

OPINION 6
SARPANCHS NEED TO
BE ACCOUNTABLE**WORLD 9**
'RUSSIA WILL STATION
TACTICAL NUKES IN BELARUS'**MONEY 10**
MARKETS TO TRACK GLOBAL FACTORS
IN HOLIDAY-SHORTENED WEEK

NEW DELHI, MONDAY MARCH 27, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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Cong's 'satyagraha' protests against BJP

**Party slams
Rahul Gandhi's
disqualification
from Lok Sabha**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leaders and workers on Sunday observed "Sankalp Satyagraha" to protest against disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha, with party president Mallikarjun Kharge lashing out at the ruling BJP and asking why it is pained if fugitives such as Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi are criticised.

Top party leaders P Chidambaram, Jairam Ramesh, Salman Khurshid, Pramod Tiwari, Ajay Maken, Mukul Wasnik and Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary, were also seen at the protest.

Party workers in several States and UTs like Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat took part in the satyagrah during which prominent party leaders addressed the protesters.

The police in Gujarat detained several party functionaries for holding the stir.



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi speaks during the party's 'Satyagraha' against disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha, at Rajghat in New Delhi on Sunday

While addressing a gathering at Rajghat in New Delhi, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday said a martyred Prime Minister's son who walked thousands of kilometres for national unity can never insult the country.

She said the time had come to raise a voice against an "arrogant government" as barring Rahul from contesting elections does not bode well for the country and its democracy.

Continued on Page 2

Delhi Police's 'no' to Rajghat event over law & order

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has denied permission to the Congress for holding 'satyagraha' at Rajghat to protest against Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha, officials said on Sunday.

In a letter, the Delhi Police said the request was rejected due to law and order and traffic reasons and prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC imposed in and around Rajghat.

Rassi jal gayi, bal nahi gaya: Nadda's dig at Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a dig at Congress over its nationwide protest against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi, BJP president JP Nadda on Sunday said the court asked Rahul to apologise but there's so much arrogance in him that he did not apolo-

gise. "They give casteist slurs saying 'chor'. Court asked you (Rahul) to apologise but there's so much arrogance you don't apologise, membership goes, you're sentenced but 'rassi jal gayi, bal nahi gaya', Nadda said in Madhya Pradesh.

Continued on Page 2

India summons Canadian envoy over Khalistan stir

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking exception to protests in Canada outside its Embassy and consulates by alleged Khalistan supporters, India has summoned High Commissioner of Canada to New Delhi to register its displeasure over security arrangements outside the diplomatic premises there.

"It is expected that the Canadian Government will take steps which are required to ensure safety of our diplomats and security of our diplomatic premises so that they are able to fulfil their normal diplomatic functions," a Ministry of External Affairs statement on Sunday said. High Commissioner Cameron MacKay was summoned on Saturday.

"India sought an explanation on how such elements were allowed, in the presence of police, to breach the security of our diplomatic Mission and Consulates," the statement said.

MacKay was summoned to the External Affairs Ministry.

Continued on Page 2



Khalistan supporters protest outside Indian Embassy in Washington

PTI

Indian scribe assaulted by Khalistani protesters in US

PNS | AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI | WASHINGTON

Days after vandalising the Indian consulate in San Francisco, alleged Khalistan supporters have attacked Indian journalist Lalit K Jha working for the Press Trust of India (PTI) in Washington.

He was covering a pro-Khalistan protest outside the Indian Embassy there on Saturday afternoon when the

incident took place. Local police saved him. The Indian Embassy has condemned the attack. Jha took to twitter on Sunday and thanked the US Secret Service and police for protecting him.

Reports said Jha was physically attacked and verbally abused by Khalistan supporters. Washington-based journalist said he was hit on his left ear with two sticks by the Khalistan supporters.

Continued on Page 2

Centre notifies raised NREGA wage rates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has notified a hike in wage rates under the rural job guarantee programme for the 2023-24 financial year with Haryana having the highest daily wage at ₹357 per day and Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the lowest at ₹221.

The Union Ministry of Rural Development issued a notification on the change in wage rates under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on March 24. The notification was issued under Section 6 (1) of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, that says the Centre may, by notification, specify the wage rate for its beneficiaries. The wage hikes, which range from ₹7 to ₹26, will come into effect from April 1.

Compared to last year's rates, Rajasthan registered the highest percentage increase in wages. The revised wage for Rajasthan is ₹255 per day, up from ₹231 in 2022-23.

Continued on Page 2

PM bats for organ gift, hails women for spreading wings

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the increasing presence of women in different fields, and said "woman power" is playing a big role in India's growing strength. Also, he appealed to people to opt for organ donation, and said his Government is working on a uniform policy that will make the process easy and encourage people to adopt the life-saving exercise.

He mentioned several examples, including that of Surekha Yadav becoming the first women loco pilot in Asia. Producer Guneet Monga and director Kartiki Gonsalves brought laurels to the country by winning an Oscar for their documentary "The Elephant Whisperers," he said and also lauded women's role in the NDRF's relief and rescue work in Turkey.



Modi said, "India has also deployed a Women-only Platoon in the Peacekeeping Force under the UN Mission."

Urging people to embrace organ donation, Modi said those who donate their organs

after death are "godlike" to recipients, he said in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' radio broadcast, adding that people's preference for it can save and make many lives.

Continued on Page 2

ISIS's India focus: Forms 2 sub-groups

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

In its apparent bid to further ramp up its activities in South India, international terror group Islamic State (ISIS) has launched two sub-groups for the region.

While one sub-group will cover Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, the other one will target the rest of southern States like Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The ISIS has a significant footprint in South India as most of the cases linked to the group under investigation by the anti-terror probe body National Investigation Agency (NIA) are from these States.

A number of recruits from South India have also participated in so-called Hijrat (migration) for ISIS to other countries. The outfit has particularly been active in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The ISIS had even roped in the now banned Popular Front of India (PFI) recruitment, spreading the violent Islamist ideology, training and raising a militia of trained jihadist to execute terror attacks.

The PFI was initially raised in Kerala but subsequently shifted its headquarters to Shaheen Bagh in the national Capital.



Earlier, the ISIS had formed groups like ISIS JK for Jammu & Kashmir, ISIS Deccan for South India, and ISIS Hind for the hinterland, experts tracking the group said.

"Investigations in the case had revealed that the accused had been conspiring to drive a wedge between different communities and groups living in India, spread the concept of violent extremism and jihad in India with the objective of dismembering the country and taking it over by establishing Islamic rule in India by 2047," the NIA has been on record stating this.

Continued on Page 2

Nikhat bags 2nd world title; Lovlina breaks bronze jinx with gold



A combination of pictures shows India's Lovlina Borgohain (L) and Nikhat Zareen posing with their medals during award ceremony, at the 2023 IBA Women's Boxing World Championships, in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nikhat Zareen continued to grow in stature as she added a second world title to her swelling trophy cabinet while Lovlina Borgohain broke her 'bronze jinx' to claim her maiden gold medal at the marquee event here on Sunday.

Nikhat upstaged two-time Asian champion Nguyen Thi Tam of Vietnam by a 5-0 verdict to take the light flyweight title in front of a packed home crowd at the KD Jadhav Indoor Hall.

Two-time bronze medalist Lovlina, on the other hand, defeated two-time Commonwealth Games medal-

list Caitlin Parker of Australia 5-2 to win her maiden world title.

With the win, Nikhat becomes only the second Indian after the legendary MC Mary Kom to win the title of the prestigious tournament twice.

"I am very happy that I have become a world champion for the second time, especially in an Olympic category," Nikhat, who won the 52kg title last year, said after her bout.

The first bout of the day between the two Asians was an exciting affair that went down to the wire.

Continued on Page 2

CONGRATULATIONS TARUN RAWAT, A VIPS ALUMNI for winning RAMNATH GOENKA EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AWARDS IN PHOTO JOURNALISM



Our Alumni Tarun Rawat from Vivekananda School of Journalism & Mass Communication (BAJMC 2019) receiving the award from Chief Justice D Y CHANDRACHUD

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Daily Covid cases in country highest in 149 days

New Delhi: India logged 1,890 new coronavirus cases, the highest in 149 days, while the active cases increased to 9,433, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday. The country had recorded 2,208 cases in a single day on October 28 last year.

CAPSULE

POLICE TAKE ATIQ TO UP FROM GUJ JAIL

Ahmedabad: A police team from Uttar Pradesh came to the Sabarmati central jail in Ahmedabad on Sunday and took gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed to Prayagraj, where he will be produced before a court on March 28 when it passes an order in a kidnapping case in which he is an accused, officials said.

G20: 2nd green meeting to start in Gandhinagar today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The second G20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group meeting will start in Gandhinagar on Monday with focus on arresting land degradation, accelerating ecosystem restoration, circular economy and climate resilient blue economy.

The ECSWG, one of the 13 working groups under the Sherpa track, is scheduled to meet four times. The first meeting of the ECSWG was held in Bengaluru from February 9-11. The third meeting will be held in Mumbai (May 21-23) and the fourth in Chennai (May 26-27). The ministerial meeting is expected to be held on July 28 in Chennai. In a statement, the Environment ministry said 130



delegates from G20 member countries along with 11 invitee countries and 14 international organizations will take part in the second meeting.

"The three-day meeting would focus on thematic areas like arresting land degradation, accelerating ecosystem restoration and enriching biodiversity, encouraging resource efficiency and circular economy and promoting a sustainable and climate resilient blue economy," it said. Special presentations on major initiatives like Namami Gange, climate resilient infrastructure, participatory ground water manage-

ment, Jal Jeevan Mission, and Swachh Bharat Mission will also be made during the meeting. Land degradation, biodiversity loss, marine pollution, resource overconsumption and lack of waste absorption are the key environmental concerns which will be addressed in the four ECSWG meetings in India's G20 presidency.

Under the Biodiversity and Land Degradation Theme, India aims to enhance G20's contributions to achieve 50 per cent reduction in degraded lands by 2040.

It also seeks to enhance global efforts to foster growth and development while pursuing strong climate ambitions, it said. India is committed to restoring 25 million hectares of land and sequestering an additional 2.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide by 2030.

I know their programme, they want to kill me: Atiq

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD (GUJ)

As he stepped out of Sabarmati central jail where and was being taken to Prayagraj by Uttar Pradesh police, gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed on Sunday expressed fear that he might be murdered.

"Hatya, hatya (murder, murder)," Ahmed told reporters outside the prison while being whisked away in a police vehicle by security personnel. When some reporters asked him if he feared for his life, the former Samajwadi Party MP said, "Mujhe inka programme maloom hai...Hatya karna chahte hain (I know their programme...They want to murder me)."

He also said that his appearance in a Prayagraj court was a just pretext for the police to kill him. "Court ke kandhe pe rakh ke maarna chahte hain (They want to kill me under the pretext of court appearance)," he said as he was taken towards the van.

A team of the Uttar Pradesh police reached the Sabarmati jail in Ahmedabad city in the morning to take him to Prayagraj where he will be produced before a court on March 28 when it passes an order in a kid-

napping case in which he is an accused. The police team left the premises with Ahmed amid tight security around 6 pm after completing the necessary formalities. Ahmed, a former Samajwadi Party MP from Phulpur, was shifted to the Sabarmati central jail in June 2019 following a Supreme Court order after he was accused of orchestrating the kidnapping and assault on a real estate businessman Mohit Jaiswal while in prison in UP.

He is named in more than 100 criminal cases, including the recent Umesh Pal murder case, police said. After Umesh Pal, a key witness in the 2005 killing of then BSP MLA Raju Pal, and his two security guards were killed in the brazen shooting on February 24, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had, while speaking in Uttar Pradesh Assembly, vowed to destroy the mafia.

Two of the accused were shot dead in separate encounters by police on February 27 and March 6. On March 1, Ahmed moved the Supreme Court, claiming there is a "genuine and perceptible threat" to his and his family members' lives and referred to the statement made by Adityanath.

Centre notifies raised NREGA wage rates

From Page1

Bihar and Jharkhand have registered a percentage increase of around eight from last year. Last year, the daily wage for a MNREGA worker in these two states was Rs 210. It has now been revised to Rs 228. For Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, which have the lowest daily wages at Rs 221, the percentage increase from last year was recorded at 17.

In 2022-23, the two states had a daily wage of Rs 204. The increases in the wages for States range between two and 10 per cent. Karnataka, Goa, Meghalaya and Manipur are among the states to register the lowest percentage increase.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a flagship programme aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work.

Rassi jal gayi, bal nahi gaya: Nadda's dig...

From Page1

BJP national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member Sudhansu Trivedi while addressing a Press conference here also called out Congress for staging 'satyagrah' in the name of Mahatma Gandhi but "doing just the opposite" of what the Father of the nation stood for.

He attacked the Congress for going to the 'samadhi' of Gandhi and taking Jagdish Tytler, an accused in the anti-Sikh riots, in its "so-called 'satyagrah'." The BJP leader accused Rahul of "insulting" OBCs in the country and seeking special treatment in law for himself. Trivedi charged the Congress leader with unending arrogance and repeatedly maligning country in the foreign land.

Cong's 'satyagraha'...

From Page1

The Congress leader alleged that Rahul was disqualified for questioning the prime minister on industrialist Gautam Adani and people will give a befitting reply to those behind the action.

"My family's blood has nurtured democracy in this country. We are ready to do anything for this country's democracy. Great leaders of the Congress laid the foundation of democracy in this country. If they think they can scare us, they are wrong. We will not be scared," she said.

"You call my brother, the son of a martyr, a traitor and Mir Jafar. You insult his mother. Your Chief Minister says Rahul doesn't know who his mother is. You insult my family every day. But no cases are filed," and aggressive Priyanka said. "Your Prime Minister, in a Parliament full of people, says 'why doesn't this family use the name Nehru name'. He insults the whole family of Kashmiri Pandits, and the custom of a son carrying forward the family's name after the death of his father," she said. Slamming the BJP over its charge that Rahul insulted OBCs with his remark for which he has been convicted in a criminal defamation case, Kharge said why is the ruling party pained if fugitives such as Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi are criticised.

Kharge also thanked all Opposition parties for standing with Rahul and the Congress to save democracy. "They talk of OBC now, is Lalit Modi OBC, is Nirav Modi OBC, is Mehul Choksi OBC, they run away with people's money.

If they are fugitives why are you pained if they are criticised. You (BJP) punish the person who works to save country and send those abroad who loot country," Kharge said. "Rahul is fighting for the people of this country, for the women, for the youth, fighting against unemployment and inflation," he said. Rahul was disqualified from the Lok Sabha on Friday, a day after a court in Gujarat's Surat convicted him in a 2019 defamation case. The disqualification will prevent Rahul (52), a four-time MP, from contesting elections for eight years unless a higher court stays the conviction.

In Gujarat, the police detained state Congress chief Jagdish Thakore, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Amit Chavda and senior leader Bharatsinh Solanki along with party workers when they arrived at Lal Darwaza in Ahmedabad to protest.

The protesters were taken to the police stadium where they continued to shout slogans against Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party. In Srinagar, party members led by former JKPC president Ghulam Ahmad Mir protested at the party's headquarters at M A Road. Mir said not only Congress party, but all non-BJP secular parties have come together, and are "wailing over the death of democracy" in the country. Punjab Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja Warring alleged that the action against Rahul was taken because the BJP-led Centre was "scared" of his next speech in Parliament on the Adani issue. Warring said a "tearing hurry" was shown by the Lok Sabha Secretariat in disqualifying Rahul allegedly at the behest of the BJP-led Government.

Haryana Congress chief Uday Bhan said Rahul has been raising his voice against the BJP-led Centre on various issues. "They want to silence his voice, but they are mistaken," he said. Charging that institutions are being attacked in the country, Punjab's Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa said it is time for "all democratic forces to get together".

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I, Jeet Kaur (Wife of Harbans Singh Sahni – Legal Heir) now have applied to the Company for issue of duplicate share certificate(s) in lieu of the above. Any person having any objection to the issue of duplicate Share certificate(s) in lieu of the original share certificate(s) as aforesaid is requested to lodge his/her objection thereto with the Company at their above address 3rd Floor, Select Citywalk, A-3, District Centre, Saket, New Delhi – 110017 in writing within 15 days from the date of publication.

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Tender Notice

NIT No- 28/2022-23 Chhatarpur, Date 21/03/2023

Online Tender for mentioned below are being invited. The Tender have been uploaded on the E-procurement system of Public Works Department on the Portal www.mptenders.gov.in Tender details are as below:-

S. No.	Tender I. D. No.	Nature of work	Name of work	Call No.	Cost of Project (PAC) (In lack)	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2023_PWDRB_262219	Renewal Work	B.T. Renewal For Bangayan Junction To Lusasi-Jhihan-Sardarpur-Hirapur (Length-10.60Km), Charan Paduka Road (Length-3.0Km), Khajuraho Ranhefall Road (Length-1.0 Km), Naijawn-Padariya Road (Length-1.60Km), Kaddoha Approach Road (Length-1.0Km), Chowka Chhirawal, Himmatpura Road (Length-4.40Km), Chhatarpur Town Road (Length-6.00Km) Total Length 27.60 Km.	First	391.80	EMD & Other Required Documents Submitted Online Only & Compulsary.
2	2023_PWDRB_262220	Renewal Work	B.T. Renewal For Work on Hatwaha Satai Road (Length-4.50 Km), NH 75 to Sandni Junction (Length-10.05Km) under Sub Division Chhatarpur Total Length 14.55 Km.	First	228.86	EMD & Other Required Documents Submitted Online Only & Compulsary.
			Total		620.66	

The document can only be purchased online from the above website after making online payment. The last date & time for purchase on Dated 05/04/2023 and submission of tender Document online is on Dated 05/04/2023 upto (17:30) Bid will be open on 06/04/2023 at office of the CE PWD SAGAR. Detailed NIT and other details can be viewed on the above mentioned portal. Amendments to NIT, if any, would be published on website only, and not in newspaper.

(Ram Sanehi Shukla)
Executive Engineer,
PWD (B&R) Division,
Chhatarpur (M.P.)

PM bats for organ gift, hails women for spreading wings

From Page1

"It is a matter of satisfaction that the awareness about organ donation is rising in the country," Modi said, noting that the condition of being a state domicile for receiving organs has been removed to allow the needy to register themselves anywhere in the country. A decision to remove the age criteria of being less than 65 years for donating organs has also been taken, he added.

From less than 5,000 cases of organ donations in 2013, the number has grown to over 15,000 in 2022, he said.

Organ donation from one deceased person can help eight to nine persons, he noted.

The Prime Minister also spoke to family members of those whose organs were donated after death. This included an Amritsar-based couple who decided to donate the organs of their daughter who passed away 39 days after being born with a fatal condi-

tion. Modi effusively praised the families for opting to donate the organs of their deceased members. He said, "Great donors like them make us understand the importance of life.

A large number of needy people are waiting for an organ donor in the hope of a healthy life. It is a matter of utmost satisfaction for me that, to make organ donation easy and to encourage it, work is being done on a uniform policy in the whole country."

Modi also noted that the cases of corona are rising in some places and asked people to take precautions. In the field of clean energy, he said, India's growing presence is being lauded globally.

The speed with which India is moving forward in the field of solar energy is a big achievement in itself, he said, noting that Diu has become the first district in India to consume only clean energy for all

day time needs.

"Through solar panels, more electricity is being generated in Diu than required during the day time. Through this solar project, about 52 crore rupees have also been saved. The environment has also benefited a lot," he said, encouraging the use of clean energy.

Noting the recent celebration of ancient ties between people of Varanasi and Tamil Nadu though the 'Kashi-Tamil Sangamam' held in the holy city, he said 'Saurashtra-Tamil Sangamam' will be held in different parts of Gujarat during April 17-30. Such programmes are driven by the spirit of 'Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat', he said.

Amid the ongoing official celebration of the 400th birth anniversary of Assamese general Lachit Borphukan, credited for defeating the Mughals, Modi said people will be surprised to know that about 45

ISIS forms...

From Page1

"To achieve these objectives, the PFI had established various wings and units, such as 'Reporters Wing', 'Physical and Arms Training Wing' and 'Service Teams'. Investigations by the NIA have revealed that the PFI was using its various campuses, facilities and infrastructure to impart arms training to selected cadres in the guise of physical education, Yoga training etc.

They also established a 'Reporters Wing' and 'Service Teams or Hit Teams' to eliminate their 'targets'. Whenever required, the PFI pressed into service its loyal and highly trained cadres of their 'service teams', as 'executioners' of the orders pronounced by their parallel courts, called 'Dar-ul-Qaza'," it had said recently.

The NIA is also probing the role of the PFI for encouraging vulnerable youth to join terrorist organisations, including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)/Daesh and Al-Qaida. The NIA has already charged the PFI for conspiracy to establish Islamic rule in India by 2047 by dismembering the country through jihad.

Indian scribe assaulted by Khalistani...

From Page1

He also shared a video of the Khalistan supporters on his Twitter handle. "Thank

you @SecretService 4 my protection 2day 4 helping do my job, otherwise I would have been writing this from hospital. The gentleman below hit my left ear with these 2 sticks & earlier I had to call 9/11 & rushed 2 police van 4 safety fearing physical assault." Jha tweeted on Sunday.

"At one point I felt so threatened that I called 911. I then spotted Secret Service officers and narrated the incident to them," Jha said, adding that the protesters took charge of the situation.

However, the journalist decided to take no action against those who heckled him. The pro-Khalistan protesters even openly threatened to vandalise the

embassy and threatened Indian Ambassador Taranjit Singh Sandhu, he said.

The protesters included turbaned men of all ages who raised pro-Khalistan slogans. They came in from different parts of the DC-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) area. The organisers used microphones to make anti-India speeches both in English and Punjabi and targeted the Punjab Police for alleged human rights violations.

Condemning the incident, the Indian embassy said in a statement, "We condemn such a grave and unwarranted attack on a senior journalist. Such activities only underscore the violent and anti-social tendencies of the so-called 'Khalistani protestors' and their supporters, who routinely engage in wanton vio-

lence and vandalism."

"We have seen disturbing visuals of a senior Indian journalist from the Press Trust of India being abused, threatened and assaulted physically while covering so-called 'Khalistan protest' in Washington DC earlier today," the Indian embassy said.

The Indian embassy also thanked the law enforcement agencies for their prompt response in the matter.

"We understand that the journalist was first verbally intimidated, then physically assaulted, and fearing for his personal safety and well-being, had to call in law enforcement agencies, who responded promptly," the press release further said. Multiple events of protests by supporters of Khalistan have been staged outside the Indian embassy and the San

Francisco Consulate. The Indian Consulate in San Francisco was also attacked on March 20.

The US strongly condemned the attack on the Indian consulate in San Francisco a week back by a group of separatists, terming it absolutely unacceptable. The US has also pledged to defend the safety and security of such diplomatic facilities and the diplomats who work there.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Twitter the US condemns the acts of violence against the Indian Consulate in San Francisco. He further said the US is committed to the safety and security of Indian diplomats.

He said the US State Department is in touch with the local law enforcement authorities.

Nikhat bags 2nd world title; Lovlina breaks...

From Page1

"Today's bout was the toughest for me, she is an Asian champion and my next target is Asian Games and I might meet her, so I will work hard," Nikhat said. "It was a roller coaster bout, she got warning, I got a warning, she got count so did I.

But I went all out," Nikhat, who has moved down from her preferred 52kg, looked tentative at first as Tam was the first one to attack. But after a few seconds, the home favourite leaped forward to attack. She then landed two right hooks, followed by straight jabs. Tam was handed a penalty point for clinching further, tilting the result in Nikhat's favour as she took the first three minutes by a unanimous verdict.

But, Tam made a strong comeback as she launched into

attack mode. The southpaw landed several punches, forcing Nikhat to play with her head down which earned her a penalty point. The Vietnamese managed to take the round 3-2. In the final three minutes, both boxers went for broke and attacked each other relentlessly.

If Nikhat's powerful right cross forced the referee to give Tam the eight count, Tam's jab compelled the referee to do the same to the Indian. "For me, this is the first major competition in this category after the Commonwealth Games, which did not have much competition.

"But here, countries from all over the world competed and had back-to-back matches also, my body was a bit slow in some matches. I will learn from these experiences and

try to become stronger," Nikhat, who has already qualified for the Asian Games, said. Maiden world title for Lovlina Eyeing her maiden gold medal, Lovlina, who has moved to the middleweight category as her 69kg doesn't feature in the Olympics, started the bout from a distance.

The Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist looked to use her slight height advantage in the opening round. She used her reach to land accurate jabs. Parker too was accurate with her punches. But Lovlina managed to take the first round 3-2.

Lovlina changed her strategy in the second round, switching to playing from a close range. The change in the game plan did not work for her ad Parker had better access and launched a series of attacks on

the Indian to take the round 4-1. The final round was played on an even keel and the bout was sent for review with Lovina emerging winner. "It was the final so there was stress but I tried to play like the coaches said, I wasn't entirely successful at times but I am happy to win the gold and make India proud," Lovlina said after the bout. "Our plan was to play the second round from a closer range and play the final round from afar. Coaches had told me dur se khelna (play from a distance)."

The gold came after Lovlina made early-round exits at the World Championships and Commonwealth Games last year.

However, since bulking up to 75kg, it is Lovlina's fourth title. She won the National Games,

Championship and the Asian Championships. Although she is self-admittedly still adapting to the category, the hope is that she can book an Olympic berth at the Asian Games later this year.

Matching best gold medal count With Nikhat and Lovlina winning their bouts, it has been a golden weekend for India. On Saturday, Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) and Saweety Boora (81kg) were crowned world champions in their respective weight categories.

Hosts India matched their best-ever performance in terms of gold medals, though the country did not win any silver or bronze this time. India had won four golds in the 2006 edition at home which was also the country's best-ever performance with a haul of eight medals, including a silver.

City logs 153 fresh Covid cases

Positivity rate jumps to 9.13%

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded 153 fresh coronavirus cases with a positivity rate of 9.13 per cent on Sunday, according to data shared by the health department.

Delhi reported 139 cases with a positivity rate of 4.98 per cent on Saturday. It saw 152 cases with a positivity rate of 6.66 per cent on Friday and 117 cases with a positivity rate of 4.95 per cent on Thursday. The city had logged cases in three-digit figures last October.

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

The city registered 84 coronavirus cases with a positivity rate of 5.08 per cent on Wednesday. On Tuesday, it had reported 83 cases with a positivity rate of 5.83 per cent

and a fatality linked to the disease.

The number of fresh cases had seen a decline over the past few months in Delhi. It had dropped to zero on January 16, the first time since the pandemic began ravaging countries.

With the fresh cases, the national capital's COVID-19 tally has increased to 20,08,732, while the death toll stands at 26,524. The health department data also showed that 1,675 tests were conducted on Saturday.

Thirty-nine of the 7,984 beds are occupied in dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, while 340 patients are in home isolation, it said.

The number of active cases in the national capital currently stands at 528, the data showed.

Amid a gradual increase in COVID-19 cases in Delhi in recent days, some medical



experts say the new XBB.1.16 variant could be driving the rise in cases but add there's no need to panic and people should follow Covid-appropriate behaviour and get booster shots if they have not already.

They also say this rise could be a result of more people getting themselves tested for Covid as a precaution when they actually get infected with the influenza virus and develop fever and related ailments.

Delhi Health Minister

Saurabh Bharadwaj had last week said there were not many influenza cases in city hospitals and the situation is being monitored closely.

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

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

City Govt hospitals carry out mock drills to assess Covid preparedness

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi government-run hospitals carried out mock drills on Sunday to assess their COVID-19 preparedness, amid a spurt in the number of coronavirus cases in the city.

The Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan (LNJP) Hospital, which was a mainstay in the national capital's fight against Covid-19, carried out a two-hour-long mock drill.

"We assessed the patient response time. When a patient is brought to the hospital, how long does it take for us to shift him to a room.

"For critical patients who need to be shifted to the ICU, we have a red corridor. We checked whether all the ventilators and oxygen points were functioning. We have around 450 beds for coronavirus patients," Dr Suresh Kumar, the medical director of LNJP Hospital, told PTI.

The senior doctor said the

bed occupancy at the LNJP hospital was zero in the last one month. The scenario has changed in the last few days, the doctor said.

"A 54-year-old patient is on a ventilator. He has diabetes while another 36-year-old patient is on oxygen support. He is suffering from pneumonia," he said.

By afternoon, the mock drill had been conducted at other hospitals too, including the Satyawadi Raja Harish Chandra Hospital (SRHCH).

"The mock drill lasted for about an hour. All Covid preparedness parameters were assessed," a senior doctor at the hospital told PTI.

Though SRHCH is not a Covid facility, instructions were issued to ensure all logistics measures and health infra-



structure are ready to deal with any eventuality, he said. "During the drill, we checked bed and oxygen availability, staff requirement and other ancillary factors as would be required if Covid patients are to be attended in future."

Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital also carried out a mock drill from 11 am to 2 pm, its medical director Dr SK

Arora said.

"We had 15 dummy patients. Five with Severe acute respiratory infections, five had influenza-like illnesses and the remaining were paediatric and gynaecology patients. The drill was aimed at gauging the preparedness of all departments in handling such cases. We have 40 beds for Covid patients," he said.

Bansuri appointed co-convener of Delhi BJP's legal cell

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Bansuri Swaraj, the daughter of late Sushma Swaraj, has been appointed as co-convener of the legal cell of Delhi BJP, paving her entry into active politics.

Swaraj practices law in the Supreme Court.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva, in his first appointment in the state unit after taking over as full-time state president, appointed Swaraj as co-convener of the legal cell.

In a letter issued on Friday, Sachdeva said that Swaraj's appointment would come into force with immediate effect and hoped that she would strengthen the BJP.

Swaraj said she has been helping the party in legal matters earlier as well.

"It is just that I have been formally given an opportunity to serve the party more actively in the capacity as a legal department co-convener of the



Delhi BJP," she told PTI.

Swaraj thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and top BJP leaders for her appointment.

"I am grateful to the Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi ji, Amit Shah ji, J P Nadda ji, B L Santhosh, Virendra Sachdeva, @BJP4Delh and @BJP4India for giving me this opportunity to serve the party as the state co-convener of the Bharatiya Janata Party Delhi State Legal Cell," she said in a tweet.

Swaraj enrolled with the Bar Council of Delhi in 2007

and has 16 years of experience in the legal profession, according to a statement from Delhi BJP.

After her undergraduate studies from the University of Warwick with a BA (Hons) in English Literature, she went on to study Law at BPP Law School in London. She qualified as a Barrister at Law and was called to the bar from the Inn of Inner Temple, London. Thereafter, she completed her Masters of Studies from St Catherine's College at the University of Oxford, it said.

Delhi Traffic Police organises Raahgiri programme

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Traffic Police organised a Raahgiri programme on Sunday at Connaught Place Inner Circle in alignment with the G20 goal of creating sustainable and livable cities with a focus on sustainable mobility, officials said.

The programme was organised in association with Raahgiri Foundation.

Special Commissioner of Police (Traffic) SS Yadav flagged off a Yulu Bike rally that was organised as a symbolic gesture to promote the safety of pedestrians on roads, and creating sustainable and livable cities.

A painting competition for school students was also organised by Delhi Traffic Police. In addition to that there was a lecture on the importance of golden hour and a demonstration on first-aid and CPR administration,



they said.

According to officials, other units of Delhi Police also showcased demonstration on self-defence techniques by personnel from the Special Police Unit for Women and Children (SPUWAC), orchestra performance by a team of IV battalion Delhi Armed Police, demo by Dog squad of Crime Branch. Some other attractions that featured at the event include - Help-desk set up and a mobile exhibition van showcasing road safety

measures by Road Safety Cell of Delhi Traffic Police; a pledge wall and a selfie-stand to promote safe two-wheeler riding.

"Raahgiri foundation also organised some interesting activities for the promotion of healthy lifestyle such as cycling, skating, zumba and yoga," the official added.

Ankita Chakraborty, Secretary, NDMC and other senior officers of Delhi Traffic Police participated in the event that was organised between 7 am to 10 am.

Nigerian national tries to kill self in Nihal Vihar after hearing about parents' death

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Nigerian national allegedly attempted to kill himself after hearing about his parents' death in an accident in his homeland, police said here on Sunday.

The victim, Ndinojuo (37), jumped from the second floor of a building in outer Delhi's Nihal Vihar area on March 18, they said, adding that he is recovering.

A purported video of the incident also surfaced on the internet in which the victim was seen being hit by a some people.

Confirming that the video is of the March 18 incident, a senior police official said, "The person in the video had lost his parents on the same day and out of depression, he jumped from the building. He got injured and grappled with a person for help as no one was



able to understand him. To get that person disentangled, people tried and hit him also," a senior police official said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Harendra Kumar Singh said a PCR call regarding the incident was received at Nihar Vihar police station.

On reaching the spot, a Nigerian national was found lying in an injured condition, asking for help from passersby, he said.

Ndinojuo was taken to Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital where he was treated, the DCP said.



Youth Congress workers hold protest in Delhi on Sunday over Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha Ranjan Dimri

Two drug rackets busted, 4 arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police's Special Cell busted two different drug cartels and recovered heroin and opium worth about Rs 40 crore with the arrest of four men here, officials said on Sunday.

In two separate operations, high quality 2.7 kilogram of heroin and 100.338 kilogram of opium, concealed in cavities of three vehicles, were recovered, they said. Police said the drug peddlers sourced heroin and opium from Manipur and supplied it in Delhi, NCR, Punjab and Rajasthan.

The Special Cell busted a Manipur-based interstate syndicate involved in supplying illegal narcotics substances in different parts of Delhi and NCR. During the operation, heroin weighing around 2.7 kg packed in 224 soap boxes and concealed in cavities of a vehicle was recovered, they said.



It led to the arrest of 26-year-old Mohammad Irfan, a resident of Imphal, Manipur, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Alok Kumar said the recovered drugs were smuggled to Manipur through the Myanmar border and were further supplied to Delhi and NCR. The accused, who was apprehended from near Ghazipur on Saturday, revealed

that he used to carry drugs in his vehicle to Assam and Delhi from Manipur and was paid Rs 20,000 per trip, he said.

"The accused revealed that the recovered consignment had to be delivered to one of the associates of Veinilthig Kipgen after reaching Delhi. Kipgen had lured the accused to carry illegal drugs to Assam and Delhi. In greed of money, the accused consented to such illegal work," the police officer said. In the second operation, the Special Cell busted a narcotics drug cartel by arresting its three key members, police said.

The accused — Onkar Mal (52), Om Prakash (42) and Vikash Pareek (35) — hail from Rajasthan.

They were arrested in Delhi on March 13 when they were bringing 100.340 kg fine quality opium from Manipur in a canter and a car to supply the same in Delhi-NCR and Rajasthan, police said.

Class 11 student dies after jumping from 3rd floor of building



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A class 11 student died after she allegedly jumped from the third floor of her building in east Delhi's Madhu Vihar on Sunday, police said.

The girl, aged 18 years, was in friendship with a boy in her class which her parents did not like and this might have led to her taking the extreme step, a senior police officer said.

The spot was inspected by a crime team and forensic

experts, he said.

During enquiry, the statements of a few neighbours were recorded and all of them supported the version that the girl had jumped off the third floor, he added.

The body has been preserved at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital and an autopsy will be done on Monday, police said, adding the deceased's father runs a private business. Inquest proceedings have also been initiated, they added.

Body of man found from well in Dhaula Kuan

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The body of a 23-year-old man was recovered from a well in southwest Delhi's Dhaula Kuan, police said on Sunday.

The deceased has been identified as Pawan. He was a resident of Haryana's Faridabad and was in a private job, they said. A woman visited the Subroto Park police post on Saturday and informed that her friend Pawan had fallen into a well at the PWD park in Dhaula Kuan, officials said.

With the help of the fire department and divers, Pawan's body was recovered from the well and his father and cousin were informed about his death, police said.

Delhi to Dehradun distance will be covered in 2.5 hours: Dharam

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/DEHRADUN

Assuring full cooperation to the NHAI to speed up the works for the completion of the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dharam on Sunday said after the project's completion the distance between the two cities will be covered in 2.5 hours.

While conducting a site inspection of the expressway works near Datkali temple here, Dharam said permission has been given to work during the night to speed up the construction works.

He also asked the agencies involved to complete the work with quality within the stipulated time. The chief minister



said that after the completion of the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway, the distance from Delhi to Dehradun would be covered in just 2.5 hours.

He said that the fast pace at which road connectivity is increasing in the state will also

boost economic activities in the state in the coming times.

The authority officials said that a target has been set to complete the expressway works by March 2024 and efforts are being made to complete it before that.

One injured as crane falls on auto-rickshaw

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A crane being used at a construction site of Delhi-Dehradun Highway toppled and fell on an auto-rickshaw, injuring the 40-year-old driver of the three-wheeler on Sunday, police said. The injured, Manoj, was taken to Jag Praveesh Chandra Hospital for treatment and his condition is stable, they said.

Police said officials at New Usmanpur police station received information about the incident at 4th Pushta around 7.30 pm. The auto-rickshaw driver was taken to the nearby hospital for treatment. There is simple abrasion on his left arm and his condition is stable, a police official said.

BRO reopens strategic Leh-Manali Highway in record 138 days

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has opened strategically important Leh-Manali Highway (NH 3) in record time of 138 days after clearing snow. Last year, it took 144 days for the BRO to open the highway for traffic.

The key road opened for traffic on Saturday is 427 km long highway connecting Ladakh to the rest of India via Manali, having strategic importance for the movement of the armed forces and their supplies to forward areas in Ladakh, as well as connecting the people



of Ladakh to India, officials said here.

The highway is an alternate route to the 422 km long Srinagar-Kargil-Leh Highway (NH-1D) which was opened by the BRO on March 16.

November end with onset of winter till it is opened in March. The entire 427 km road has been cleared of snow by BRO frontline Project Himank in Ladakh and Project Deepak in Himachal Pradesh.

These challenging operations commenced from two extremities of the road by two different teams comprising skilled manpower and state-of-the-art machines. As the two snow clearance teams converge at a common point in Sarchu, Himachal Pradesh, a 'Golden Handshake' ceremony was organized there to declare the highway open.

The BRO also opened the mighty Shinkula Pass located at 16,580 ft in Nimmu-Padum-Darch road in record time of 55 days, on March 23.

The Leh-Manali highway generally remains closed from

People from within country taking politics outside, outsiders interfering : Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said "people from within the country are taking politics outside, and people from outside the country are interfering in politics inside." These remarks came even as the BJP is seeking an apology from Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his recent speech in London and the opposition party not conceding to the demand.

"Many people in the world were very comfortable with how things were in India till 2014 and after things changed, they saw different confidence, different beliefs. Suddenly peo-



ple started saying there is something wrong, the court is not performing properly, the election commission is not okay, press is being restricted. Everything happened after 2014 only?" Jaishankar said at an event in Bengaluru on

Friday. "Why is that happening? You have people outside India who have an interest in people inside India. And when those people do not get electoral success and they are today seen as less and less

representing the reality of India, there is an attempt from outside to make out as though that is normal and somewhere India has started to deviate. Now if you look historically, this is the normal -- what you are seeing today," Jaishankar said.

As Jaishankar interacted at the event organised by Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya, he also commented on the recent attack on Indian missions abroad by pro-Khalistani supporters. "It is the obligation of the receiving country to ensure the embassy or the high commission or the consulate and their premises are respected. These obligations were not met," Jaishankar said.

Prez Murmu on two-day tour of West Bengal from today, to visit Santiniketan



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu will be on a two-day tour of West Bengal from Monday, during which she will visit Santiniketan to grace the annual convocation of Visva-Bharati, according to a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Sunday.

The president will visit Netaji Bhawan in Kolkata to pay homage to Subhash Chandra Bose on Monday.

Later on during the day, she will visit Jorasanko Thakurbari

-- Rabindranath Tagore's House -- to pay tributes to him, the statement said. In the evening, the president will attend a civic reception to be hosted in her honour at Netaji Indoor Stadium, Kolkata, it added.

The president will visit Belur Math the next day.

She will also grace the celebration of completion of 80 years of UCO Bank in Kolkata.

Later, the president will visit Santiniketan where she will grace the annual convocation of Visva-Bharati, the statement said.

Plea in SC seeks 'Ram Sethu' be declared as national monument

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking that the Ram Sethu be declared as a national monument.

The PIL, filed by advocate Ashok Pandey, also seeks construction of a wall at the spot to facilitate devotees.

On March 20, the top court had said that it will list at the earliest a petition by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy seeking a direction to the Centre to declare the Ram Sethu as a national heritage monument.

Ram Sethu, also known as Adam's bridge, is a chain of limestone shoals between Pamban Island, off the south-eastern coast of Tamil Nadu, and Mannar Island, off the north-western coast of Sri Lanka.

Swamy had raised the issue of declaring the Ram Sethu a national monument in his PIL against the controversial Sethusamudram Ship Channel project, initiated by the UPA-



I government.

The matter reached the apex court, which in 2007 stayed work for the project on the Ram Sethu.

The Centre later said it had considered the "socio-economic disadvantages" of the project and was willing to explore another route to the shipping channel project without damaging the Ram Sethu.

The Sethusamudram shipping channel project has been facing protests from some political parties, environmentalists and certain Hindu religious groups.

Under the project, an 83 km water channel was to be created, linking Mannar with Palk Strait, by extensive dredging and removal of limestone shoals.

Increasing road accidents matter of grave concern, says LS Speaker

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla expressed "grave concern" on Sunday over a rising number of road accidents in the country and urged people to follow basic traffic rules.

He said these incidents are also leading to an increasing number of fatalities.

Birla pointed out that more than four lakh road accidents, with a cumulative death toll of over 1.5 lakh, are reported in the country every year.

If the number of road accidents annually is assessed economically, the loss would be equal to about one per cent of the GDP, he said. "Therefore, road accidents are a loss to the family, society and the country," the Lok Sabha Secretariat quoted Birla as saying in a statement.

The speaker made these remarks after flagging off a car rally at the Constitution Club here.



Besides members of Parliament, officers from defence and central police forces, eminent personalities from industry and people from different walks of life participated in the car rally.

The theme of this year's car rally was "road safety".

Birla lamented that while people are aware of traffic

rules, including those related to walking, those are seldom followed.

Describing engineering, enforcement, education and emergency care as the four pillars of road safety, the speaker said while the government can frame rules, it is the citizenry that has to follow those.

Delhi excise policy scam: SC to hear today plea of BRS leader Kavitha against ED summons

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by K Kavitha, Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader and daughter of Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao, seeking protection from arrest and challenging the summons issued by the ED.

On March 11, the 44-year-old BRS leader deposed before the ED to record her statement and was summoned again on March 16 for questioning.

She was last quizzed for about 10 hours on March 21, which was her third day of deposition before the Enforcement Directorate.

The BRS leader has denied all allegations against her.

According to official sources, Kavitha, during her

questioning by the ED, was confronted with the statements made by Hyderabad-based businessman Arun Ramchandran Pillai, who has been arrested in the case, apart from those of a few others allegedly involved in the case.

Kavitha's statement was recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Pillai was arrested by the ED earlier. He has moved a city court accusing the ED of forging his statements.

The ED had said Pillai "represented the south group", an alleged liquor cartel linked

to Kavitha and others that paid kickbacks amounting to about Rs 100 crore to the Aam Aadmi Party to gain a larger share of the market in the national cap-



ital under the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy for 2020-21.

The "south group", according to the ED, comprises Sarath Reddy (promoter of Aurobindo

Pharma), Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy (YSR Congress MP from Ongole in Andhra Pradesh), his son Raghav Magunta, Kavitha and others.

The ED had also alleged in Pillai's remand papers that he "represented the benami investments" of Kavitha, who has also been questioned by the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection with the case.

The ED has so far arrested 12 people in the case, including former Delhi deputy chief minister and AAP leader Manish Sisodia.

It has recorded the statement of Butchi Babu, a char-

tered accountant allegedly linked to Kavitha, where he said "there was a political understanding between K Kavitha and the chief minister (Arvind Kejriwal) and the deputy chief minister (Sisodia). In that process, K Kavitha also met Vijay Nair on March 19-20, 2021."

Nair was arrested in the case by both ED and CBI. Butchi Babu has been arrested by CBI.

According to Butchi Babu's statement, Nair was "trying to impress Kavitha with what he could do in the (excise) policy". "Vijay Nair was acting on

behalf of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia," the statement recorded by the ED said.

It is alleged that the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22 to grant licences to liquor traders allowed cartelisation and favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge strongly refuted by the AAP.

The policy was subsequently scrapped and the Delhi lieutenant governor recommended a CBI probe, following which the ED registered the case under the PMLA.

Reduce civil services recruitment cycle, assess reasons for candidates low turnout: Par Panel to UPSC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the nearly 15 months long recruitment process wastes candidates' prime years besides taking a heavy toll on their physical and mental health, a Parliamentary Committee has asked the UPSC to reduce the civil services examination's selection cycle.

In its latest report, the panel also asked the Union Public Service Commission to examine the reasons for the low turnout of candidates in the civil services examination.

The examination is conducted annually by the UPSC in three stages -- preliminary, main and interview -- to select officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) among others.

The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice said according to the data provided by the UPSC, the average time taken for civil services examination from the date of issue of notification to the date of declaration of the final result is nearly 15 months.

"The Committee is of the opinion that the duration of any recruitment examination should not ordinarily exceed six months as long and protracted recruitment cycles



waste prime years of a candidates' life besides taking a heavy toll on their physical and mental health. The Committee, accordingly, recommends that UPSC should take steps to reduce the duration of the recruitment cycle significantly without compromising the quality," the report said.

On the low turnout, it said out of approximately, 32.39 lakh candidates who had applied for examinations conducted by UPSC in 2022-23, only 16.82 lakh candidates, (51.95 per cent) actually appeared for examinations.

For instance, 11.35 lakh candidates applied for the civil services examination in 2022 but only 5.73 lakh candidates (50.51 per cent) actually appeared for the exami-

nation.

The Committee recommended UPSC furnish the details of examination fees collected from the candidates during the last five years.

"The Commission may also provide the details of expenditure incurred by it on the conduct of the examinations for the same period. The Committee also recommends UPSC to examine the reasons for low turnout of candidates and share the findings thereof with the Committee," the report said.

The panel has recommended forming an expert committee to assess if the present scheme of recruitment through civil services examination provides an equal opportunity to both English-medium-educated urban can-

didates and non-English medium-educated rural candidates.

While UPSC has changed the pattern of civil services examination from time to time on the basis of recommendations made by various expert committees, no study has been commissioned to assess how such changes impacted the aspirants, nature of recruitment and administration at large, it said.

The panel said an expert group or committee should be appointed to assess the impact of changes made in the scheme, pattern and syllabus of civil services examination in the last ten years on the quality of recruitment and administration at large.

"The expert group so constituted may assess if the present scheme of recruitment provides an equal opportunity to both english-medium educated urban candidates and non english medium educated rural candidates," said the report tabled in Parliament recently.

This group may also assess whether the existing pattern of preliminary and mains examination provides a level playing field for all candidates irrespective of their academic background, it said.

The Committee is of the considered opinion that the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) and UPSC should consider making fur-

ther changes in the scheme and syllabus of civil services examination in the light of the findings of the impact assessment study, the report said.

The panel was also apprised that the UPSC releases the answer key of the preliminary test of the civil services examination only after the completion of the entire process of the said examination.

In other words, the Commission is depriving the candidates of an opportunity to contest the answer key before progressing to the next stage of the examination, the report said. "This practice not only demoralises the candidates but also compromises the validity and fairness of the examination process. Although recruiting agencies exercise utmost caution to ensure that the answer key is foolproof, the possibility of errors cannot be ruled out.

"The Committee, therefore, recommends that UPSC may take steps to publish the answer key right after the preliminary stage of the civil services examination and allow candidates to raise objections," it said.

The Committee said UPSC may also collect feedback from the candidates and effect improvements in the examination system from time to time to ensure more transparency, fairness and candidate friendliness.

ICMR releases first ethical guidelines for AI application in biomedical research, healthcare

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has come up with the country's first Ethical Guidelines for the Application of Artificial Intelligence in Biomedical Research and Healthcare to provide an ethical framework for the development of AI-based tools which will benefit all stakeholders.

According to a document drafted by the Department of Health Research and ICMR's Artificial Intelligence Cell, AI for health, to a large extent, depends on data obtained from human participants and invokes additional concerns related to potential biases, data handling, interpretation, autonomy, risk minimization, professional competence, data sharing, and confidentiality.

"It is therefore imperative to have an ethical framework that addresses issues specific to AI for biomedical research and healthcare," the guidelines stated.

The adoption of AI technology in healthcare is growing in India. However, AI as data-driven technology has many potential ethical challenges which include algorithmic transparency and explainability, clarity on liability, accountability and oversight, bias and discrimination, said ICMR Director General Dr Rajiv Behl.

"The DHR-ICMR AI Cell has identified the need to develop these guiding ethical



principles concerning artificial intelligence and machine learning-based tools.

"These guidelines will provide the ethical framework for the development of AI-based tools which will benefit all stakeholders, including innovators, developers, patients, technologists, researchers, healthcare professionals, ethics committees, sponsors and funding agencies involved in research related to AI in biomedical research and healthcare," he said.

NTAGI chief Dr N K Arora said the purpose of the guideline is to provide an ethical framework which can assist in the development, deployment, and adoption of AI-based solutions for biomedical research and healthcare delivery.

The guidelines are intended for all stakeholders involved in research on artificial intelligence in healthcare, including creators, developers, technicians, researchers, clinicians, ethics committees, institutions, sponsors, and funding organizations.

It includes separate sections addressing ethical prin-

ciples for AI in health, guiding principles for stakeholders, the ethics review process, governance of artificial intelligence for healthcare and research, and the informed consent process involving human participants and their data.

The guideline has been formulated after extensive discussions with subject experts, researchers and ethicists, said Dr Arora.

The induction of AI into healthcare has the potential to be the solution for significant challenges like diagnosis and screening, therapeutics, preventive treatments, clinical decision-making, public health surveillance, complex data analysis, and predicting disease outcomes. This list is likely to grow in the future, the document said.

The purpose of these guidelines is not to limit innovation or recommend any disease-specific diagnostic or therapeutic approach but to guide effective yet safe development, deployment and adoption of AI-based technologies in biomedical research and healthcare delivery, it said.

Shah lauds Karnataka Govt, says religious quota unconstitutional

Home Minister slams previous Cong Govt for appeasement politics

PTI ■ BIDAR/RAICHUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday lauded the Karnataka Government's decision of scrapping the four per cent reservation for Muslims under 2B Other Backward Classes (OBCs) category, saying the quota on religious lines was constitutionally invalid.

Addressing public gatherings at Gorata village in Bidar district and Gabbur in Raichur district, he slammed the Congress for introducing the four per cent reservation for Muslims for "its vote bank politics".

The Union Minister pointed out that Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai-led BJP government also tried to do away the injustice to the Scheduled Castes by introducing a new internal reservation.

The entire 2B category was only for the Muslims and the BJP government scrapped it saying that it was not constitutionally tenable and divided the four per cent quota equally among the two dominant communities of the state: Vokkaligas in 2C reservation category and Veerashaiva-Lingayats in 2D reservation category.



With this, 2B became redundant while Vokkaligas' reservation went up from four per cent to six per cent and Lingayats from five per cent to seven per cent. "The BJP never believes in appeasement."

So, it decided to change the reservation," Shah said strongly defending the decision. "The BJP abolished the four per cent reservation given to the minorities

and gave two per cent to the Vokkaligas and two per cent to the Lingayats," Shah said.

"The reservation for minorities is not Constitutionally valid. There is no provision in the Constitution to give reservation based on religion. This Congress government did it for its appeasement politics and gave reservation to the minorities," he added.

36 satellites placed into orbits, another feather in ISRO's cap

PTI ■ SRIHARIKOTA

The Indian Space Research Organisation on Sunday scripted yet another history after its LVM3 rocket successfully placed 36 satellites of UK-based OneWeb group company into intended orbits. The 43.5 metre tall rocket blasted off at prefixed time at 9 am today, from the second launch pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre here, about 135 kms from Chennai, at the end of a 24.30 hour countdown.

This is the second dedicated mission for NewSpace India Ltd, the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation. ISRO had signed an agreement with Network Access Associates Ltd, United Kingdom (OneWeb Group Company) for the launch of 72 satellites into Low-Earth orbits (LEO).

The first batch of 36 satellites of OneWeb Group company were launched on October 23, 2022 by ISRO. OneWeb is a global communication network powered from space, enabling connectivity



ISRO's LVM3 carrying 36 satellites lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Station, in Sriharikota, on Sunday. The 36 satellites were part of the agreement with NewSpace India Ltd, the commercial arm of ISRO and Network Access Associates Ltd, United Kingdom

for governments and businesses. Soon after the take off, the rocket sequentially deployed the satellites into multiple orbits.

While the first set of 16 satellites were injected, it was announced that the remaining satellites would be placed into the intended orbits. ISRO said, "LVM3-M3/OneWeb India-2 mission is accomplished. All 36

OneWeb Gen-1 Satellites injected into the intended orbits." "In its sixth consecutive successful flight, LVM3 carried 5,805 kgs of payload to Low Earth Orbit," the space agency said in its official social media account.

ISRO chairman S Somanath congratulated NSIL, ISRO and OneWeb for the successful launch of LVM3-

M3-OneWeb India-2 Mission. "As we know today the first 16 satellites of the series are already placed into the right orbit."

And now it has gone into the far south of the Earth and we will be getting confirmation of the remaining spacecraft separation soon once the onboard storage data is acquired by our Indian ground stations," he said addressing the scientists and guests at the Mission Control Centre.

The launch was the 18th for OneWeb Group company while for ISRO, it would be the second mission in 2023 after the successful launch of SSLV/D2-EOS07 mission undertaken in February.

"Till now, based on the observations, the vehicle has done extremely well, it went up to the right orbit and placed spacecraft at the right orbit and also with very minimal disturbances to it," Somanath noted. Somanath expressed gratitude to NSIL for the support and for the confidence that OneWeb India team reposed in ISRO for building this rocket.

CG copter crashes soon after takeoff from Cochin Airport

Pilot's presence of mind' saves three on board

PTI ■ KOCHI

One person was injured when a Coast Guard helicopter crashed on Sunday just after takeoff from its enclave at the Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL) here, but the "presence of mind" of the pilot saved the lives of three persons onboard, a release said.

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) said the ALH Mk III chopper CG 855, based in Kochi, took off from the enclave located inside CIAL

complex at about 12.25 pm for "inflight checks after fitment of control rods" on the aircraft.

It said the chopper lost control when it was about 30-40 ft above the ground. However, the pilot showed "exemplary professionalism and presence of mind" with bare minimum controls and manoeuvred the aircraft away from blocking the main runway of the international airport, the ICG statement said

"Prior to the inflight checks, HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited) and ICG teams had carried out extensive and satisfactory ground trials," the ICG said. "Immediately after takeoff, when CG 855 was at about 30-40 ft above ground,



A Coast Guard ALH helicopter crashed just after takeoff from Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL), in Kochi, on Sunday

the cyclic controls (which controls longitudinal and lateral movement of aircraft) did not

respond." The pilot "cushioned the landing to the extent possible" in order to save the three persons on board, it added. One person has a minor injury in his hand, sources told PTI. The chopper's rotors and airframe have been damaged, and an inquiry has been ordered to ascertain the cause of the crash.

Meanwhile, CIAL said airport operations were suspended for two hours after Advanced Light Helicopter of Coast Guard met with accident."The ALH was removed from operational area around 2 PM and the runway has been cleared substantially after safety inspections, and flight operations have been resumed," CIAL said in a statement.

Will bar outsiders from purchasing land in J&K if voted to power: Azad

PTI ■ JAMMU

Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad on Sunday said his party will pass laws in the Assembly to bar outsiders from purchasing land in Jammu & Kashmir if it is voted to power.

He said the people of J and K only have the right over the Union Territory's resources. Azad, while addressing a public meeting in Barnoti in Kathua district, said the J and K administration thought making tall claims of creating abundant job opportunities for the youth has failed miserably as it is snatching the land from locals. "The land is meant for people and when it is taken away from them then what is



the use of it. No government has the right to snatch the livelihood of people, rather it is duty-bound to offer more economic opportunities to them," he said. While the present regime did some good things that benefited the people, that all was washed away after it took anti-people decisions like evicting people from their land,

imposing property tax and giving contracts to outsiders, Azad said. "If our party comes to power, we will ensure that jobs and land are protected for the local people. We will pass the laws in the state assembly to bar outsiders from purchasing land here and securing jobs if elected to power," he said.

Azad also criticised the administration for allotting land to 1965 Pakistan Occupied Kashmir refugees but not granting them ownership rights. He said the administration should provide compensation to farmers whose crops were damaged due to excessive rain. He said to empower the people of Jammu and Kashmir politically and economically, the restoration of statehood is important.

Bhojpuri actress Akanksha found dead in hotel, suicide suspected

PTI ■ VARANASI

Popular Bhojpuri actress Akanksha Dubey was found dead inside a hotel room here on Sunday, police said. The 25-year-old actress was found hanging from the fan with a piece of cloth and the police were called immediately, according to the hotel staff.

Dubey, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Bhadohi district, had come to Varanasi for the shooting a movie and was staying in the hotel under Sarnath police station area.

When Dubey did not come out of the room till late morning the hotel staff, on the insistence of her colleagues, opened the gate of her room using a masterkey. Assistant Commissioner of Police (Sarnath) Gyan Prakash Rai

said, "The family members of the deceased live in Mumbai. They have been informed about the incident. No suicide note has been recovered from her room. Prima facie it appears to be a case of suicide."

Varanasi police Commissionerate said that the body has been sent for post-mortem and police are investigating the matter.

Dubey starred in several regional films including Kasam Paida Karne Wale Ki ??, Mujhse Shaadi Karogi (Bhopuri) and 'Veeron ke Veer'. Bhojpuri film personalities such as Rani Chatterjee, Vinay Anand and Aamrapali Dubey took to social media to pay condolences. "Can't believe seeing this news. What should I write, it is not right to end your life like this. May your

soul find peace wherever it is, which it could not find in this world, it could find in heaven. It is hurting a lot! Om Shanti! #rip #aakanshadubey," Chatterjee wrote on Instagram.

Anand said he is pained by Dubey's demise and he would like the authorities to investigate the case.

"Just found out that Bhojpuri artist Akansha Dubey died by suicide, so sorry to hear about that. We never worked together as far as I can remember. I'd like to know the reason behind this. May she rest in peace. Hari om," Anand said in an Instagram post in Hindi. Posting a photo with the 25-year-old actress on her Instagram, Aamrapali Dubey wrote, "I wanted to use our pictures together only to highlight your achievements!"

PRIEST CAN BE THIEF, DEITY CAN'T Minister vouches for Didi's integrity

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With a number of Trinamool Congress leaders, including ministers and MLAs, going to jail on corruption charges and at a time when the Bengal ruling outfit is facing one of the worst political crises in 25 years of its existence, senior State minister Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay on Sunday vouched for the integrity of the captain of the ship, Mamata Banerjee saying no one could make him believe that she was a thief.

Speaking at a public rally the minister said that he could even doubt his own integrity but would never do so about the Bengal Chief Minister.

"Even I can be a thief but Mamata Banerjee is not," he said reminding that both good and bad constituted a society but that did not make whole of it bad or corrupt. Apparently comparing Chief Minister to a deity in a temple he asked, "can deity inside the temple be a thief

... No. All others, even the priest can be a thief... But a deity cannot." Reminding that all parties had corrupt people but that did not make the entire party thief he said that an attempt was being made to tarnish the image of the Chief Minister and the party she made.

Ear he said, "People are saying there are a lot of thieves in your party. Yes, they are there. But I am looking for a political party that does not have a single thief," adding he was prepared to sweep the floors of a party that did not have thieves in it.

"I will sweep the office of such a party if they can say they have no thieves," Chattopadhyay otherwise considered one of the very few non-controversial faces of the TMC said. Meanwhile, in a parallel development, the Left-Congress alliance once again hogged limelight, this time wrestling back two rural cooperative society boards from Trinamool Congress.



Congress workers stage a protest against disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha at Ridge in Shimla on Sunday

PTI Photo

BMC slammed over failure to produce ₹3,538 cr Covid expenditure records

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Part from bringing to fore several lapses and irregularities in the special audit of 76 identified works worth Rs 12,023 crore expenditure, the Accountant General (Audit)-I Maharashtra has pulled up the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for its failure to produce records for an expenditure of Rs 3,538 crore incurred on the Covid-19 management between early 2020 and October 31, 2022.



Significantly enough, the Special Audit report submitted to the State government by the Accountant General (Audit)-I Maharashtra has said that it could not audit the expenditure on the Covid-19 management owing to the BMC's failure to

produce expenditure records for audit. "In the absence of Covid 19 management records, no confirmation can be made in audit on the propriety, efficiency, economy and effectiveness of Covid 19 related expenditure by BMC," the Accountant General (Audit)-I Maharashtra in its report submitted to the Maharashtra government a few days ago. The 76 audited works worth Rs 12,023.88 crore, covering 9 key BMC departments, were for the period November 28, 2019 -

the day on the MVA government headed by then united Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray took oath as Chief Minister - till October 31, 2022. Of the total expenditure, the Accountant General (Audit)-I Maharashtra could not audit the details of expenditure of Rs 3,538.73 crore owing to lack of records.

Despite repeated reminders to the State Government to direct BMC to produce the records related to Covid 19 management and

reply to the legal notice of BMC by the Office of the Accountant General (Audit)-I, Maharashtra on 25 January 2023 clearly bringing out the fallacies in the legal arguments of BMC, these records were not produced for audit by BMC.

As such, this report includes audit comments pertaining to works excluding those related to Covid 19 management," the Accountant General (Audit)-I Maharashtra stated in its report. It may be recalled that Eknath Shinde-led

Shiv Sena-BJP alliance government had on October 31, 2022 asked Accountant General (Audit)-I, Maharashtra for Special Audit of 76 identified works, costing 12,023.88 crore, as executed by nine departments of BMC during period from 28 November 2019 to 31 October 2022. After Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India assented to conduct of Special Audit, Accountant General (Audit)-I, Maharashtra began audit from November 14, 2022.

Dirty debate

Our leaders must shed some sanctimony and mawkishness to cleanse the political arena

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's conviction in a defamation case, the ensuing disqualification from Lok Sabha as a Member of Parliament, and the attendant political row over it reveals—if any revelation was needed—a lot that is wrong and rotten in Indian politics. To begin with, there are the falling standards of political debate: A court in Surat found his rhetorical remark “why all thieves have Modi surname” defamatory. As we mentioned earlier, it was surely in bad taste. A senior leader not only condemned a large section of people just because they share their surname with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but also refused, and refuses, to show any remorse for making the unsavoury remark. An apology might have resulted in the withdrawal of the case or perhaps his exoneration. There is nothing wrong in apologising. After all, our political masters are also human, and it's human to err. They, however, refuse to act like the man on the street, who says sorry when he does anything wrong. Apparently, Rahul doesn't believe that he can err. So, the day he was disqualified from Lok Sabha, he said, “My name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi. Gandhis don't apologise to anyone.” It is interesting to note here the fact that he had quoted Gandhi immediately after his conviction—as if his deplorable remark is something any politician could be proud of. But then in politics, self-righteousness has become an integral part of the belief systems that parties subscribe to and the communication strategies they adopt. On Sunday, the former Congress chief changed his Twitter bio, which now describes him as a ‘Dis'Qualified MP’ Evidently, he is wearing the conviction and the disqualification as badges of honour.

The same day, the Congress started a day-long Sankalp Satyagraha at Rajghat in Delhi to show their solidarity with Rahul Gandhi. The entire grand old party is with him. Party luminaries like president Mallikarjun Kharge, general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and senior leaders KC Venugopal, P Chidambaram and Salman Khurshid were among those who participated in the satyagraha. While the GOP has not covered itself in glory, the Bharatiya Janata Party too has not reacted in a manner that can be termed as dignified. Vice-president of Gujarat BJP Gordhan Zadaphia said at a press conference an OBC (other backward class) community has been insulted. In response, Kharge asked, “Is Nirav Modi OBC? Is Mehul Choksi OBC? Is Lalit Modi OBC? They are fugitives.” On her part, Priyanka indulges in sentimentalism and whataboutery. She said on Sunday, “You call my brother, the son of a martyr, a traitor and Mir Jafar. You insult his mother. Your Chief Minister says Rahul Gandhi doesn't know who his mother is. You insult my family every day. But no cases are filed.” Could our political leaders shed some sanctimony and mawkishness? For the same of some swachhata in the political arena.



People buy bananas for 'Chaiti Chhathi' festival, in Patna.

PTI

Fight for ticket heats up in coastal Karnataka

Too many hands for Kumta seat in coastal Karnataka, writes Manjunath K Shresthi

The southern state of Karnataka with 224 seats is scheduled to the assembly polls anytime in the next two months in 2023. This is subject to the Election Commission of India (ECI) dates. The state's geographical area begins with the Uttara Kannada (U.K) district in north-west Karnataka. One enters Karwar via Polem (Goa state) after crossing the excise check post on NH 66. The state shares land borders with Maharashtra in the north; Telangana/Andhra Pradesh in the East, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south and south west respectively. The Uttara Kannada (U.K) district in the state has 11 taluks and six legislative assembly constituencies (LAC), and two or more taluks make up one assembly constituency. They being: Haliyal-Joida (including Dandeli) 76; Karwar-Ankola (77); Kumta-Honnar (78); Sirsi-Siddapur (80); Mundagod-Yellapur (81). Bhatkal (79) stands out as the smallest constituency compared to the above areas in the largest UK district. The Kumta-Honnar (78) constituency has definite-



ly raised political temperatures during an election season, and the heat may become unbearable in the run up to the polls. The BJP has clarity with its choice of candidates and only a formal announcement is expected for most of the seats in the district, barring a few (or only one seat). The five current MLAs from the saffron party in the district might retain their seats (but surprises are not ruled out). The Congress party has one MLA, R.V. Deshpande, representing the Haliyal-Joida assembly seat. Dinakar Shetty twice and the current BJP MLA won the seat from the JD (S) in 2008. In 2013, the seat was won by Congress MLA Ms. Sharada Shetty; Dinakar Shetty con-

tested for the BJP seat in the 2018 assembly election, and defeated his Congress opponent. There's no smooth sailing for the Congress party, as it's now facing a plenty problem for the Kumta-Honnar assembly seat. It is learnt that there are 15 candidates aspiring for the party ticket. They are old loyal party members who have been in the party for a long time. There's another new entrant, from outside Kumta, who's thrown his hat in the ring. Former Governor Ms. Margaret Alva's son, Nivedith Alva, is also vying for the Kumta party ticket. This new development has taken the party members in Kumta by surprise; and they are trying to push their candidature for

the B Form. There has been a mixed response to Nivedith's entry, as some voiced their dissent and others quietly supported him. None of the Congress ticket hopefuls criticise him, as he wields clout in the party. There is both opposition and support for his entry. Some ticket aspirants have invited him to the Kumta constituency. They have also convinced him of their support in the upcoming elections. Nivedith Alva along with another candidate from Uttara Kannada (UK) district, were conspicuous on the dais, during Rahul Gandhi's one-day recent visit to Belagavi on March 20. If Nivedith gets the party ticket, will he win the confidence and support of Congress members in the constituency? The constituency voters will finally get to decide who they will choose in the elections ahead? And will the Congress party finally be able to increase its tally in the geographically large Uttara Kannada (UK) district in the 2023 elections? There's a lot of answering for Nivedith Alva to do, if he gets the party ticket from the Kumta assembly constituency?

Sarpanchs need to be accountable

A large amount of funds allocated to panchayati raj institutions are misused through the mutual connivance of the Pradhans and the Govt functionaries

Haryana witnessed a major Sarpanch agitation against the state government. The sarpanchs were on a warpath with the state government on two crucial issues. One, the introduction of an e-tendering process for development works above Rs 5 lakhs and two, the “right to recall” law that allows people to remove a sarpanch if they are not happy with their performance. The state government justified these actions as steps towards “course correction” taken with the intention of bringing transparency and credibility in the working of the Panchayats. They are directly related to the use of developmental funds and the continuation of sarpanchs in power.

These remedial measures were suggested by the report submitted by the Haryana Lokayukta Justice, Hari Pal Verma in December, 2022. The audit report of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for 2017-18 had also listed many cases of irregular expenditure and account books. The report cited many instances of misappropriation of lakhs of rupees. It found that in most cases the records of panchayats were found missing which were supposed to be in the custody of the sarpanches. It was revealed that nearly 1,100 former sarpanchs had not submitted village development records. The explanation given for this lapse was that the records were either burnt, washed away or soiled. The office bearers of the Association of Sarpanches put the blame on the panchayat secretaries who had failed in maintaining and submitting the records to the authorities. Recently, on the complaint of a resident of Aashiyaki Tappa Jadhthal village in Rewari district, an enquiry conducted by Block Development Panchayat Officer (BDPO), Dharuhera, has found the ‘gram scahiv’, Rohit Kumar and former sarpanch Mahesh Kumar guilty of embezzling Rs 7.44 Lakh in the construction of the pathway. Construction work cost Rs 8,37,399 on paper. However, the inquiry revealed that the cost of work was evaluated as Rs 92,692 causing a loss of Rs 7,44,777 to the state exchequer.



The ‘gram sachiv’ has been suspended and orders for recovery of the embezzled amount from the former sarpanch and gram sachiv have been issued. We find that candidates spend a phenomenal amount of money to win the elections for sarpanch in villages. They lure voters by offering gifts, interest free loans, distribution of liquor and sweets. The intention is to win the elections by hook or crook. This will enable me to recover many times the election investment. After getting elected, the sarpanchs indulge in corruption by siphoning away the money allocated for the village's development.

In order to contain the agitation, the state government announced that sarpanches could get development works up to Rs 5 lakh executed on a quotation basis. This was earlier Rs 2 lakh and e-tendering mode would be used for works valued at more than Rs 5 lakh. The honorariums of sarpanches were increased from Rs 3,000/- to Rs 5,000/- and the panches from Rs 1,000/- to Rs 1,600/- by linking these with Dearness Allowance on the lines of government employees. To make

BOTH ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES AND GOVERNMENT SHOULD DISCHARGE THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES HONESTLY AND TRANSPARENTLY

the gram scahivs accountable to the sarpanchs, the provision of recording the comments in the Annual Confidential Report (ACR) of gram sachiv by sarpanches has been introduced. For the social audit of development works in panchayats, a committee would be formed at the village level. This committee would consist of village residents who would keep watch of the development works being undertaken in the village.

A separate engineering wing would be set up for the Development and Panchayat Departments. The panchayats could get works done on quotations for a total amount of Rs 25 lakh in a financial year or up to 50 per cent of the total grant amount of the State Finance Commission, whichever is less. The responsibilities for quality have also been fixed. The technical staff would ensure the quality of the development works through e-tendering. The sarpanches would be responsible for the quality of works carried out on a quotation basis.

The introduction and implementation of the Panchayati Raj system in the 1980s was a landmark decision of the Government headed by

then Prime Minister, late Rajiv Gandhi. It led to decentralization of financial powers to the local grassroot representatives—the gram pradhans paving way to the implementation of the concept of “Gram Swaraj” envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi and to ensure the utilization of funds meant for panchayats in a transparent manner.

Through the connivance of government functionaries and pardhans, crores of rupees are disbursed annually to PRIs, of which a large amount is misused. The practice of these practices needs to be checked and those found guilty should be punished. Both elected representatives and the government should discharge their responsibilities honestly and transparently. The Haryana government has done a commendable job in checking malpractices by laying down check and balances. This would help in judicial use of funds at the grassroots level.

(The writer is a senior journalist and Chairman, Panwar Group of Institutions, Solan, Himachal Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LACK OF STORAGE FOR FARMERS

Sir — Farmers often struggle to grow fruits and vegetables. But due to a lack of storage options, they have to sell them at very low prices. It is also often the result of natural calamities. When rain falls unseasonably, all stored goods are soaked and damaged. The government intends to implement the godown scheme in the village so that agricultural produce can be stored locally till it fetches a high price. The study will be conducted by a 12-member committee. There are times when the cost of production is not even available.

But transportation costs also have to be paid. Due to lack of price, sometimes the plow is turned in full fields. Therefore, it is not possible for all the farmers to store till they get a reasonable price. Vakhar Corporation has warehouses. Their number is very small, 205. The storage capacity is 17 lakh 60 thousand metric tons. There is capacity.

There are only two things farmers need to do before they can sell at the price they get: take a risk. So this is the government's plan for rural areas. By setting up storage areas in rural areas with all the necessary facilities, improving the quality of its goods, and providing financing and credit facilities, we will be able to achieve our goals. The government is implementing this plan. Through this plan, efforts will be made to invest in the private and cooperative sector in warehouse construction.

The criteria for the scheme, the exact nature of the scheme, how to provide state-of-the-art facilities for perishable goods, and this committee will study. The report is to be given till 13th June. From the point of view of farmers, the scheme “Village There Godown” is commendable. The committee should give its report at the earliest and the government should give justice to farmers through the recommendations of the committee.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

Rahul Gandhi's disqualification



Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) heartily wanted not ‘Congress mukt Bharat’ (Congress less India) but Rahul Gandhi less Parliament. Hence their joy no bounds when the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) HH Varma, in Surat in Gujarat sentenced Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to two years in jail in a 2019 criminal defamation case filed against him in which he linked the prime minister's family name to that of two Indian fugitives accused of swindling millions of dollars, Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi.

Kapil Sibal, a top Indian lawyer and former federal law minister, told the media that while Gandhi was automatically disqualified as a legislator, his two-year jail sentence itself was “bizarre”.

The court granted him bail immediately and suspended the sentence for a month. After Rahul Gandhi was sentenced to two years in prison in a defamation case, India's parliament disqualified him. Though the Opposition not only have accused the prime minister of using the law to stymie political critics, but they have also accused PM Modi of misusing national agencies, including the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Directorate of Enforcement (ED), to go after critics including journalists (“The press must remain free if a country is to remain a democracy,” Chief Justice of India Mr. Chandrachud), nonprofits and media companies.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

DIABETIC FOOT CARE

Sir — Most diabetes patients can prevent serious foot complications. Regular care at home and doctor's appointments are your best bet for preventing foot problems. This will help in stopping small problems from becoming serious ones. Wash your feet every day in warm (not hot) water. Don't soak your feet. Dry your feet completely and apply lotion to the top and bottom—but not between your toes, which could lead to infection. Never go barefoot. When you check your feet every day, you can catch problems early and treat them immediately. Early treatment greatly reduces your amputation risk. Check your feet every day for cuts, redness, swelling, sores, blisters, corns, calluses, or any other change to the skin or nails. Use a mirror if you can't see the bottom of your feet, or ask a family member to help. Remember: Diabetes-related foot problems can worsen very quickly and are difficult to treat, so seek prompt medical attention.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

VANDALISM BY KHALISTAN SUPPORTERS

Sir — Khalistan supporters' vandalism acts at Indian missions abroad are serious concerns. Khalistan demand is not justified as India cannot be further broken into pieces. But equally wrong are those who want India to be declared a ‘Hindu rashtra’ since people do not want India to become a ‘Hindu Pakistan’. India is a secular country and cannot be based on religion. Action should also be taken against those who raise such obnoxious demands. Secondly, the Punjab Police has launched a major crackdown against radical preacher Amritpal Singh, and his outfit Waris Punjab ‘De. Kejriwal proudly claimed that strict action being taken against criminals by the government had shown that ‘AAP is a hardcore patriotic party’. Amritpal escapes the police dragnet.

Vishal Mayur | Tumkur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

HOW TO DEAL WITH SEIZURES?



DR RAVINDRA SRIVASTAVA

In the early human civilisations, it was geography and weather that decided what crops were to be grown in any region. The same crop was consumed by the people of that area. Exports were tough and risky. But, in modern civilisation, Governments directly or indirectly control the food consumed.

Epilepsy accounts for a significant proportion of the world affecting 50 million people. Each year an estimated 5 million people are diagnosed with epilepsy. In India, more than 10 million patients suffer from epilepsy, which represents 20% of the 50 million worldwide. Purple Day is an international awareness day dedicated to raising awareness about epilepsy and reducing the stigma surrounding this neurological disorder. Observed annually on March 26th, Purple Day encourages people to learn more about epilepsy. It encourages people to recognize the signs of a seizure and support those living with this condition. By coming together to raise awareness and support those affected by epilepsy, we can improve the lives of millions of people around the world.



What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a chronic disorder that affects the brain's ability to transmit electrical impulses. These disruptions can cause seizures, which can be mild or severe and affect various parts of the body. Epilepsy is a lifelong condition, and while it can be managed with medication, it cannot be cured. Some people may outgrow epilepsy, while others may have it for their entire lives.

What are seizures?

Seizures are the primary epilepsy symptom. They occur when there is a sudden surge of electrical activity in the brain. The symptoms of a seizure can vary widely depending on the type and severity of the seizure. Some people experience a brief loss of awareness or consciousness, while others have convulsions and lose control of their limbs.

Medically Intractable Epilepsy

Medically intractable epilepsy is a severe form of epilepsy that cannot be controlled with medication. People with this type of epilepsy may experience multiple seizures per day, which can severely impact their quality of life. Treatment options for medically intractable epilepsy may include surgery or implantable devices that regulate brain activity.

Seizure First Aid

If you witness someone having a seizure, it is essential to stay calm and take the following steps:

- Keep the person safe: Clear the area around the person to prevent injury. Remove any sharp objects that could harm.
- Protect the person's head: If possible, place something soft, like a jacket or pillow, under the person's head to cushion it.
- Turn the person on their side: If the person is lying down, turn them onto their side to prevent choking.
- Time of the seizure: Note the time the seizure began and how long it lasted. This information can help medical professionals.
- Do not restrain the person: Do not restrain the person or put anything in their mouth during the seizure.
- Stay with the person: Once the seizure has ended, stay with the person until they are fully alert and oriented.

(The writer is Director, Neurosciences, Primus Superspecialty Hospital)

Open letter to Rahul Gandhi

By questioning Rahul's conviction, the Opposition party is undermining the judiciary



SUMET BHASIN



“

IT IS WORTHWHILE TO ASK: WHY SHOULD ANYONE LEVEL ALLEGATIONS AGAINST OTHERS WHICH THEY CANNOT SUBSTANTIATE

”

Indian politics, from insulting Manmohan Singh to demeaning Indian democracy on foreign soil in London. The Congress' yearning for sympathy votes is old. The party daydreams that people will vote for it out of sympathy. It has been marginalised under the Gandhi family.

Why should the country sympathise with Rahul Gandhi? What is his contribution to the uplift of the poor of this country? He has been convicted for defaming a community. In his statement that "all thieves have the Modi surname", what message did he intend to convey? Did it not occur to him that he was defaming a hard-working community, spread over the country and abroad?

People must decide if the country's politicians have freedom to say anything against anyone. Some people argue that defamation should not be a criminal offence. But it is worthwhile to ask: why should anyone level allegations against others which they cannot substantiate? This license to defame others has taken Indian politics to a new low. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal made libelous insinuations against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a television show. The news anchor tried to contest Kejriwal's claims, but he was bullied to stay silent. Kejriwal questioned the educational qualifications of PM Modi. The same news channel reproduced the interview of PM Modi given several years ago from which Kejriwal had selectively quoted.

The Delhi Chief Minister repeated his insinuations against PM Modi in the Assembly. There are millions of youths who pursue distant learning. Kejriwal has

defamed a vast number of youths for such learning which government has promoted for several decades. There are a number of universities, including the Indira Gandhi National Open University, for this purpose.

Also, it is well known that Kejriwal escaped conviction in defamation cases by apologising to the late Arun Jaitley and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari. Gandhi chose not to apologise in the Surat court. Defamatory political discourse, based on mudslinging, has no space in Indian democracy, which is known to be aspirational. Rahul Gandhi has also said that he's "not Savarkar, but Gandhi and Gandhis don't apologise." But not long ago he had apologised to the Supreme Court for making baseless allegations on the Rafale issue.

Members of the legislature must commit themselves to the singular efforts to realise the dreams of the people. This naturally calls for a review of the discretionary powers of the Members of Parliament. It must be asked if it's still relevant for an MP to recommend students for admission in Kendriya Vidyalaya and to exercise similar discretionary powers in extending other entitlements.

There must not be any doubt that the Gandhi family has a feudal mindset. Despite a strong campaign for inner democracy, the Congress coterie defeated the efforts for genuine intra-party democracy. This coterie keeps alive the feudal mindset of the party's ruling family.

Memories are still fresh of how Sitaram Keshri was thrown out of the party by the Gandhi family. People of the country

have not forgotten that the mortal remains of late PV Narsimha Rao, former prime minister, were not allowed into the party office premises for his followers to pay their last respects to the departed soul. As a result of breaking the law and claiming victimhood, the Gandhis have demonstrated the least political decency in the world.

But the law is the same for all. Laws don't discriminate between citizens.

The Opposition, protesting against Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha membership after his conviction in a criminal defamation case is as good as a celebration of corruption, which the people in the national capital saw after the arrest of Manish Sisodia, the former deputy chief minister of Delhi, by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The New Excise Policy of the city government is being probed for financial irregularity and conspiracy.

Indian democracy rests on institutions. The judiciary is a crucial institution in the country. By questioning Rahul's conviction, the Opposition party is undermining the judiciary.

Also, Parliament has passed laws. If the Opposition parties believe that some laws need changes, they can certainly change them in Parliament. But for that they need people's mandates. Self-centered politics must stop immediately. Stringent rules should be framed with necessary amendments to the Representation of People's Act. This will guide Indian democracy on the path free of compulsive lying and defamation.

Human resource management is a prerequisite for growth

The top management must be compassionate towards their employees, it ensures productivity and high standards of corporate ethics



RAVI CHANDER KOCHHAR

In the recent past, Human Resource Management has transformed and become the epicentre of any organisation aspiring for excellence. Day by day the involvement and importance of Human Resource Management have increased and become the central point of the outcome of any Centre of Excellence.

This transition has not been an easy one but over some time all out sustained efforts by the organisations have been made for a complete overhaul of the system. No doubt digitisation has made some difference in HR Processes and Decision Making, however, it's the policies that have triggered the overall changes and brought about the revolution in HRM.

First and foremost, has

been the WHY factor in the decision-making at the highest echelon of management to decide in which direction you want the organisation to move and once WHY has been clearly defined then the whole process will revolve around it to achieve this aim. This WHY factor can be defined by the Mission and Aim of the Organisation. Having decided the WHY factor one can now clearly move to WHAT type of personnel you want to hire. Clearly define their roles and responsibilities, set the targets, and milestones and carve out a roadmap to be followed by the organisation to achieve its Mission and Aim.

The next step will be when the recruiters start defining the QRs including the Qualification, Expertise,

Experience, Previous Job profile and the notable results achieved. Having decided the WHY and WHAT factors one has to move to the next factor, HOW. This is also an important factor, one has to start planning as to how one wants to proceed in this direction.

The organisation must ensure that the best person for the job is available and thus the search has to be perfect before recruiting anyone. Check out the newspapers which have maximum circulation and accordingly insert a well-designed advertisement in local / all India editions as per the requirement. The head-hunting team of the organisation must search on the job portals, as well as various websites that provide the details of employees, check if

anyone matches the organisational requirement of a specific job and establish contact if they are willing to change before setting up the process of recruitment. Once the database is available, the process of shortlisting begins, making sure that no compromise is made on the QRs laid down for each profile. For every possible job, shortlist at least five persons and conduct personal interviews at various levels to check the suitability of the person for the job. Of these five, the best two must be met by the top management. During the process, it must also be considered what financial package is to be decided. During the interviews, the family background of the candidate must also be examined as that will determine

how much time he /she will be able to devote towards undertaking the task assigned including roles and responsibilities.

Yet another consideration must be, the scope for his/her future growth in the organisation. Once the selection process is complete, the financial package is acceptable and the candidate has joined the organisation, the even more important phase of onboarding must be seamless. The buddy system has proved very beneficial wherein one person is attached to the new joiner to make him feel comfortable and introduce him/her to the systems and practices of the organisation, introduce him /her to colleagues and others as required.

This phase is of relevance

so that the person doesn't feel out of place and adapts to the new environment amicably. Initially, at short intervals, the candidate may be guided and advised to appreciate his/her strong/ weak points and there's ample opportunity available for him to take corrective action. As the organisation grows, the employees must also grow and part of the benefits must also be passed on to the employees. It's very important to retain experienced people so that they effectively contribute to the growth of the organisation. At the same time, the organisation must also continuously evolve ways and means to look after the employees, be it annual increments or various welfare measures so that the employees concentrate on their job

and performance to ensure the growth of the organisation. One of the important aspects must be that top management must be compassionate towards their employees, be it leave or medical cover or such other arrangements so that each employee feels confident that in times of need the person will not be left high and dry to face the emergent condition and this aspect is very important, everyone must be treated with dignity and humanity must prevail.

Finally for any organisation to grow it needs qualified, experienced and dedicated, sincere and loyal employees and this leadership must be provided by the top management with compassion and transparency in their policies and systems.

Imran unveils Pak’s revival roadmap

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan’s ousted prime minister Imran Khan held a massive rally here on Sunday and presented his party’s 10-point roadmap for the cash-strapped country’s economic recovery, including sops for the diaspora. Addressing the public rally at Minar-i-Pakistan in the early hours of Sunday, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman challenged the country’s ruling party to put forward a plan to rescue Pakistan from the many crises it finds itself mired in.

“I challenge that the incumbent rulers don’t have the ability or the intention [to save the country],” he said. Khan, 70, said he would happily step aside if the establishment tells him they have a plan.

“I know what the programme is...there is no programme,” he was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper. Announcing the 10-point programme, Khan said that overseas Pakistanis will be motivated to invest in Pakistan to attract foreign direct investments to avoid going to the IMF again and again. “We will facilitate all those who would export and bring dollars into the country,” he added.

Pakistan, which is in dire need of funds as it battles a wrenching economic crisis, has received economic assistance from the IMF in the past. The country is in discussions with global lender to resume its loan programme. Khan asserted that the country needs to take difficult decisions to improve its tax collections and exports.

“A major surgery is needed to put our house in order. Overseas Pakistanis will bring their dollars to the country provided they are given incentives,” he said, adding that only 2.5 million Pakistanis out of 220 million pay taxes. “There is a need to increase the tax base to



achieve progress,” he said and also proposed giving loans to young people to start businesses and reviving the mortgage scheme.

Khan said his government would promote tourism, adding that the minerals sector would be focused on generating revenue. The ex-premier said after coming to power his government would increase agriculture productivity with the cooperation of China.

The government would take measures to stop money laundering, he said, adding that the current account deficit would be curtailed as well. Khan, who is facing threats to his life, addressed the rally from a bullet-proof glass container.

Pakistan’s broadcast media blacked out the coverage of the event under the ‘pressure’ of the PML-N-led government backed by the powerful military establishment. The authorities appeared so desperate to fail the Khan’s power show that all major roads leading to Minar-i-Pakistan were blocked by police with containers and barricades.

The internet services were snapped in parts of Lahore, especially at the rally site. The people reached the venue on foot after covering long distances. Lashing out at the PML-N-led government and its handlers (a reference to the military establishment) for arresting and torturing over 2,000 of his party workers ahead of

this rally, Khan said, “one thing is clear, whoever is in power, they will get a message today that people’s passion cannot be curbed via hurdles and containers.”

“The way the powerful circles are behaving in Pakistan today it seems that Imran Khan is the only problem of the country,” he said. Khan said a cabal of thieves was imposed on the nation after the toppling of his government in April last year. “I have completed a century of cases. I may cross 150. Poor spend their entire life fighting false cases in this country. Pakistan has no future if there is no rule of law,” he said and added that ‘real freedom’ will only come if rule of law prevails in the country. He slammed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for begging around the world but still failing to get any reprieve.

Taking a jibe at prime minister Shehbaz, Khan said: “Former army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa said he used to scold Shehbaz for 40 minutes and he would not react and listen patiently. This happens when you (Shehbaz) come to power through the backdoor”. The cricketer-turned-politician said for the first time in his life he felt what the people in Palestine feel.

“Police attacked my house as they wanted to arrest me in false cases. The people supported me during the clash with the police as they knew I was right.

Sharif accuses President Alvi of following PTI diktat

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday hit back at President Arif Alvi, accusing him of being partisan and following the dictates of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party instead of remaining neutral as the head of the state. His comments came two days after President Alvi in a letter on Friday accused the premier of using disproportionate force against politicians, political workers and journalists in recent clashes with former prime minister Imran Khan’s PTI.

The president, who was a member of Khan’s party before assuming the office, had also asked Sharif to direct all authorities to assist the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in holding the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elections as per the orders of the Supreme Court. In his five-page letter to President Alvi,

Sharif said that he was writing to “set the record of the government straight” and bring the latter’s “partisan attitude” on record.

He said Alvi’s communication in parts read like “a press release of the opposition political party PTI whose one-sided, anti-government views you continue to openly espouse, notwithstanding your constitutional oath/office of President”.

He said that the president on several occasions violated his oath, including the order of the dissolution of the National Assembly in April last year on direction of then prime minister Imran Khan, and also his failure to discharge his constitutional duty to give oath to Sharif on his election as the prime minister.

“Despite the foregoing and several other instances, where you actively worked towards undermining a constitutionally elected government, I have

made all-out efforts to maintain a good working relationship with you. However, the contents of your letter, its tone, and language have compelled me to respond to it,” he stated in the letter. Sharif said that actions by the law enforcement agencies were in accordance with the law.

“Regrettably and ostensibly due to your party allegiance, you have failed to note the sheer violation of laws, contumacious disregard of court orders, attacking the law enforcement agencies, damaging public property, attempts to create chaos, civil and political unrest, and in short, to bring the country to the brink of economic default and civil war by PTI,” he said.

He said the PTI’s complete disregard of law tarnished the image of Pakistan in the international community and cast negative repercussions on the future of democracy and state of human rights.

‘Political turmoil could lead to martial law’

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party chief Sirajul Haq has said that the tussle between the ruling coalition and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) could result in the imposition of a martial law in the country, according to a media report on Sunday. The cash-starved country is under constant political turmoil after the ouster of prime minister Imran Khan in April last year. “The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government has become a burden on the nation,” Haq was quoted as saying by the Express Tribune newspaper. Haq said that the tussle between the ruling coalition and the Pakistan opposition could result in the imposition of a martial law in Pakistan. Proposing nationwide elections, Haq condemned the government’s attempts to suppress protests, saying peaceful demonstrations are the constitutional right of every political party. “The government and the Election Commission

of Pakistan (ECP) are violating the Constitution and the orders of the Supreme Court by running away from elections,” he said while addressing the media on Friday in Lahore. Haq said that the caretaker Punjab government was a part of the PDM. “It seems from their (the caretaker government) statements that they will stay for a long time. I want to make it clear that this country has come into existence through a democratic process and can only be sustained through democratic action,” he said, adding that unconstitutional measures should be avoided. Warning of grave consequences, he announced that he would resist those who “undermine the Constitution”. Pointing out the duplicity of the ruling alliance, the JI chief said that the same parties, including the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), had been protesting against inflation before coming to power.

Mid-air collision averted in Nepal

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

A major tragedy was averted on Friday when an Air India and a Nepal Airlines aircraft came close to collision mid-air but the warning systems alerted the pilots whose timely action prevented the disaster, authorities said here on Sunday. The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has suspended three employees of the air traffic controller department for “carelessness” during duty hours, according to CAAN spokesperson Jagannath Niroula. On Friday morning, an aircraft of the Nepal Airlines coming to Kathmandu from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and an Air India plane coming to Kathmandu from New Delhi almost collided. Both aircraft were Boeing A320 with the

capacity of around 150 passengers. The Air India aircraft was descending from 19,000 ft while the Nepal Airlines aircraft was flying at an altitude of 15,000 ft at the same location, Niroula said.

After it was shown on the radar that the two aircraft were in proximity, the Nepal Airlines aircraft descended to 7,000 ft, the spokesperson said.

The Civil Aviation Authority has formed a three-member probe committee to investigate the matter. The CAAN has removed three staff of the Tribhuvan International Airport who were on duty at the time of the incident from active control position until further notice, according to a notice issued by the CAAN.

Israeli group asks court to punish Netanyahu over legal plan

AP ■ TEL AVIV

An Israeli good governance group on Sunday asked the country’s Supreme Court to punish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for allegedly violating a conflict of interest agreement meant to prevent him from dealing with the country’s judiciary while he is on trial for corruption.

The request by the Movement for Quality Government in Israel intensifies a brewing showdown between Netanyahu’s government and the judiciary, which it is trying to overhaul in a contentious plan that has sparked widespread opposition.

Tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets, military and business leaders have spoken out against it and

leading allies of Israel have voiced concerns.

Netanyahu’s government is pushing ahead for a parliamentary vote this week on a centrepiece of the overhaul — a law that would give the governing coalition the final say over all judicial appointments.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, a senior member of Netanyahu’s Likud party, became the first to break ranks late Saturday by calling for the legislation to be frozen. Gallant cited the turmoil in the ranks of the military over the plan. But it was unclear whether others would follow him.

On Sunday, the Movement for Quality Government in Israel, a fierce opponent of the overhaul, asked the court to force Netanyahu to obey the law and sanction him either

with a fine or prison time for not doing so. It said he was not above the law.

“A prime minister who doesn’t obey the court and the provisions of the law is privileged and an anarchist,” said Eliad Shraga, the head of the group, echoing language used by Netanyahu and his allies against protesters opposed to the overhaul. “The prime minister will be forced to bow his head before the law and comply with the provisions of the law.” The prime minister responded saying the appeal should be dismissed and said that the Supreme Court didn’t have grounds to intervene.

Netanyahu is barred by the country’s attorney general from directly dealing with his government’s plan to overhaul the judiciary.

Travel disruption hits Germany before transport strike

Berlin: An increased number of travellers in Germany boarded trains and planes on Sunday, a day before a major one-day strike that aims to bring the country’s transportation system to a standstill. But even advance travel was met with disruption in some places as Munich airport already shut down because of the impending strike on Monday, and technical problems affecting German airline Lufthansa in Frankfurt led to flight delays and cancellations at the country’s biggest airport.

Munich Airport, the country’s second-busiest, said that the Verdi union was hitting it with two days of strikes and it has no regular passenger or cargo flights on either Sunday or Monday. A total of around 1,500 connections were affected, and takeoffs and landings were only possible for emergency humanitarian flights, German news agency dpa reported. German unions have called on thousands of workers across the country’s transportation system to stage a one-day strike as employees in many sectors are seeking hefty raises to reflect persistently high inflation. AP

Indian delegation discusses energy coop with SL Prez

PTI ■ COLOMBO

A high-level Indian delegation called on Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe here on Sunday and briefed him on the developments in the jointly-identified priority areas for bilateral collaboration in the crucial energy sector. President Wickremesinghe provided his insights on the early implementation of these initiatives when the delegation led by Pankaj Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum Natural Gas, met him, the Indian High Commission here said. It said India would gift Sri Lanka 500 solar-powered indoor cooking systems.

The Lanka India Oil Company (LIOC), the local operator of Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), said the visiting Secretary to the ministry of power and natural gas Jain and Chairman IOC Shrikant Madhav Vaidya had earlier visited the Trincomalee eastern Sri Lanka’s IOC terminal. Sri Lanka and India run a joint venture storing fuel in the

World War II time storage tanks in Trincomalee.

In January last year, Sri Lanka formally signed an agreement with India to jointly develop the oil tank farms in Trincomalee.

The joint venture was finalised amid growing concerns over China’s influence in the island nation. Jain had inaugurated three new LIOC retail fuel sheds in their ongoing expansion whilst addressing the chamber of commerce and attended a meeting of chief executive officers of leading Indian businesses based in Sri Lanka.

Chairman IOC Vaidya said he was delighted to have met former World Cup-winning Sri Lankan cricket captain Arjuna Ranatunga.

The top-level Indian delegation on the petroleum sector is expected to have extensive talks with their Lankan counterparts for further collaboration, LIOC said. LIOC provided much assistance to Sri Lankan fuel consumers at the height of the country’s worst economic crisis.

Kamala Harris ‘excited about future of Africa’

Accra (Ghana): Vice President Kamala Harris was greeted by schoolchildren, dancers and drummers as she arrived on Sunday in Ghana for the start of a weeklong visit to Africa intended to deepen US relationships amid global competition over the continent’s future. “We are looking forward to this trip as a further statement of the long and enduring very important relationship and friendship between the people of the United States and those who live on this continent,” Harris said.

The children cheered and waved Ghanaian and American flags as she stepped off her plane after an overnight flight. She smiled broadly and placed a hand on her heart as she passed by the dancers. “What an honour it is to be here in Ghana and on the continent of Africa,” Harris said. “I’m very excited about the future of Africa.” She said she wanted to promote economic growth and food security and welcomed the chance to “witness firsthand the extraordinary innovation and creativity that is occurring on this continent”.

Ghana is one of the continent’s most stable democracies, but Harris is arriving at a time of severe challenges for the West African nation. Its economy, among the fastest growing in the world before the COVID-19 pandemic, faces a debt crisis and soaring inflation that is driving up the cost of food and other necessities. AP

Gallant calls govt to halt ‘judicial reforms’ in big jolt to Netanyahu

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has called upon the government to stop the controversial judicial overhaul legislation that has sparked protests across the country, sticking his neck out amid Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s insistence to go ahead with the proposed “reforms”. His intervention came as Israelis opposed to the changes held mass rallies across the country for the twelfth week in a row. “The security of the State of Israel is my life’s mission. Over the course of my entire adult life, I have dealt with Israel’s security day in and day out,” Gallant, Netanyahu’s close aide, said on Saturday.

He said that he still supported the need to revamp the court system, but acknowledged that “unprecedented feelings of anger, pain and disappointment have risen” within the military over the proposed changes to Israel’s balance of power. The revamp includes enabling Parliament to overrule decisions made by the Supreme Court - a move that critics say will undermine the independence of the judiciary and



Court urged to punish ex-PM

Tel Aviv (AP): An Israeli good governance group on Sunday asked the country’s Supreme Court to punish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for allegedly violating a conflict of interest agreement meant to prevent him from dealing with the country’s judiciary while he is on trial for corruption. The request by the Movement for Quality Government in Israel intensifies a brewing showdown between Netanyahu’s government and the judiciary, which it is trying to overhaul in a contentious plan that has sparked widespread opposition.

could be used for political ends.

“Clothed in the IDF’s (Israel Defence Forces) uniform, I have risked my life dozens of times for the State of Israel. And at this time, for the sake of our country, I am willing to take any risk and pay any price,” Gallant said in a televised speech. “I declare loudly and publicly, for the sake of Israel’s security, for the sake of our sons and daughters – the legislative process should be stopped,” he asserted, pointing to the visible diminishing morale of the Army he could sense that is endangering Israel’s security and unity.

Thousands of soldiers, including those in critical divisions of the Army, had called to stop reporting for reserve duty amid the ongoing judicial overhaul process stressing that it poses a grave danger to Israel’s democracy and could turn it into a dictatorship.

“I hear their voices, and I am worried. The events taking place and the issues in Israeli society do not skip the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Unprecedented feelings of anger, pain and disappointment have risen from all over,” the Israeli Defence Minister said.

HK hold first protest in years

Hong Kong: Dozens of people on Sunday joined Hong Kong’s first authorised protest since the lifting of major COVID-19 restrictions under unprecedentedly strict rules, including wearing a numbered badge around their necks.

The rules set out by the police, who cited security reasons, came as the financial hub was promoting its return to normalcy after years of anti-virus controls and political turmoil. During the pandemic, protests were rare due to COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, many activists have been silenced or jailed after Beijing imposed a national security law following massive protests in 2019.

Critics say the city’s freedom of assembly that was promised Hong Kong when it returned to China from Britain in 1997 has been eroded. Sunday’s demonstration against the proposed reclamation and construction of rubbish-processing facilities was the first police-approved march of its kind after the city scrapped its mask mandate and social distancing limits.

But organisers had to com-



ply with police requirements such as taking measures to ensure the number of participants would not exceed the expected turnout of 100 people and asking for proof of a “reasonable excuse” from protesters who wore masks during the event.

At the height of the 2019 anti-government movement, Hong Kong’s government invoked emergency powers to ban masks from public gatherings so it can identify protesters who officials accused of illegal acts. On Sunday, about 60 people expressed their opposition to the plans in Tseung

Kwan O, a residential and industrial idea, and had to walk in a cordoned-off moving line in the rain amid heavy police presence.

Theresa Wang described the new restrictions as “a bit weird” but said they were still acceptable because the city was adjusting to “the new Hong Kong.”

“I’m not happy but we have to accept it. We have to accept what is deemed legal now,” the 70-year-old retiree said, adding that she hoped the protest would be a sign the government is more open to discussion. AP

Time zone confusion in Lebanon

Beirut (AP): The Lebanese government’s last-minute decision to delay the start of daylight savings time by a month until the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan resulted in mass confusion on Sunday. With some institutions implementing the change while others refused, many Lebanese have found themselves in the position of juggling work and school schedules in different time zones — in a country that is just 88 kilometers (55 miles) at its widest point.

In some cases, the debate took on a sectarian nature, with many Christian politicians and institutions, including the small nation’s largest church, the Maronite Church, rejecting the move.

The small Mediterranean country normally sets its clocks forward an hour on the last Sunday in March, which aligns with most European countries. However, on Thursday Lebanon’s government

announced a decision by caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati to push the start of daylight savings to April 21.

No reason was given for the decision, but a video of a meeting between Mikati and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri leaked to local media showed Berri asking Mikati to postpone the implementation of daylight savings time to allow Muslims to break their Ramadan fast an hour earlier.

Mikati responds that he had made a similar proposal but goes on to say that implementing the change would be difficult as it would cause problems in airline flight schedules, to which Berri interjects, “What flights?”

After the postponement of daylight savings was announced, Lebanon’s state airline, Middle East Airlines, said the departure times of all flights scheduled to leave from the Beirut airport between Sunday and April 21 would be advanced by an hour.



Girls raise their hands in their classroom on the first day of the new school year, in Kabul, Afghanistan, on this Saturday. The new Afghan educational year started, but high school remained closed for girls for the second year after Taliban returned to power in 2021. AP/PTI

‘Russia will station tactical nukes in Belarus’

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced plans on Saturday to station tactical nuclear weapons in neighbouring Belarus, a warning to the West as it steps up military support for Ukraine. Putin said the move was triggered by Britain's decision this past week to provide Ukraine with armour-piercing rounds containing depleted uranium. The Russian leader earlier made a false claim that the rounds have nuclear components.

He subsequently toned down his language, but insisted in a state television interview broadcast on Saturday night that the ammunition posed an additional danger to both troops and civilians in Ukraine.

Tactical nuclear weapons are intended for use on the battlefield, unlike more powerful, longer-range strategic nuclear weapons. Russia plans to maintain control over the ones it plans to Belarus, and construction of storage facilities for

them will be completed by July 1, Putin said.

Putin didn't say how many nuclear weapons Russia would keep in Belarus. The U.S. government believes Russia has about 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons, which include bombs that can be carried by tactical aircraft, warheads for short-range missiles and artillery rounds. In his interview, Putin argued that by deploying its tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia was following the lead of the United States, noting that the U.S. has nuclear weapons based in Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

"We are doing what they have been doing for decades, stationing them in certain allied countries, preparing the launch platforms and training their crews," Putin said. "We are going to do the same thing."

Russia has stored its tactical nuclear weapons at dedicated depots on its territory, and moving part of the arsenal to a storage facility in Belarus

Ukraine seeks emergency UN meeting

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's government on Sunday called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to "counter the Kremlin's nuclear blackmail" after Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed plans to station tactical atomic weapons in Belarus.

One Ukrainian official said that Russia "took Belarus as a nuclear hostage". But Moscow said it was making the move in response to the West's increasing military support for Ukraine. Putin announced the plan in a television interview that aired on Saturday, saying it was triggered by a UK decision this past week to provide Ukraine with armour-piercing rounds

containing depleted uranium. Putin argued that by deploying its tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia was following the lead of the United States. He noted that Washington has nuclear weapons based in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

"We are doing what they have been doing for decades, stationing them in certain allied countries, preparing the launch platforms and training their crews," he said.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry condemned the move in a statement on Sunday and demanded an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council.

"Ukraine expects effective action to counter the Kremlin's

nuclear blackmail by the UK, China, the US and France, including as permanent members of the UN Security Council, which have a special responsibility to prevent threats of aggression using nuclear weapons," the statement read.

"The world must be united against someone who endangers the future of human civilisation."

Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, tweeted on Sunday that Putin's announcement was "a step towards internal destabilisation" of Belarus that maximised "the level of negative perception and public rejection" of Russia and Putin in Belarusian society.

weapons to send a signal to the West about the readiness to use them.

Putin said Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has long asked for the nuclear weapons as a counter to NATO. Belarus shares borders with three NATO members — Latvia, Lithuania and Poland — and Russia used its territory as a staging ground to send troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022.

Putin noted that Russia helped modernize Belarusian military aircraft last year to make them capable of carrying nuclear warheads. He said 10 such planes were ready to go. He said nuclear weapons also could be launched by the Iskander short-range missiles that Russia provided to Belarus last year. Belarusian opposition leader

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who is living in exile, said the agreement to transfer the tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus "underlines the threat to regional security" from Lukashenko's regime.

Three hurt in blast caused by drone

Kyiv (AP): Russian authorities said on Sunday a drone caused an explosion that injured three people in a town far from the border with Ukraine, but gave no word on the drone's origin.

The explosion occurred on Sunday afternoon in the town of Kireyevsk, in the Tula region about 300 kilometres (180 miles) from the border with Ukraine and 175 kilometers (110 miles) south of Moscow. Russia's state news agency RIA-Novosti cited local authorities as saying the explosion, which damaged some residential buildings, was caused by a drone but did not immediately give further details.

The Latvia-based Russian news outlet Meduza reported that the blast left a crater about 15 metres (50 feet) in diameter and five metres deep (16 feet). Ukraine's government on Sunday called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to "counter the Kremlin's nuclear blackmail" after Russian President Vladimir

Putin revealed plans to station tactical atomic weapons in Belarus.

One Ukrainian official said that Russia "took Belarus as a nuclear hostage". But Moscow said it was making the move in response to the West's increasing military support for Ukraine. Putin announced the plan in a television interview that aired on Saturday, saying it was triggered by a UK decision this past week to provide Ukraine with armour-piercing rounds containing depleted uranium.

Putin argued that by deploying its tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia was following the lead of the United States. He noted that Washington has nuclear weapons based in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey. "We are doing what they have been doing for decades, stationing them in certain allied countries, preparing the launch platforms and training their crews," he said.



Natalia cries at the grave of her husband and Ukrainian serviceman Andrii Neshodovsky during his funeral ceremony at the cemetery in Kyiv, Ukraine, Saturday. AP/PTI

US Prez's pick to lead FAA withdraws amid shaky Senate support

Wilmington (US): President Joe Biden's choice to run the Federal Aviation Administration has withdrawn his nomination, a setback for the administration that comes after Denver International Airport CEO Phillip Washington appeared to lack enough support in the closely divided Senate. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg confirmed Washington's withdrawal in a tweet Saturday night, calling him "an excellent nominee" and blaming underserved and partisan attacks. Republicans were united in opposition to Washington, calling him unqualified because of limited aviation experience.

Democrats and allied independents still might have pushed the nomination through, but key senators on their side balked at supporting Biden's pick. Washington's fate appeared settled when Senate Commerce Committee Chair Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., abruptly called off a scheduled vote last Wednesday — a sign that she lacked enough votes to move the nomination out of committee. She said some senators wanted

more information about Washington. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who was a Democrat until switching to independent in December, and moderate Democrat Jon Tester of Montana declined to say how they would have voted. A person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press that Sinema was holding up the nomination and had indicated her opposition. The person was not authorised to discuss the process publicly and insisted on anonymity.

Before the White House announces a new nominee, it likely will want assurances of support from Sinema, Tester and other moderates. The FAA has lacked a Senate-confirmed administrator since March 2022. The agency is trying to reassure Americans that air travel is safe despite a surge in close calls between planes this year.

It is also struggling with aging technology that failed in January, briefly cancelling all takeoffs around the country. And it is still trying to repair its reputation after approving Boeing planes that crashed in 2018 and 2019. AP

Joe Biden declares emergency as crews dig through storm wreckage

Washington (AP): President Joe Biden early on Sunday issued an emergency declaration for Mississippi, making federal funding available to Carroll, Humphreys, Monroe and Sharkey counties, the areas hardest hit Friday night by a deadly tornado that ripped through the Mississippi Delta, one of the poorest regions of the US. At least 25 people were killed and dozens of others were injured in Mississippi as the massive storm ripped through several towns on its hour-long path. One man was killed after his trailer home flipped several times in Alabama.

Search and recovery crews on Sunday resumed the daunting task of digging through the debris of flattened and battered homes, commercial buildings and municipal offices after hundreds of people were displaced.



Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell was scheduled to visit the state on Sunday to evaluate the destruction.

FEMA Coordinating Officer John Boyle has been appointed to oversee federal recovery operations. Following Biden's declaration, federal funding can be used for recovery efforts including temporary housing, home repairs, loans covering uninsured property losses and other individual

and business programs, the White House said in a statement. The twister flattened entire blocks, obliterated houses, ripped a steeple off a church and toppled a municipal water tower. Even with recovery just starting, the National Weather Service warned of a risk of more severe weather Sunday — including high winds, large hail and possible tornadoes — in eastern Louisiana, south central Mississippi and south central Alabama.

‘21 held in oil scheme’

Caracas (AP): Venezuela's attorney general said Saturday that 21 people, including senior officials in the government of President Nicolás Maduro and business leaders, have been arrested in connection with a corruption scheme involving international oil sales.

Prosecutor Tarek William Saab said the alleged scheme involved selling Venezuelan oil through the country's cryptocurrency oversight agency in parallel to the state-run Petróleos de Venezuela SA. The oversight agency allegedly signed contracts for the loading of crude on ships "without any type of administrative control or guarantees," violating legal regulations, Saab said, without mentioning the amounts involved. Once the oil was marketed, "the corresponding payments were not made" to the state oil company.

The attorney general's statement comes five days after Venezuela's once-powerful oil minister, Tareck El Aissami, resigned amid allegations of corruption against some of his closest associates. El Aissami said he resigned to "accompany and fully support" the investigations. For now, El Aissami, who was one of Maduro's trusted ministers, is not facing charges.

Honduras forms ties with China after Taiwan break

Beijing (AP): Honduras formed diplomatic ties with China on Sunday after breaking off relations with Taiwan, which is now recognized by only 13 sovereign states, including Vatican City. The announcement reported by Chinese state media CCTV came after the Honduran and Taiwanese governments made separate announcements that they were severing ties.

"The government of the Republic of Honduras recognizes the existence of only one China in the world and that the government of the People's Republic of China is the only legitimate government that represents all of China," Honduras's Foreign Ministry said in a statement posted on Twitter. It added that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory, and as of today, the Honduran government has informed Taiwan of the severance of diplomatic relations, pledging not to have any official relationship or contact with Taiwan," Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu said on Sunday that Taiwan had ended its relations with Honduras to "safeguard its sovereignty and dignity." Wu said that Honduras President Xiomara Castro and her team always had a "fantasy" about China and had raised the issue of switching ties before the presidential election in Honduras in 2021. Relations between Taiwan and Honduras

were once stable, he said, but China had not stopped luring Honduras. The Honduran administration had asked Taiwan for billions of dollars of aid and compared its proposals with China's, Wu said, as he detailed work Taiwan had done to help develop its former ally. "The Castro government dismissed our nation's longstanding assistance and relations and carried out talks to form diplomatic ties with China. Our government feels pained and regretful," he said.

Taiwan's presidential office spokesperson Olivia Lin noted in a statement that the relations between both sides had lasted for more than 80 years. "China has suppressed Taiwan's international space for long and unilaterally endangers the region's peace and stability," she was quoted saying in the statement. Honduras is the ninth diplomatic ally that Taipei has lost to Beijing since pro-independence President Tsai Ing-wen first took office in May 2016. China and Taiwan have been locked in a battle for diplomatic recognition since the sides split amid civil war in 1949, with Beijing spending billions to win recognition for its "one China" policy.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, and refuses most contacts with countries that maintain formal ties

Man gets 100 years in prison in Indian-origin girl's death case

Washington (PTI): A 35-year-old man has been sentenced to 100 years of hard labour for causing the death of a 5-year-old Indian-origin girl in the US state of Louisiana in 2021, according to local media reports.

Joseph Lee Smith from Shreveport was sentenced following his conviction in January of the killing of Mya Patel, local news media outlets like KSLA News 12 and the Shreveport Times reported.

Patel was playing in a hotel room on Monkhouse Drive when a bullet entered her room and struck her in the head. Patel was rushed to a nearby hospital, where she battled for three days and was pronounced dead on March 23, 2021.

During Smith's trial, it was revealed to the jury that Smith got into an altercation with another man in the parking lot of the Super 8 Motel. The hotel was owned and operated at that time by Vimal and Snehal Patel, who lived in a ground-floor unit with Mya and a younger sibling.

During the altercation, Smith struck the other man with a 9-mm handgun, which discharged. The bullet missed the other man but went into the hotel room and struck Patel in the head before grazing her mother.

29 dead as boat sinks in Tunisia

AP ■ TUNISIA

Boat sinkings off the coast of Tunisia over the weekend killed at least 29 people from countries in sub-Saharan Africa who were trying make the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Italy, the Tunisian National Guard said on Sunday.

Tunisian fishermen recovered 19 bodies, said National Guard spokesman Houssameddine Jebabli.

The Coast Guard also recovered eight bodies on Saturday night and rescued 11 survivors who had been aboard a boat that went down, he said.

Two other bodies were recovered in waters off the Tunisian port of Sfax, he said. It wasn't immediately clear how many more people might also have been aboard boats that sank.

A Tunisian NGO that tracks migration issues said five boats are believed to have foundered in the past two days off Sfax and that 67 people remain unaccounted for.

People fleeing conflict or poverty routinely take boats from Tunisian shores toward Europe, even though the central Mediterranean is the most dangerous migration route in the world, according to the International Organisation for Migration. Many are from sub-Saharan Africa.

Hindus among healthiest, says UK census

PTI ■ LONDON

Hindus living in the UK are among the healthiest and well qualified religious groups and Sikhs are most likely to own their homes, according to latest census data for England and Wales. The UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) has been analysing census statistics to release information across various subcategories for the country's population based on the responses of the online census conducted in March 2021. In its latest release entitled 'Religion by housing, health, employment and education' this week, the ONS finds that life outcomes for religious groups varied considerably.

"In 2021, those who identified as 'Hindu' had the highest percentage of their population reporting either 'very good' or 'good' health (87.8 per cent), compared with 82.0 per cent of the overall population," the ONS finds, adding that the Hindus also reported the "lowest prevalence of disability". "People who identified as 'Hindu' had the highest percentage with a 'Level 4 or above' [certificate-level] qualification (54.8 per cent), compared with the overall population (33.8 per cent)," it noted.

"People who identified as 'Sikh' were more likely to live in households that owned their home... 77.7 per cent of those who identified as 'Sikh' lived in households that owned their home," the ONS said. The



religion question is voluntary in the census and in 2021, 94 per cent of the overall population in England and Wales of 56 million chose to answer the question.

The ONS said that many of the life outcomes discussed in its analysis may be influenced by the differing age and sex profiles of religious groups.

"In 2021, people who identified as 'Muslim' were nearly four times more likely to live in overcrowded homes than the overall population of England and Wales," the statistics show. "In 2021, people who identified as 'Muslim' had the lowest percentage of people aged 16 to 64 years in employment (51.4 per cent compared with

70.9 per cent of the overall population); this resulted from the high percentages of people who were students or looking after home or family in this group," it said.

The ONS pointed out that life outcomes for religious groups often overlap, as people in poor health or caring for others may be less able to work or gain education.

Income, where people live, and cultural background, also have an influence on outcomes.

The analysis reveals that those who identified as "Christian" had an older age profile and reported poorer health than the overall population.

"People who identified as 'Christian' were most likely to live in households that owned their home outright (36 per cent), 8.9 percentage points higher than the overall population (27.1 per cent). This group had a median (average) age of 51 years, compared with 40 years for the overall population, suggesting that they may have had time to pay off a mortgage or loan," the ONS said.

The 2021 census survey was filled out by more than 24 million households across England and Wales and data from the survey is being published in stages by the ONS since then. According to an earlier release, people identifying as Christian fell below half the population for the first time, while those identifying as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh registered a small rise.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, CONSTRUCTION DIVISION,
UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM, CHAMPAWAT
Phone/Fax : 05965 - 230044 E-Mail:- executivechampawat@gmail.com

Bid Notification No : 545 / Nivida / 317 Date: 25.03.2023

E - TENDER NOTICE (Two Bid System)

Name of the works: BHADIYANS SOLAR PUMPING W/SSCHEME (J/M)
Date of Publication on e-procurement portal Date. 27.03.2023 at 17.00 hrs.
Note : Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal - www.uktenders.gov.in & contact 05965-230044.

"जल संचय जीवन संचय" "झारा संकल्प, हर घर नल से जल" "वाक पधना है जरूरी" "आपस में हो रो मल दूरी"

Executive Engineer

कार्यालय नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर - हरिद्वार

पत्रांक-977/E-Tender NPP Laksar/2022-23 दिनांक- 25.03.2023

पुनः ई-निविदा सूचना

सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर द्वारा Door to Door Collection, Segregation, Secondary Storage & Transportation of Municipal Solid Waste Management System कार्य हेतु Online निविदा वेबसाइट <https://uktenders.gov.in> पर निम्न कार्यक्रमानुसार आमंत्रित की जाती है।

Sr.	EVENT DESCRIPTION	DATE
1.	Advertising Date	27.03.2023
2.	RFP Document Download and Submission Start Date & Time	27.03.2023 (10:00 Hrs)
3.	Last date & time of submission of Online Bid and (Submission of Technical and Financial Proposal)	10.04.2023 (14:00 Hrs)
4.	Date for opening of Technical Proposal	10.04.2023 (15:00 Hrs)
5.	Website for downloading Tender Document, corrigendum's Addendums etc.	https://uktenders.gov.in
6.	Opening of Financial proposals of Technically qualified bidders.	To be confirmed
7.	Bid Mode Submission	The Bids should be submitted through online mode only on e-procurement website https://uktenders.gov.in
8.	Detail of the contact person for Queries	Sh. Gulsanawar Mob. 8410637880

नोट- निविदा कि शर्तें <https://uktenders.gov.in> अथवा नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर के कार्यालय में देखी जा सकती है।

(चंद्रशेखर शर्मा)
अधिकांशी अधिकारी
नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर
जनपद-हरिद्वार

(अम्बरीश गर्ग)
अध्यक्ष
नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर
जनपद-हरिद्वार

कार्यालय नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर - हरिद्वार

पत्रांक-978/E-Tender NPP Laksar/2022-23 दिनांक- 25.03.2023

पुनः ई-निविदा सूचना

सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर द्वारा Solid waste processing and composting plant at laksar SWM site, Laksar कार्य हेतु Online निविदा वेबसाइट <https://uktenders.gov.in> पर निम्न कार्यक्रमानुसार आमंत्रित की जाती है।

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(चंद्रशेखर शर्मा)
अधिकांशी अधिकारी
नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर
जनपद-हरिद्वार

(अम्बरीश गर्ग)
अध्यक्ष
नगर पालिका परिषद् लक्सर
जनपद-हरिद्वार

RBI may go in for 25 bp interest rate hike

In monetary policy meet next month: Experts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With retail inflation remaining above the comfort level of 6 per cent and most global peers including US Fed continuing hawkish stance, the Reserve Bank of India too may go in for a 25 basis points hike in the bi-monthly monetary policy to be announced on April 6, opined experts.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India will be meeting for three days on April 3, 5 and 6 to take into account various domestic and global factors before coming out with the first bi-monthly monetary policy for fiscal 2023-24.

The two key factors which the committee will deliberate intensely while firming up the next monetary policy are elevated retail inflation and the recent action taken by central banks of the developed nations especially the US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and Bank of England.

The Reserve Bank of India



(RBI) has been raising benchmark rates since May 2022 to contain inflation which has been largely driven by external factors, especially the disruption of the global supply chain following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war.

In its last policy meeting held in February, RBI had raised the policy rate or repo by 25 basis points to 6.50 per cent. Having remained below six per cent for two months (November and December 2022), the retail inflation breached the comfort zone warranting action by the Reserve Bank.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation was 6.52 per cent in January and 6.44 per cent in February.

“Given that CPI inflation has been 6.5 per cent and 6.4 per cent in the last two months and that liquidity is now near neutral, we may expect the RBI to raise rates once again by 25 bps and probably change stance to neutral to signal that this cycle is over,” opined Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda.

India Ratings and Research Chief Economist D K Pant too expects the central bank to raise policy rate by 25 bps (basis points).

“This is likely to be last rate hike in present policy tightening cycle,” he said, and added that inflation trajectory from here is going to decline due to impact of past policy rate hikes, softening of global commodity prices, and base effect.

Meanwhile, Ranen Banerjee, Partner, Economic Advisory Services, PwC India, said that the risk of dis-anchoring the inflation expectations by going for a pause owing to the banking turmoil has forced the US Fed, ECB and BoE to raise the policy rates.

Markets to track global factors in holiday-shortened week

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets may face Svolatility in a holiday-shortened week ahead amid monthly derivatives expiry, besides global factors and foreign fund trading activity would continue to dictate terms, analysts said.

Factors such as movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude and the rupee would also guide the trend in equities.

Markets would remain closed on Thursday for Ram Navami.

“While volatility may increase locally before the March Futures and Options (F&O) expiry, the position of major international banks will continue to play a significant role in the direction of the market globally.

“The market will also keep an eye on the geopolitical situation because there is still tension between Russia and Ukraine and there is also some tension developing between the US and Syria. But, the market is not paying much attention to this. Due to FIIs’ aggressive selling in recent months, the institutional flow will also be crucial,” said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

Last week, the BSE bench-



mark fell 462.8 points or 0.79 per cent, while the Nifty slipped 155 points or 0.90 per cent. Both the benchmarks ended in the negative territory for the third week in a row.

Three major factors that contributed to the market’s volatility were the global banking crisis, the US Federal Reserve’s rate increase, and the Finance Bill amendment, Meena added.

“This week is a holiday-shortened one and we expect volatility to remain high due to the scheduled expiry of March month derivatives contracts.

Besides, global cues, foreign flows and movement in crude could further add to the choppiness,” Ajit Mishra, VP - Technical Research, Religare

Broking Ltd, said.

Global markets have been turbulent amid worries over turmoil in the banking sector and uncertainty about what the Federal Reserve and other central banks will do with interest rates going forward.

Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said this week will see further increase in volatility due to the monthly F&O expiry.

Global markets were mostly lower on Friday with traders remaining cautious as lingering concerns about the recent turmoil in the banking sector continue to hang over the markets amidst fears of economic slowdown, said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

RCAP resolution plan hits roadblock as bidders upset over another auction plan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The plan of debt-ridden Reliance Capital’s lenders to conduct a second round of auction has hit a roadblock, as bidders are apparently not inclined to another round under the insolvency resolution process, according to sources.

Meanwhile, the apex court has listed the matter regarding the second auction for hearing in August.

The Supreme Court (SC) on March 20, 2023, admitted ‘Torrent Investments’ — the highest bidder with Rs 8,640 crore resolution plan — appeal against the lenders’ decision to hold another round of auction.

However, the court refused to stay the second round of the auction.

The insolvency process of RCAP has been going on for more than 450 days, which is much longer than the statutory time limit of 330 days.

According to the sources, Torrent has recently conveyed



to the lenders that it is not willing to participate in the second round of auction. The other bidder — IndusInd International Holdings Ltd (IIHL) of Hinduja Group — has also told the lenders that it wants to withdraw its revised bid of ₹9,000 crore, which it had made after the auction process, and retain the old offer of ₹8,110 crore in the first round of auction.

This has upset the Committee of Creditors (CoC) plan to conduct a second round of auction with a base price of ₹9,500 crore to maximise the recovery from the RCAP resolution process.

OneWeb offering can match mobile services rates of western nations, not India tariff: Mittal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Satellite communication service provider OneWeb is able to match mobile services rates of western countries but its prices can’t be at par with the “extremely low” tariff in India, company’s executive chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal said on Sunday.

With the launch of 36 Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites by NewSpace India Limited early in the day, OneWeb constellation now has 618 satellites for global coverage including India.

Sharing details of OneWeb launch and services, Mittal said that the services will be affordable and at par with mobile rates if a community of 30-40 homes in a village use it. However, the services will cost more for individual use in India compared to existing mobile services plans.

“If you ask me, can the pricing of satellite communication be at par with mobile tariffs? Whatever is currently available in the Western world, it can be done today. What is available in India for 2 and 2.5 dollars a month? No, because that is a pricing which is extremely low,” Mittal said. He said that the company expects all the permissions required for services launched in India to be in place by July-August. OneWeb has the permission for satellite services but it needs to wait till Spacecom Policy is in place and spectrum is allocated to the company for transmitting signals.

Tenstorrent to partner Indian startups for building open source RISC-V based microprocessors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tenstorrent, a next-generation computing company that builds computers for AI, is looking to partner with Indian startups for building open source RISC-V based microprocessors, a top official of the company said.

Tenstorrent CEO Jim Keller told PTI that he is looking forward to real India projects to come out of the country’s startups like building an entire data centre using RISC V services designed by local companies.

“Tenstorrent as a company is going to invest in some (startups). We are not an investment company but we have a very keen interest. Let’s say there has been progress with some because we’re going to collaborate where we plan to share some technology,” he said.

Keller is known for his work in designing the AMD K7 processor, which was the first computer chipset to achieve 1 gigahertz processing speed, AMD K8 processors, Apple A4 and A5



chipsets and later his role for the leading design team at AMD.

The Apple A4 chip was used in the first iPad.

Keller said that he has worked with Indian engineers over the years and has realised that sometimes they are “unwarrantedly optimistic”.

When asked about his views on India’s semiconductor mission during the time when there is excess supply of the chipsets in the market, Keller said that the chip industry is cyclical in nature and it takes a couple of decades to build the industry.

Only 15% insolvency cases reach resolution during Oct-Dec 2022

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Only 15 per cent of the 267 insolvency cases admitted in company law tribunals during October-December 2022 reached resolution with overall recovery of just 27 per cent of claimed amount, the IBBJ data showed.

As much as 45 per cent cases were concluded through liquidation, according to a Kotak Securities analysis of the latest data from the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).

On quarter-on-quarter basis, the second quarter of FY23 saw 256 cases in NCLTs (National Company Law Tribunals), massively down from the yearly run-rate of 2,000 cases in FY20.

According to the analysis, one-third of all liquidations happened because no resolution plans were received. Of the 1,901 cases resolved so far, in



1,229 cases the banker decided to go in for a liquidation, while in 600 cases, no resolution plans were received.

In 56 cases, the resolution plan was rejected for non-compliance and in the remaining 16 cases, the debtor contravened provisions of the resolution plan. Also most cases (76 per cent) that ended up in liquidation were either non-functional and/or part of past

BIFR (Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction) process and the rest were due to other reasons.

The brokerage, however, considers the low admissions and resolution levels as signs of corporate India being comfortably placed and observes that as a result the direction of cases and outstanding claims will likely stay low as legacy stress gets resolved.

Soft drinks to soaps: Reliance unveils big price war plan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After stirring a price war in the soft drink segment with the relaunch of Campa, billionaire Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance has entered the personal and home care segment of FMCG, offering products at 30 to 35 per cent lesser price.

Experts say “the jury is out” and a competitive offering from Reliance would attract the customers to try its products and evaluate performance, quality and perception in comparison to the same from the established brands.

Products of RCPL, the FMCG arm and wholly-owned subsidiary of Reliance Retail Ventures Limited (RRVL), are available only in selected markets but the company is building a dealer network on a pan-India basis, and the availability of its products will be scaled up across modern and general trade channels.

“They are creating a distinct and dedicated distribution



network comprising traditional dealer/stockists as well as modern trade b2b channels,” said an industry source.

It articulates ambitions to be a relevant player in the USD 110-billion FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) segment, largely dominated by players as HUL, P&G, Reckitt, and Nestle.

RCPL has priced its Glimmer beauty soaps, Get Real natural soaps, and Puric hygiene soaps at ₹25, which is much lower than the products

of leading brands such as Lux (₹35 for 100 gm), Dettol (₹40 for 75 gm) and Santoor (₹34 for 100 gm) etc, while prices of its Enzo 2 litre front load and top load liquid detergent is ₹250 (on Jio Mart) in comparison to a 2-litre pack of Surf Excel Matic priced at ₹325.

For Enzo front-load and top-load detergent powder, it had priced at ₹149 for 1-kilogramme pack (on Jio Mart).

Front-load and top-load refer to the two categories of washing machine.

Five of top 10-firms lose ₹86,447 cr in m-cap; Infosys, TCS, SBI hit hard

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Five of the top 10 most valued firms together lost ₹86,447.12 crore in market valuation last week, with Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services and State Bank of India taking the biggest hit.

Last week, the BSE benchmark fell 462.8 points or 0.79 per cent. While Reliance Industries Limited, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS),

HDFC Bank, Infosys and State Bank of India suffered erosion from their valuation, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever Limited, ITC, HDFC and Bharti Airtel posted gains.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Infosys tumbled by Rs 25,217.2 crore to ₹5,72,687.97 crore.

The valuation of State Bank of India fell ₹21,062.08 crore to ₹4,51,228.38 crore, and that of TCS tanked ₹21,039.55 crore to



₹11,42,154.59 crore. The mcap of Reliance Industries declined by ₹13,226.53 crore to ₹14,90,775.40 crore, and HDFC Bank dipped ₹5,901.76 crore to ₹8,71,416.33 crore.

However, ICICI Bank added ₹10,905.18 crore, taking its valuation to ₹5,94,888.25 crore.

The valuation of Hindustan Unilever rallied Rs 7,542.19 crore to ₹5,82,816.11 crore, and ITC climbed

₹3,664.01 crore to ₹4,70,360.22 crore.

Bharti Airtel’s mcap jumped ₹2,787.57 crore to ₹4,24,964.64 crore, and that of HDFC advanced ₹384.89 crore to ₹4,69,845.34 crore.

Reliance Industries continued to rule the top 10 most valued firms chart followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Infosys, ITC, HDFC, State Bank of India and Bharti Airtel.

‘Majority of pvt cos do not have adequate risk management function’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 67 per cent of private companies do not have an adequate risk management function, and over 52 per cent are still not equipped with formal risk management processes, said a report by risk advisory firm MGC Global.

Over 50 per cent of the survey participants were affiliated with companies that reported revenues of over ₹1,000 crore.

It was conducted with an outreach to over 60,000 professionals in management and board-level roles in various sectors in India to assess the corporate governance on a range of pertinent practices in their respective companies, MGC Global said in a release.

According to the survey titled ‘State of Corporate Governance in India, 2023’, about 67 per cent of closely held companies and 38 per cent of public companies were found to have inadequate practices for risk management. In addition, several companies are at risk of cronyism due to less than one-third of the board being independent directors.

This survey also found out that around 45 per cent of respondents from private companies have less than one-third of their board comprising independent directors. This could lead to cronyism and impact objectivity in decision-making.

“This year, we had launched a survey with a wide and cross-sector outreach and had looked closely at the state



of governance on the ground in an environment that has been witnessing a significant change in terms of the development and adoption of governance practices,” said Monish G Chatrath, Managing Partner, MGC Global.

With data theft on the rise and with the advent of data protection regulations, such as GDPR, it is encouraging to see that 89 per cent of public companies have policies and procedures relating to cyber security and data protection in place, the report said.

The survey also found that women are grossly under-represented on boards of 96 per cent of private companies and 51 per cent of public companies; shareholder engagement is restricted to annual general meetings in 67 per cent of public companies; codes of ethical business conduct were not published in 25 per cent of private companies; and CEOs, CFOs and HR directors play the roles of ombudsman in 41 per cent of public companies.

MGC Global is an independent member firm of the \$4.6 billion Atlanta headquartered Allinial Global.

Export benefits under RoDTEP extended to certain textile items

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has extended export benefits under RoDTEP scheme to 18 items related to textiles sector, including saari and lungi, with a view to boost shipments of these goods.

Benefits under the duty refund scheme — Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) — will be given to exports made from March 23, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification.

Under the RoDTEP, various central and state duties, taxes, and levies imposed on input products, among others, will be refunded to exporters. “18 tariff lines...Are being added...Under RoDTEP for exports made from March 28, 2023,” it said.

The items include shirting fabrics, casement, and cambric.

Govt hikes duty on X-ray machine imports to 15% from April 1

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has hiked customs duty on import of X-ray machines and non-portable X-ray generators to 15 per cent with effect from April 1.

Currently, portable X-ray machines and non-portable X-ray generators and apparatus attract 10 per cent import duty.

The changes in the customs duty rate was brought in as part of the amendments to the Finance Bill, 2023, which was passed by the Lok Sabha last Friday. The new rates would be effective from April 1, 2023, the amendment said.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said this is intended to improve barriers to manufacturing in India. “This will encourage ‘Make in India’ to reduce import dependence in the niche sector,” he said.

‘Housing sales up 14% annually in Jan-Mar to 1.13 lakh units across top 7 cities’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales in India’s top seven cities are estimated to rise 14 per cent during January-March to over 1.13 lakh units on strong demand despite increase in prices by 6-9 per cent, according to Anarock.

Real estate consultant Anarock, which tracks the primary (fresh sales) residential market, said the “bull run” continued in the housing segment of Indian realty sector despite rise in interest rates on home loans, leading to highest quarterly sales in the last one decade.

According to the data compiled by Anarock, housing sales are estimated at 1,13,770 units in January-March, up 14 per cent from 99,550 units in the year-ago period across seven major cities.

Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Pune contributed 48 per cent to total sales.

Delhi-NCR is the only city likely to witness a decline in sales during the first quarter of this calendar year.

“The residential market’s winning streak continued in the first quarter of 2023 with housing sales in top cities



breaching the previous high of Q1, 2022.

“The quarter has recorded the highest ever sales in the last decade amid significant rise in demand for high-ticket priced homes (more than ₹1.5 crore),” Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said.

Puri, however, cautioned that emerging headwinds could pose a challenge in the short-term.

“Persistent inflation concerns along with another possible rate hike by the RBI in the near future could dent the housing market’s growth trajectory in the upcoming two quarters,” Puri said.

As per the data, housing sales in MMR are likely to rise 19 per cent to 34,690 units in January-March from 29,130 units in the corresponding period of last year.

Satwik-Chirag win Swiss Open title

PTI ■ BASEL

Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty capped off their impressive campaign with a title win, beating China's Ren Xiang Yu and Tan Qiang in the final of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Sunday.

The second-seeded Indian pair, the 2022 World Championships bronze medallist, was solid in defence and dished out an attacking game to outwit the world No. 21 pair 21-19, 24-22 in 54 minutes.

It was the first title of the season for India with Satwik and Chirag putting to rest the disappointment of last week's All England Championships where they had exited in the second round.

Overall, it was the fifth career world tour title for the Indian pair, who had claimed the India Open and French Open last year, besides securing the Thailand Open in 2019 and Hyderabad Open in 2018.

Satwik and Chirag had also won the Commonwealth Games gold in 2022.

The title run also meant India continued its love affair with the Swiss Open, with PV Sindhu (2022), Saina Nehwal (2011, 2012), Kidambi Srikanth (2015) and HS Prannoy (2016) claiming the crown in the past.



The two pairs had contracting march to the final with Satwik and Chirag playing three three-game matches on their way to the summit clash, while Tan and Ren didn't drop a game.

Tan had forged a world No. 10 pairing with He Jiting in 2019, winning the 2021 World Championships silver medal, while Ren had been ranked as high as 16 with his former partner Ou Xuanyi.

Playing the Chinese pair for the first time, Satwik and Chirag turned up the heat at the right moments, displayed their attacking prowess and steely nerves to come out victorious.

A service error from Chirag was a dampener but India managed to lead 3-1 early on before the Chinese drew parity at 6-6. There was another service error for height from Satwik before the Indians entered the break with a three-point cushion.

The Indians tried to keep the rallies flat and short and it worked, as they led 15-10 and then 18-13.

However, Tan and Ren soon narrowed down the gap to 17-18.

But, a precise smash from Chirag, which bisected the court, gave India two game points. Satwik sailed one long before sealing the game with a winner to take the first advantage.

The second game was an extremely close affair as the rivals

fought tooth and nail.

After trailing 2-4 early, Chirag went on the attack from the front court to draw level.

The Chinese pair kept fighting and clawed back at 8-8 with Tan finding a winner at the forecourt with a drop.

Satwik smashed one into the net before the Chinese made a service error to hand a two-point advantage to the Indians at the mid-game interval.

The Indian duo quickly extended the lead to 14-11 with Satwik producing a powerful smash. Tan and Chirag then engaged in a terrific rally but the latter went long as the Chinese kept breathing down the neck of the Indian pair.

With Satwik erring twice, China was back on level par at 16-16. In the end, a straight smash from Chirag earned India two championship points. After another exciting rally, Chirag went long to squander one opportunity.

A lucky net chord helped China draw parity at 20-20 before Tan sent one into the net to gift another match point to the Indians.

However, once again, a return bounced from the net as China saved another championship point.

Tan and Ren then grabbed a game point of their own with Chirag erring, but China lost it with a shot going into net.

Indian lifters bag two bronze on Day 1 of World Youth C'ships

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian weightlifters Dhanush Loganathan and Jyoshna Sabar won bronze medals in their respective categories on the opening day of the IWF World Youth Championships in Durrës, Albania.

Competing in the women's 40kg event, 14-year-old Jyoshna had a combined lift of 115kg (53kg in snatch and 62kg in clean & jerk) as she came in third on Saturday night.

Jyoshna won silver in the snatch section but was sixth in the clean and jerk category in the seven-lifter field.

Dhanush, on the other hand, heaved a total weight of 200kg (88kg+112kg) to finish third behind Filipinos Prince K. Delos Santos and Eron Borres in the men's 49kg event.

The 16-year-old won a silver medal in the snatch category.

Lifters between the age of 13-17 are eligible for youth competitions.

Gauff loses out to Potapova, Rybakina rallies in Miami

AP ■ MIAMI

American Coco Gauff was knocked out of the Miami Open on Saturday after an intense three-set battle with Anastasia Potapova while Indian Wells champion Elena Rybakina earned a hard-fought comeback win against Spain's Paula Badosa.

Three-times Miami winner Victoria Azarenka fell to Poland's Magda Linette but third-seed Jessica Pegula advanced with a 6-1, 7-6 (7/0) win over fellow American Danielle Collins.

Potapova showed determination, stamina and some powerful baseline hitting as she beat South Florida-based Gauff, the world number six, 6-7 (8/10), 7-5, 6-2.

The two hour, 41 minute match in the early afternoon heat ebbed and flowed before Potapova took a firm grip in the third set.

The win was Potapova's third career victory against a top 10 opponent and her first against Gauff after two losses.

"I think I just let it go, and I started to focus on my tennis and going for my shots and not



thinking what she is going to do," Potapova said of her turnaround performance.

Gauff was disappointed with a performance where she failed to find a consistent rhythm.

Potapova will play Chinese starlet Zheng Qinwen in the round of 16 after she beat 12th seed Liudmila Samsonova 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 in 3 hours and 7 minutes.

Rybakina rallied from a set down to sink Badosa 3-6, 7-5, 6-3. She extended her winning streak to 10 matches as she kept on course to claim the Miami-Indian Wells "Sunshine Double".

Azarenka fell in three sets to the lower-ranked Linette 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 6-4 ending her hopes of a fourth Miami title.

Linette, who had not won a set off of Azarenka in their two prior meetings, converted five of her eight break points and will now face Pegula for a place in the quarter-finals.

Former French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko defeated 13th seed Brazilian Beatriz Haddad Maia for the fourth time in as many meetings to reach the fourth round with a 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 win.

Samra clinches 50m 3P bronze in shooting WC

PTI ■ BHOPAL

India's upcoming shooter Sift Kaur Samra came up with an inspired performance to clinch her second senior medal at the international level, beating a tough field to win the 50m rifle 3P bronze on the penultimate day of the ISSF Rifle/Pistol World Cup here on Sunday.

On a day when China continued their domination, with Zhang Qiongyue winning gold in the event, Samra, the reigning national champion, scored a total of 403.9 points in the ranking round to finish third, even as Zhang (414.7 points) and Czech Republic's Aneta Brabcova (411.3) entered the title round.

In the gold-medal round, Zhang defeated her Czech rival 16-8.

India are currently second on the medals table behind China with one gold, one silver and five bronze medals.

China are leading the tally with seven gold, two silver and an equal number of bronze.

On Sunday, Samra added to the bronze medal she had won



last year at the World Cup in Changwon, China.

All eyes were on world championship silver medallist in air rifle Anjum Moudgil in the preliminary round of the 3P event. But Samra was in a different zone on Sunday, shooting superb series in all three positions to emerge second

best at the end of the qualification round with a score of 588.

Samra, 21, who had some of the best scores in the trials held in New Delhi ahead of the World Cup, had three awful 'standing' rounds in the ranking match, which allowed Zhang and Brabcova to race to the top.

Bayern players 'shocked' by Nagelsmann dismissal



AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich midfielders Joshua Kimmich and Leon Goretzka admitted on Saturday that Julian Nagelsmann's dismissal as head coach had come as a "disappointment" and a "shock".

"It's always difficult when a coach goes, and I had a very close relationship with Julian," Goretzka told ZDF broadcaster after Germany's 2-0 friendly international win over Peru. "In the last year, I've probably seen him more than my family, so it is a shock," he added.

Kimmich said that he and his team-mates were at fault for the departure of Nagelsmann, who was sacked by Bayern on Friday.

"It's always disappointing when a coach is sacked, because it means we have not delivered as players," said Kimmich.

He added that it had been strange to prepare for an international game amid the noise of Nagelsmann's dismissal.

"It's a curious situation,

but that's the football business at the end of the day. There is not much heart, not much love."

Nagelsmann was sacked on Friday after a 2-1 defeat to Bayer Leverkusen saw Bayern slip behind title rivals Borussia Dortmund last weekend.

His successor Thomas Tuchel was presented in Munich on Saturday, with Bayern bosses expressing optimism that the former Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain coach could turn a turbulent season around.

Kimmich, though, admitted that he had no relationship with Tuchel as of yet.

"I don't know him yet," he told ZDF.

Goretzka, meanwhile, seemed to question statements by Bayern sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic that there had been a split between Nagelsmann and the players.

"I'd be stupid to contradict my boss, but personally, I had no split with Julian," he said. "We have to trust our bosses that they are making the right decision for the club," he added.

Morocco stun Brazil for first time

AP ■ TANGIERS

Morocco stunned Brazil 2-1 in a friendly international on Saturday as the north African side recorded a first ever win over the five-time world champions.

Midfielder Sofiane Boufal, a former Southampton star, but now playing with Al Rayyan in Qatar, gave Morocco the lead after 29 minutes, scoring with a powerful turn and drive from a pass by Bilal El Khannous.

Brazil skipper Casemiro

levelled in the 67th minute when his weak shot was fumbled by goalkeeper Yassine Bounou.

But on-loan Sampdoria midfielder Abdelhamid Sabiri struck the winner with a volley in the 79th minute as Morocco showed that becoming the first Arab or African nation to reach the World Cup semi-finals last year was no fluke.

"I wouldn't say we lacked understanding, it's about putting into practice the ideas of a new coach," said



Fuellkrug at the double as Germany sink Peru

AP ■ MAINZ

Two goals from Niclas Fuellkrug helped Germany blow away their World Cup blues with a 2-0 win in a friendly against Peru on Saturday.

Fuellkrug struck twice in the first half to give Hansi Flick's side a welcome victory in their first game since a catastrophic World Cup campaign in Qatar last year which ended with a group stage exit.

"It was all about getting a good start to the year today," said Fuellkrug.

"After what happened at the World Cup, it was important that we started well in 2023, so I'm happy we managed to do that," added Germany goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, who deputised in place of the injured Manuel Neuer. With his side automatical-



ly qualifying for Euro 2024 as hosts, Flick had made clear his desire to experiment with younger players in friendlies against Peru and Belgium.

The Germany coach named a squad which con-

tained five uncapped players and left out big-name stars such as Thomas Mueller, Leroy Sane and Ilkay Gundogan.

But it was 30-year-old Bundesliga journeyman Fuellkrug who made the differ-

ence as Germany eased past a toothless Peru side.

Germany dominated the first half and deserved to take the lead on 12 minutes.

Kai Havertz brought down a long ball from Nico Schlotterbeck in the box, allowing an unmarked Fuellkrug to smash in the opener from close range.

Debutant Marius Wolf fizzed a low cross into the box to set up Fuellkrug for a first-time, close-range finish to double the lead just after the half-hour mark.

Fuellkrug has now scored five goals in as many games for his country, and is well on the way to establishing himself as a regular for Germany.

"I'm getting my opportunities and I'm really happy that I'm linking up so well with the others, so let's hope it continues," he told broadcaster ZDF.

Spain make winning start in Euro qualifying

AP ■ PARIS

Spain won 3-0 against a Norway side missing the injured Erling Haaland in the opening round of Euro 2024 qualifiers on Saturday, while Wales snatched a stoppage-time equaliser to frustrate Croatia.

Dani Olmo turned in Alejandro Balde's driven low cross on 13 minutes in Malaga and Joselu scored twice on his Spain debut to give new coach Luis de la Fuente a victory in his first match in charge.

Three-time European champions Spain next go to Scotland, who saw off Cyprus 3-0 in their Group A opener after Scott McTominay scored twice late on as a substitute at Hampden Park.

Croatia, finalists and semi-finalists at the past two World Cups, conceded a last-gasp equaliser to kick off Group D as Wales debutant



Nathan Broadhead tapped home a flick-on from a long throw.

Turkey came from behind to defeat Armenia 2-1 in Yerevan.

Renato Steffen scored a first-half hat-trick as Switzerland thrashed Belarus 5-0 in a game played behind closed doors in Serbia.

Dennis Man and Denis Alibec were on target as Romania eased to a 2-0 win away to 10-man Andorra, while Israel drew 1-1 at home to Kosovo.

MI CREATE HERSTORY, WIN WPL TITLE

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A late flourish from England all-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt (60 not out) helped Mumbai Indians beat Delhi Capitals by seven wickets in a low-scoring summit clash to become champions of the inaugural Women's Premier League here on Sunday.

In front of a partisan crowd that filled the Brabourne Stadium here to the brim, Mumbai Indians chased down the target of 131 with three balls to spare to lift the trophy.

Opting to bat first, Delhi Capitals suffered a collapse to be reduced to 79 for 9 in 16 overs but posted a respectable total of 131 for 9, thanks to a 52-run partnership for the unbroken 10th wicket between Shikha Pandey (27 not out) and Radha Yadav (27 not out).

It was not an easy run chase for MI but they eventually crossed the line, reaching 134 for 3 in 19.3 overs, with Sciver-Brunt and captain Harmanpreet (37) playing crucial roles.

Sciver-Brunt (60 not out from 55 balls, 7x4), also the Player of the Final, struck her third fifty and finished second behind DC captain Meg Lanning (345) in run-scorers' chart in the WPL with 332 runs.

Harmanpreet (37 from 39 balls, 5x4s) and Sciver-Brunt joined forces when MI were precariously placed at 23 for 2 in

the fourth over, and combined their batting prowess to soak the pressure and add 72 runs for the third wicket.

MI needed 45 runs from the last five overs though they had eight wickets in hand then. Sciver-Brunt was 28 off 38 balls at that stage but she struck a flurry of boundaries to help her side cross the line.

In the process, Mumbai Indians recorded their second win over Delhi in three meetings this season, with their bowlers producing a stunning show in the first half.

MI made a shaky start, with Yastika Bhatia (4) hitting straight to deep midwicket for the fourth wicket of the final on a full toss, off Radha Yadav. Jess Jonassen dealt the second blow to Mumbai with Hayley Matthews (13 of 12 balls, 3x4s) chipping one straight to short midwicket.

Earlier, Shikha Pandey and Radha Yadav fought back with a counter-attacking 52-run unbeaten stand for the 10th wicket, lifting Delhi to 131 for 9.

Delhi Capitals were off to a rocky start, collapsing from 74 for 3 in the 11th over to 79 for 9 after 16, thanks to devastating show from overseas bowlers Hayley Matthews (4-2-5-3), Isabelle Wong (4-0-42-3) and Amelia Kerr (4-0-18-2).

However, the 52-run stand between Shikha (27 not out



from 17 balls) and Radha Yadav (27 not out from 12 balls) took them across the 100-mark and gave them a fighting chance.

Shikha hit three fours and one six in her knock, Radha smashed two boundaries and as

many maximums.

Earlier, Matthews, Wong and Kerr had shared a total eight wickets between them to put Mumbai in a strong position.

While the Caribbean all-rounder Matthews took her

wickets tally to 16 - highest in the tournament alongside UP Warriorz' Sophie Ecclestone - Wong and Kerr also finished at 15 wickets each.

Saika Ishaque failed to get any breakthrough and ended up

with an impressive 15 wickets too.

The final was off to a dramatic start with MI claiming the first three wickets off full-tosses from Wong.

The first two decisions were

ruled against the batters by the third umpire.

Shafali Verma (11 off 4 balls, 1x4s, 1x6s) began with a six over long-on and a four on the next ball in the second over from Wong, sliced over backward point to beat the third man.

However, the Delhi dasher was caught at point by Kerr off a full toss from the English bowler which was waist high.

Wong dealt another blow to the Delhi Capitals, again off a surprise full toss with Alice Capsey (0) failing to control her shot. The catch was completed by a stunning diving effort from Amanjot Kaur at extra cover, and left Delhi reeling at 12 for 2 in 1.5 overs.

Jemimah Rodrigues (9 off 8 balls, 2x4s) began with a superb cover drive off the first delivery she faced off Wong and brought out another drive against Sciver-Brunt in the third over. But before that, Lanning smacked two fours on the first two balls to shrug off some pressure.

But Delhi sunk further when a low full toss swinging away from the off stump from Wong, who changed the bowling ends, had Jemimah playing it straight to Hayley Matthews at point.

DC, who were 38 for 3 at the end of the powerplay, were steadied by Lanning and Kapp. At the halfway mark the Capitals were relatively safe at 68

for 3, but the worst was yet to come.

From 74 for 3 in the 11th over, Delhi Capitals collapsed to 77 for 7 after 14 overs with some poor batting and communication in the middle.

Kapp (18 off 21 balls, 2x4s), who hit her first four on the 17th ball she faced, was removed by Kerr in the 11th over with Yastika Bhatia grabbing the catch.

The South African all-rounder added 38 runs for the fourth wicket in 37 balls.

Mumbai Indians, however, made the biggest breakthrough in the 12th over when Delhi's captain and mainstay Lanning was run-out for 35.

Lanning's hesitation to run after Jess Jonassen (2) hurdled a delivery off towards Amanjot at cover cost her dearly, with Bhatia breaking the stumps.

Kerr claimed her second wicket by getting rid of Arundhati Reddy (0), and after Matthews spilled a return catch off Jonassen's bat in the 14th over, she grabbed a similar chance.

Matthews returned to cap off her best spell in the WPL, getting Minnu Mani (2) stumped to take her 15th wicket in the competition, and added one more when she got one to sneak between Taniya Bhatia's (0) bat and pads for her third wicket in the game to leave DC tottering at 79/9.



Batting with Virat was just fantastic: Gayle

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Swashbuckling West Indian batter Chris Gayle praised Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli for his work ethic and passion, and recalled the intense competition between the two during their heyday at Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Both Gayle and Kohli spent several seasons together at the IPL, dominating the rival bowlers and entertaining the crowd at their home base, Chinnaswamy Stadium, with as many as 10 century partnerships.

"Batting with Virat was just fantastic. I like the passion he has for the game. I like his passion and his work ethic, it's fantastic. You have to give him credit for that and he wants to show it with his performances," Gayle said.

"Sharing a dressing room with Virat and the other guys, once I am there, I am always jovial and having a lot of fun, dancing and everything like that," said Gayle.

"I'd show them a few moves and realise Virat's got the skills. He can move, you know. But if it's an Indian dance, Chris Gayle will win. If

it's a Caribbean dance, Chris Gayle will win!"

Their relationship was strong but the pair could also be competitive with each other. Gayle narrated a story about Kohli's reaction to the former earning the Orange Cap from him during a season.

"One thing I remember, just to go back a bit, I remember Virat was the Orange Cap holder one particular season. I was getting runs but he was more of the guy at the time scoring a lot of runs.

"Then, bam bam, two or three games, whatever the case may be, I became the Orange Cap holder. He was like, 'man this guy just came in, bang bang bang, and became the Orange Cap holder?' It was just a funny thing that I'll always remember," Gayle said.

For years, Kohli and Gayle toyed with the opposition bowling attacks, sending the Chinnaswamy Stadium into a frenzy.

However, Gayle added that it was not only fours and sixes that did the trick for them. He insisted they paid a lot of attention to running between wickets and that yielded rich dividends.

The way Shubman is playing, I'll pick him ahead of myself: Dhawan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India cricketer Shikhar Dhawan has said he would pick Shubman Gill over himself in the national side, given the young cricketer's form with the bat of late.

Gill has been in sublime form in all three formats this season, with the 23-year-old virtually securing his place in the side for the ODI World Cup in India later this year, even as Dhawan finds himself out of favour due to a dip in form.

The young cricketer's form has seen him score centuries in all three formats this year, including an ODI double ton against New Zealand and a century against Australia in the drawn fourth Test at

Ahmedabad.

Dhawan, a veteran of 167 ODI, who would still be eyeing a place in the India side for the ODI World Cup at home, said had he been the selector, he would pick Gill over himself based on current form.

"I feel the way Shubman is (playing). Like he was playing two formats and performing well in Tests and T20s. He was playing more matches in the international circuit and I wasn't... If I were the selector then definitely would have given the chance to Shubman. Would have selected Shubman over Shikhar," Dhawan told Aaj Tak.

Dhawan added that while skipper Rohit Sharma and coach Rahul Dravid had earlier backed him and told him to



South Africa chase record target in T20Is

IAN S ■ CENTURION

South Africa scripted a record run-chase in T20Is after they chased down 259 runs against West Indies in the 2nd T20I to level the series 1-1 at SuperSport Park, here on Sunday.

Johnson Charles had brought fireworks for the West Indies by striking a 39-ball century in the first innings. But Quinton De Kock smashed his maiden T20I century in the chase for South Africa in a blistering 152-run opening partnership in little more than 10 overs to set the base for South Africa completing the highest ever successful run chase in T20Is with seven balls to spare.

Racking up 102 in the first six overs in the run-chase, the highest score by any team in the Powerplay in T20Is, de Kock and Reeza Hendricks kickstarted South Africa's innings in style.



The opening stand of 152 came off just 10.5 overs as South Africa suddenly turned into favourites to win the game. De Kock then fell for 100 off 44 balls, hitting nine

fours and eight sixes at a strike-rate of 227.27.

While the visitors made a comeback of sorts by dismissing Rilee Rossouw, Hendricks and David Miller in

fairly quick succession, skipper Aiden Markram continued the carnage to lead his side to a memorable win, remaining unbeaten on 38 off just 21 balls as a whopping 517 runs were aggregated from the match.

With this, South Africa now hold the record for the highest successful run-chase in both ODIs and T20Is.

The previous record for the highest successful run-chase in T20Is was held by Bulgaria against Serbia in 2022, when the former chased down 243 in 19.4 overs.

Earlier, Charles broke the record of Chris Gayle when he slammed the fastest T20I hundred by a West Indies batter in men's T20Is in the first innings. Coming in early, Charles hit 10 fours and 11 sixes in his innings at a strike-rate of 256.52. He was eventually cleaned up at 118 by a Marco Jansen yorker.

Patidar could miss first half of IPL, Hazlewood doubtful

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bangalore's top-order batter Rajat Patidar could miss the first half of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) owing to a heel injury.

According to a report in ESPNcricinfo, the 29-year-old Patidar, who was one of the top performers for RCB last season, is currently undergoing rehab at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru.

There are also "serious doubts" over Australian pacer Josh Hazlewood's participation in the tournament as he continues to recover from Achilles tendonitis, adding to the Faf du Plessis-led team's woes ahead of the league starting in less than a week's time.

The 32-year-old Hazlewood was signed for Rs 7.75 crore in the mega-auction last year. As far as Patidar is con-



cerned, the report stated that the player has been "advised rest for the next three weeks before an MRI scan will determine his participation in the second half of the competition".

Patidar, who picked up the injury prior to joining the camp, will need an NCA clearance heading back to the RCB setup.

Nikhat wants to send her parents to perform Umrah with WC money

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Contrary to her earlier plans of buying a Mercedes, newly-crowned two-time World Champion Nikhat Zareen now wants to send her parents to perform 'Umrah' with the prize money.

Nikhat won her second world championship title with a 5-0 win over Nguyen Thi Tam of Vietnam here on Sunday.

With the title she also received USD 100,000 winner's cheque and 'Thar' car gifted by sponsors Mahindra.

She had earlier said she would buy a Mercedes car with the prize money.

"I haven't thought about it. Last time I said I will get a Mercedes but since I have got a Thar as a gift so now I'm thinking of not getting a Mercedes.

"I want to send my parents

for Umrah because Ramazan is going on. I will talk to them about this at home," Nikhat, who belongs to a Nizamabad-based Muslim family, told reporters hours after her bout.

'Umrah' is a minor pilgrimage to the twin Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

A believer in thinking positively, Nikhat said she manifest her two world titles and Commonwealth Games title.

"Everyone has a success mantra. I visualise things. I like to think positive. I have written 'champion' and drew a gold medal on a sticky note and pasted it on my bed.

"Every day when I wake up I see that, when I go to sleep I see that. It motivates me to do well. I did that for the last world championships, the CWG and this time too."

Nikhat has already quali-

fied for the Asian Games, which is also an Olympic qualifier later this month.

"My next target is Asian Games which is a qualifier. I hope to qualify for Paris Olympics."

Lovlina breaks bronze medal jinx

As the referee raised Lovlina Borgohain's hand, the Olympic medallist Assam boxer let out a scream, pent-up emotions finally getting the better of her.

She finally won her maiden World Championships gold after two bronze medals, in her fourth attempt.

After her semifinal win over China's Li Qian, Lovlina had broken her 'bronze medal jinx'. And what better shade of the medal than gold to change the bronze to.

The 25-year-old has won three bronze medals at mar-

quee events, including two at the World Championships and one at the Tokyo Olympics.

"I am happy to win the gold and make India proud," a relieved Lovlina said after her final bout.

"I had two bronze in Worlds and one in the Olympics. Worked really hard to change the colour. I am ecstatic to have changed the colour," she said.

"Ups and downs are part of life, but I took these as opportunities and worked hard and I have gold today."

It was also a redemption of sorts after a string of underwhelming performances after the Olympic medal.

Lovlina has had a roller coaster of a year and a half. The Assam boxer, who prefers to keep a low profile, was pushed to the spotlight ever since she won the bronze at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

