

OPINION 6
DON'T PUSH THE
DIVISIVE NARRATIVE

WORLD 8
RUSSIA STOPS SHARING MISSILE TEST
INFO WITH US, OPENS DRILLS

MONEY 10
SEBI TO CURB FRAUDS BY
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RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
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Amritpal's live video leaves cops red-faced

Fugitive preacher rouses emotions,
calls for congregation on Baisakhi

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

High-octane drama was witnessed on Wednesday with the launch of a massive manhunt by the Punjab Police to nab pro-Khalistan preacher Amritpal Singh in Hoshiarpur, followed by reports of his "possible surrender" before the Akal Takht jathedar, and ultimately ending up with his live video message calling for organising "Sarbat Khalsa" on Baisakhi "to break the fear created by the Government in

the minds of the people".

Releasing the first video after his escape on March 18 amid the reports of his likely surrender, the radical Sikh preacher lashed out at the Punjab Police for arresting Sikh youths during a crack-down against him and even invoking the National Security Act against many of them.

His live video message at a time when cops are looking for him has come as an embarrassment to the police.

Amritpal, who claimed

that he was not afraid of being arrested, said the Government action against him "was not about his arrest but an attack on the Sikh community".

Wearing a black shawl and turban over white kurta or chola, the Khalistani sympathiser fugitive also claimed that he was "in *chardi kalan* (high spirits)".

Notably, after escaping the police dragnet on the day of crackdown in Jalandhar district, Amritpal has reportedly been evading arrest, switching vehicles and changing clothes and appearances.

"What was done to the Sikhs during Beant Singh's



regime, the same is being done now. I thank all the Sangats for holding protests. To understand our condition, it must be understood that the issue is not of my arrest but about the attack on the entire Sikh community. I was neither afraid of arrest earlier and not now," he said in the two and a half minute video message issued in the evening amid reports of his surrender.

On Tuesday evening, the police launched a massive manhunt after some suspects abandoned their vehicle at Marnaian village in Hoshiarpur following a hot chase by a team of Punjab Police's counter

intelligence wing.

Police officials maintained that a counter intelligence team chased a car from Phagwara suspecting that Amritpal could be in that vehicle. The suspects, believed to be three to four in number, abandoned their vehicle near Gurdwara Bhai Chanchal Singh in Marnaian village and fled.

Heavy police deployment was ensured in and around the Marnaian village where the police carried out conducting door-to-door search operations to nab the suspects. Check posts and barricades were also installed on the roads.

Continued on Page 2

SCO members must respect each other's sovereignty: Doval

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

With tension persisting at the border in Ladakh between India and China, National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval on Wednesday stressed the need for respecting each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty and not seek unilateral military superiority in adjacent regions.

Making this assertion here



National Security Adviser Ajit Doval in a meeting with Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, in New Delhi on Wednesday PTI

during the meeting of the security advisers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), he also flagged the issue of terrorism and said it is among the most serious threats to international peace and security.

The meeting was joined by the Secretary of Russia's Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, senior officials of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and a representative of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of SCO.

The officials of China and Pakistan participated in the meeting virtually.

Continued on Page 2

High-stakes K'taka polls on May 10, results 3 days later

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India on Wednesday announced that the 224-seat Karnataka Assembly will go to polls on May 10 and results will be declared on May 13.

With the announcement of the Assembly polls in Karnataka, it remains to be seen whether the BJP will script history by bucking a four-decade old trend of the ruling party losing the polls or if the Congress upstages its saffron rival to up its stakes as a challenger ahead of the 2024 parliamentary polls.

No political party has won a successive mandate in the State since 1985 and the BJP is eager to rewrite this bit of history and retain its southern citadel. Karnataka currently has 119 MLAs of the ruling BJP, while the Congress has 75 and its ally JD(S) 28 seats. The current term of the Assembly ends on May 24.

The BJP, the JD(S) and the Congress have already launched spirited campaigns for the polls.



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar speaks during a press conference for the announcement of the schedule of Karnataka Legislative Assembly elections, in New Delhi on Wednesday

The Karnataka Assembly polls would be the first of the four "semi-finals" between the BJP and the Congress before the 2024 general elections, and the notion of a sympathy factor for the grand old party post the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha would also be put to test in the high-stakes contest.

Four Assembly elections — Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya

Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — are scheduled for this year in which the BJP and the Congress are in a direct contest.

The four States together have 93 Lok Sabha seats, which account for 17 per cent of its total strength, but they are close to 50 per cent of about 190 seats where the BJP and the Congress were in a direct fight in 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Continued on Page 2

Bypolls for 1 Lok Sabha, 4 Assemblies on May 10

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday announced bypolls to one Lok Sabha and four Assembly seats across four States on May 10, along with the Karnataka Assembly polls, but the poll panel is not in hurry to declare by-election to the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat.

The Wayanad seat fell vacant after disqualification of Rahul Gandhi, who has been granted a month time to file an appeal by the trial court. Addressing a Press conference, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the trial court in Surat has given Rahul 30 days to seek a judicial remedy the matter.

Continued on Page 2

Mother of democracy India flourishing: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said India is the mother of democracy and the country has become the fastest-growing major economy despite many global challenges and it proves that democracy can deliver.

Giving this message in a virtual address to the Summit for Democracy, 2023, Modi also said that every initiative of his Government is powered by collective efforts of the citizens of India. The second Summit for Democracy is co-hosted by US President Joe Biden, Costa Rica President Rodrigo Chaves Robles, Zambia President Hakainde Hichilema, Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte and South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol. Nearly 120 global leaders were invited to participate.

"India, despite many global challenges, is the fastest growing major economy today. This itself is the best advertisement for democracy and the world. This itself says that democracy can deliver," the Prime Minister said.

Speaking during the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the Summit for Democracy, via video conferencing, in New Delhi on Wednesday PTI

"Leader-level Plenary on Democracy Delivering Economic Growth and Shared Prosperity" session hosted by President Yoon, Modi said the idea of elected leaders was a common feature in ancient India long before the rest of the world.

"Our epic Mahabharata describes the first duty of citizens as choosing their own leader. Our sacred Vedas speak of political power being exercised by broad-based consultative bodies. There is much historical evidence of republic States in ancient India where rulers were not hereditary," Modi said.

"India indeed is the moth-

er of democracy. Democracy is not just a structure, it is also a spirit. It is based on the belief that the needs and aspirations of every human being are equally important. That is why in India, our guiding philosophy is 'Sabka saath, sabka vikas', meaning striving together for inclusive growth," he said.

"Whether it is our effort to fight climate change through lifestyle changes, to conserve water through distributed storage or provide clean cooking fuel to everyone, every initiative is powered by collective efforts of citizens of India. During Covid-19, India's response was people-driven," the Prime Minister added.

No UPI payment fee for customers; merchants to pay 1.1% over ₹2,000

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) on Wednesday clarified that bank to bank account transfer via UPI will continue to remain free but any merchant payment that goes through two different wallets will be chargeable above ₹2,000 from April 1. This interoperable charge of 1.1 per cent for each transaction above ₹2,000 will be payable by merchants.

"Interchange charges are only applicable for the prepaid payment instruments (PPI) merchant transactions and there is no charge to customers," NPCI, payment gateway, clarified in a statement.

In simple words, the charge will kick in when a customer having a wallet of one particular company makes a payment to a merchant, who has a wallet of another firm. **See P10**

Good news for US visa applicants: Visitor's visa wait time cut by 60%

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/
AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/
WASHINGTON

In a positive development for Indians seeking a US visa, the wait time for visitor's visa interview in India has been reduced by 60 per cent this year. This comes against the backdrop of concerns in India over long waiting period for first time applicants, especially for those applying under B1 (business) and B2 (tourist) categories. The waiting period of first time B1/B2 visa applicants in India was close to 1,000 days in October last year.

The reduction in waiting period was due to several measures taken by the Biden administration, including opening more diplomatic missions in India and abroad to process these applications. More than 100 US diplomatic missions were now issuing



US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Visa Services Julie Stuft PTI

visas to Indians, a senior US official has said. India was one of the very few countries where applications for US visas saw a major upswing after coronavirus-related travel restrictions were lifted.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Visa Services Julie Stuft told PTI that the goal of the State Department is to get to 1 million visas issued this year, which would be above the pre-pandemic number.

"We have increased the number of officers going to India. We have set up arrangements, which is unprecedented, with other embassies in the world like Bangkok to take Indians who are seeking visas. We are opening a new consulate in Hyderabad... And we're just focused on making sure that we can bring the wait time down in India," she said.

Stuft noted that Frankfurt, London and Abu Dhabi have taken a lot of Indian citizens who are seeking visas.

"We have asked these missions to take Indians as if they were from their own host country. Especially in places like Bangkok where there is no visa required for Indians and it is a relatively short flight. Obviously this is not ideal. We want Indians to be able to apply in India, and that's where we'll get to," she said.

Continued on Page 2

₹1,338-cr fine slapped by CCI on Google valid, rules NCLAT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An appellate tribunal on Wednesday handed out a mixed verdict on Google's alleged anti-competitive practices in the android mobile device case — upholding a fine of ₹1,338 crore but scrapping conditions like allowing hosting of third-party app stores on its Play Store.

While upholding the fine imposed by the CCI for exploiting its dominant position in Android, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) struck down anti-trust regulator order that had said Google will not restrict the removal of its pre-installed apps by the users.

Google said it is reviewing the order and is in the process of evaluating legal options.

Detailed report on P10

Congress preparing petition to challenge Rahul's conviction

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress is learnt to have prepared the petition challenging their leader Rahul Gandhi's conviction and sentencing by a trial court in Surat in a defamation case.

Sources said the party's top legal advisers are working on the review petition which will be filed before the Surat sessions court in a day or two.

Rahul also visited the party's office in the Parliament House complex and met some members there and spent around 20 minutes at the party office and also called on Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut and others.

He later left along with his mother and Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi for lunch.

This was his first visit to Parliament after being disqualified as a MP.



Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi arrive at Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Wednesday PTI

The Congress has said it will fight the matter both politically and legally and will take the issue to the public.

The former Congress chief was convicted and was given a

two-year sentence in the 2019 defamation case over his remarks on "Modi surname", following which he was disqualified as MP of Lok Sabha.

Continued on Page 2

Siyaya gifts India its first cubs 70 years after cheetah's extinction

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Almost 70 years after cheetahs were declared officially extinct in India, a cheetah translocated from Namibia to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh has given birth to four healthy cubs, officials said on Wednesday.

The happy news came in the wake of the death of another relocated female cheetah at the Park two days ago. Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav described the birth of four cubs as a momentous event in India's

wildlife conservation history during "Amrit Kaal".

"I am delighted to share that four cubs have been born to one of the cheetahs translocated to India on 17th September 2022, under the visionary leadership of PM Shri @narendramodi ji (sic)," the Minister tweeted.

He congratulated the entire team of Project Cheetah for their relentless efforts in bringing back the large carnivore to India and for their efforts in correcting an ecological wrong done in the past.

Expressing his happiness

over the safe birth of four cubs, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that for the first time the state has welcomed four cubs at Kuno National Park. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi had given a big gift for Madhya Pradesh on his birthday (September 17, 2022). It is good news for all of us," Chouhan added.

Chouhan also ruled out speculation that two more cheetahs were unhealthy.

Under the ambitious Cheetah reintroduction programme, Prime Minister



Narendra Modi released the first batch of eight spotted felines — five females and three males — from Namibia into a quarantine enclosure at Kuno on his 72nd birthday on September 17 last year.

Another set of 12 cheetahs were brought to India from South Africa last month.

One of the Namibian cheetahs, Sasha, died due to a kidney-related ailment on Monday.

Twelve more cheetahs were flown in from South Africa and released into Kuno in Sheopur district on February 18 this

year.

Cheetah is the only large carnivore that got completely wiped out from India due to over-hunting and habitat loss.

The last cheetah died in Koriya district of present-day Chhattisgarh in 1947 and the species was declared extinct in 1952.

A senior official at Kuno National Park said the cubs were believed to have been born five days ago, but they were spotted by officials on Wednesday.

"Siyaya", their mother, and the cubs were fine and healthy,

said Sheopur divisional forest officer PK Varma.

In fact, Siyaya has killed two animals since she became mother, officials said. She has been kept in a big enclosure at the park as of now. A female cheetah generally gives birth 90 to 93 days after mating. As Namibian cheetahs were brought here in September, Siyaya would have mated after her arrival in India. The twelve cheetahs brought from South Africa in February are housed in a quarantine enclosure and are healthy and active, officials said.

Didi’s anthem insult plaint: Court tells police to probe

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A magistrate’s court here on Wednesday asked police to probe a complaint against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for allegedly disrespecting the national anthem after the Bombay High Court denied her relief.

Metropolitan Magistrate (Sewree court) P I Mokashi directed the Cuff Parade police station in south Mumbai to conduct an inquiry into the matter and submit a report by April 28. Local Bharatiya Janata



Party (BJP) functionary Vivekanand Gupta had approached the magistrate’s court with a complaint alleging that Banerjee did not stand up immediately when the national anthem was sung at an event here during her visit in December 2021.

She sang it while sitting before standing up and singing two more verses, and then left the venue abruptly, he alleged.

A First Information Report should be registered against her under the Prevention of Insults to the National Honour Act, he demanded.

Earlier in the day, Justice Amit Borkar of the Bombay High Court dismissed Banerjee’s application challenging the sessions court’s order of January 2023 sending the matter back to the magistrate’s court.

Haryana Govt issues fresh Covid guidelines

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Amid a spike in Covid cases in several parts of the country, the Haryana government has issued fresh guidelines and asked all health facilities to record travel history of a suspected case having travel history to a country or an area where the virus has been reported.

India recorded a single-day rise of 2,151 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday, the highest in five months. The State reported 91 Covid cases on Tuesday, 57 of them from Gurugram alone, according to health bulletin.

Senior IAS officer to probe PMO conman visits to Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The Union Administration in Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday appointed a senior IAS officer to probe alleged conman Kiranbhai Patel’s frequent visits to the Kashmir valley posing as a PMO official and the security protocol provided to him.

Interestingly, the probe was ordered 26 days after he was formally arrested by the Jammu and Kashmir police from a five star hotel in Srinagar on March 3. Earlier on Tuesday Malini Patel, wife of Kiran Bhai Patel was also arrested for cheating and trying to usurp property from a senior citizen in Ahmedabad.

According to an order issued by the home department, Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, V K Bhiduri has been appointed as the inquiry officer and directed to submit a detailed report



within one week.

“The inquiry officer shall identify the lapses in part of the officers/officials concerned and submit a detailed report within one week,” it read.

Patel had managed to get Z-category security protocol during his visits to the valley and attended several official meetings.

He had also visited many sensitive areas, including the Line of Control in the Uri sector. Amit Pandya and Jay Sitapara, who accompanied Kiran Bhai Patel at the time of his arrest, have also been arrested by the J&K police.

BJP MP, Maha’s former Min Girish passes away

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra’s former Minister and BJP MP Girish Bapat died while undergoing treatment at a Pune hospital on Wednesday. He was 72. He breathed at the Deenanath Mangeshkar Hospital &

Research Centre, where his condition had been described as “critically ill” and was on life support.

He was cremated at Vaikunth crematorium at Pune later in the evening. Hundreds of fans, well-wishers and prominent personalities from various walks

of life turned out for his funeral. A five-time MLA, Bapat had begun his political career in 1973 and was elected to the Pune Municipal Corporation in 1983 and functioned as a corporator for three consecutive terms. He was elected for the first time to the Maharashtra Legislative

Assembly in 1995 from Kasba Peth constituency which sent him back to the lower house of the State Legislative Assembly for the next four consecutive terms. Bapat was the cabinet minister for Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, Food and Drugs.

Congress... Good news for...

From Page 1

The grand old party is also studying the matter of NCP leader Mohammed Faizal’s plea against his disqualification as Member of Parliament in view of Lok Sabha secretariat’s notification restoring his membership that was disposed by the Supreme Court on Wednesday.

The bench said it is leaving the question of maintainability of the plea open. Senior Congress leader and advocate of the case, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, produced the notification before the court and said now that his membership has been restored, nothing survives in his plea. “It took two months for the Lok Sabha to revoke his disqualification. It was done on Wednesday morning”, Singhvi said and handed over the notification to the court.

Faizal was disqualified from Lok Sabha on January 13, after he and three others were sentenced to 10-year rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs one lakh each by a sessions court in Kavaratti for attempting to murder Mohammed Salih, son-in-law of the late Union Minister PM Sayeed, during the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. The trial court had on January 11 convicted and sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment in the case. Later, the High Court stayed the conviction and the sentence imposed upon Faizal.

Congress Whip in Lok Sabha Manickam Tagore said the Government has deliberately disqualified Rahul under a well-planned conspiracy to not allow him to attend Parliament during this Budget Session.

From Page 1

“As a result of all of these efforts, the visitor visa interview wait time has decreased by 60 per cent just in the last couple of months. This is a result of all the work that we’ve put into making sure that Indians who wish to travel to the US can do so,” she explained.

The US Embassy in India has said with the lifting of Covid-related travel restrictions, the mission has made it a priority to facilitate legitimate travel and adjudicated over 8,00,000 non-immigrant visas in 2022, including record numbers of both student and employment visas.

“In every other visa category, interview wait times in India are at pre-pandemic levels or lower,” the embassy said in a statement in January this year. Stufft said that currently “visa production in India is 40 per cent higher than what it was before the pandemic”, asserting that the State Department was working hard to bring down the wait time.

In February, the US had the highest on-record production of visas in India. “Our team there is working very hard and they’re well on their way to accomplishing the 1 million visa goal,” Stufft said.

In addition to the visitor’s visa, the State Department official said they are working on other types of visas, including student visas.

“Because we have been able to expand interview waivers, meaning fewer Indians need to come to the embassy or consulate for an interview, we can process that without seeing the applicant,” Stufft said.

Amritpal’s live video leaves cops...

From Page 1

While the police search operation was going on, reports started pouring in the afternoon that Amritpal would surrender possibly before the Akal Takht jathedar (head priest of Sikhs’ highest temporal seat). Soon, security was beefed up

around the Golden Temple in Amritsar, at Takht Damdama Sahib in Talwandi Sabo of Bathinda district — where Akal Takht jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh is present; and also at Takht Keshgarh Sahib in Sri Anandpur Sahib of Ropar district. Flag march was also carried out by the police in the area around the Golden Temple. Even as the police officials and also the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) maintained that they have no official information about

Amritpal coming to the Golden Temple, there was heavy police deployment with the cops also present in plain clothes.

“Our focus is to make sure there are no obstructions on any of the routes leading to the Golden Temple and law and order is maintained,” said Amritsar DCP, law and Order, Parminder Singh Bhandal.

Amritsar Police Commissioner Naunihal Singh said there is no specific input on whether Amritpal will surrender at Golden temple, “but it’s his wish if he wants to”.

SCO...

From Page 1

Without naming China, Doval emphasised the need for regional connectivity at the SCO meet but said such initiatives should be consultative and transparent and respect the sovereignty of all countries.

These observations came in the backdrop of India’s opposition to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as it passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).

He also said members of the group should respect territorial integrity and not seek unilateral military superiority in adjacent regions, an apparent swipe at China’s action in the region.

Urging all countries to respect territorial integrity, Doval referred to the SCO charter and said it “calls upon member states to have mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of states and inviolability of State borders, non-use of force or threat of its use in international relations and

seeking no unilateral military superiority in adjacent areas.”

The charter further calls on member states to maintain relations with other countries and to cooperate in preventing international conflicts and in their peaceful settlement, Doval said as Ukraine conflict is unabated.

On the scourge of terrorism, the NSA said, “Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and its financing are amongst the most serious threats to international peace and security. Any act of terrorism, regardless of its motivation, is unjustifiable.”

India became a full member of SCO on June 9, 2017. There are four observer states - Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia and six dialogue partners - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey.

The SCO is an inter-governmental organization established in 2001 and it comprises eight member states, namely, India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In 2022,

India assumed the SCO Chairship for 2023.

Connectivity, Doval said, is a key priority for India, which is ready to cooperate in making investments to forge greater linkages within the region.

“While expanding connectivity, it is important to ensure that such initiatives are consultative, transparent and participatory, and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries,” he said.

“India’s approach in this area is in sync with the SCO Charter to ensure comprehensive and balanced economic growth for integration into the global economy and improvement of transit capabilities”, he said. India is also committed to including Iran’s Chabahar port within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), he said.

Besides India’s objections to CPEC, the Indian side has expressed concerns about China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) resulting in a playing field that is not level and favouring Chinese firms.

NCR-PULSE

ANNUAL CULTURAL FEST HELD AT MA COLLEGE

New Delhi: Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi, concluded its three day annual cultural fest- “Yuvaan” on Monday with more than 250 teams and 1478 participants from various institutions of Delhi/NCR like IIT Delhi, Delhi Technical University (DTU), Jawaharlal Nehru University, Deen Dayal Upadhyay College, Netaji Subash University of Technology, etc participating in various competitions. On the occasion, Principal of the college, Prof. Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari said that events like Yuvaan are not only a place to showcase their talents but also it gives an edge to understand the managerial skills and leadership skills to the students.



KAREENA PROMOTES UNICEF’S READING DRIVE

New Delhi: To promote foundational learning and reading among young children as a part of UNICEF’s ‘EveryChildReading’ campaign, Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor Khan said reading should be inculcated among children in their own language. “I would not hesitate to say that I have been introduced to reading very late. But my children Taimur Ali Khan and Jeh Ali Khan do get a reading session at bed time every day. We have a small library and Saif’s (Saif Ali Khan-the actor is married to Kareena Kapoor) childhood books have also been preserved. So there is a session every night and if I miss it due to some of my professional commitments then we (Either me or Saif) compensate for it with some more reading.

INNOVATIONS SHOWCASED AT SUFEX-23

New Delhi: Amity University showcased its path-breaking Agricultural Innovations at the 2nd Edition of SUFEX 2023 (Smart Urban Farming Expo) held at Thyagaraj Stadium last week. The Expo is India’s only specialized trade show for the industry and an ideal platform for organizations to showcase the most innovative products and services for the Urban Farming Sector. During SUFEX 2023, Dr. Nutan Kaushik, Director General, Amity Food and Agriculture Foundation, chaired a symposium on ‘Urban and Peri-Urban Farming: Status and Way Forward’. Dr. Ashok K. Chauhan, Founder President, Amity Education Group, and Dr. A.K. Singh, Deputy Director General, Horticulture, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) were present on the occasion.

BLS-POLISH EMBASSY TIE UP FOR VISA OUTSOURCING

New Delhi: BLS International Services Ltd has signed an agreement with the Polish Embassy in Manila to provide visa outsourcing services. The company will be processing 20,000 applications annually and opening offices in Manila and Cebu. “We are especially excited about signing this contract with the Polish government as it commences our association with them and we are very positive about participating in their upcoming tenders worldwide. Additionally, the rising demand for last-minute getaways, combined with the ease of travel, will make it a win-win situation for all,” said Shikhar Aggarwal, Joint Managing Director, of BLS International, one of the world’s largest players in visa processing and consular services.

Bypolls for 1 Lok Sabha, 4 Assemblies...

From Page 1

“There is no hurry, we will wait. There is no hurry to do it before exhausting that particular remedy which the trial court had accorded. We will take a call after that,” Kumar said.

He said the vacancy in the Wayanad parliamentary party was notified on March 23 this year and as per the law, a bypoll has to be conducted within six months.

“Under section 151 of the Representation of People’s Act, the Commission has six months to hold polls to the constituency of Wayanad. Meanwhile, Rahul has been given thirty days by the trial court to exercise judicial remedy. So we will wait. There is no hurry,” he said.

Kumar further said the law also states that if the remainder of the term was less than one year, then the election will not be held. The CEC said in the case of Wayanad, the remainder of the term is more than a year.

Rahul’s disqualification from

Lok Sabha had the rumour mills claiming that the Election Commission may soon announce bypoll to Wayanad constituency from where the Congress leader was a member of Lok Sabha.

Kumar, however, indicated that the EC would wait as Rahul has been given a 30-day window to challenge the conviction in appellate court.

The EC has also announced the poll date for to Jalandhar parliamentary constituency and four Assembly seats across four States will be held on May 10 along with the Karnataka assembly polls. The counting of votes will take place on May 13.

The Jalandhar parliamentary constituency fell vacant following the death of Congress MP Santokh Singh Chaudhary, 76, in January this year following a heart attack while taking part in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

The poll panel also announced a bypoll to the Jharsuguda Assembly seat in Odisha which was necessitated by the death of Naba Kisore Das, who was shot dead by a police officer in January this year. Bypoll to the Suar assembly seat in Uttar Pradesh was necessitated following the disqualification upon conviction of Samajwadi Party MP Abdullah Azam Khan.

High-stake K’taka polls...

From Page 1

Addressing a Press conference, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the notification for the elections will be issued on April 13 and the last date for filing nomination papers will be April 20. Kumar said the nomination papers will be scrutinised on April 21 and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is April 24. He said the elections have been scheduled on a Wednesday, and not on a Monday or Friday, to encourage greater participation of voters.

The State has 5.21 crore registered voters including 2.62 crore males and 2.59 crore females. “First-time voters have increased from 2018-19 by 9.17 lakhs in Karnataka. All young voters who are turning 18 years of age by April 1, will be able to vote in Karnataka Assembly elections,” Kumar said.

As usual, corruption, price rise, reservations, caste

politics, election promises, dynasty politics are likely to dominate during the campaigning in the State.

The BJP Government, being led by Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai is also putting in efforts to return to power and stressing on the Kannadigas issue, reservation to the Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities by scrapping a religion-based reservation for the Muslim community, a decision which the State Government took recently.

The 4 per cent reservation will now be distributed equally between the Vokkaliga and Lingayat communities. The Government, last year, had proposed that the companies that do not give first preference to Kannadigas will not be eligible for incentives. The Government’s move came in the later part of last year in a bid to promote Kannada. It was included in the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development Bill.

OFFICE OF THE NAGAR PALIKA PARISHAD SHIVPURI, DIST-SHIVPURI

(FIRST CALL)

Section-1

Notice Inviting e-Tenders

NIT No. 2023_UAD_261308_1

Date 17.03.2023

Online bids for the following works are invited from registered contractors and firms of reputed fulfilling eligibility criteria interested Bidder can view the NIT on website <https://www.mptenders.gov.in>.

S. No.	Name of the work	Probable amount of contract (Rs in lakh)	Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) (In Rs.)	Cost of Bid Document (In Rs.)	Time of Completion
1.0	Selection of Contractors for The Work of Legacy West Dump site Remediation through Bioremediation Biominning and Disposal of Residual west in Nagar Palika Parishad Shivpuri	Rs. 3,92,30,400.00	Rs. 1,96,152.00	Rs. 15000	Six months including rainy season

1. The Bid Document can be purchased only Online from 03:30 PM of 17.03.2023 to 05:30 PM 17.04.2023.

2. Amendment to NIT, if any, would be published on website only, and not in Newspaper.

CHIEF MUNICIPAL OFFICER

NAGAR PALIKA PARISHAD, SHIVPURI

NORTHERN RAILWAY

INVIATION OF TENDER THROUGH E-TENDERING (E-PROCUREMENT SYSTEMS)

S. N.	NIT NO	NAME OF WORK	APPROX. COST (Rs.)	BID SECURITY (Rs.)
1	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-10	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at PALWAL Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	13,75,51,067.51/-	8,37,800
2	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-11	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at BALLABHGARH Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	17,04,30,703.05/-	10,02,200
3	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-12	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at FARIDABAD NEW TOWN Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	13,77,14,046.02/-	8,38,600
4	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-13	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at SONIPAT Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	9,31,49,904.43/-	6,15,800
5	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-14	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at NARELA Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	6,76,06,866.61/-	4,88,000
6	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-15	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at SABZI MANDI Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	7,69,54,737.54/-	5,34,800
7	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-16	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at MANSA Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	6,76,06,866.61/-	4,88,000
8	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-17	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at NARWANA Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	7,69,54,737.54/-	5,34,800
9	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-18	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at JIND Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	8,16,28,772.28/-	5,58,200
10	CPM-GSU-ABSS-WT-NIT-19	Construction and Improvement of station Building, facade, elevation, interiors, waiting halls, toilets and improvement of traffic circulation and beautification of circulating area at ROHTAK Railway Station of Delhi Division of Northern Railway.	8,38,02,331.87/-	5,69,000

11 Completion period of work (NIT-10 to 19) : 10 Months

12 Date and time for submission of tender and opening of tender : Upto 15.00 hrs. on 20.04.2023 Opening of tender at 15.00 hrs. on 20.04.2023

13 Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc. : Above tender available, on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in.

No.: CPM/GSU/ABSS/WT/NIT/10-19 Dated: 29.03.2023

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NORTHERN RAILWAY

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Name of work and its location: 30-Elect-27-T-R4-22-23-E3 Comprehensive annual maintenance contract (CAMC) of 04 nos. Escalators of Autometer make installed at FOB-2 Ajmeri Gate side & Paharganj side at New Delhi Railway station for three years.

Approx cost of the works in : Rs. 41.97 lacs

Address of the office : Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

Bid Security : Rs. 84000.00

Date and time of submission of tender : 24.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.

Opening of tender : 24.04.2023, 12:00 Hrs.

Website & notice board : www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

956/2023

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कार्यपालक अभियंता का कार्यालय

ग्रामीण विकास विशेष प्रमंडल, जमशेदपुर

Email ID- rdsdjamsshedpur@gmail.com

-- शुद्धि पत्र --

इस कार्यालय का अल्पकालीन ईओ-निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना संख्या RDS/JAMSHEDPUR/15/2022-23 जिसका (PR No :- 293811 (Rural Development) 22-23)- D के माध्यम से दैनिक समाचार पत्र में प्रकाशित है, का क्रमांक सं०-04 में अंकित निविदा शुल्क, अग्रघन की राशि एवं Affidavit एवं Bank Certificate for Credit Facility जमा करने की तिथि एवं समय 28.04.2023 अपराह्न 05:00 बजे तक है

निविदा शुल्क एवं अग्रघन की राशि जमा करने के स्थान :-

(1) ग्रामीण विकास विशेष प्रमंडल, जमशेदपुर।

(2) ग्रामीण विकास विशेष अंचल, राँची / जिला नियंत्रण कक्ष, राँची।

(3) E-Procurement Cell, मुख्य अभियंता, ग्रामीण विकास विशेष प्रक्षेत्र, एफओएफपीओ भवन, धुर्वा, राँची पड़ा जय।

शेष सभी कंडिकायें यथावत् रहेंगी।

कार्यालय अभियंता

ग्रामीण विकास विशेष प्रमंडल

PR 293921 Rural Development (22-23)_D जमशेदपुर

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Geeta Devi Chauriya who is purchasing the Built-up Property bearing No.12-A, area admeasuring 30 Sq. Yds., carved out of Kharsa No.17/2, situated in the area of Village Hasla, colony known as Ghat Enclave, Villages Nagar, New Delhi-110055, from Mrs. Late Devr. W/o. Mr. Mahavir Mahato (also known as Mahavir Prasad) who is owner/ POA holder of the aforesaid property vide Notarized General Power of Attorney, Agreement to sell & WILL dated 15.02.2019 executed by Mr. Ajay Kumar & Mr. Vijay Kumar, and same to be financed & mortgaged by Vastu Housing Finance Corporation Limited. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person having any type of claim / right / title / interest / creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

Lucem Legal LLP

Plot No.136, Basement Floor, Uday Park, New Delhi-110049; Contact # 011-40046316

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of Trilok Singh who is purchasing the Property No.157-A (earlier part of Property No.157), area measuring 50 Sq. Yds, Kharsa No.1417/53, Village Klokari, Hari Nagar Ashram, New Delhi: from Mr. Akash Bhargava, who is owner of the aforesaid property vide Sale Deed dated 24.12.2020 which is registered vide Document No. 4277, at SRO-V(1), New Delhi, and intend to mortgage against the financial assistance from Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited. That the (1) Sale Deed dated 28.04.1980 (vide Document No. 88) (2) Death Certificate of Late Mr. Umrao Singh, (3) Surviving Member Certificate (SMC) of Late Mr. Umrao Singh, (4) Probate Order passed by the concerned Court of Law in favour of Mr. Narendar Kumar Jain and Mr. Anil Kumar Jain are Lost/Misplaced/Not available. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person having any type of claim / right / title / interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 07 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

Lucem Legal LLP

Plot No.136, Basement Floor, Uday Park, near Mother Dairy, New Delhi -110049 Contact# 011-40046316

MCD budget with workers, traders at its core cleared

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The much-awaited civic budget was cleared during a special meeting held at the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Wednesday, with the ruling AAP saying that “welfare at workers” is at the core of it. According to the MCD, the revised budget estimates for 2022-22 stand at ₹14,80,429 lakh (expenditure), while the budget estimate for 2023-24 stands at ₹16,02,355 lakh (expenditure).

AAP MLA and party’s MCD in-charge Durgesh Pathak at a Press conference held after the end of the session at the Civic Centre, said the budget was cleared, and four resolutions introduced by its councillors for the welfare of traders were “also passed”. The civic budget is worth ₹16,023 crore and puts focus on areas such as sanitation, education and health, a senior official said.

A piece of land measuring 47.346 acres has been allocated by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) for a landfill site in Tehkhand area near Okhla, out of which 32.346 acres will be used for setting up an engineering landfill site, work for which is expected to be completed by April 2023,



MCD Mayor Shelly Oberoi presides over a special budget meeting of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) house at the Civic Centre in New Delhi on Wednesday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

according to the budget speech of the Commissioner, made last December. Delhi has three sanitary landfill sites located at Ghazipur, Okhla and Bhalswa. This proposed “engineering landfill site” will be city’s first such site, officials said.

The current three landfill sites in Delhi are spread over an area of 202 acres in total, according to the speech. In the budget, the Commissioner also said that CCTV cameras have been installed at 570 school locations, and proposals have been sent for other schools. Also, 1.5 lakh plants along with flower pots are planned to

be bought in view of the G20 meetings, the budget had added. After discussion, the budget was passed, Pathak told reporters, soon after the session was over. “The welfare of workers is at the core of the budget, and besides the budget being passed, four resolutions introduced by our councillors for the welfare of traders were also passed.

These resolutions were brought in with the intent to provide relief to traders who have been facing problems due to sealing and other issues. Work on ‘vikas’ (development) will be carried out along with

the welfare of workers, employees,” he said. Today, two of the promises made in “Arvind Kejriwal’s 10 guarantees have been fulfilled”, and slowly other guarantees would also be fulfilled, Pathak said.

The AAP councillor and Leader of House Mukesh Goel told reporters that with the passage of the budget, “employees and workers will get salary on time”. Pathak on Monday had announced that their councillors will introduce four resolutions for the welfare of traders during the special meeting of the civic body to discuss its budget.

One of the resolutions would be brought by AAP councillors Parveen Kumar and Sunil Chaddha relating to presenting the MCD’s side before the judicial committee appointed by the Supreme Court to look into the matter of sealing of local shopping centres, he had said.

Prem Chauhan and Devender Kumar will bring another resolution, which will propose that the traders who have received notices will not be penalised, he had said. The fourth resolution proposed that no notices, whatsoever, be sent to local shopping centres and commercial shopping centres, Pathak said.

₹7,643 cr DDA budget gets LG nod

₹1,000 crore committed by authority for Metro Phase IV

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant-Governor (LG) VK Saxena on Wednesday approved the annual budget of the DDA for 2023-2024, with an annual outlay of ₹7,643 crore, focusing on civic infrastructure, particularly on the third Ring Road under the Urban Extension Road II (UER-II) for development of Narela, Dwarka and Rohini, rejuvenation and restoration of Yamuna flood-plains and green spaces.

The DDA also approved Pre-Determined rates for Rohini, Phase IV and V, Tikri Kalan and Narela for financial year 2022-23 and permitted land use change for improving public transport system in Delhi. The budget has projected receipts to the tune of ₹8,541 crore.

As per the budget document, construction of UER-II as third Ring Road of Delhi is in progress through the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI). For this project, ₹3,600 crore will be funded by DDA out of the total project cost of ₹6,421 crore (for Delhi portion). This project will decongest Delhi and reduce vehicular pollution.

“It will also serve the land pooling areas of Delhi, apart from being an arterial connectivity to Rohini and Narela. It will allow traffic moving



between Gurugram and Sonapat to by-pass Central Delhi. This will also lead to faster access to the airport. It shall act as an additional Western Ring Road in Delhi, thereby decongesting the road network between Mukarba Chowk to Singhu Border,” the budget document said.

The DDA has committed ₹1,000 crore for Phase IV of Delhi Metro and a provision of ₹350 crore has been made in BE 2023-24.

A total allocation of ₹3,314 crore has been made for development of land, physical infrastructure and maintenance of existing infrastructure that includes roads, sewage, water supply, power lines and drainage in development areas falling under the jurisdiction of DDA. These areas are primar-

ily in Narela, Dwarka and Rohini. To contain encroachment of DDA’s land, a provision of around ₹106 crore has been made towards security of land. The authority meeting was attended by Subhashish Panda, Vice-Chairman, DDA and other members including MLAs Vijender Gupta, Somnath Bharti, OP Sharma and DK Pandey.

The authority has planned construction of a Trunk Drain of about 7.2 Kms length, costing ₹293.21 crore to prevent waterlogging in DDA-developed sectors 20, 21 & 22, vacant land of undeveloped Sectors 39, 40 and 41 of Rohini and adjoining 106 unauthorised colonies in Kirari Assembly constituency. A provision of ₹100 crore in BE 2023-24 has been kept for this

purpose. Construction of Storm Water Drain at Sector-8, Dwarka is in progress. This drain will cater to the excess discharge of rain water of airport and prevent flooding in Rajnagar, Baghdola and Palam area. For this purpose, a provision of ₹30 crore has been made in 2023-24.

DDA, with an overall outlay of ₹928.92 crore, has undertaken the work of rejuvenation and restoration of the floodplains of river Yamuna. The work is being taken up in a phased manner as 10 separate sub-projects.

A sum of ₹405 crore has been provided in BE 2023-24 for this purpose. The construction of Bharat Vandana Park is in full swing. The park located in Sector-20, Dwarka, is spread over 189.28 acres with the project cost of ₹524 crore. A provision of ₹105 Crore has been kept in BE 2023-24 for this purpose.

DDA has projected revenue of around ₹4310 crore on account of sale of additional inventory of existing housing projects which are nearing completion. The housing projects that will be completed in the current year include projects in Dwarka having around 1114 HIG flats facing Dwarka Golf Course, around 650 MIG flats in Lok Nayak Puram and around 9000 HIG/MIG flats in Narela.

ED, CBI have brought all corrupt people in one party: Kejriwal

BJP withdrew no-trust motion after it failed to poach AAP MLAs, says CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday claimed that let alone the 2025 Assembly polls, the BJP would not even win Delhi in 2050. Speaking on the confidence motion tabled by him in the Delhi Assembly, Kejriwal alleged that the BJP withdrew the no-confidence motion after it failed to poach AAP MLAs, who he said won’t succumb to any pressure.

He alleged that the raids by the CBI and ED have brought all the corrupt people into “one party” and when the BJP’s rule ends the country will become corruption-free. The motion was passed with majority by the House. The eight BJP MLAs were absent during the voting. Alleging the use of central agencies by the BJP, Kejriwal said the saffron party has not failed to



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal speaking during the Budget Session of Delhi Assembly, in New Delhi, on Wednesday
PTI

miss any chance to “trample” democracy in the country. Kejriwal claimed his MLAs have been threatened with CBI and ED raids and offered Rs 25 crore bribe but nothing could break them. “Each one of you is a gem. Don’t be afraid. Even if you go to jail, I will take care of

your family,” he said. Citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s remark a day before that the ED-CBI have brought all the corrupt on one platform, Kejriwal took a dig at the BJP, saying “The ED and the CBI have brought all the corrupt people in one party.” “All the

thieves, looters and corrupt are in one party! Once the BJP people are in jail after their Government’s rule ends, the country will become corruption-free,” he charged.

Citing the examples of Narayan Rane, Himanta Biswa Sarma and Suwendu Adhikari, he alleged that since they were involved in corruption, they joined the BJP. Kejriwal said that the BJP had tried to break his Government in 2017 and even in subsequent years, but were not successful. “If you have some dignity left, do not try ‘Operation Lotus’ on our MLAs.

“We are followers of Bhagat Singh,” he said. Kejriwal said the BJP needed 14 MLAs for a no-confidence motion, and tried tactics to get AAP MLAs to its side but everything failed. “Happenings inside the Delhi Assembly send out a positive message for democracy today,”

he added. Later, speaking to reporters after the Assembly session, Kejriwal said BJP had announced it will bring a no-confidence motion.”But to table such a motion, you need signatures at least 20 per cent MLAs. In order to do so, they threatened our MLAs but none of them broke. AAP MLAs cannot be broken through fear and threat,” he said.

Opposing the trust motion, Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that the AAP Government has lost the trust of the people. Even though it is in majority in the House, due to the height of corruption and neglect of public problems, now the public has no faith in this Government. Bidhuri said that the Kejriwal Government is embroiled in many corruption cases. Delhi’s exchequer was looted of thousands of crores of rupees due to

the liquor scam, instead of providing clean water to Delhi, the people of Delhi were duped by the Jal Board scam, in the name of providing free electricity, they committed the electricity subsidy scam. Apart from this, the security of the country was put at stake due to the espionage scam.

The Leader of the Opposition said that this Government came to power in the name of solving Delhi’s problems, but apart from making a dent in the government treasury, this Government did nothing. Participating in the discussion, BJP MLA Anil Bajpai alleged that the voice of Opposition is being suppressed in the House. AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak asserted that the confidence of the House as well as confidence of the people of Delhi is intact in the Kejriwal Government.

National status for AAP under review, says EC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Wednesday said it is looking into the issue of national status to the Aam Aadmi Party. “It is under review... We will soon come back to you,” Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said while responding to a query at a Press conference.

Election Commissioners Anup Chandra Pandey and Arun Goel were also present. Meanwhile, the AAP has demanded that the EC recognise it as a national party “immediately” and ensure it gets all the “facilities” during the Karnataka Assembly polls that a national party is entitled to.

The EC’s announcement comes days after a Punjab and Haryana High Court advocate urged the top poll body to grant AAP ‘national party’ status. “The Election Commission announced the schedule for Karnataka elections today but we have a grievance with it,” AAP Rajya Sabha MP and national spokesperson Sanjay Singh said at a press conference.

He lamented that the poll panel has not yet taken any decision on the matter even after the AAP fulfilled the conditions required to be declared a national party with its performance in Punjab, Gujarat and Goa polls last year.

“Election Commission has not officially given national party status to AAP despite the party ruling Delhi and Punjab and has two MLAs with over 6 per cent vote share in Goa. The party also has five MLAs in Gujarat where it secured about 14 per cent vote share in the assembly polls last year,” Singh said.

AAP became eligible for ‘national party’ status last year after securing nearly 13 per cent of the votes in the Gujarat



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar speaking during a press conference for announcement of the schedule of Karnataka Legislative Assembly elections, in New Delhi on Wednesday.
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

election. To earn a national party status, a political outfit needs to be recognised as state party in four states and have at least two members in the respective legislative assemblies, according to the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) order, 1968.

And in order become eligible to be recognised as the state party, a political outfit has to win two seats and secures a minimum six per cent votes in the state. There are other criteria also to earn the national party status.

The AAP has been recognised as a state party Delhi, Punjab, Goa and Gujarat. The AAP stormed to power in Punjab winning 92 of the 117 assembly seats, recording a stupendous victory in the state assembly polls last year. It was anyway already recognised as a state party in the state.

In Goa, it bagged two seats and secured an overall vote share of 6.77 per cent, leading to its recognition as a state party in the coastal state. By the end of the 2022, the AAP’s national ambition got wings as it won five seats and secured an overall vote share of 13 percent in the Gujarat assembly polls, which was enough for the AAP to be recognised as the state party.

Students protest against harassment of women at IP College fest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Several students protested outside the Delhi University’s Indraprastha College for Women against alleged harassment of the college students were detained by police.

According to the Left affiliated All India Students’ Association (AISA), some of the protesters were manhandled. Meanwhile, the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) has issued a notice to the city police and IP College over alleged harassment of women students during a college fest.

The DCW said it has been reported that some men entered the college during the fest and harassed the students. Some men also allegedly tried to enter a hostel meant for girl students, it said. Earlier, the students had gathered to stage a protest after some men scaled the college’s



boundary walls during a fest and misbehaved with the women students on Tuesday. “AISA activists had called for a protest at 11 am on March 29 demanding accountability on behalf of the Delhi Police and arrest of those involved in the harassment of students.

The Delhi Police showed up and brutally detained several of our activists in the most inhumane way possible,” the students body said in a statement. It further said the student activists were taken to the Burari police station. “This entire incident is a proof of the Delhi Police’s inability to stand for justice and catch the real culprits.

AAP MLAs slam LG for poor law & order in city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP MLAs on Wednesday raised the issue of alleged harassment of students at IP College in the Delhi Assembly and blamed the Lieutenant Governor for “poor” law and order situation in the national capital. Meanwhile, four BJP MLAs were marshalled out of the Assembly following arguments with Speaker Ram Niwas Goel on the issues to be taken up for discussion in the House.

AAP MLA Bhavna Gaur raised the matter of women security and law and order in view of the Tuesday’s incident at Indraprastha College for Women where several men scaled college walls and

harassed students. The BJP members, however, wanted a discussion on the issue of corruption, including the now-repealed excise policy, but the Speaker did not allow it, saying it had already been discussed.

“We should be ashamed that men trespassed into women’s college and misbehaved with the students. This is a serious issue. Does women security not matter to you? The college is close to the Vidhan Sabha, the chief minister’s residence and right under the nose of the Raj Niwas,” he said. Goel requested BJP members to leave House if they did not want to participate in discussion on issue of women security and law and order in Delhi.

Teachers want annexe near NIA HQ gone; Dayal Singh says regularisation plea in

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Dyal Singh College campus has an “unauthorised” building for several years just adjacent to the NIA building, faculty members alleged on Wednesday, adding that the structure jeopardises the security of the probe agency’s headquarters.

Teachers at DU’s Dyal Singh College have demanded the demolition of the structure built by the Dyal Singh Evening College (DSEC) in 2017 when it became a full-fledged morning college. They also alleged that “large-scale corruption” and “nexus” between Dyal Singh Evening College administration and civic authorities



have prevented any action against the structure. However, the evening college said it is not an “unauthorised” structure and that they have applied for the regularisation of the facility where around 700 students take classes. The Dyal Singh Evening College (DSEC) was earlier an evening college but became a full-fledged morning college in 2017.

₹39.16 cr for beautification of 2 road stretches

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government has approved projects worth Rs 39.16 crore for beautification of two main road stretches, one of them on Mehrauli-Mahipalpur road. Under these projects roads from Andheria More to NH-48 on Mehrauli-Mahipalpur Road and Martyr Captain Vikram Batra Flyover to Burari Flyover on Outer Ring Road will get a facelift.

Under the vision of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to make the roads of Delhi beautiful, safe and world-class, the government is working in mis-

Facilities to be made during strengthening of roads

● Maintenance and upkeep of pavements, central verges and service lanes of the entire road stretch

● Allied works such as lane marking, white-washing of parapet walls, painting of kerbstones/railings,

● Plantation on central verges and roadsides.

● Maintenance of streetlights



with all safety and security measures during the maintenance work. The minister said that the Delhi government is working in a phased manner to strengthen the two city roads,

which were constructed a long ago and have suffered a deterioration in their quality causing hassles to the commuters. An assessment of these roads has been conducted by IIT-Roorkee, according to the statement.

The beautification work will involve maintenance and upkeep of pavements, central verges and service lanes of the entire road stretch, lane marking, white-washing of parapet walls, painting of kerbstones/railings, plantation on central verges and roadside, and maintenance of streetlights, read the statement.



The National Capital received a heavy downpour late on Wednesday evening.
PTI

Detach politics from religion, hate speech will end: SC

‘Hate speeches are vicious circle, people should restrain themselves from making such utterances’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday took serious note on rampant hate speeches across the country, saying these will end the moment politics and religions are separated and politicians stop using religion in politics. Terming hate speeches a “vicious circle”, the top court said these utterances are being made by fringe elements and people should restrain themselves from doing so.

A Bench of justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna referred to speeches of former Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying people from remote areas and every nook and corner used to gather to hear them. The court pro-



ceedings also witnessed serious arguments between Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and the Judges. “Major problem arises when politicians are mixing politics with religion. The moment politics and religion are segregated, this will end. When politicians stop using religion, all this will stop. We have said in our recent verdict also that mixing politics with

religion is dangerous for democracy,” Justice Joseph said. Wondering as to how many people can courts initiate contempt action against, the Bench said why cannot the people of India take a pledge to not vilify other citizens or communities. “Everyday fringe elements are making speeches to vilify others including on TV and public forums,” the Bench

said while hearing a contempt petition against various state authorities including Maharashtra for failing to register FIRs against those making such speeches.

When Solicitor General Tushar Mehta pointed out a provocative slogan made in Kerala at a PFI linked organisation’s rally against Hindu and Christian communities and questioned that petitioner Shaheen Abdullah has selectively pointed out the incidents of hate speeches in the country, this triggered sharp exchanges between the court and Mehta.

Mehta also pointed out a statement made by a DMK party leader and said why has the petitioner’s counsel not made him and those States party in the contempt petition. The bench referred to those

speeches and said “every action has equal reaction” and emphasised, “We are following the Constitution and orders in every case are bricks in the structure of rule of law. We are hearing the contempt petition because states are not taking action in time.

This is because the state has become impotent, powerless and does not act in time. Why should we have a state at all if it is silent?” Mehta then said, “Can’t say that about any State but Centre is not. Centre has banned PFI. Please issue notice to state of Kerala so that they can respond to this.”

As the court asked Mehta to continue with his submissions, he said, “Please do not do this. This will have wider ramification. Why are we shying away from looking at the clip? Why can’t the court allow

me to play the video clip of the speeches? Why Kerala can’t be issued notice and made a party to the petition. Let us not be selective. I am trying to show the clip which is in public domain. This court could have taken suo motu cognisance of these speeches.” The bench replied, “Let us not make this a drama.

This is legal proceedings” and added, “There is a method to see the video clip. This applies to all equally. If you (Mehta) want, you can include it in your submission.”

The hearing of the contempt petition saw some strong observations from the court in which it said, “Hate speeches are like a vicious circle. One person will make it and then another will make it. When our constitution was founded, there were no such speeches. Now

there are cracks coming up in the idea of fraternity. There has to be some restraint. Some sought of mechanism needs to be developed by the state so that we can curb this kind of statements.” Justice Nagarathna said, “We need to look where we as a country are going? There were orators like Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the midnight speech. People from remote areas and every nook and corner used to come hear these leaders.

Now fringe elements from all sides are making these statements and we are now asked to take contempt action against these people.” She said that how can a court curtail “intellectual deprivation” which comes from lack of knowledge and education. “How many contempt after contempt we

can take against these people. That’s why I asked the other day, how the apex court will deal with this. Why do you (petitioner) start with the apex court? Should not there be some restraint on speeches else we will not become the India we desire for.

Why cannot the citizens of this country take a pledge to not vilify others and what kind of pleasures we are deriving by making these speeches,” she said. The top court, which allowed an intervention application, filed by an organisation “Hindu Sama”, which had held rallies in Maharashtra told its counsel, “Statements are being made by some people, which vast majority of community do not subscribe to. “They are saying things which are denigrating and demolishing dignity of others on a regular basis.

US assures India of safety of mission, staff

Violence is never acceptable form of protest, says State Dept spokesman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Against the backdrop of alleged Khalistan supporters vandalising an Indian consulate in the US and posing a threat, Washington has said it is committed to taking all appropriate steps to protect the diplomatic missions and diplomats. This assurance came days after two Indian missions in America were attacked by Khalistan supporters. At a news conference late Tuesday in Washington, US

State Department Deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel condemned the incidents of violence at Indian diplomatic facilities in the United States, saying violence is never an acceptable form of protest.

“Consistent with our Vienna Convention obligations, the department is committed to taking all appropriate steps, including coordination with federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities, to protect the safety and security of these facilities and the diplomatic individuals who work within them as well,” he said. Patel was responding to a question on violent protests outside the Indian Embassy in Washington DC and vandalism of the Indian consulate in San Francisco.

Last week, a group of Khalistan supporters held a protest in front of the Indian Embassy here and tried to



incite violence and even threatened the country’s envoy, but timely intervention by law enforcement agencies prevented them from vandalising the property. A few days earlier, pro-Khalistan protesters attacked the Indian consulate in San Francisco. India registered its “strong protest” with the US Charge d’Affaires in New Delhi over the incident and asked the American government to take appropriate measures to pre-

vent the recurrence of such incidents. “We condemn the recent violent incidents that have taken place during protests at Indian diplomatic facilities in the United States. We support the First Amendment rights of protesters and engagement in free speech activities. However, violence or the threat of violence is never an acceptable form of protest,” Patel said. “Attacks against journalists are never

acceptable and we condemn any incidents of violence against a member of the media just doing their job and any act of violence or vandalism against a diplomatic facility as well,” he said.

India has said it expects to see action against the perpetrators of vandalism at its missions abroad and hoped the host governments would prosecute those involved in these incidents instead of holding out assurances. “I think we are not just interested in assurances, I think we would like to see action,” External Affairs Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said in New Delhi last week.

Indian missions in the UK, Australia and Canada were vandalised recently by pro-Khalistan activists following the police action against radical preacher Amritpal Singh in Punjab.

NCP’s Faizal back in House after LS revokes disqualification

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



NCP MP Mohammed Faizal at Parliament House complex during the Budget Session, in New Delhi, on Wednesday PTI Photo

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Mohammad Faizal who was disqualified from Lok Sabha on January 13 was back in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday as his disqualification from the lower house was revoked following the suspension of his conviction and 10-year jail term by the Kerala High Court in an attempt to murder case.

Faizal, who was present in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, said he had to approach the Supreme Court to get himself reinstated. He also met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla along with NCP floor leader Supriya Sule. The NCP member from Lakshadweep parliamentary seat , however, expressed

unhappiness over Lok Sabha secretariat’s “delay” in revoking his disqualification following Kerala High court order. “The disqualification should have been revoked immediately after Kerala High Court passed an order on January 25”,

he said. Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh issued a notification restoring the membership of Faizal, who represents Lakshadweep in the lower house, citing suspension of his conviction and 10-year jail term by Kerala High Court in an attempt to murder case. Kerala high court suspended conviction on January 25.

The decision is significant in the backdrop of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s disqualification from Lok Sabha following his conviction in a criminal defamation case with a two-year jail term by a trial court in Gujarat. Rahul is yet to appeal to a higher court against verdict but according to his party papers are being readied for cancelling his conviction by lower court.

NIA chargesheets 3 LeT men in Hyd terror conspiracy case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Following thorough investigations into the case involving Lashkar -e-Tayabba (LeT) terrorists who were allegedly targeting Hyderabad City, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday filed a chargesheet against three Lashkar operatives.

Mohd Abdul Wajid alias Zahed, Samiuddin alias Sami and Maaz Hasan Farooq alias Maaz have been charged for their role in the terrorist conspiracy to raise funds, collect explosives and carry out recruitment into the LeT in the Hyderabad hand grenade case, the NIA said in a statement.

NIA had taken over investigations into the case in January this year from Hyderabad Police.

“NIA investigations revealed that Zahed, Sami and Maaz were in touch with Farhatulla Ghorri, an ‘individual terrorist’ listed by the Government of India. Simultaneously, they were also in league with Siddiqu bin Osman alias Abu Hanzala, Abdul Majeed alias Chotu and

other LeT leaders and operatives. They had aimed to carry out bomb blasts at crowded places in Hyderabad City,” the NIA said.

Farhatulla Ghorri, Siddiqu bin Osman alias Abu Hanzala and Abdul Majeed alias Chotu are both based in Pakistan. Ghorri recruited Zahed from cyberspace and sent funds to him through hawala channels.

Zahed was tasked to recruit more persons into LeT and to carry out terrorist acts. Sami, Maaz and Mohammed Kaleem were instigated and prodded by Zahed to work for the LeT.

“Four hand-grenades were dead dropped at an isolated

spot near Manoharabad village on Hyderabad-Nagpur Highway (NH-44) on 28.09.2022. Zahed got the hand-grenade consignment collected through Sami and then gave one grenade each to Sami and Maaz with instructions to hurl the same at public gatherings during Dussehra festival,” it said.

However, their intentions could not bear fruit as they were arrested before the planned attacks. The grenades were recovered from their possession during a search of their houses. Rs 20 lakhs was also seized from Zahed, it said.

“The NIA unraveled all these facts and has filed a chargesheet today against Zahed, Sami and Maaz under sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 153A (offence committed in any place of worship or in any assembly engaged in the performance of religious worship or religious ceremonies). Sections 4, 5, 6 of the Explosives Substances Act, 1908 and Sections 13, 17, 18, 18B, 20, 38, 39 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act,” it added.

Rahul Gandhi does politics of entitlement: Railway Min

New Delhi: Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Wednesday hit out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over the disqualification of the Wayanad MP and said that the Congress MP was disqualified by the Parliament because of his sheer arrogance who thinks that he is above law, every institution like Parliament, Constitution.

“Rahul does politics of entitlement. He thinks he is above the law and the constitution. Mr Gandhi believes that all the institutions built on the basis of the constitution made by Babasaheb Ambedkar are below him.

Tell the country that talks about institutions, whether tearing an ordinance when the then Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh) was abroad was not respecting institutions,” Vaishnav said addressing the media. He said that while BJP is working with new enthusiasm for the development of the country, all the corrupt political parties are united with the same goal of distracting present government.

Adani saga disrupts LS again as Opp sticks to JPC probe demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Opposition members wearing black clothes protest in the Well of the Lok Sabha over disqualification of Rahul Gandhi during the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday. PTI

Lok Sabha was adjourned again on Wednesday to meet again on April 3 after the House passed the Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022, amid ruckus with Opposition MPs wearing black clothes trooping into the Well of the House and continuing their protest over the Adani issue.

The House will meet on Monday as members agreed to not hold a sitting on Friday and Thursday being a holiday. The House adjourned soon after it resumed the proceedings of the day and as MPs re-assembled at 12 PM after the first adjournment in the morning, opposition members rushed to the Well of the House and raised slogans demanding a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into the Adani issue.

Some papers as well as reports were laid on the table of the House amid the din. Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav then introduced the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023. Amid the loud sloganeering by Opposition mem-

bers, the Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022 was taken up for consideration and was passed without a debate and discussion. As the opposition members, several of whom were dressed in black as a mark of protest against the government, continued their sloganeering while holding placards with ‘democracy in danger’ written on them, Rama Devi, who was in the Chair, adjourned the proceedings for the day.

Earlier, Opposition MPs were on their feet as soon as the

House assembled at 11 am, raising slogans and demanding a JPC probe into the Adani issue. They displayed placards as some Opposition members trooped into the Well of the House.

Bhartruhari Mahtab, who was in the Chair at the time, adjourned the House till 12 noon amid the noisy protest. The treasury and Opposition benches are at loggerheads with the government over the Adani issue and the disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from the lower house.

Second edition of Africa-India Field Training Exercise to conclude today

New Delhi/Pune: The second edition of Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX-2023) between India and 23 nations of the African continent that commenced on Tuesday at the Foreign Training Node, Aundh, Pune, will culminate on March 30.

Nearly 100 participants from Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, Sudan, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, are attending this unique field training exercise. The participants were addressed by Lt General Rakesh Kapoor, Corps Commander, Desert Corps, officials said on Wednesday.

The joint exercise is in keeping with India’s outreach to Africa, which commenced in 2008 through the India-Africa Summit and has been thereafter held in 2015 and 2019.

The theme of the exercise is focused on Humanitarian Mine Action and Peace Keeping Operations. The Military cooperation and engagement between the participating member nations are vital for refining the interoperability and operational preparedness for UN peace keeping operations.

The Objectives of the exercise are to continue to build upon the initiatives taken to strengthen India - Africa relations, with a focus on enhancing peace and security, to create opportunities to exchange ideas and perspectives, learn from the African experience in cooperative security and management of security crisis situations as well as to promote a collaborative approach in capacity enhancement of African armies.

The Exercise is divided into four phases. Initially, the trainers have been trained. This will now be followed by a Humanitarian Mine Action and a Peace Keeping Operations Phase; finally, culminating in a validation exercise to assess the results of the training conducted.

India-Russia meet on roads, transport systems held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In an effort to establish an effective bilateral relationship of communication and cooperation in the road transportation, logistics, Intelligent Transport System (ITS) and green mobility sector, the first meeting of the India-Russia Working Group on Roads and ITS was held in the national Capital on Wednesday.

The working group was established under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation on Bilateral Cooperation in the Road Transport and Road Industry in September 2021. The meeting was co-chaired by Alka



Upadhyaya, Secretary MoRTH and Dmitry Bakanov, Deputy Minister of Transport of the Russian Federation. The deliberations during the meeting showcased the various initiatives taken by both the coun-

tries related to intelligent transport systems, green mobility, road safety, technology implementation in the road transport and highways sector. “The discussions held paved the way for prolonged collaboration

between India and Russia for implementation of digital technology enabled ITS services in road transportation development,” said a senior road ministry official.

“Both the countries will benefit from mutual cooperation in the field. Increased cooperation, exchange and collaboration with Russia will contribute to establishing a long-term and effective bilateral relationship of communication and cooperation in road transportation and road industry and Intelligent Transport System (ITS),” added the official. The outcome will also help in planning and administration of road infrastructure and road network management, transport policy, technologies and standards for the construction and operation of highways in the country and will further go a long way in strengthening ties

and bilateral relations between India and Russia.

As per the MoU earlier, Russia has developed technological solutions for satellite-based tolling solutions. Similarly, they have also adopted advanced intelligent traffic management systems, including crash reporting/monitoring systems.

“Considering Russia’s proven experience in the adoption of technology in the road transport sector, it would be beneficial to learn from such best practices through close interaction.

India is implementing at a rapid pace its highway infrastructure augmentation plans. To make full use of the road infrastructure it is necessary to embrace technology to enhance transport productivity and safety,” the statement of the MoU mentioned.

ED attaches ₹150 cr of Rose Valley under PMLA

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has attached assets worth Rs 287 crore in two separate cases of money laundering. In the first case, the ED has provisionally attached 139 movable and immovable properties presently valued at Rs. 150 crore belonging to Rose Valley Group of Companies and their Directors.

The PMLA investigation against Rose Valley Group of Companies and others was initiated on the basis of an FIR registered by the Bureau of Investigation (Economic Offences), Assam Police, and subsequently two FIRs registered by the CBI, Guwahati.

The CBI has also filed its charge-sheets in both the cases in 2020, wherein they had alleged that an amount totaling to Rs 718 crore remained

unpaid to the investors of Assam.

On the basis of these cases and charge-sheets, the ED launched probe under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act which revealed that the funds were collected by selling the fake and fabricated schemes through chain of agents located in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Odisha, Jharkhand and several other States.

During the course of investigation, 139 immovable properties consisting of land banks, flats, commercial spaces, office spaces and shops registered in the name of various companies of Rose Valley Group and its directors, located in states of Tripura, West Bengal and Andaman, have been identified and provisionally attached, the agency said.

PNS

Mamata begins dharna against Centre

Accuses Modi Govt of withholding funds ■ BJP, Cong stage stir against TMC for graft

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Barely weeks ahead of the rural elections, the City of Joy turned into a City of Sit-ins with Bengal Chief Minister Banerjee on Wednesday commencing a two-day dharna — against the Centre’s discrimination in releasing funds and unleashing central agencies against her party men — and the State BJP staging a sit-in condemning the alleged corrupt rule perpetrated by the ruling Trinamool Congress.

Not to be left behind, the Left and the Congress leadership too took out a massive rally against TMC corruption indicating the beginning of another round of coalition between the two parties ahead of the 2024 general elections was taking shape.

Banerjee, who had earlier alleged that the Centre had withheld more than ₹1 lakh crores affecting a plethora of welfare schemes, started her dharna at the Ambedkar statue on Wednesday morning with two senior Cabinet ministers Firhad Hakim and Arup Biswas by her sides.

She had earlier alleged that New Delhi had “stopped releasing funds for MGNREGA and Indira Awas Yojana (Grameen). Besides, it has also stopped scholarships for OBC students” justifying her sit-in



West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee with party leaders during a two-day sit-in demonstration near BR Ambedkar Statue at Red Road against the Union Government’s alleged discriminatory attitude against the State, in Kolkata on Wednesday

demonstration — an act that was promptly dismissed by the Opposition BJP as a political drama to divert attention from the wave of scams that had hit her government hard.

On Tuesday Banerjee said as the Chief Minister, “I would stage a sit-in demonstration in front of the statue of Dr B R Ambedkar in Kolkata from March 29 and continue it till the evening of March 30 because I want the whole of the State and the country know how the opposition ruled States are being deprived and discriminated against by the Centre.”

While the Chief Minister maintained a strategic silence her nephew and TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee launched a scathing attack on the Narendra Modi Government holding it responsible for the financial crisis that the State was in.

Slamming Prime Minister Narendra Modi he said “when he had come to Kolkata before the 2014 general elections he spoke of two laddus (sweet meat) that Bengal would get ... today he has proved himself right ... he has genuinely given Bengal ‘laddus’ (zero) only.”

Alleging that the BJP could

not digest the resounding defeat that it faced at the hands of the TMC in 2021 Assembly elections junior Banerjee said, “just after the 2021 defeat they have stopped releasing funds for MNRREGA, PMAY and 106 other welfare projects... their misdeed has affected 17 lakh families who have worked under the MNREGA but not yet received their dues for the 100-days work scheme.”

“They are trying to starve Bengal ... as we unlike many other political parties have not bowed before them they are indiscriminately using central agencies against our leaders,” Abhishek Banerjee said adding how in 21 cases ED-and-CBI investigation have been ordered.

“They are sending agencies to arm-twist us ... they are sending central teams ... so much so that in the past two years they have sent 151 central teams in Bengal whereas they are not sending any team to Tripura to investigate the devastating post-poll violence on the poorest of the poor people, they are not sending any team to Assam to look into the mischievous acts of the government there ... why this discrimination,” he asked.

The BJP was prompt to hit back even as senior leader Rahul Sinha the funds were not blocked on its own but they were stopped to stop more

corruption from taking place. “This money does not belong to the Prime Minister or the BJP ... this money belongs to the people and that has to be adequately accounted for ... as the Government has failed to account for the funds given earlier further payments have been stopped,” he said from the BJP’s dharna dias at Shyam bazar in North Kolkata.

Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari hit back asking for a regular probe into the MNREGA and PMAY schemes in Bengal. “Let there be a probe and things will come out on its own,” he said.

Banerjee in his part attacked the Prime Minister for trying to take credit for all the projects he said, “they are making roads, houses out of public money but naming them after the Prime Minister ... why should these projects not be named after the State (read Bengal) where these projects are being implemented ... such is their ballooning ego and conceit that they have even constructed cricket stadiums in their names.”

Slamming the BJP for harbouring businessmen houses like the Adani group, Banerjee said how the Adani scam had robbed the LIC and the State Bank of India of ₹1 lakh crore “the fund that could have taken care of a number of projects in Bengal.”

PM too should be disqualified for his ‘Didi-o-Didi’ jibes: Abhishek

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Following the precedent set in the Rahul Gandhi case the Trinamool Congress proposes to bring legal action against BJP leaders like Suwendu Adhikari and even Prime Minister Narendra Modi for that matter for hurting the sentiments of tribal people and women in that order.

TMC second-in-command Abhishek Banerjee on Wednesday directed his party’s legal cell to consider filing cases against Adhikari and even the Prime Minister for using alleged unparliamentary words against Bengal Minister Birbaha Hansda a tribal woman and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee respectively.

Referring to the Rahul Gandhi case and condemning the way the defamation case was conducted against him and the way he was disqualified from the Lok Sabha in a hurry Banerjee said, “it is not that I am raising my voice for Rahul Gandhi ... I would have done so even if there would have been any other MP ... neither do I support his speech that might have hurt the sentiments of some community ...



TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee waves at supporters during a protest rally of Trinamool Youth Congress and TMC Chhatra Parishad over Union Government’s alleged discriminatory attitude against the state, at Shahid Minar maidan in Kolkata on Wednesday

but the question is why law should be discriminately implemented.”

Referring to how the Prime Minister during the 2021 election campaign on several occasions publicly caricatured Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s name calling her “Didi O Didi!” the junior Banerjee asked, “is that not a humiliation of a woman and in fact the humiliation of the whole womanhood ... should his membership of the Lok Sabha not be taken away...”

Then he raised the issue of how Adhikari once said that people like Birbaha Hansda, a Bengal minister and a woman were fit to remain under his feet. “Is this not the insult of the whole tribal population that Birbaha represents ... I think if Rahul can lose membership of parliament then even Suwendu Adhikari too should be disqualified,” he said, directing his party legal cell to “consider preparing cases making the Surat court order against Rahul Gandhi as a precedent.”

EC manages to find new excuses to delay polls in Valley, says Omar

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Election Commission seems to be in no hurry to conduct the Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir and manages to find “new excuses to delay” the elections, National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah said on Wednesday.

“When asked about assembly elections in J&K, the chief election commissioner acknowledged a ‘vacuum needs to be filled’. Yet surprisingly the @ECISVEEP seems to be in no hurry to conduct elections, on the contrary they manage to find new excuses to delay polls,” Abdullah wrote on Twitter.

He was referring to the comments made by Chief



Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar at a presser in New Delhi called to announce the Karnataka poll dates.

Responding to a question on the fresh special summary revision of electoral rolls in the Union territory, the CEC said, “But nonetheless, it does not disturb the scheduled part, the conduct part that depends on various other factors which we will come back to you. We are aware that there is a vacuum that needs to be filled.”

HC acquits all accused in Jaipur blasts that killed 71

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The Rajasthan High Court on Wednesday acquitted four men who were given the death sentence by a lower court for the 2008 serial Jaipur blasts that killed 71 people and slammed the investigating agencies over their “shoddy investigation”.

It also affirmed the acquittal of a fifth accused by the trial court.

Jaipur was rocked by a series of blasts on May 13, 2008 when bombs went off one after another at Manak Chawk Khanda, Chandpole Gate, Badi Chaupad, Chhoti Chaupad, Tripolia Gate, Johri Bazar and Sanganeri Gate. The explosions in the evening left 71 people dead and 185 injured.

According to advocate S S Ali, the counsel for the accused, the high court lambasted the investigating agencies for doing a shoddy investigation in connecting the chain of evidence. The court also directed the director general of police of Rajasthan to take action against the officers involved in the



investigation.

Ali said the court found the entire theory presented by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), which investigated the case, wrong.

He said the high court issued directions to the chief secretary to monitor the case.

“The ATS failed to prove the travel plan of the accused that they had travelled from Delhi to Jaipur in a bus on May 13, had lunch at a restaurant, purchased cycles, planted bombs and returned the same day to Delhi in Shatabdi express. The ATS could not produce bus tickets,” the counsel said.

Ali said the frame numbers of the cycles mentioned in the bills produced by the ATS did

not match with the cycles seized after the blasts and the bills of cycle purchase were tampered with.

“The pellets which the agency said that the accused had purchased from a shop outside Jama masjid in Delhi to plant in the bomb did not match with the pellets found in the dead bodies. The pellets did not match in the FSL report,” he said.

“The court said that the allegations against them are not proven. The ATS has failed to establish its theory. The court also said that the ATS did not try to reach the real culprits,” Ali added.

In December 2019, a special court gave the death sentence to four men — Mohammad Saif, Mohammad Salman, Saifur and Mohammad Sarvar Azmi — and acquitted another accused, Shahbaz Hussain.

While the state government challenged the acquittal of Shahbaz Hussain in the high court, the four awarded capital punishment filed an appeal against the trial court order.

Raj medical services hit as Govt, pvt docs jointly protest Right to Health Bill

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Medical services were affected in parts of Rajasthan on Wednesday after government doctors and faculty members in medical colleges went on a one-day strike in solidarity with private doctors agitating against the Right to Health Bill.

However, many government doctors attended to patients in OPDs at places like Bharatpur, Alwar and Udaipur.

Emergency services and ICUs were exempted from the strike.

There was not much impact of the boycott in Sawai Mansingh (SMS) hospitals, the largest state-run hospitals in the state. Similarly, the services remained unaffected in Dausa, the hometown of state Health Minister Parsadi Lal Meena.

In Rajasthan, private doctors are demanding withdrawal of the Bill passed in the state assembly last Tuesday. According to the Bill, every resident of the state will have the

right to emergency treatment and care “without prepayment” at any “public health institution, health care establishment and designated health care centres.”

Iqbal Khan, joint secretary, health department, had on Tuesday issued an order to medical college principals directing them to ensure that medical services in OPD, IPD, ICU, emergency and maternity wards were not affected and to take disciplinary action against the doctors going on leave without approval.

Meena said the strike was “unfair” and “unjustified” and that the doors of the government were always open for any negotiation.

Taking a tough stand, the state government warned of disciplinary action against the government doctors for going on leave without approval. As a result, some of the doctors returned to work after boycotting work for two hours in Alwar, Bharatpur, Udaipur and Durgapur.

ED attaches ₹106 cr assets in Chinese Loan App case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached movable assets worth ₹106 crore in the Chinese Loan App Case.

The ED initiated an investigation on the basis of FIRs registered by Cyber Crime Police Station, Bengaluru under various sections of Karnataka Money Lenders Act, 1961, Information Technology Act, 2000, Karnataka Prohibition of Charging Exorbitant Interest Act, 2004, and various Sections of Indian Penal Code, 1860 against numerous entities/persons in connection with their involvement in extortion and harassment of the public who had availed small amounts of loans



through the mobile apps being run by those Chinese national controlled entities/persons.

“The investigation by ED revealed the modus operandi of these entities wherein these entities were incorporated by appointing dummy directors on behalf of Chinese nationals, used to obtain KYC (know your customer) documents of company staff and appoint them as Directors of such entities and even opened bank accounts in their name, without their knowledge or prior consent,” the ED said in a

statement.

The agency said these entities are involved in illegal/criminal activities by submitting fake addresses in KYC documents and taking assistance from various professionals and other persons.

These entities have provided instant short-term loans to the public through loan apps and other means and charged high processing fees and exorbitant rates of interest and amounts were subsequently recovered from the public by these companies by way of threatening and causing mental torture to the borrowers of the loans over the phone as well as contacting their family members, relatives and friends asking for the money, it said.

NEW DELHI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL PALIKA KENDRA NEW DEHI HEALTH ESTABLISHMENT-II

Vacancy Circular

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) propose to fill up one (01) post Medical Officer of Health (MOH) on deputation basis in the pay scale Level-14 Matrix (Rs.144200-218200) under 7th CPC. The eligibility criteria and other terms and conditions for the post may be downloaded from NDMC website i.e. www.ndmc.gov.in

The last date of receipt of applications completed in all respect is 03.05.2023

Director (Personnel)

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B Nagar, (U.P.)
Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors / firms for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened / downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <https://etender.up.nic.in> Please ensure to see these website for any changes / amendments & corrigendum etc.

(1)	29/SPE/PE (PH-II)/ET/2022-23	Construction of Windows Composting 200 TDP in Village Astoli, Greater Noida	Rs. 4273727.88
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The above tenders can be uploaded from dated **31/03/2023 to 06/04/2023 upto 5.00 PM**. Pre-Qualification shall be opened / downloaded on dated **07/04/2023 at 11.00 AM**.

Dy. GM/Sr. Project Engineer (Public Health) Noida.

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

Face action if tribals found settled in elephant habitat, HC warns Kerala

PTI ■ KOCHI | IDUKKI

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday warned the State of strict action if it found that the area in Idukki district where a wild tusker, ‘Arikomban’, was roaming had been an elephant habitat before tribal people were resettled there.

A Bench of Justices A K Jayasankaran Nambiar and Gopinath P called for records and reports on the resettlement of tribal people in the area back in 2000 and said, “If it was an elephant habitat, you had no business resettling people there and putting them



in danger.”

The court said that resettling people in an elephant habitat was the “root of the entire problem.”

“We will examine it. If it was an elephant habitat, then your policy makers went way off board. If people were resettled there despite being aware of this fact, we will come down heavily on those responsible.

“Errors in history can be corrected later in time. We need to find whether the mistake happened and if yes, correct it,” the bench added.

The court, however, declined to issue any direction in the interim for capture and captivity of the elephant, Arikomban, so named as it raids ration shops and houses for rice.

Instead, the bench said it would constitute a five-member committee which would decide whether to capture the wild bull elephant and turn it into a captive tusker or relocate it to interior areas of the forest.

Good start

Joint Cyber Crime Coordination Teams must ensure that online felons get convicted fast

Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jamtara, Mewat and Visakhapatnam are spread all over the country, but what they have in common is a thriving cottage industry — of cyber crime. The Central Government has set up seven Joint Cyber Crime Coordination Teams for these cyber-crime hotspots. But the above-mentioned seven towns and cities are not the only ones where online criminals are operating from. As a report in The Pioneer said, over three dozen towns and villages in nine States, from Delhi to Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat to Assam, have become cyber crime hotspots which are being closely monitored by law enforcement agencies. In a bid to cripple India's financial system and national security grid, hostile countries have also joined in the fun. Unsurprisingly, the foreign cyber attackers mostly belong to countries like China, Pakistan and Türkiye. It is a well-known fact that cyber crooks have been stealing money from people by deploying a variety of ruses — luring unsuspecting victims into accepting 'lottery' money, extracting credit or debit card details on some pretext or the other, making lucrative offers, etc. There have also been crackdowns on cyber felons, but the need for coordination was often felt by the authorities. The reason is simple: since online connectivity is not restricted by police jurisdictions, it becomes very difficult

for cops in, say, Delhi investigating an online theft to catch the culprit in Jamtara in Jharkhand. Jamtara has come to symbolise a cyber crime hotspot because of a web series made on it.

The Centre's worry is that new hotspots have begun to emerge. It is not that no coordinated effort was made in the past. In 2020, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, came into being. In the last few years, however, several more cyber crime hubs have emerged. The number and kind of victims have also multiplied manifold; it is no longer uneducated or less informed people who have fallen prey to the online pirates; even highly educated and reasonably tech-savvy persons have lost their money. Therefore, a properly coordinated endeavour at the national level was the need of the hour. A couple of points need to be made here. First, the Government and other authorities concerned should also sensitise ordinary people about the perils and types of cyber crime. As soon as a trick by cyber felons is detected, people should be informed about it. Second, the long arm of the law should not just reach the criminals but also reach fast, so that they are not deprived of the chance to fleece more innocents. Third, the joint teams must ensure that the guilty get convicted; a high conviction rate would be a big deterrent. And, finally, the Centre and States may consider the possibility of special courts to try online felons. After all, most of their victims are common people who suffer badly.



Artists dressed as Hindu deities participate in a procession on 'Ashtami', in 'Chaitra Navratri' festival, in Kanpur

The makeover of the heritage state

Odisha, the state known for its mineral reserves, is now making headlines for its development and promoting its rich cultural heritage

Odisha, also known as the "soul of India," is home to a rich cultural heritage that dates back thousands of years. The land of Odisha has witnessed the rise and fall of many empires, the invasion of foreign powers, and the birth of great religious movements. All of these events have left a lasting impression on the culture and traditions of the state.

Of late a clear push to upgrade its infrastructure is changing the landscape of the state. One of the major developments in the state is the improvement in infrastructure. The state government has undertaken several projects to improve connectivity within the state and with neighbouring states. The state has seen the construction of new highways, railway lines, airports, and seaports. The development of the Jharsuguda airport as an international airport and the expansion of the Paradip port are examples of this.

Another area where Odisha has witnessed development is in the industrial sector. The state government



has taken several initiatives to attract investments in various sectors such as steel, power, and tourism. The state has also implemented several policies to promote ease of doing business, such as the single window clearance system. The state has also introduced several incentives and subsidies to encourage entrepreneurs to set up their businesses in the state. The government of Odisha has also focused on the development of the tourism sector. The state has a rich cultural heritage and is home to several historical sites, temples, and natural wonders.

The history of Odisha can be traced back to the 3rd century BC when it was ruled

by the Kalinga dynasty. The state is home to some of the most impressive architectural wonders of India, including the Sun Temple of Konark, the Jagannath Temple in Puri, and the Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar. These temples are not just religious centres but also showcase the unique art and architecture of the region.

The Odia language, which is the official language of the state, has a rich literary heritage. It has been the language of great poets and writers like Sarala Das, Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja, Fakir Mohan Senapati, and many others. Odissi, the classical dance form of Odisha, is also known for its grace and beauty. It has been recognized as one of the eight classical dance forms of India.

The state is also known for its exquisite handicrafts like Pattachitra, which is a traditional form of painting on cloth. The state is also famous for its silver filigree work, stone carving, and handloom textiles. The beaches of Puri, Konark, and Gopalpur are also major attractions for tourists from all over the world.



PRABHA GUPTA

In order to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Odisha, the state government organizes Odisha Parba, an annual festival that takes place in New Delhi. The festival is a celebration of the food, art, culture, and traditions of Odisha. The festival provides a platform for artists, performers, and artisans to showcase their talent and skills to a wider audience. Beautiful handicrafts from different districts of the state, such as Silver Filigree from Cuttack, artistic Pattachitra paintings, several amazing jute products, and brass products are attracting all the avid shoppers. Apart from handicrafts, Odisha's unique handlooms are also available for handloom lovers.

The Odisha Parba festival is an excellent opportunity for people from all over the country to experience the rich cultural heritage of Odisha. It is a celebration of the diversity and beauty of India's culture and traditions. The festival also helps to promote tourism in Odisha, which has a lot to offer to visitors.

(The writer is a business consultant and development writer)

Don't push the divisive narrative

The 'Cutting South' conclave, with its avowed mission of separating South India from the North, is being supported by the coalition in power in Kerala

At a time when the world is reeling under the threat of war — which, if not handled with restraint and pragmatism by stakeholders, could become a world war — as the chairman of the G20, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave the call of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in tune with Bharat's ethos. As Bharat's statue is on the rise, forces inimical to its interests are working together to launch an onslaught to stop its progress. Although this is not new, recent efforts are more organized and well-funded. Controversial US billionaire George Soros — whom external affairs minister S Jaishankar described as an 'old, opinionated and dangerous person' — has pledged \$1 billion to fight emerging nationalist tendencies in countries like Bharat. He bankrolls divisive forces, media outlets, and civil society organizations to build narratives of separatism. He churns out atrocity literature and trigger social schism. A businessman who benefited from the economy's destruction is believed to have attempted the same destructive tactics in Bharat. However, he failed thanks to its robust economic fundamentals.

The 'Cutting South' media conclave, organized by some pro-Islamist, pro-Left media and propaganda outlets such as Kerala Union of Working Journalists, The News Minute, News laundry, Confluence media and some funders from Canada should be viewed from this perspective. The conclave was happening at a time when India is gearing up to organize various events for G20. A few days ago, on the eve of a G20-connected event in Punjab, Pakistan-funded Khalistani elements created a ruckus vitiating the atmosphere. Their agenda was to show that Bharat under the Modi dispensation is in utter chaos and persecuted groups demand separation from the nation.

It is not a mere coincidence that around the same time, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi gave speeches in the UK. In these speeches, he called upon foreign leaders to intervene in domestic affairs 'to save democracy' in Bharat. Although all



these events may appear unconnected, the message and narrative sent across are dangerous, to say the least.

SINISTER DESIGNS

The most worrying aspect of the 'Cutting South' conclave, with its avowed mission of separating South India from the North, is that the coalition in power in Kerala has not only given it moral support but also men and material. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and some of his senior colleagues and Congress leader VD Satheesan attended the event. The organisers tried to trap BJP leaders by hard-selling the event as a Global Media Festival. Fortunately, BJP leaders and several well-meaning journalists refused to participate.

The event was organised to give ideological inputs and impetus to the agenda of anti-India forces, including the banned Popular Front of India (PFI) of dividing Bharat and promoting secessionism. Reports of the NIA chargesheet on PFI's 'Vision' of creating an Islamic country in Bharat by 2047 should be seen from this perspective. PFI,

PFI HAD MANAGED TO BUILD A COMMON CAUSE WITH SECESSIONIST FORCES, MAOISTS AND URBAN NAXALS WHICH WAS EVIDENT DURING THE ANTI-CAA PROTEST

according to the chargesheet, planned to enhance jihadi capacities in the South to turn it into a hub of Islamic terror activities. This was so that in the event of an attack from Pakistan, its cadres could attack the Indian Army, making our country vulnerable.

The chargesheet also mentioned how PFI promoted and funded divisive forces to widen fault lines in Hindu society. Dubious journalist Siddique Kappan, an associate of PFI, is facing trial in a UAPA case for creating social tension in Uttar Pradesh. When Kappan was lodged in jail, the conclave organizers were pushing fake and pro-PFI narratives through their media outlets.

PFI had managed to build a common cause with secessionist forces, Maoists and urban Naxals which was evident during the anti-CAA protest. Khalistani elements provided funds and logistical support to the Shaheen Bagh protests. Former JNU students instigated Islamists to cut Assam and North East from the mainland using crowds and violence.

In this context, it should be

mentioned that the preparations for the conclave had started much before the ban on PFI. The conclave's social media page had a distorted Bharat map. The Chief Minister and organisers pulled wool over people's eyes by saying that the conclave was an event to "celebrate pro-people journalism" in the Global South. If this were the case, why would it be necessary to separate South India from the North? The whole of Bharat is part of the Global South — not a truncated Bharat.

Already efforts to drive a wedge between communities are underway in South Indian states. The recent incidents in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu triggered by language chauvinists are part of the larger scheme. Sharjeel Imam who advocated Bharat splitting is languishing in jail. In contrast, those who called for the vivisection of the South enjoy political parties. It is high time the Centre turned its gaze on the South to prevent such outfits from pursuing their divisive agenda.

(The author is the national convener of Prajna Pravah, an RSS-inspired organisation)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Delay the Wayanad bye-election



The election commission should avoid holding the bye-election in the Wayanad parliamentary constituency which fell vacant as per the notification issued by the Lok Sabha secretariat due to a sentence of two years to Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case under sections 499 and 500 CrPC.

Rahul Gandhi was granted bail immediately for 30 days to appeal to a higher court. So the election commission should wait for 30 days to declare the bye-election in Wayanad otherwise it will be treated as a hasty step as the election commissioner appointment was made at electric speed. To maintain the sanctity of the election commission it is expected that the by-

election to Wayanad would not be declared along with the dates for assembly elections of Karnataka. In another case of the MP of Lakshadweep is also pending before the supreme court which is of a somewhat similar case of Rahul Gandhi the case has been filed for violation of fundamental rules whereas the supreme court had mentioned that it is not covered under violation of fundamental rights and quote below the contents of discussion in the supreme court?

Is the right to represent a constituency a fundamental right? The Supreme Court asked on Tuesday while considering a petition filed before it and court had said that it will cover under Constitution section 226 and it should be filed before the high court As the discussion is in progress so the conclusion is still awaited. The Supreme court had delivered the judgment for the appointment of a commissioner and to avoid any further irritation the election commission should not declare the date of Wynard's bye-election.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

in Hamilton in Ontario on March 23. Khalistani backers attack Indian installations and temples on the rise. Starting in 2023, a string of attacks was unleashed upon Hindu temples across Canada. These attacks included close to half-a-dozen incidents of vandalism, spiteful graffiti, break-ins and burglaries. In July last year, the statue of Mahatma Gandhi located at the Vishnu Mandir in Richmond Hill in the Greater Toronto Area was vandalized and defaced with graphic words.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

HATRED AGAINST INDIA

Sir — Hatred against India is increasing alarmingly in various foreign countries as another statue of Mahatma Gandhi was vandalized at a university campus in Burnaby, Canada, the Consulate General of India in Vancouver announced on Tuesday, just days after another statue was targeted in Ontario.

In the latest incident, the statue was placed in Peace Square at Simon Fraser University's Burnaby campus. The Canadian authorities must investigate the matter urgently and bring the perpetrators to justice swiftly.

The incident comes just after anti-India elements defaced and spray-painted a statue of Mahatma Gandhi near City Hall

CKR Nathan | Ghaziabad

tion from these sectors is a lack of regulatory practices such as environmental monitoring, guidelines, and best practices. This is in addition to a comprehensive fuel policy, regulatory enforcement, and poor policy implementation on the ground. As a result of the alarming increase in air and water pollution, regulators must act as an ombudsman.

For better compliance, SMEs should be educated in order to understand environmental laws and regulatory strategies. Additionally, ambient and stack-based monitoring should be made aware. SMEs should be trained for water audits for effective waste water management and for dissemination of waste management to decrease pollution.

Vijay Kumar HK | Raichur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE OF ANIMATION CAREERS IN DESIGNING

Skills and a keen eye for detail are at the core of animation and graphic design



Animation industry witnesses rapid growth. With the rising exposure to digital media and the ever-growing need for compelling visual content, animation has emerged as a widely used medium for storytelling, advertising, and entertainment. As a result, there is a high demand for skilled animators, and the industry is looking for the freshest talent. This makes an animation career an attractive option, with promising prospects for professional development and advancement. On the other hand, the graphic design sector has fallen into a slumber due to the emergence of do-it-yourself visual design tools and platforms like Canva and Adobe Spark. The launch of such apps has enabled individuals to create their own designs without professional graphic designers. Despite the enduring demand for graphic designers, the field is highly competitive, making it challenging to differentiate oneself in the industry.

Animation opens new doors for creativity and imagination. Animators are not restricted by reality when creating characters, environments, and worlds. Unlike graphic designers, they can breathe life into their concepts and convey stories through motion and sound. This adds emotion and depth to their work. Graphic design, on the other hand, is more focused on creating static designs to represent a brand identity. While graphic design certainly allows creativity, there are limitations to what can be achieved. Graphic designers must adhere to brand guidelines and design principles, which stifle creativity.



Animation provides a broader array of career options than graphic design. Animators can work in diverse industries such as film, television, video games, advertising, and education. In addition, they specialize in 2D animation, 3D animation, character design, and visual effects. This broad range of possibilities enables animators to explore different paths and discover a niche that matches their skills and interests. On the other hand, graphic designers typically work in advertising, branding, and marketing, with fewer options available in different industries like publishing and web design.

Animation is a collaborative industry that relies on teams of animators, writers, directors, and other artists working together to create engaging projects. This collaborative process fosters a diverse exchange of ideas and perspectives, leading to a refined and polished final product. On the other hand, while graphic design can also involve collaboration, it often requires working closely with individual clients or small teams. This nature of graphic design work can sometimes result in more isolated working conditions, which can challenge individuals who thrive on teamwork.

The art of animation can achieve worldwide popularity. As online streaming platforms and digital distribution channels continue to grow, animated content has the potential to reach audiences across the globe. This presents a significant opportunity for animators to make a substantial impact on a broader scale. They can also earn worldwide recognition for their creations. While graphic design also has a wide audience, its influence is often more local to specific regions or markets. A graphic designer specializing in creating brand identities for a particular industry may have a strong reputation in that field. However, their fame may not extend beyond it.

Animation is becoming a preferred career choice due to its growing industry and diverse opportunities. It allows for more creativity and collaboration, resulting in polished final products. Animators also have global recognition and impact. Overall, it is an attractive career for art and storytelling enthusiasts.

(The writer is Founder & CEO- iCubesWire)

NPAs should be decriminalised

NPA needs to be delinked from criminality and treated as part of the normal banking function

I was appointed as the Government director on the Board of Indian Bank in 1999, which had a negative net worth at the time. Had it not been a public sector bank, the regulator (Reserve Bank of India) would have recommended its closure.

Owing to the fact that the Government is the lender of last resort, public sector banks are allowed to function; they get the required capital support from time to time. It was during the same period that an expert committee of the Planning Commission, under an international expert who later became the RBI Governor, identified three banks as weak banks—Indian Bank, UCO Bank, and Punjab and Sind Bank — recommended their closure.

Despite the fact that it was not within the jurisdiction of the Planning Commission to have taken up such an exercise, recommendations of the expert committee hit the headlines and were discussed at various forums; these were seen as necessary to strengthen the Indian banking system. Even the Narasimham Committee, appointed by the Government for the banking sector, did not recommend such a closure of the so-called weak banks. The RBI and the Finance Ministry acted correctly by not examining the expert committee report and ignored it.

The Government has superseded the boards of weak banks to improve their performance. At that time, in Indian Bank there were only four directors — an RBI nominee, a Government nominee, a CMD, and an ED. A non-local CMD was also consciously appointed in these banks. The newly truncated Board has the specific task to revive the bank in a defined time frame. In the first meeting of the Board of Indian Bank, it was informed that the bank was not extending any credit due to high non-performing assets (NPAs) in its portfolio and the board was almost non-functional.

Bank loans are assets and deposits are liabilities. Banks cannot survive on liabilities. Narrow banking, earlier adopted and newly launched payment banks, have yet to prove effective. At the Board meeting, when asked about the NPA account not being settled, it was informed that most of the cases were referred to the CBI and were under investigation. So the bank was not doing anything, despite the fact that many of the cases were reportedly backed by substantial assets or performance securities. There was a fear on the part of the management to enforce these and realise the outstanding amounts.

At the second meeting of the Board, I mentioned that the CBI will look into criminal offences and will not be able to help recover the outstanding amount. The bank shall close and realise all NPA cases based on assets and security available. The CMD was reluctant and stated, “What will happen to my career? Will the CBI not object to this?” The RBI nominee did not oppose the proposal. The CMD was, however, later convinced that it will be the joint responsibility of the entire Board and she alone could not be held responsible for the decision of settlement.

It was emphasised that the bank's revival was closely dependent on addressing the bank's NPA. The government was also unlikely to provide capital support with such a high NPA. Fortunately, everyone in the Board agreed to the proposal. In the next six months in the bank management committee and Board, the only



GOVERNMENT CONTROL INFLUENCED THE BANKING SECTOR'S HEALTH AND CONTAINED THE ADOPTION OF CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTS TO MEET THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE EMERGING POPULATION

(Retd IAS, former CMD, CSC e-governance, Ministry of Information Technology)



agenda was approval of the settlement proposal of the NPA cases. All accounts, whether referred to the CBI or otherwise, were settled based on the security assets available in each case. The books were cleaned and the bank began lending again, while the Government provided capital infusion under a restructuring proposal.

The enthusiasm of the bank's officers and staff increased significantly and their commitment to the revival of Indian Bank was noticeable. A leading public sector bank in the country, Indian Bank is listed on stock exchanges. Its market cap is better than many other banks. Revival of Indian Bank is a case study, aptly elucidated by the ex-CMD in a book written by her.

During the Indian Bank revival period, the Government appointed an “oversight committee” of experts from outside (private sector) to guide the bank Board. In the first meeting the oversight committee had with the Board, they came up with suggestions to wind up operations in Singapore and sell some more assets of the bank. These suggestions were rejected outright by the Board.

The oversight committee complained to the RBI and the Finance Ministry about the lack of cooperation from the Board. I explained the views of the Board to the Ministry and the RBI; fortunately for the Bank, the oversight committee never again made suggestions to the Board.

The bank was once considered weak, fit for winding up, but now stands out as a shining example of a successful bank in India. As a result, NPAs can be viewed as an integral part of the banking sector and should not be considered criminality. In private banks, NPAs are manageable; they restructure, compromise, or write them off on time. In public sector banks, it is mandatory for banks to refer a case of NPAs to the vigilance department. This delays the settlement process; the underlying assets and securities get stripped due to this and the bank has to make full provisions (even if there are underlying assets).

NPAs are related to the economic growth cycle, technological changes, and regulatory considerations. Banks need to appreciate all these on a case-to-case basis and take a view regarding restructuring, compromise, settlement, etc. These conditions of referring cases to vigilance are unnecessary; they obstruct the bank in resolving the NPA issue in a timely manner. All decisions of this nature are made by the management committee, which includes the RBI and government nominee as well as the independent director. (RBI nominees are not appointed as of now).

The 1990s were a difficult decade for public sector banks. Nationalisation in 1969 and then in 1980 brought banks under the Government. The change in managerial character impacted their functioning. Many positive things

happened. Bank lending was linked to the Government vision of promoting an equitable society with access to credit; hitherto neglected sectors were categorized as “priority sectors.” Forty per cent of the total credit was mandated to be extended to priority sectors which included agriculture and MSME—the backbone of the Indian economy.

However, Government control influenced the banking sector's health and contained the adoption of cutting-edge technology and products to meet the aspirations of the emerging population. It was mainly after the emergence of private sector banks that provided quality service to customers that the public sector banks started to reform.

They adopted technology with greater focus on customer service. There is no doubt that the quality of officers and staff is very competent and capable in public sector institutions; the problem is with the lack of flexibility and incentives. Bank managements should be allowed to deal with NPAs; CBI and CVC should not become burdens for them.

Banks have their own vigilance departments which can address all such matters. NPAs in banks need to be delinked from criminality and treated as part of the normal banking function. Accountability must be defined at every stage of the loan.

It is time to provide a level-playing field to public sector banks.



How to treat and prevent bipolar disorder

March 30 is World Bipolar Day. Bipolar disorder can be treated and disability prevented in a lot of individuals

World Bipolar Day is observed on March 30 every year, on the birthday of Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh—one of the most influential artists in the history of Western art. His creativity was paralleled with his mental illness and he was posthumously diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

World Bipolar Day is an initiative by the International Society for Bipolar Disorders (ISBD) partnered with the International Bipolar Foundation (IBPF) and the Asian Network of Bipolar Disorders (ANBD).

Bipolar disorder dramatically affects mood and may result in episodes of depression and elation, which can affect one's health, productivity, and relationships. World Bipolar



(The writer is Consultant Neuropsychiatrist, at Apollo Multispecialty Hospitals, Kolkata)

Day educates and promotes the spread of information on bipolar disorder through international collaborative efforts.

WHAT IS BIPOLAR

Bipolar disorder, previously known as manic depression, is a severe mental disorder characterised by periods of depression and periods of abnormally elevated mood that last from days to weeks. If the elevated mood is severe or associated with psychosis, it is called mania; if it is less severe, it is called hypomania.

During mania, an individual behaves or feels abnormally energetic, happy or irritable, and they often make impulsive decisions with little regard for the consequences. There is usually also a reduced need for sleep during manic phases. During periods of depression,

the individual may experience crying and have a negative outlook on life and poor eye contact with others.

Commonly starting between 20-25 years, Bipolar disorder affects nearly 1 per cent of the global population. When it starts earlier in life, it's associated with worse outcomes.

The presence of this disorder in multiple family members, disrupted sleep patterns, alcohol/cannabis addiction, extreme stress and impaired daily schedule—all these can lead to bipolar disorder, though the exact cause is not yet known. Imbalance in neurotransmitter levels in the brain areas responsible for mood, energy, sleep and functioning as well as impaired nerve-to-nerve signalling in

these areas can all lead to bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder can be quite severe and disabling. The frequent swings between a 'manic' and 'depressive' phase are often undetected and considered to be a normal part of mood fluctuations. If untreated, this illness takes a heavy toll on social life, relationships and professional domains. With time, mood episodes tend to be more frequent and severe.

Irritability and restlessness can increase. During the 'high' phase (mania), an individual often does not admit or understand that he/she is ill and refuses treatment. The family needs to identify the signs and initiate treatment. Often, hospitalization may also be necessary to deal with

the acute episode. The risk of suicide is high; over a period of 20 years, 6 per cent of those with bipolar disorder died by suicide, while 30–40 per cent engaged in self-harm behaviours. Other mental health issues, such as anxiety disorders and substance use disorders, are commonly associated with bipolar disorder.

TREATMENT

Several medicines are used to treat bipolar disorder successfully and the treatment depends on the 'phase' of the illness (high or low). Certain medicines called mood stabilisers help the mood to remain stable and prevent the extreme fluctuations that happen in this illness (just like an inverter reduces voltage fluctuations). If there is more than one episode, medicines may

need to be continued for a long time, at times throughout life. Stopping medications without discussion with your doctor and simply for the fear of side effects or stigma, is extremely harmful and carries a huge risk of recurrence of this disorder.

Besides, various approaches to psychotherapy are helpful to prevent relapses in bipolar and maintain mood stability. They are best done by a qualified clinical psychologist in addition to the prescribed medicines.

Lifestyle changes are immensely important to keep this disorder at bay, especially regulating your sleep cycle, maintaining proper sleep hygiene and ensuring adequate night-time sleep. Daily exercises, yoga, avoiding alcohol and other addictions, proper

nutrition and stress management also help.

SPREADING THE WORD

Perhaps the most important is to identify the early signs of this disorder and seek professional help as early as possible. There is no stigma or shame in seeking help. The 'mania' or 'depression' episodes do not start in a day. Initially, the signs may be easy irritation, disturbed sleep, increased talking, overspending, change in behavioural patterns, reduced social interaction, problems in focusing, feeling or perceiving 'weird' sensations, etc. Family members should be on the watch for such symptoms in an individual with bipolar disorder and seek prompt help in case these appear. This prevents a mood episode from escalating further.

Pak NA adopts bill to curtail powers of CJ

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's National Assembly on Wednesday adopted a bill aimed at curtailing the discretionary powers of the chief justice, a day after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that "history would not forgive us" if parliament did not enact laws to curtail the powers of the country's top judge. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar presented 'The Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act, 2023' in parliament on Tuesday night, which was approved by the Cabinet earlier in the evening.

"The National Assembly passes 'The Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill, 2023,' the lower house announced in a tweet.

The development comes two days after two Supreme Court judges questioned the suo motu (on its own) powers of the country's top judge.

"It is being said that a constitutional amendment should be made," Tarar said. "I want them to know there is no need for a constitutional amendment." North Waziristan lawmaker Mohsin Dawar introduced amendments which were accepted.

Earlier in the day, the Standing Committee on Law and Justice approved the cabinet's proposed amendments.

Additional amendments included

Imran Khan: CJP powers taken to put pressure on judiciary

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf chairman Imran Khan has lashed out at the federal government for trying to clip the discretionary powers of the country's chief justice, asserting that the move was aimed at putting more pressure on the judiciary. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar presented "The Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act, 2023" on Tuesday, after a suo motu notice taken by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial on February 22 on elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces "Every one of us wants judicial reforms.

But, their [the PDM parties'] only goal is to escape from the election," Geo TV quoted the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief as saying in a televised address on Tuesday. "The attack on the Supreme Court of Pakistan by the gang of criminals, the attempts to reduce its powers and degrade it, is being strongly resisted by the people and this resistance will continue," Khan tweeted. Khan, 70, said the current dispensation took the decision in a hurry, only to put pressure on the judiciary, the report said. The suo motu (on its own) power is based on

the original jurisdiction of the court under Article 184 of the Constitution. However, its usage over the years has created an impression of partiality on the part of the Chief Justice.

It was openly challenged for the first time by the two judges who were part of a bench which, in its 3-2 majority decision of March 1, directed the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to consult with President Arif Alvi for polls in Punjab and Governor Gulam Ali for elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The five-member bench was reconstituted by Bandial, who took a suo motu action against the delay in elections and initially formed a nine-member bench to deal with the issue. However, two of the nine judges differed with the decision to take suo motu notice, while two other judges recused themselves, prompting the Chief Justice to form a new bench.

Justice Shah and Justice Mandokhail, in their detailed 28-page dissenting note, rejected this judgment in the suo motu case and lambasted the Chief Justice's power to form a bench for important cases.

the right to appeal against the suo motu verdicts taken up to 30 days before the passing of the Lawyers' Protection Act were included in the bill along with the amendment that any case that involves interpreting the Constitution will not have a bench with fewer than five judges.

Dawn newspaper reported. Regarding suo motu powers, the draft states that any matter invoking the exercise of original jurisdiction under Article 184 (3) shall be first placed before the committee of three senior-most judges."

If the Committee is of the view that a question of public importance with reference to the enforcement of any of the fundamental rights conferred by Chapter I of Part II of the Constitution is involved, it shall constitute a bench comprising not less than three judges of the Supreme Court of Pakistan which may also include the members of the Committee, for adjudication of the matter," it adds.

The legislation also allows appeals within 30 days of a verdict being issued on a suo motu case and enforces that a bench be constituted to hear such an appeal within 14 days. The bill as presented aimed to reduce the discretionary powers of the chief justice to take suo motu action and also set up benches for hearings of cases.

'No talks with Khan unless he apologises'

Islamabad (PTI): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ruled out any talks between the government and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan unless the former premier admits his wrongdoings and issues a public apology.

While addressing the National Assembly on Tuesday, prime minister Sharif criticised Khan by calling him a "fraud" and said it is impossible to talk to someone who "looted the country, attacked the judiciary and did not believe in the Constitution and justice", Geo News reported.

The joint session of parliament was summoned last week to discuss the key issues confronting Pakistan and provide guidelines to deal with those issues. "I believe no discussions can be held with a person who consistently and condescendingly rejects invitations for talks on everything - be it COVID-19, the state of terrorism in the country, the apex committee meeting or the Kashmir conference," Sharif was quoted as saying. Referring to the recent fiasco witnessed during the court proceed-



ing of the PTI chief, Sharif said that a certain "favourite" does not appear before any court, no matter how many notices have been issued to him, it said.

"He gets an extension in different courts in the dark of the night and makes a mockery of the judiciary," Sharif said, criticising Khan for his remarks against a sitting woman judge and the fact that no action has been taken in this case so far. "Khan made false cases against the opposition when he was in government and signed an agreement with the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and violated it," the premier said while listing the wrongdoings of the former PTI government.

NBW against ex-Pak PM in woman judge threat case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A court in Pakistan on Wednesday issued non-bailable arrest warrants for former prime minister Imran Khan in a case related to alleged threats made to a woman judge. Islamabad-based judicial magistrate Malik Aman presiding over the hearing rejected a plea by Khan's counsel to grant him exemption from in-person appearance.

He also rejected a plea by Khan's lawyer to allow the former prime minister to appear on March 30 when the prosecution lawyer opposed the move by saying that he should have appeared by the deadline of the arrest warrants.

The judge issued non-bailable arrest warrants against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf chief and directed the authorities to present him before the court on April 18.

At the last hearing on March 24, the court converted the non-bailable arrest warrant issued for Khan into a bailable warrant. He was supposed to appear by March 29 but failed to come to the court.

Earlier, Senior Civil Judge Rana Mujahid Rahim had on March 13 issued the non-bailable arrest warrants against him in the case. The case is based on a speech by Khan in August last year, using threatening language against Additional District and Sessions Judge Zeba Chaudhry and the Islamabad police officials. Khan was booked under various sections of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA). Besides, Islamabad High Court (IHC) also initiated contempt of court proceedings against him. Later the terrorism charges were dropped.

The former prime minister has been facing dozens of cases registered against him in various cities after his ouster from power in April last year.

Ex-Starbucks CEO to defend union opp before Senate

New York (AP): Longtime Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz will face sharp questioning Wednesday when he appears before the Senate Health, Education, Labour and Pensions Committee to defend the company's actions during an ongoing unionising campaign. U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont Independent who has been a vocal supporter of Starbucks labour organisers, has been seeking Schultz's testimony for months.

Schultz had tried to sidestep the hearing, suggesting that others in the company were more deeply involved in the union effort, which Starbucks opposes. But Sanders had argued that Schultz — a longtime leader who stepped down as interim CEO last week but remains on the company's board — was instrumental in setting the company's policies.

Bill to reform H-1B, L-1 visa programme introduced

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A group of influential lawmakers have introduced a bipartisan legislation in the US Senate to comprehensively overhaul the H-1B and L-1 visa programmes and usher in more transparency in the recruitment of foreign workers.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The L-1 is the other type of work visa the US issues to professionals looking to work in the country. Unlike the

H-1B, where an individual is looking to join an American company, the L-1 visa is issued to those who are already employed by the company in another country, and who are merely relocating to an American office. Two influential Senators — Dick Durbin and Chuck Grassley — have introduced this legislation in the US Senate.

The co-sponsors include Senators Tommy Tuberville, Bernie Sanders, Sherrod Brown, and Richard Blumenthal.

The H-1B and L-1 Visa Reform Act will reduce fraud and abuse in the immigration system, provide protections for American workers and visa holders, and require more transparency in the recruitment of foreign workers, a media release said on Tuesday.

11 killed while collecting free flour

Lahore (PTI): At least 11 people, including women, have died while trying to get free flour from government distribution outlets in Pakistan's Punjab province in recent days, authorities said. The deaths were reported after several people flocked to the government distribution points after the cash-strapped Pakistani government introduced a free flour scheme for the poor, especially in Punjab province, to beat the skyrocketing inflation.

The scheme aims to counter the rising popularity of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan. Two elderly women and a man died on Tuesday, while 60 others suf-



fered injuries in stampedes at free flour centres in four districts -- Sahiwal, Bahawalpur, Muzaffargarh and Okara -- of south Punjab. The other districts where deaths were reported are Faisalabad, Jehanian and Multan. Police have been blamed for causing mayhem at the centres by manhandling and baton-charging the citizens waiting in long queues to

get free flour. Security forces also resorted to a heavy-handed approach following the looting of free flour trucks in the Muzaffargarh and Rahim Yar Khan cities. Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi announced on Wednesday the opening of free flour centres at 6 am throughout the province to reduce overcrowding and inconvenience for citizens.

Sweden summons Russian envoy

Copenhagen: Sweden's Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's ambassador Wednesday after Moscow's diplomatic mission in Stockholm said the Scandinavian country would become a "legitimate target for Russia's retaliatory measures" if it joined NATO.

Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom called the statement posted on the Russian Embassy's website an "obvious attempt at influence." Sweden's security policy is determined by its government and no one else, he told Swedish news agency TT. It's unclear if or when the Russian ambassador will appear at the Foreign Ministry.

Sweden and neighbouring Finland jointly applied for NATO membership in May 2022, abandoning decades of non-alignment in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Approval of Sweden's bid has stalled due to opposition from Turkey and Hungary.

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Ruling parties in Nepal agree on power sharing

Kathmandu (PTI): Nepal's ruling coalition on Wednesday agreed on a power-sharing deal, paving the way for Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' to expand his Cabinet. The top leaders of the ten ruling parties held two rounds of meetings at the Prime Minister's official residence at Baluwatar to reach an agreement on the distribution of ministries among various political parties. Prachanda is likely to expand his Cabinet on Thursday following the deal. Power sharing and the distribution of ministerial portfolios had been major bottlenecks among the members of the ruling alliance as the demand for Cabinet posts was exceeding the number of ministries available, according to political observers.

Prime Minister Prachanda, Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba, and CPN-Unified Socialist president Madhav Kumar Nepal among others were present during the meeting.

"An agreement has been reached among the top leaders of the ten ruling parties in principle over the distribution of ministries," according to sources close to the Prime Minister.

The ruling parties have also agreed on the common minimum programme presented by Prime Minister Prachanda, the sources said.

Among the ten parties, which took part in the talks on Wednesday, nine are likely to join the council of ministers.

'US committed to protecting diplomatic missions, diplomat'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US is committed to taking all appropriate steps to protect the diplomatic missions and diplomats in this country, a senior US official has said, days after two Indian missions in America were attacked by Khalistan supporters.

At a news conference on Tuesday, US State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel condemned the incidents of violence at Indian diplomatic facilities in the United States, saying violence is never an acceptable form of protest.

Consistent with our Vienna Convention obligations, the department is committed to taking all appropriate steps, including coordination with federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities, to protect the safety and security of these facilities and the diplomatic individuals who work within them as well," he said. Patel was responding to a question on violent protests outside the Indian Embassy in Washington DC and vandalism of the Indian consulate in San Francisco.

Last week, a group of Khalistan supporters held a protest in front of the Indian

Embassy here and tried to incite violence and even threatened the country's envoy, but timely intervention by law enforcement agencies prevented them from vandalising the property.

A few days earlier, pro-Khalistan protesters attacked the Indian consulate in San Francisco. India registered its "strong protest" with the US Charge d'Affaires in New Delhi over the incident and asked the American government to take appropriate measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

"We condemn the recent violent incidents that have taken place during protests at Indian diplomatic facilities in the United States.

We support the First Amendment rights of protesters and engagement in free speech activities. However, violence or the threat of violence is never an acceptable form of protest," Patel said.

"Attacks against journalists are never acceptable and we condemn any incidents of violence against a member of the media just doing their job and any act of violence or vandalism against a diplomatic facility as well," he said.

BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES FARIDKOT

Vacancies BFU-23/3

Online applications are invited **w.e.f 31/03/2023 to 13/04/2023** from eligible candidates through University website i.e **www.bfufs.ac.in** for various posts i.e Research Scientist (Medical) under VRDL and Research Scientist-II, Research Scientist-I, Data Entry Operator under MRU Lab at Govt. Medical Colleges, Patiala/Amritsar under Deptt. of Medical Education & Research, Govt. of Punjab. For Eligibility, terms & conditions & other information visit university website i.e **www.bfufs.ac.in**

REGISTRAR

NIL/12/76/2022/22629 Dated CHD: 3/29/2023

GUJARAT WATER SUPPLY & SEWERAGE BOARD.

SECTOR-10/A, GANDHINAGAR

BRIEF SHORT NOTICE INVITING ONLINE TENDER FOR FIXING RATE CONTRACT FOR SUPPLY OF GUN METAL/COPPER ALLOY AND CAST IRON FLOAT VALVES FOR THE YEAR 2023

GWSSB invites online tender through e-tendering for Manufacture, Supply & Delivery of Gun Metal/Copper Alloy and Cast Iron Float Valves (65 to 200mm Dia.) only from Indian Manufacturers. Interested bidder who wishes to participate in above tender may view the detailed tender notice & down load the Tender documents at free of cost from website. <https://www.nprocure.com>

The last date of submission of online tender is **19-04-2023**

No/INF/VPN/2023/G/2794

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.

(Regd. Office PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala)

Corporate Identification No. U40109PB2010SGC033813

website: www.pspcl.in Mobile No.96461-55525

E-Tender Enq. NO.445/P-3/EMP-12133 Dated 27-03-23

Dy. Chief Engineer / Headquarter (Procurement Cell-1) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-Tender ID No.2023_POWER_99929_1 for work of Re-conditioning of CW Chlorination Plants of Stage-II & III, GGSSTP. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from **28-03-2023 / 5.00 PM** onwards.

Note: Corrigendum & addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

76155/12/1514/2022/22588 **RTP-34/23**

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Engineering Department

Tender Notice

Tender Reference No.GNDU/ENGG/2023/03/01-06

The Engineering Department of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar invites online bids for 5 different types of Civil works and 1 for supply of 20000 bag of cement.

Closing Date & Time: 12-04-2023 upto 4.00 p.m.

For details log onto www.eproc.punjab.gov.in

Note: Any Corrigendum/Addendum to the tender notice shall be published on the above website only.

Incharge Division-1

Engineering Department

Guru Nanak Dev University

Amritsar.

NA/12/15411/2022/22617 Dated CHD: 3/29/2023

G20

Government of Jammu & Kashmir

DIRECTORATE OF FLORICULTURE (G&P) DEPARTMENT KASHMIR

Tel-0194-2474234 Fax -2482032 -email- kashflori@rediffmail.com

GIST of e- Tender Notice No. 37 of 2023

Dated:- 28/03/2023

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of J&K UT, e-tender is invited from interested bidders for Outsourcing of Entry Ticketing system of Nehru Memorial Botanical Garden Cheshmashahi, Srinagar of Floriculture Department Kashmir as per details given below:-

The bidders have to quote their bid amount in the concerned BOQ:-

S. No.	Period of contract	Reserve Bid	Value of security deposit @ 10% of Reserve bid	Cost of tender document
1.	(01) One year from the date of award of contract	Rs.55,14,000.00	Rs.5,51,400.00	Rs.1000.00 in the shape of e-challan

The bidding document(s) consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, terms and conditions and other details can be seen/downloaded through the Departmental website www.dofkashmir.com/www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of date given below:-

1.	Period of downloading of bidding document	28.03.2023 from 03:30 PM to 15.04.2023 up to 02:00 PM
2.	Bid submission Start Date	28.03.2023 from 04:30 PM
3.	Bid submission End date	15.04.2023 up to 02:00 PM
4.	Date and time of Opening of Tenders (Online)	17.04.2023 at 02:00 PM

In case of any eventuality, the date of opening will be considered on any other convenient working day.

No:DIPK-18975/22
Date: 28.03.2023

Sd/-
Accounts Officer,
Member Secretary

G20

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work:

1	Name of Work with its Location	"Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & commissioning of 25Kv ac OHE in connection with "Provision of Brake Van reversal siding at Asthal Bohar station to avoid involvement of running lines"
2	Approx. Cost of Work	Rs. 2396852.26 /-
3	Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 47900.00
4	E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	14.04.2023
5	E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	28.04.2023 (15.00 Hrs.)
6	Fund Allocation	PH-16
7	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

E-Tender No.: 40-TRD-NDLS-2022-23 Date : 28.03.2023 **950/23**

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

G20

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

N.I.T. No.	47A-22-23-W-2 Dated 28.03.2023.	
1	Name of work with its location	
A)	Augmentation/Up gradation of LC civil infrastructure works in the section of SSEW/SMQL under ADEN/SMQL	
2	Approx. Cost of work NIT - 47A-22-23-W-2	As per IREPS Notice
3	Earnest Money NIT - 47A-22-23-W-2	As per IREPS Notice
4	Completion period of Work NIT - 47A-22-23-W-2	As per IREPS Notice
5	Cost of tender on cash/by post NIT - 47A-22-23-W-2	As per IREPS Notice
6	Date and time for submission of tender and opening of tender	07.04.2023 to 21.04.2023 upto 15:00 hrs Opening of tender 21.04.2023 at 15:00 hrs.
7	Similar nature of Work NIT - 47A-22-23-W-2	As per IREPS Notice
8	Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can ased etc.	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in

NIT - 47A-22-23-W-2 Dated: 28.03.2023. **947/2023**

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Office of the Superintending Engineer

1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora

Phone/Fax: 05962-230295 Email: sepwdalm@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 1470(i)/ Nivida-01/2022-23 **Dated : 23/03/2023**

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (E-Tendering)

Short Term E-TENDER NOTICE

The Superintending Engineer, 1st Circle, PWD Almora invites tender through **E-Tendering (Two Bid System)** on behalf of Honourable Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from dated 27/03/2023 & onwards on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Cost of Tender Form	Earnest Money (Rupee in lakh)	Validity of Tender	Time of Completion	Contractor's Category of Registration for tendering
1	Renewal work by SDBC under Annual Maintenance 2023-24 of Kathgodam (Ranibagh) - Bhimtal-Khutani - Padampuri - Dhanachuli - Paharpani - Saharfatak - Mornoula - Devidhura - Lohaghat - Panchweshwar Motor Road Km. 70 to 71, Km. 73 to 77 and Km. 81 to 82 in Jageshwar Constituency under District Almora.	₹ 5000.00 + 18% GST	₹ 4.02 Lakh	60 Days	06 Months (Including Raining /Winter season)	Class "A" & Higher in Road Work in Central Govt./Any State Govt. /Any Govt. Undertaking

The tenders of qualifying eligibility criteria, consisting of general and commercial terms and conditions of contract and other details can be viewed/downloaded from the website www.iktenders.gov.in

The bids shall be submitted in electronic format on the website www.iktenders.gov.in. The bids uploaded on the website up to due date and time, will be opened on the time and date (given in the broadband information), in the office of the Chief Engineer Jal Shakti Kashmir PHE Deptt. Srinagar in presence of all the bidders who wish to be present. In case offices happen to be closed due to a holiday, or any other reasons, on the schedule date of opening, the bids will be opened on the next working day at the scheduled time and venue or on any day convenient/feasible to the tender opening committee/authority of the Department.

THE COMPLETE BIDDING SHALL BE ONLINE IN TWO COVER SYSTEM:

The Cover 1st of bids shall be opened online in the office of the Chief Engineer, Jal Shakti Kashmir PHE Deptt. Srinagar on the time and date given in the broadband information of tender or any other date and time convenient to Chief Engineer, Jal Shakti Kashmir PHE Deptt. Srinagar.

The date and time of opening of 2nd cover i.e., Financial bids shall be notified separately. The Financial bids of qualified bidders shall be opened online on same website in the office of Chief Engineer, Kashmir PHE, Jal Shakti Deptt. Srinagar.

The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of **180 days** from opening of the Price Bid

INSTRUCTION TO BIDDERS REGARDING E-TENDERING PROCESS:

- The interested bidder can download the NIT/bidding document from the website <http://www.iktenders.gov.in>
- To participate in bidding process, bidders have to get (DSC) "Digital Signature Certificate" as per Information Technology Act-2000, to participate in online bidding. This certificate will be required for digitally signing the bid. Bidders can get above mentioned digital certificate from any approved vendor. The Bidders, who already possess valid (DSC) Digital Signature Certificates, need not to procure new Digital Signature Certificate.
- The bidders have to submit their bids online in electronic format with Digital Signature. The bids cannot be uploaded without Digital Signature. No Proposal will be accepted in physical form.
- Bids will be opened online as per time schedule.
- Before submission of online bids, bidders must ensure that scanned copies of all the necessary documents have been attached with bid.
- The department will not be responsible for delay in online submission of bids whatsoever reasons may be.
- All the required information bids to bid will be filled and submitted online.
- The details of cost of documents, EMD specified in the tender documents should be the same, as submitted online (scanned copies) otherwise bid will not be accepted.
- Bidders can contact the undersigned for any guidance for getting DSC or any other relevant details in respect of e-tendering process.
- Bidders are advised to use "My Documents" area in their user account www.iktenders.gov.in, e-tendering portal to store important documents like Experience certificate, Balance sheet, VAT Certificate, sales Tax Clearance Certificate and other related documents etc., and attach these certificates with Non-Statutory documents while submitting the bid.
- Bidders are advised not to make any change in BOB (Bill of Quantities) contents or its name. In no case they should attempt to create similar BOB manually. The BOQ downloaded should be used for filling the net item rate inclusive of all taxes and it should be saved with the same as it contains.
- Bidders are advised to scan their documents at 100 DPI (Dots per inch) resolutions with Black and White, JPEG Scan properly, convert scanned images to PDF.

The guidelines for submission of bid online can be downloaded from the website <http://www.iktenders.gov.in>

As per JK Finance Department Order No. - A/24(2017)-651, Dated:- 07-08-2018, furnishing of hard copies of bids immediately after submission of e-tenders is dispensed with. Hence the hardcopies need not to be submitted. The hardcopies along with EMD shall be obtained from the bidder who is declared as 1st (lowest Bidder) for each of the item on tender as per BOQ evaluation after opening of financial bids).

1. Position of Funds:- The availability of funds shall be ensured before placement of Supply order.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Jal SHAKTI/Kashmir PHE (K)

Sebi to curb frauds by stock brokers

To soon put in place mechanism

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sebi on Wednesday said it will institute a formal mechanism for the prevention and detection of fraud or market abuse by stock brokers.

In this regard, amendments will be made to the stock brokers' regulations that will also provide for having a whistleblower policy as well as systems for surveillance of trading activities and internal controls.

Besides, the amended norms would provide for the obligations of the stock broker and its employees, and the provision for escalation and reporting mechanisms.

The approved amendments will come into effect from October 1, 2023, Sebi said in a release.

The proposal for instituting the mechanism was cleared by the board of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi)



at its meeting here on Wednesday.

Also, the regulator's board has in principle approved a proposal to regulate index providers to foster transparency and accountability in the governance and administration of financial benchmarks in the securities market.

In a move aimed at mitigating the credit risk on intermediaries and the risk of potential misuse of clients' funds, Sebi's board has given its nod for introducing a regulatory framework on upstreaming of clients' funds by stock brokers and non-bank

clearing members to clearing corporations.

"Under the approved framework, clients' funds shall be upstreamed by stock brokers/ non-bank clearing members to clearing corporations on the end of day basis, to ensure that client's funds are not retained by stock brokers/ non-bank clearing members.

"The funds shall be upstreamed only in the form of cash, a lien on fixed deposit receipts (subject to certain conditions), or pledge of units of mutual fund overnight schemes," the release said.

According to Sebi, the framework would not apply to bank-clearing members.

"The framework is proposed to be implemented with a glide path comprising two phases. Phase I of the framework is expected to be implemented from July 1, 2023," the release said.

Sensex rallies 346 pts, Nifty inches closer to 17,100 on global relief rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex settled higher by 346 points while Nifty inched closer to the 17,100 level in a volatile trade on Wednesday driven by foreign fund inflows and firm trends in global markets.

Buying in services, realty, commodities and auto stocks on the monthly expiry day also aided the momentum.

The 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 346.37 points or 0.60 per cent to close at 57,960.09. During the day, it jumped 510.48 points or 0.88 per cent to 58,124.20.

The broader NSE Nifty climbed 129 points or 0.76 per cent to end at 17,080.70.

Among the Sensex firms, HCL Technologies, Tata Motors, Hindustan Unilever, NTPC, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance and Mahindra & Mahindra were the major gainers.

Bharti Airtel, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and Asian Paints were the laggards.

Markets managed to gain nearly a per cent on the monthly expiry day amid excessive volatility, Ajit Mishra, VP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said, adding that a



sharp surge in the last half an hour helped barometers notch gains.

Global markets advanced on ebbing concerns that the global financial system might be cracking under the strain of interest rate hikes to cool inflation, analysts said.

"The home market is being impelled to stay non-sticky in both directions by the continuous instability in the international market. The domestic market's

favourable ending was supported by a significant upswing in both the US and European markets.

"This volatility is expected to continue until the global banking system gets fully recovered from the turmoil, along with a confirmation of the Fed's decision to pause rate hikes," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Global equities were mostly up on Wednesday as easing

concerns over the banking sector revived risk appetite, said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.68 per cent and midcap index jumped 1.67 per cent.

Among indices, services rallied 3.28 per cent, realty jumped 2.55 per cent, commodities (1.89 per cent), auto (1.74 per cent), industrials (1.66 per cent), metal (1.57 per cent) and capital goods (1.42 per cent).

Oil & Gas index was the only laggard, ending marginally lower.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Japan and Hong Kong ended in the green while Shanghai finished lower.

European markets were quoting in the positive territory during the afternoon trade. The US markets ended lower on Tuesday. Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude advanced 0.38 per cent to USD 78.95 per barrel.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net buyers on Wednesday as they bought equities worth Rs 1,245.39 crore, according to exchange data.

Markets would remain closed on Thursday for Ram Navami.



7 Adani Group stocks end higher; Adani Enterprises jumps nearly 9%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Out of the ten listed Adani Group stocks, seven ended in the positive territory on Wednesday, with Adani Enterprises rallying nearly 9 per cent.

Shares of Adani Enterprises jumped 8.75 per cent, the most among the group stocks on the BSE.

Adani Ports rallied 7.25 per cent, Adani Wilmar went up by 5 per cent, NDTV advanced by 4.99 per cent, Adani Power climbed 4.98 per cent, Ambuja Cements (1.52 per cent) and ACC (0.78 per cent).

However, the stock of Adani Green Energy fell 4.45 per cent, Adani Total Gas went lower by 4.28 per cent and Adani Transmission declined by 1.33 per cent.

In the equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 346.37 points or 0.60 per cent to finish at 57,960.09.

Shares of all the ten listed firms of Adani Group ended lower for the second day in a row on Tuesday, with Adani Enterprises tumbling 7 per cent.

The group stocks were down on Tuesday amid reports on debt payments not matching with pledged shares data.

Billionaire Gautam Adani-led promoter group has paid off all of the USD 2.15 billion loans taken pledging their shares in the conglomerate, and only debt at the operating company level remains, Adani Group said, seeking to assure investors of its ability to repay debt.

Adani Group in a statement termed reports of the group not completing repayment of USD 2.15 billion share-backed debt "baseless and deliberately mischievous".

"Adani has completed full prepayment of margin-linked share-backed financing aggregating to USD 2.15 billion (as was announced on March 12), and all corresponding shares pledged for those facilities have been released," it said.

While "all share-backed facilities availed by the promoters have been paid off", residual pledges pertain to debt taken by operating companies, it said.

The statement came after reports cited exchange filings showing banks not releasing a large portion of the promoters' shares held as collateral to suggest that the debt hasn't been fully paid off.

BRIEF



CHAMBER INDIA-GLOBAL SOUTH CENTRE LAUNCHED

New Delhi: The Chamber of Commerce, Sustainable Development and Foreign Relations, has announced the launch of the Chamber India-Global South Centre, taking forward the clarion call of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make India the voice of the Global South.



Malik Music Events CMD Sanjay Malik awarded with Big Impact Award 2023 by Dr Satinder Saraj & Rahul Sharma (Metro Market Head) at event hosted by Big FM 92.7

ABILYMPICS WINNERS FELICITATED

New Delhi: Social Justice and Empowerment Minister, Dr Virendra Kumar on Wednesday felicitated Abilympics medal winners of the Indian contingent. The felicitation ceremony was organised by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. It is for the first time the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has taken a decision to felicitate the abilympic winners.

3 PROJECTS TRANSFERRED TO POWERGRID

New Delhi: 'PFC Consulting Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Power Finance Corporation Limited, a Maharatna CPSE, has transferred three transmission projects (Special Purpose Vehicles) namely 'BhadlaSikar Transmission Limited', 'Dharamjaigarh Transmission Limited' & 'Raipur Pool Dharmtari Transmission Limited' to 'Power Grid Corporation Of India Limited', the successful bidder, on March 28, 2023.

OMFED TO INCREASE MILK PRICES

Bhubaneswar: In view of the rising input cost of farmers e.g feed and fodder prices, medicines & fuel costs as well as costs of packaging material, OMFED is compelled to raise its liquid milk prices by Rs 2/-per 500 ml with effect from April 1, 2023. The new prices will be applicable for all milk variants.



Lions Club organised mega free eye health checkup camp at A-Block Gurudwara, Tagore Garden, New Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The cumulative investment under the production-linked incentive scheme to boost mobile manufacturing has increased to Rs 5,124 crore till December from Rs 3,726 crore target set earlier for the current fiscal, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar in a written submission to the Lok Sabha shared that the cumulative investment target for the entire scheme period is Rs 7,000 crore.

The data shared by the minister shows that the government has set a target to achieve production of Rs 8.12 lakh crore under the five-year scheme period of the Production Linked

Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing (LSEM) to boost mobile phone manufacturing.

"Over the tenure of the PLI Scheme, the 16 approved companies are expected to lead to a total production of more than Rs 8,12,550 crore. Out of the total production of Rs 8,12,550 crore in the next 5 years, around 60 per cent is expected to be contributed by exports of the order of Rs 4,87,530 crore," Chandrasekhar said.

The data shows that a 91 per cent cumulative production target of Rs 2,63,086 crore for the current fiscal have been achieved till December, and a 90 per cent export target amounting to Rs 1,03,539 crore has been accomplished as of December 2022.

The government has achieved 56



per cent of the cumulative job creation target under the scheme till December.

The companies have reported the creation of 52,509 jobs out of a cumulative target of 93,009 in the current fiscal under the scheme.

The government has set a target to

create 2 lakh jobs during the entire scheme period.

Pilots' bodies at Tata Group-owned Air India say airline makes 'rapid', 'regressive' changes in service conditions

Mumbai, Mar 29 (PTI) Pilots' bodies at Tata Group-owned Air India have accused the airline management of making unilaterally "rapid" and "regressive" changes in the service conditions of pilots.

In a letter to Air India Chief Human Resources Officer Suresh Dutt Tripathi on Tuesday, Indian Pilots Guild (IPG) and Indian Commercial Pilots Association (ICPA) also stated that "all unilateral violations of their rights and service agreements are creating industrial unrest and shattering employee confidence in the current management".

India to start coal export by 2025-26: Coal Minister Joshi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that India has adequate coal reserves, Union Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi on Wednesday said the country will start exporting the dry fuel by 2025-26. From a net importer of coal, India is moving towards becoming a net exporter of non-coking coal, Joshi said on the sidelines of the seventh round of auctions for commercial mining of coal blocks in the national capital.



The minister also assured of an uninterrupted supply of coal in the approaching summer season — when the peak demand is expected to be 229 GW during April.

Domestic demand for coal is estimated to reach 1,087 million

tonnes in the ongoing financial year. The industry meets some parts of its requirements through imports.

According to the Coal Ministry, India's cumulative total estimated coal reserve as of April 1, 2022, was 3.61 lakh million tonnes (MT).

On a question related to imports, he said India's imports of substitutable coal were 90 MT, which will be stopped by 2025-26 when the country will start exporting the dry fuel.

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PTI ■ MUMBAI

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The communication comes amid Air India



reducing drastically the annual limit of privilege leave accumulation to 60 days from 300 days earlier, as per a source.

IPG represents the wide-body aircraft pilots at the airline while ICPA represents pilots who operate the narrow-body fleet of Air India.

"To help the company, the unions have supported you in good faith for over a year. But still, we are being fed the same non-committal, bidding-for-time excuses while rapid and regressive changes are being introduced unilaterally in our service/working conditions through organisational announcements and policies," the two unions stated in a joint letter.

Leasing of retail space may rise 17-28% this year to 55-60 lakh sq ft in top 8 cities: CBRE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leasing of retail space in malls and prominent high-street locations across eight major cities is expected to rise 17-28 per cent to 55-60 lakh square feet, driven by demand from retailers in fashion & apparel, homeware, and departmental stores categories, according to CBRE India.

Real estate consultant CBRE South Asia Pvt Ltd on Wednesday released its report, '2023 India Market Outlook' that highlights key trends and projections for realty sector.

"Retail leasing is expected to touch 5.5-6 million (55-60 lakh) square feet in 2023, the highest level after the 2019 peak of 6.8 million (68 lakh) square feet. It is expected that primary leasing in newly completed malls will remain the key driver of retail



space demand in 2023," the consultant said.

Figures denote leasing of space in investment-grade malls, prominent high streets and standalone developments. The eight cities tracked are Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai and Pune.

After the 2019-peak, the leasing of retail space fell to 20 lakh square feet during the 2020 calendar year because of lockdowns to control the COVID pandemic.

The demand bounced back to 39 lakh square feet in 2021 and further improved to 47 lakh square feet in 2022 across the eight major cities.

Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO — India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE, said India's strong domestic consumption would continue to strengthen the retail sector. Leasing activities and new supply in retail real estate would grow.

"We believe that any impact of an expected slowdown on economic activity will be circumvented by strong macroeconomic fundamentals and domestic consumption," he said.

NCLAT upholds ₹1,337.76 cr fine on Google, make some modifications in CCI order

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The NCLAT on Wednesday upheld the orders of the fair trade regulator CCI imposing a penalty of Rs 1,337.76 crore on tech major Google in the Android mobile devices case, with some modifications.

A two-member bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has directed Google to implement the direction and deposit the amount in 30 days.

"We upheld this penalty... The appellant (google) is allowed to deposit the penalty" after adjusting 10 per cent of the

amount already deposited as per its previous order of January 4 within a period of 30 days, it said.

It also granted Google 30 days time to implement the measures as directed by the Competition Commission of India, which have been upheld by NCLAT.

The NCLAT bench comprising Chairperson Justice Ashok Bhushan and Member Alok Shrivastava also made some modifications to the CCI order passed on October 20, 2022.

The modifications to the CCI order include striking down



some portions related to permission for uninstalling Google suite software, and some other points.

It also rejected Google's plea that there was a violation of natural justice by the CCI in the probe.

An e-mail sent to Google for comments did not elicit any response.

On October 20 last year, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) slapped a penalty of Rs 1,337.76 crore on Google for anti-competitive practices in relation to Android mobile devices. The regulator had also ordered the internet major to cease and desist from various unfair business practices.

This ruling was challenged before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), which is an appellate authority over the orders passed by the CCI.



Parliamentarians form Friends of MSMEs group to aid job creation

Over a dozen Members of Parliament cutting across party lines have come forward and formed a group named 'Friends of MSMEs'.

A senior Lok Sabha Member (Meerut), Rajendra Agrawal, has been chosen Chairman by the group.

"Neither Government nor corporate sector can create over one crore jobs needed every year in India. They could only be created when millions of youth entering in job market opt to be an entrepreneur and set-up MSMEs" said Chairman of Friends of MSMEs.

The group intends to study and focus on resolving some of the binding constraintsthat impede and shackle the MSME sector in India.

The group plans to hold consultations with MSMEs before each session of the Parliament. The Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME), the national MSME body, is to function as the Secretariat of Friends of MSMEs.

No charge on UPI payment; interoperable fee only on merchant transactions: NPCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) on Wednesday clarified that bank to bank account transfer via UPI will continue to remain free but any merchant payment that goes through two different wallets will be chargeable above Rs 2,000.

The interoperable charge of 1.1 per cent for each transaction above Rs 2,000 will be payable by merchant from April 1.

"Interchange charges are only applicable for the prepaid payment instruments (PPI) merchant transactions and there is no charge to customers," NPCI, payment gateway, clarified in a statement.

In simple words, the charge will kick in when a customer having a wallet of one particular company makes a payment to a merchant, who has a wallet of another company. This levy was being introduced to help cover for the cost of interchange or interoperable between two wallets.

PhonePe, GooglePay Paytm are dominant players in the mobile-wallet payment market.

NPCI has permitted the PPI wallets to be part of interoperable UPI ecosystem and levied 1.1 per cent charge on unified payment interface (UPI) transactions above Rs 2,000

while using PPI.

"The interchange charges introduced are only applicable for the PPI merchant transactions and there is no charge to customers, and it is further clarified that there are no charges for the bank account to bank account-based UPI payments (i.e. Normal UPI payments)," it said.

With this addition to UPI, the customers will have the choice of using any bank account, RuPay Credit card and prepaid wallets on UPI-enabled apps, it said.

Share of individual to merchants transactions above Rs 2,000 is about 5 per cent of the total transactions in February.

In recent times, it said, UPI has emerged as the preferred mode of digital payment by offering free, fast, secure and seamless experience.

Traditionally, it said, the most preferred method of UPI transactions is linking the bank account in any UPI-enabled app for making payments, which contribute over 99.9 per cent of total UPI transactions.

These bank account-to-account transactions continue to remain free for customers and merchants.

No customer will pay any charges on making payments from UPI either from bank account or PPI/Paytm Wallet, Paytm said in tweet.

100 FOR MESSI

Leo becomes third men’s footballer to score century of goals in int’l matches

AP ■ SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO

Argentina captain Lionel Messi on Tuesday scored his 100th international goal for the reigning world champions as they romped to a 7-0 friendly win over outclassed Curacao.

Seven-time Ballon d’Or winner Messi opened the scoring against the Caribbean island minnows on 20 minutes in Santiago del Estero.

It came 17 years after he opened his Argentina account in a 3-2 defeat to Croatia in March 2006.

The 35-year-old soon added another just after the half-hour mark to make it 3-0, and then completed his hat-trick on 37 minutes with the fifth as Argentina toyed with their over-matched opponents.

It was his seventh hat-trick for the national team.

"You cannot describe Messi in words," said fellow goalscorer Nicolas Gonzalez.

"He's the best in the world and he shows it match after match, day after day. Every time he touches the ball, he makes you smile."

Messi came into the game not just as his country's all-time record goalscorer, but with more goals than the next two top marksmen — Gabriel Batistuta on 56 and Sergio Aguero with 41 — put together.

This was Argentina's second match since winning the World Cup in dramatic style against France in Qatar in December - triumphing 4-2 on penalties after a thrilling 3-3 draw -- and it was always going to be about



Messi reaching 100 goals.

Now with 102, he remains third in the all-time list, behind great rival Cristiano Ronaldo (122) of Portugal and Iran's Ali Daei (109).

STRAIGHT TO THE MUSEUM

Messi had come up short on Thursday last week when he notched his 99th goal for the Albiceleste as Argentina toiled in their homecoming celebration match against Panama.

The Central Americans had

held out until the 78th minute before 21-year-old MLS sensation Thiago Almada broke their resistance.

Messi then scored direct from a free-kick a minute from time — his 800th goal in professional football — in front of 83,000 delirious fans in Buenos Aires.

Curacao, ranked 86th by world governing body FIFA, could only hold out for 20 minutes before Messi took a pass from Giovanni Lo Ceslo, cut inside his marker onto his weak-

er right foot and fired a low shot into the bottom corner.

The referee was then seen on live television throwing the ball to someone on the side of the pitch as DirecTV commentators speculated that it was heading "straight to the museum."

Three minutes later Gonzalez outjumped goalkeeper Eloy Room to head home from four yards. Gonzalez turned provider as Messi scored the first of three goals in four minutes, this time with his left foot.

He then laid off the ball for Enzo Fernandez to make it four with a shot from distance before Lo Celso released Messi behind the defense to notch his treble.

Argentina took their foot off the gas in the second half, with only a generously-awarded Angel Di Maria penalty and close-range finish from Gonzalo Montiel adding to the score.

But the 42,000 fans present remained in party mood throughout, waiting for their heroes to lift the World Cup trophy in front of them.



Senegal, South Africa, Burkina Faso qualify for AFCON

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

Defending champions Senegal, South Africa and Burkina Faso qualified for the Africa Cup of Nations in match-day four on Tuesday while Namibia are close to joining them after a shock win over Cameroon.

Reigning African Footballer of the Year Sadio Mane set up Boulaye Dia to score in the first half and give Senegal a 1-0 win over Mozambique in Maputo and an eight-point Group L lead.

Mihlali Mayambela pounced on a loose ball to score the winner as South Africa defeated Liberia 2-1 in Monrovia and join shock 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco as the Group K qualifiers.

Burkina Faso needed one point from a visit to Togo to qualify and they drew 1-1 with Dango Ouattara giving the visiting side an early lead that Kodjo Laba cancelled out in

Lome. Captain Peter Shalulile opened the scoring for Namibia, who replaced Cameroon as Group C table-toppers by winning 2-1 in Soweto near Johannesburg.

Senegal, whose penalty shootout victory over Egypt last year brought the Cup of Nations trophy to Dakar for the first time, stretched a perfect group record to four wins. But it was a much closer contest against Mozambique than last week when the Teranga Lions romped to a 5-1 victory at home.

Mozambique remain second, but will be overtaken if Rwanda win at home to Benin in Kigali on Wednesday.

South Africa ground out a win as Zakhele Lepasa put them ahead, although William Jebor levelled for Liberia before half-time after a blunder by captain and goalkeeper Ronwen Williams. Another goalkeeping howler, this time by Liberian Thomas Songo, gifted Mayam-

bela the crucial goal eight minutes into the second half.

"It was difficult, but 90 minutes of perseverance got us through," said South Africa coach Hugo Broos.

"Coping with the physicality of the Liberians was a real challenge. Fortunately, we chose the right players in the right positions and coped." Morocco, the first African or Arab nation to reach the World Cup semi-finals, did not play because scheduled opponents Zimbabwe were barred due to government interference in the sport.

Cameroon football boss and former star Samuel Eto'o looked on from the stand as a team lacking injured forwards Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting and Karl Toko Ekambi came off second best. Shalulile and Absalom Ilimboudi scored in the second half for the Brave Warriors before Vincent Aboubakar snatched an added-time consolation goal for the Indomitable Lions.

Ferguson, Wenger inducted into Premier League Hall of Fame

AP ■ LONDON

Former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson and ex-Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger on Wednesday became the first managers to be inducted into the Premier League Hall of Fame.

The two men locked horns during a period of intense rivalry starting in the 1990s, winning 16 English top-flight titles between them.

Ferguson, 81, is the most successful manager in Premier League history, guiding Manchester United to 13 titles, while Wenger won the competition three times with Arsenal, including going unbeaten in the 2003/04 season.

Ferguson, who managed United for more than 26 years, won the inaugural Premier League title in 1992/93 to deliver the Red Devils' first league success since 1967.

Six players managed by Ferguson have already been inducted into the Premier League Hall of Fame — David Beckham, Eric Cantona, Roy Keane, Wayne Rooney, Peter Schmeichel and Paul Scholes.



"It's an honour when you receive recognition like this," said Ferguson, who retired in 2013 after winning his 13th title.

"However, it's not just about me as a person. It's about the job at Manchester United and the bond we had over many years, so I'm also proud for the club, the staff and my players."

Wenger arrived at Arsenal in 1996 as one of the first foreign

managers in the Premier League, staying at the club until 2018.

The Frenchman implemented a revolutionary football philosophy, bringing a focus on nutrition and sports science to the English game.

He was committed to playing attractive, attacking football, winning the title in 1997/98, his first full season with the club.

Wenger oversaw an astute transfer strategy, including

scouting abroad for talent — fellow Hall of Fame members Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira were two of his key players.

"To share this with Sir Alex is a great honour for me," said the 73-year-old, who is currently FIFA's football development chief.

"It's like two boxers — you fight like mad and go the distance together. At the end of the day, you have respect and it will be a great opportunity to meet with him, share a good bottle of wine and memories of our old battles."

Premier League chief executive Richard Masters said the two managers brought "unparalleled levels of success" to their clubs.

"The dominance of Manchester United under Sir Alex remains unmatched after he guided them to an incredible 13 titles across 21 Premier League seasons," he said.

Masters added: "Arsene was an innovator who was well ahead of his time... and the Invincibles season is not only one of the greatest accomplishments in English football, but sport in general."

Rybakina glides into semis



AP ■ MIAMI

Elena Rybakina moved into the semi-finals of the Miami Open with a confident 6-3, 6-0 win over Italy's Martina Trevisan at Hard Rock Stadium on Tuesday to extend her winning streak to 12 matches.

American world number three Jessica Pegula had to dig deep to come back from a set down to beat Russian Anastasia

Potapova 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), saving two match points, in a match which finished at 1:30 am.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina, who competes for Kazakhstan, remains in strong contention for the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami WTA titles after she beat Aryna Sabalenka in California earlier this month.

Sabalenka is the biggest obstacle to Rybakina triumph-

ing again with the Belarusian in impressive form in South Florida.

Sabalenka powered past Barbora Krejčíková in straight sets in her fourth-round match on Monday and faces Romanian Sorana Cirstea in the last eight on Wednesday.

Rybakina took charge of her match with Trevisan when the Italian double-faulted to hand her opponent a break and a 3-1 advantage in the first set.

Although Trevisan broke back to get back on serve at 4-3, Rybakina took full control and won the remaining eight games to wrap up the win in 69 minutes.

Pegula has got off to flying starts in her matches in Miami and she broke early again to go 2-0 up in the first set, but Potapova struck back winning the next five games with some aggressive winners and then holding to take the set.

Pegula was in control in the second but Potapova was determined in the third and put herself in position to win the contest but she couldn't convert on her two match points and was forced into a tie-break.

The American looked exhausted, but she found the energy for a strong finale, winning the breaker 7-2.

Renard set for France women's job

AP ■ PARIS

Herve Renard has resigned as Saudi Arabia coach, the country's football federation announced on Tuesday, and is likely to take over as boss of the France women's team. Frenchman Renard, 54, took the Green Falcons to a memorable World Cup group stage victory over Argentina in November.

Renard's departure was confirmed after Tuesday's 2-1 friendly defeat by Bolivia.

"The Saudi Arabian Football Federation Board of Directors has agreed on the contract termination of the head coach of the Saudi national team Mr Herve Renard upon his request," the governing body said on Twitter. "A legal settlement has been reached to end the contract between the two parties."

"The president of the board of directors of SAFF wish for Mr Renard every success in his future career." The two-time Africa Cup of Nations winner has been touted as favourite to succeed Corinne Diacre before this year's Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

McTominay double stuns Spain

AP ■ GLASGOW

Scott McTominay scored twice as Scotland stunned Spain 2-0 at Hampden Park on Tuesday to continue a perfect start to Euro 2024 qualifying.

McTominay came off the bench to score twice against Cyprus at the weekend and the Manchester United midfielder struck early in both halves to secure Scotland's most famous win since beating France in 2007.

"The manager said this is our chance to create legacies as Scotland players and these are the nights in 20, 30 years that people remember," said McTominay.

Steve Clarke's men could not have asked for a better start in their aim to qualify for a second consecutive European Championship as they sit top of Group A with maximum points from their opening two games.

But questions will be asked for Spain boss Luis de la Fuente's decision to make eight changes from the side that beat Norway 3-0 in his first match in charge on Saturday.

That included an entirely new defence and the visitors were caught cold after just seven minutes.



De Bruyne shines in Belgium win over Germany

AP ■ COLOGNE

A goal and two assists from Kevin De Bruyne lifted Belgium past struggling Euro 2024 hosts Germany, winning 3-2 in a friendly in Cologne on Tuesday.

De Bruyne set up two goals to give his side a 2-0 lead inside 10 minutes, before scoring one of his own late in the second to deepen Germany's woes ahead of next year's European Championship on home soil.

"Independent of the result, it is important how we perform in these friendly games," said



new Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco.

"It's not easy to play here... the German team have some really good players."

Germany were hoping to

find some form after recent uncharacteristic early exits from major tournaments, but lost to Belgium for the first time since 1954.

"We were too restrained, too passive, and we weren't able to put the opponent under pressure," Germany coach Hansi Flick told TV network RTL, saying "Belgium played mercilessly".

The four-time world champions suffered a second successive World Cup group-stage exit in Qatar last year, which followed a last-16 loss to England at Euro 2020.

McTominay had scored just one international goal in 37 caps before Saturday before hitting four in four days.

Scotland twice had fortune on their side as Pedro Porro's slip gifted Andy Robertson possession and when he picked out McTominay, his shot deflected off Inigo Martinez and past the helpless Kepa Arrizabalaga.

De la Fuente tried to inspire a response from the three-time European champions at half-time with the introductions of Dani Carvajal and Nico Williams.

But Real Madrid right-back Carvajal was at fault as Scotland struck again six minutes into the second half.

Kieran Tierney sped past Carvajal down the left and when his cross was only cleared to the edge of the box, McTominay swept home a fine finish on his weaker left foot.

Only the woodwork denied Scotland a third moments later when John McGinn's in-swinging free-kick came back off the cross-bar.

Spain spent the final half hour camped in Scottish territory but it was a familiar tale of a lack of cutting edge from La Roja in the final third.

Alcaraz blasts Paul to set up Fritz clash

AP ■ MIAMI

World number one Carlos Alcaraz charged into the quarter-finals of the ATP Miami Open with a convincing 6-4, 6-4 victory over Tommy Paul on Tuesday but second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was knocked out by Russian Karen Khachanov. Alcaraz, the defending Miami champion and also the winner at Indian Wells earlier this month, will face another American in the last eight when he comes up against Taylor Fritz.

Paul came into the match having won his last 12 encounters with Spanish players, including wins over Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal last year, but he was unable to get a foothold in the contest.

It was the ninth straight victory for the 19-year-old Spaniard, who delighted a supportive South Florida crowd with his powerful strokes from the baseline and readiness to move forward, once again making use of his increasingly effective drop shot.

Tsitsipas had to wait a week for his first contest in Miami, beating Chilean Cristian Garin on Monday, but he came unstuck against Khachanov, losing 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

The Greek has been troubled by a shoulder injury in



recent weeks but Khachanov ended his six match losing streak against Tsitsipas and 23 match barren spell against top ten opponents. In a clash of top-10 players, American Fritz defeated Denmark's Holger Rune 6-3, 6-4 to reach to the last eight in Miami for the first time in his career.

Fritz, who won at Delray Beach last month, beat Emilio Nava and Denis Shapovalov in straight sets before Tuesday's encounter and he was pleased with the way he was able to go on the attack. Fritz will be joined in the quarter-finals by compatriot Christopher Eubanks who claimed another scalp by beating France's Adrian

Mannarino 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5).

Eubanks now faces world number five Daniil Medvedev after the Russian comfortably dealt with French qualifier Quentin Halys 6-4, 6-2 in a match which started after midnight following a four-hour rain delay.

Italian Jannik Sinner also advanced to the last eight without dropping a set and he was in firm control from the outset against Russian sixth seed Andrey Rublev, winning 6-2, 6-4. Sinner, who has never failed to reach the quarters in his three appearances in Miami, will face Emil Ruusuvuori after the Finn beat Dutchman Botić van de Zandschulp 4-6, 6-4, 7-5.

Expectation of people doesn’t bother me: Rohit

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma knows a thing or two about winning IPL trophies and having been there and done that on five occasions for Mumbai Indians, public expectation is the last thing to make him wary.

The most successful captain in the history of IPL with five championships, Sharma knows that Mumbai Indians as one of the title contenders comes enters any tourney with a baggage of hype and hoopla.

And that's what a protective skipper wants to shield the youngsters in his side from as one can easily get overawed by the sense of occasion.

"Expectations will always be there whenever we go out to play, not just in the IPL. Having played for so many years it does not bother me and I am not worried about what the people are expecting me to do," Sharma said at the season opening media conference organised by MI.

"We know that we have to do our best and win the trophy. To keep thinking about it all the time is to put pressure on yourself," the skipper said.

Dewald Brevis, Tilak Verma will all be playing their second season but for young Cameron Green with a multi-million dollar deal, IPL will be a different beast altogether.

"I don't want to put too much pressure on them (youngsters) right now. Closer to our first game, we will give them that specific roles. Obviously leading up that first game, guys pretty much know what we are expecting from them," Sharma explained.

"But the last thing I will do is put too much pressure on them, especial-

ly the guys who have not played IPL before and there are a few," the skipper assured to put his protective arm around the junior members of the contingent.

PLAY LIKE FC CRICKET

The one tip that MI skipper always offers to the new players in the set-up is to think the platform as an extension of domestic cricket and do exactly what got them success over there.

"I will try to tell them to replicate what they did in first-class or club cricket. I know the IPL is a different ball game but I tell them to bring that mindset. At the end of the day, the battle is between bat and ball," he added.

Sharma said while his side will miss Jasprit Bumrah but to compensate his absence, MI will have Jofra Archer ready to unleash his 145 plus thunderbolts.

Mumbai Indians are also expected to announce a replacement for Bumrah, the captain confirmed.

"It will be a big miss but it is an opportunity for someone else. There are a couple of guys who have been with this team for the last two years and they are very much ready to step up. Hopefully we will blood a few youngsters," Sharma said.

"Jofra (Archer) was part of the team last year, but he was injured. Obviously we all know the quality of Jofra. It is sad we will miss Bumrah this year, we do understand how big his (Jasprit Bumrah's) shoes are to fill, but there is an opportunity that is up for grabs, to fill that place.

"A lot of young players will get an opportunity and this is a platform for them to come out and express themselves," he said.



IMPACT PLAYER

Talking about the new rule of "Impact Player", Sharma said there will be more clarity on the change after a first few matches.

"There's no doubt that the captains would use it. But, again, like I said, it depends on all the team

dynamics. What the other teams have as an 'Impact Player' who is sitting outside.

"We will not be worried about what the other teams are doing. We will see what we can do and how we can strengthen our team on that particular day.

"We'll get some idea (about how to use the rule) in the first couple of games and obviously, we've had a good chat around this new rule as well," Sharma said.

"Luckily for us, when the first (few) games start, we are playing the last, so we would be able to watch the

other teams, what they do and how much beneficial is it to the team," he continued.

NINE PLAYERS ARE SORTED

The 'Impact Player' allows 12 players to take active part in the game and hence the skipper said that team

combinations will remain fluid although at least nine slots out of 12 being sorted.

Sharma said it was too early for him to discuss team combination.

"Obviously, (it is) too early to talk about the combination. You are playing against RCB and we know how they play. We want to field our best eleven — rather 12 now," he said.

"These practice games that we play will give us a fair bit of an idea about what we want to do as a team. In terms of combination, it's pretty tough to reveal anything right now. Your nine of the players are sorted, it's just that one or two slots that we need to have more chats around. Otherwise, our squad is pretty much settled."

WOULD LOVE TO GROW AS PLAYER

Sharma had forged a successful combination with Mahela Jayawardene for some years and is equally hopeful that he will develop a fine rapport with new head coach Mark Boucher. For the record, Jayawardene is now the Global Head of all the MI franchises.

"It's always been my philosophy. I like to learn and grow as a cricketer. I have heard so many good things from the South African players about Mark about how he is taken the SA team through in the last couple of years," the skipper waxed eloquent.

"When he is taken over as the head coach of the South African team. So, obviously, for me, again, how every individual works, what sort of mindset they have, that will be the key. To understand and learn from Mark how he has taken forward his cricket," he said.



Captaining Dhoni was a little bit daunting: Smith

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Australian star Steve Smith Asays captaining MS Dhoni in the 2017 IPL was "a little bit daunting" but he also learned to be calm and level-headed by spending time with the Indian great.

Recalling his experiences of captaining the RPS and how Dhoni played a big role in that season, Smith told Star Sports, "When I got the call to say that they wanted me to captain, it was a little bit daunting. But that season, MSD was just wonderful. You know, he helped in any way that he could and, he's a terrific guy.

"It was a great experience being able to captain him, but also very daunting as well."

Smith also spoke on the emotions he went through when he was picked as the captain of the RPS team and how he felt leading a side with Dhoni in it. "Yeah, I didn't really know what to expect initially, you know, MS had captained every team he played for, obviously throughout the IPL with Chennai, every season should I say. "But yeah, when they came and asked me, I was a little bit shocked first, and then I didn't really know what to say. It was like, have you spoken to MS about this? This is a little bit strange from my side, but after

we sorted everything out, MS was just wonderful.

"And the way he helped me and helped guide that team that year was incredible. And yeah, I couldn't thank him enough."

Smith said he was bouncing ideas off Dhoni.

"He was someone that I was bouncing ideas off. You know, being behind the stumps, he's got a great, great view of the game. He understands the angles really well and obviously playing in India also, you know, it's his home and he understands those conditions as well as anyone would."

The Australian further spoke about what he has been able to learn and emulate from Dhoni over the years.

"I think just the calmness that MS shows, we saw it throughout his career; just how calm he was. It didn't look like he was flustered by any emotions or anything like that.

"And that's certainly something that I've taken in not just in that season, but just watching him go about his business in the prior years, just how calm and relaxed he was. And you know, at times I can get quite agitated and things like that.

"So you know, I have to try and keep myself as calm and as sort of levelheaded as I can. And yeah, that's certainly something that I learned off of MS."

Will try to be unpredictable for bowlers: Root

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Ahead of his maiden IPL stint, Rajasthan Royals' star English recruit Joe Root says he will try to "get the best out of myself" and "be unpredictable for bowlers" in the tournament beginning March 31.

"I'll try and be me as much as I can and try to be unpredictable for bowlers. I am sure I will smile and enjoy it, and will try to get the best out of myself," Root said in a team release.

Ahead of a practice session here, the 32-year-old spoke about his new team.

"Everyone seems to want to create that feel around things that it's more than just performances on the field. They said they were delighted to get me in the auction..." England's ex-Test cricket captain is looking forward to the season.

"It's an experience that you can't replicate anywhere else in the world. I've never experienced it before so it's all going to be



very new to me, which, for an experienced player that's played a lot of international cricket, is really exciting."

"I've heard a lot of things. And I'm really looking forward to living it now." Sharing his thoughts on the Royals' team, Root said; "Last year was an exceptional year for the franchise and I've always enjoyed watching Sanju (Samson) play. I think he's a hell of a talent and seems to keep growing every year as a player and as a leader."

The stylish batter also spoke about how he is preparing himself for the format.

"I'm just trying to be as consistent as I can be. You can always work on things slowly and in the background but ultimately you are trying to make sure that your strengths are as good as they possibly can be.

"And that you know you're switched on and ready for any situation and scenario that you find yourself in and you have that clarity under pressure."

Rohit, Pandya make gains in ODI rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday moved up one place to be eighth in the batters' list while all-rounder Hardik Pandya jumped 10 positions to be 76th among bowlers in the ICC ODI Rankings.

Shubman Gill remains India's best-placed batter at number 5, while Virat Kohli was at the seventh position after the update took into consideration performances in the Chennai ODI. The batting chart was led by Pakistan's Babar Azam.

Mohammed Siraj at number three was the only Indian in the top 10 bowlers list, headed by Australia's Josh Hazlewood.

Among others, Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan moved back to the top of the T20 rankings after leading his side to a 2-1 series victory over Pakistan in Sharjah.



Rashid, who took a wicket each in the three matches conceding a total of 62 runs off his 12 overs, has overtaken Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga to take the top position among bowlers.

Rashid grabbed the top spot for the first time in his career in February 2018 and was number one most recently in November last year.

In the ODI rankings, Australia leg-spinner Adam Zampa has moved up three places to a career best sixth position after his match-winning haul of four for 45 in the third game against India in Chennai.

Player of the Series Mitchell Marsh also made gains, jumping four slots to reach 51st position among batters with an aggregate of 194 runs in the series.

Porel set to replace Pant at DC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Talented Bengal keeper-batter Abhishek Porel is all set to be the injured Rishabh Pant's replacement at Delhi Capitals in the upcoming Indian Premier League season starting Friday.

DC have been fretting about an Indian replacement for Pant, who met with a horrific car accident late last year and ruled out of competitive cricket for at least one year.

"The DC are likely to put forth Abhishek Porel's name as Rishabh's replacement for the current season. He is only 21 and under the guidance of Ricky Ponting and Sourav Ganguly, could be groomed as a second



option even after Rishabh comes back," an IPL source tracking the developments said.

However, maverick Mumbai man Sarfaraz Khan will be the Capitals' No.1 keeper-batter for at least the first few games, as it is unlikely that Phil Salt will be used from the onset.

"As of now, it looks like Sarfaraz will start against Lucknow Super Giants and if the experiment works, then he will continue," the source said. The problem with Phil Salt could be his batting on a Kotla track which is not conducive for stroke-play. The ball won't come on to the bat easily and he is likely to find it difficult against quality spinners.

Livingstone to miss PBKS opener against KKR

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

England's power-hitter Liam Livingstone will miss the opening game for Punjab Kings in the IPL as he is yet to get a fitness clearance from the ECB after recovering from a knee injury he suffered in December.

Punjab Kings open their IPL campaign against KKR at home on April 1. Livingstone, who is a key member of the Punjab Kings squad for his all-round abilities, has not played competitive cricket since picking up the knee injury on his Test debut in Pakistan in December.

"He is out of the first game at least as the ECB is conducting scans to determine his fitness status. He should be available from the second game onwards," an IPL source said. Livingstone on Wednesday posted a video on social media where he is seen batting in the nets.

Last year, he had his best ever season in the IPL as he amassed 437 runs in 14 games at an average of 36.42 and a sensational strike rate of 182.08. He is known for his big-hitting prowess all around the world and has represented England in 12 ODIs and 29 T20s.



Netherlands matches crucial for SA's WC hopes

AP ■ BENONI

Two end-of-season ODI matches between South Africa and the Netherlands would not normally attract much attention — but the games this weekend are crucial for the Proteas.

The hosts have yet to qualify for the Cricket World Cup in India in October and November.

They need to win both World Cup Super League matches to have a realistic chance of booking their place in world cricket's showpiece.

Even with two wins, there is still an outside chance of being pipped by Ireland, although they will have to pull off a 3-0 upset series win against Bangladesh in May.

The matches in Benoni and Johannesburg are the second and third matches of a series which started in November 2021. The first match was rained off and the remaining games were postponed because of a Covid-19 scare.

Now, with South African days becoming shorter and the chill of autumn starting to bite, the Netherlands will take on a full-strength home team with several of their own best players unavailable.

Among those missing are five of the Dutch side that inflicted on South Africa one

of their most humiliating setbacks — a defeat in last year's T20 World Cup which cost South Africa a place in the semi-finals.

South African-born Colin Ackermann, who was man of the match in the upset in Adelaide, has English county commitments as have Brandon Glover and Bas de Leede. Roelof van der Merwe was a late withdrawal and Logan van Beek is in New Zealand.

The Netherlands have some capable players, including batsmen Max O'Dowd, Tom Cooper and Scott Edwards and seam bowlers Fred Klaassen and Paul van Meekeren but South Africa will be clear favourites.

The Netherlands were beaten 2-1 in a one-day series in Zimbabwe before arriving in South Africa and lost to a South African invitational team in a warm-up game in Pretoria on Tuesday.

But the Proteas cannot afford any slip-ups, even to the extent of ensuring they do not add to the two over-rate penalties they have already incurred in the league.

With the possibility of rain showers on Friday, they will also be hoping for an uninterrupted match as they seek to add to a perfect 9-0 record at Willowmoore Park, which has not hosted a ODI since September 2016.

Shepherd, Joseph take West Indies to T20I series win

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

Romario Shepherd's late batting assault and a five-wicket haul by Alzarri Joseph took the West Indies to a series-clinching seven-run win against South Africa in the third Twenty20 international at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Tuesday.

Shepherd slammed 44 not out off 22 balls to lift the West Indies from 161 for eight to 220 for eight, sharing an unbeaten ninth wicket stand of 59 off 26 balls with Joseph, who made 14 not out.

Fast bowler Joseph then took five for 40 as South Africa

were restricted to 213 for six.

New West Indies T20 captain Rovman Powell said the players had responded to his call "to be fearless, to be natural — but you have to be smart too. The guys were excellent in this series."

Joseph, who missed the second match in Centurion when South Africa achieved a world record run chase of 259, struck crucial blows when he took the wickets of T20 stars Quinton de Kock (21) and David Miller (11).

Joseph effectively wrapped up the match in the penultimate over when he dismissed top-scorer Reeza Hendricks for 83 and followed up with the wick-



ets of Heinrich Klaassen and Wayne Parnell.

"We made a total and it was up to the bowlers to defend it," said Joseph, who was named player of the match.

"I thrive on the opportunity to make an impact."

The last two overs of the West Indian innings were match-changing as Shepherd and Joseph scored 17 off Wayne Parnell and 26 in the final over bowled by Kagiso Rabada.

"We would have liked to wrap up the last two wickets but bar the last two or three overs we were really good with the ball," said South Africa captain Aiden Markram.