is to make Putin accountable for the alleged atrocities he committed in the war against Ukraine. The ICC decision is historic in the sense that for the first time, the leader of a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) has been directly indicted.

However, the request has come at a time when Washington has intensified its attack on Chinese expansion, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Washington's profound distrust in the Chinese leadership as displayed in the recent assertions is counterproductive. In such a situation, the US's hope that China will be successful in stopping Putin from further war crimes in Ukraine is misplaced. Washington is of the opinion that China will press Russia for a ceasefire. But this will eventually allow the mighty Russian troops to stay inside the occupied territories of Ukraine as long as they want. This will only help Moscow consolidate its position within the sovereign territory of



Further, this again will simply legitimise Putin's occupation of significant portions of Ukraine. It is clear that such a move will be suicidal and will once again embolden Putin to gather more strength to push Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy into a corner. In fact, this offers the tiring Russian forces, along with the Wagner mercenaries, to plan better and learn from the initial mistakes that Moscow made while trying to occupy the capital city of Kyiv and some other critical pockets. Certainly, a ceasefire will allow Russia to target the Ukrainian soldiers much better and also provide enough legroom for Kyiv to marshal more resources to halt the

What does the Chinese

During all these strategic

Now it is worth knowing

It is also noteworthy that the ICC issued another arrest warrant for the Russian Federation's Commissioner for Children Rights, named Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, highlighting the same rights violations. According to the ICC, such forced child transfers and deportations from war

Therefore, now the ball is neither in the court of the ICC nor in the US. Rather, it is a very tricky question of how to prosecute Putin at the ICC. Labelling charges against him are well taken. But Russia's international backers like China will solidly stand behind Putin to prevent any such attempt to stop any international legal actions against Russia and Putin. The US-led liberal West needs to devise new strategies to corner Russia.

MAKHAN SAIKIA

In his concluding statement, Putin hailed the Chinese proposal for a settlement in Ukraine, which the West had all but rejected as a non-starter. The Russian leader also rolled

Chinese President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin as he leaves after their dinner at The Palace of the Facets in Moscow

A top analyst at the US
Defense Intelligence Agency

“It would undermine their whole narrative about their

US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby described the Putin-Xi relationship as “a marriage of convenience,” in which they pool efforts to challenge US leadership, and the Russians “certainly are the junior part-

Western price caps on Russia's oil forced Moscow to offer it to China and other customers at a sharp discount, but despite those lower prices, the vast Chinese market ensured a stable flow of oil revenue to the Kremlin's coffers.

More than ammunition, tanks and rockets, Russia badly needs China's help in skirting Western sanctions to maintain the flow of high-tech components for its weapons industries and other economic sectors. Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political analyst, predicted that China could be expected to act more resolutely to help Russia get them.

Korostikov noted that while Moscow's dependence on Beijing is growing, China's room for manoeuvring is also shrinking. "There is no alternative to Russia as a partner providing resources that China will critically need in case of an escalation in its confrontation with the West," he said. "It helps balance the situation and allows Moscow to hope that Beijing will not overuse its newly-acquired economic levers."

(The writer has covered Russia and other former Soviet nations for The AP since 1992)

