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Furore over German interference

BJP, Cong spar on German remarks on Rahul Gandhi's disqualification case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Days after the US remarked it was "watching" legal proceedings regarding Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Germany on Thursday said "fundamental democratic principles" should apply in his case.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, an MP from Wayanad, Kerala was disqualified last week as a Member of Lok Sabha (MP) from the date of his conviction in the criminal defamation case over his 'Modi surname' remark.

Enunciating her country's position, spokesperson of German Foreign Ministry said, "We have taken note of the verdict of first instance against the Indian Opposition politician Rahul Gandhi as well as the suspension of his parliamentary mandate. To our knowledge, Mr Gandhi is in a position to appeal the verdict." She also said, "It will then become clear whether this verdict will stand and whether the suspension of his mandate has any basis." The spokesperson said Germany expects that "standards of judicial independence and fundamental democratic principles" will apply in the case.

This statement by Germany sparked a political slugfest in the



NSUI members during a Loktantra Bachao protest at Raisina Road, in New Delhi, on Thursday against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Sabha. PTI

country with the ruling BJP and the Opposition Congress exchanging sharp remarks on the issue.

Responding to Germany's remarks, the Congress said it firmly believes that India's democratic processes themselves have to deal with the threats posed to its democracy. It also hit out at the BJP, accusing it of attempting to divert attention from the Adani issue.

In a smart rejoinder to Germany's remarks, Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said India will not tolerate foreign interference in internal matters.

"Thank you Rahul Gandhi for inviting foreign powers for interference into India's internal matters. Remember, the Indian Judiciary can't be influenced by foreign interference. India won't tolerate 'foreign influence' anymore because our Prime Minister is Shri Narendra Modi

Ji (sic)," Rijiju said in a tweet.

Earlier this week, the US said it is watching the Rahul Gandhi case and they continue to engage with the Indian Government on a shared commitment to democratic values, including freedom of expression.

"Respect for the rule of law and judicial independence is a cornerstone of any democracy, and we're watching Mr Gandhi's (Rahul Gandhi) case in Indian courts," US Department of State Principal Deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said.

On Thursday, the BJP slammed Congress Rajya Sabha member Digvijay Singh for thanking Germany for taking note of Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha and charged the Opposition party with "inviting foreign powers for interference into India's internal matters".

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Global scamsters coming to help, Cong slams Lalit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A word war began between former IPL chief Lalit Modi, accused of financial irregularities in India, and the Congress on Thursday, with the former launching a scathing attack on Rahul Gandhi. This was in response to an acidic attack from the Congress which had called Modi a "fugitive of justice".

The Congress on Thursday used Lalit Modi's tweets threatening to take Rahul Gandhi to court to attack the Bharatiya Janata Party, saying that "global scamsters" were now coming to the defence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Reacting to Lalit Modi's



remarks, Congress general secretary in-charge organisation KC Venugopal said, "Lalit Modi is a fugitive in multi-million dollar frauds whose cowardice made him run away. He now enjoys a plush life abroad thanks to BJP's inaction. It's laughable if he thinks anyone takes him seriously."

Continued on Page 9

Celebrations turn to tragedy in Indore

14 killed, many missing as roof of temple well caves in during havan on Ram Navami

PNS/PTI ■ BHOPAL/INDORE



Rescue operation underway after the roof of a 'bawdi' (well) collapsed at Beleshwar Mahadev Jhulelal, in Indore, on Thursday. At least 8 people got killed and several others are feared trapped, according to officials PTI

Ram Navami celebrations at Ra temple in Madhya Pradesh's Indore took a tragic turn when the roof of a 'bawdi' (well) collapsed during a havan (a fire ritual), killing 14 people. The toll is expected to go up during the night as the 30-35 devotees who fell into the well, many are still to be fished out and are missing.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan revealed the number of people killed at the Beleshwar Mahadev Jhulelal temple in Indore's Patel Nagar. Earlier, Indore Collector Illaiyara T had given the death toll as 12.

State Home Minister Narottam Mishra told reporters in Bhopal that a few children are feared to be missing and a search operation is on to trace them by pumping out the bawdi's water.

Nearly 30-35 devotees fell into the well after the accident at the temple, said Indore Police Commissioner Makrand Deoskar. Continued on Page 9

Clashes in Maha, Bengal, Gujarat mar festivities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI / AURANGABAD / VADODARA

Ram Navami was celebrated across the country on Thursday with grand processions and special pujas, but the festivities were marred in Maharashtra where a clash left 12 injured and in Gujarat and West Bengal some clashes were witnessed. In Delhi, a large number of people defied a police order and took out a procession in Jahangirpuri, which witnessed riots last year during Hanuman Jayanti celebrations, while stones were pelted at a march in Gujarat's Vadodara too.

In the Aurangabad city of neighbouring Maharashtra, at least 12 people, including 10 policemen, were injured after a mob of around 500 people went berserk and hurled stones and petrol-filled bottles when the personnel tried to control the situation following a clash between two groups near a Ram temple, officials said on Thursday. The incident, in which 13 vehicles were torched by the miscreants, occurred during the wee hours of Thursday in Kiradpura.

Continued on Page 9

Stalin calls Opp meet on social justice on Monday

Leaders of 20 parties, including Cong, to attend meet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has called a meeting of Opposition parties in Chennai on Monday to discuss issues relating to social justice in the country. Leaders of around 20 parties, including the Congress, are slated to attend the meeting either in person or virtually. The meeting will discuss the topic, "Taking social justice in India forward — Social Justice, the Way Forward"

Among the speakers who have confirmed their participation include Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav, National Conference patron Farooq Abdullah, BRS leader K Keshav Rao, CPI(M)'s Sitaram Yechury,



CPI's D Raja, AAP leader Sanjay Singh and TMC's Derek O'Brien. The NCP and Shiv Sena (UBT) are yet to confirm their participation. The BJD's Sasmit Patra and YSRCP's A Suresh are also among the likely attendees. If they do, then their parties would be attending such a meeting for the first time, sources said. However, the two parties are yet to confirm their presence to the DMK. Opposition leaders said the BJD and the YSRCP are likely to attend the meeting as it is not an out and out Opposition "political" meeting but a discussion on a social issue. The BJD's decision to participate would come close on the heels of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's meeting with Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Also, Opposition leaders said while the parties have confirmed presence, the names of

their representatives is tentative and will depend on availability.

With Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha coming as a blessing in disguise for the fragmented Opposition, the Congress, too, has decided to convene a meeting of top Opposition leaders next month after some of them urged the grand old party to take the lead in strengthening unity among anti-BJP forces.

Party sources said the meeting would take forward the bonhomie displayed by several Opposition parties during the Budget Session of Parliament and it would be expanded outside too. Congress sources said the proposal for this meeting was made at the meeting of Opposition leaders convened by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge at his residence on Monday evening. NCP chief Sharad Pawar, DMK leader TR Bala, JDU's Lallan Singh and a CPI-M leader, called upon the Congress leadership to convene a meeting of party's national presidents and top leaders to chalk out a blueprint for the 2024 general elections.

Now, H-1B visa holders' spouses can work in US

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

In a big relief for foreign professionals, including Indians working in the US technology sector, a judge there has ruled that spouses of H-1B visa holders can work in the US.

The H-1B visa programme is designed to allow skilled foreign workers to come to the United States and work for American companies. However, until recently, H-1B spouses were not allowed to work, which often placed a significant financial burden on families.

While giving her ruling, US District Judge Tanya Chutkan dismissed a lawsuit filed by Save Jobs USA which had approached the court to dismiss the Obama-era regulation that gave employment authorisation cards to spouses of certain categories of H-1B visa holders. Save Jobs USA said it plans to appeal against the court ruling. Tech companies such as Amazon, Apple, Google, and



Microsoft had opposed the lawsuit. The US has, so far, issued nearly 1,00,000 work authorisations to spouses of H-1B visa holders, a significantly large number of whom are Indians.

In her order, Judge Chutkan said the primary contention of Save Jobs USA is that Congress has never granted the Department of Homeland Security authority to allow foreign nationals, like H-4 visa holders, to work during their stay in the United States.

But that contention runs headlong into the text of the Immigration and Nationality Act, decades of executive-branch practice and both explicit and implicit congressional ratification of that practice, she wrote. Continued on Page 9

Govt issues draft notification for quota in civic bodies

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Paving the way for early local bodies' elections, the Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday issued a provisional list of reserved seats for mayors of municipal corporations and chairpersons of municipal councils and nagar panchayats for the three-tier urban elections, giving one week's time to the people and organisations to raise objections, if any.

Urban Development Minister AK Sharma said that the draft notification for reservation had been issued and uploaded in the department's website urbandevelopment.up.nic.in.

"People have been given one week's time to raise objections. The objections should be filed by 5 pm on April 6 at the department's office," the minister told reporters here on Thursday.

Elections are to be held in 17 municipal corporations, 199 municipal councils and 517 nagar panchayats. As per

the new notification, of these 288 seats are reserved for women, 205 for Other Backward Classes, 110 for Scheduled Caste and two for Scheduled Tribe candidates.

The revised draft notification was issued following objections raised over OBC reservation in the first notification issued on December 5.

Interestingly, there is no change in the number of OBC seats. After the survey the reservations for women, SC and ST seats have increased in the new format. The OBC reservation in December 5 notification also stood at 205. As per the notification of December 5 the number of seats reserved for women was 255, for SC it was 102 and for ST one seat was reserved.

"We are committed to providing reservation as per the recommendations of the commission. A canard was spread by opposition leaders that the Bharatiya Janata Party is anti-backwards and is

not willing to conduct elections as per reservation. Our work is transparent. We have issued a draft notification and still if someone has objections he can raise it within a week's time," Sharma said.

There is a massive change in the reservation of mayoral seats. The mayor's seats of Lucknow, Ghaziabad and Kanpur have been reserved for women while these seats were unreserved in the last notification.

The Prayagraj mayoral seat has now been declared unreserved while it was earlier reserved for Backward candidate.

The mayoral seats of Varanasi, Aligarh, Bareilly, Moradabad, Gorakhpur, Ayodhya and Mathura-Vrindavan have also been declared unreserved.

Agra and Jhansi seats are reserved for SC candidates while Shahajahanpur, Firozabad, Saharanpur and Meerut will elect backward candidates as their mayors.

CAPSULE

BANGA SET TO BE WB CHIEF UNOPPOSED

Washington: Indian-American business leader Ajay Banga is poised to become the next President of the World Bank after the nomination period closed and no country proposed an alternate candidate for the prestigious post. In February, President Joe Biden announced that the US would be nominating Banga to lead the World Bank because he is "well equipped" to lead the global institution at "this critical moment in history."

BABUS TOLD TO REVEAL STOCK HOLDINGS

New Delhi: The Centre has asked IAS, IPS and IFS officers to intimate it in case the total transactions in stock, share or other investments that they hold exceed their six months' basic pay during a calendar year, according to a latest order by the personnel ministry.

PM lauds brilliance of 'The Elephant Whisperers'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday met the team associated with 'The Elephant Whisperers', a documentary that became the maiden Indian production to win in the Documentary Short Subject category at the 95th Academy Awards, and noted that its cinematic brilliance has drawn global attention and acclaim.

'The Elephant Whisperers', directed by Kartiki Gonsalves and produced by Guneet Monga, explores the bond between humans and an abandoned elephant calf in a Tamil Nadu sanctuary, is India's first win in the Documentary Short category.

Modi met some of the team members who were behind the Tamil documentary, including Gonsalves and Monga.

"The cinematic brilliance and success 'The Elephant Whisperers' has drawn global attention as well as acclaim. Today, I had the opportunity to meet the brilliant team associated with it. They have made India very proud," Modi said in a tweet and posted pictures with the team and their Oscar trophies.

'The Elephant Whisperers' created history at the 95th Academy Awards by becoming the maiden Indian production to win in the Documentary Short Subject category.



Prime Minister Modi with Oscar 2023 winning short documentary film 'The Elephant Whisperers' producer Guneet Monga and director Kartiki Gonsalves, in New Delhi, on Thursday. PTI

Govt inks ₹36.4K-cr def deals with Indian firms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Atmanirbharta got a fillip on Thursday, with the Government inking several deals totaling over Rs 36,400 crore for the purchase of arms and armaments for the military.

The Ministry of Defence inked contracts with Indian shipyards for the acquisition of 11 next generation offshore patrol vessels and six next generation missile vessels at an overall cost of around Rs 19,600 crore, said an official press release.

The contract for acquisition of 11 next generation offshore patrol vessels was signed with Goa Shipyard Ltd (GSL) and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata, at a total cost of Rs 9,781 crore. Of the 11 ships, seven will be indigenously

designed, developed and manufactured by GSL and four by GRSE. The delivery of the ships is scheduled to commence from September 2026.

The contract for acquisition of six next generation missile vessels was signed with Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) at a cost of Rs 9,805 crore. The delivery of ships is scheduled to commence from March 2027. The NGMVs would be heavily armed war vessels incorporating stealth, high speed and offensive capability. The primary role of the ships would be to provide offensive capability against enemy warships, merchantmen and land targets.

The indigenous manufacturing of these vessels will encourage the active participation of Indian shipbuilding and associated industries.

Continued on Page 9

Youth done to death by group of friends

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A group of youths killed their friend during a booze session in a forest cover in Sushant Golf City police station area on Wednesday evening. The incident came to light when the family went out to search for him and reached the forest cover where he and his friends used to hang around.

As per reports, Shubham Awasthi of Telibagh locality in PGI left his house on Wednesday without informing any in the family and did not come back. Brother Satyam Awasthi went out to search for him. He contacted some of Shubham's friends. They told him that Shubham was seen going towards the forest cover along with Jayant, Anand Sharma aka Nankau, Ram Karan and a few others.

"Satyam reached the forest cover in Awadh Shilp Gram locality and found him lying dead," deceased's father Ajay

Awasthi said. He said he came to know from locals that Shubham and the accused youths were consuming alcohol in the forest cover between 3 pm and 3:30 pm. "His friends hit him with a brick after they picked a fight over a money-related issue," Ajay alleged. He said Jayant and his aide killed Shubham for money. The police said the body had been sent for autopsy and further probe was underway.

Meanwhile, a 35-year-old native of Punjab died after he fell off a vehicle which he was riding in Gosainganj police station area under mysterious circumstances on Thursday. As per reports, Sher Singh and Shivam (both of Punjab) were going to Bihar while carrying a wheat reaper machine. Police said Sher Singh fell off the vehicle and suffered grievous injuries. "He was pronounced dead by doctors who examined him at a hospital," police said.

In another incident, a 17-

year-old girl suffering from depression ended her life in Bakshi-Ka Talab police station area on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

Reports said Shivani of Hardhaipur was found hanging from a mango tree with a dupatta tied around her neck. Her family members rushed her to a hospital where she was pronounced dead.

Meanwhile, a missing 19-year-old girl was found hanging from a mango tree behind a temple in Nagram police station area on Thursday. Reports said the girl, along with her brother, lived with her maternal grandparents in the area. She belonged to Rae Bareli. The girl went missing on Wednesday and her parents were informed by her grandparents. "We were searching for her in the locality and reached behind a temple where we found her hanging from a mango tree," her mother said.

Processions mark Ram Navami celebration

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Devotees took out processions in different areas of the state capital on the occasion of Ram Navami on Thursday. Under the auspices of Ram Janmotsav Committee, a grand procession of Lord Ram was taken out from Indira Nagar. Lord Ram moved in the city in a chariot. In the procession, there were live tableaux with boys and girls dressed as different gods and goddesses. Elephants, horses and camels were also a part of the procession.

Jitendra Bajrangi of Prayagraj, dressed as Hanuman, danced to the tunes of bhajans and remained the centre of attraction. Former Deputy CM Dinesh Sharma, BJP MLA Ashutosh Tandon, state president of Adarsh Vyapar Mandal Sanjay Gupta, and former DGP Vikram Singh among others attended the procession which was welcomed by traders, local residents and devotees at various places.

The procession passed through Lekhraj Market, Faizabad Road, Maruti Puram,



Devotees taking part in a procession taken out from Ashrafabad area in old city on Thursday

Pioneer

Bhoothnath Market, Shalimar Chauraha, and Meena Market before concluding at the starting point.

Senior vice-president of Shri Ram Janmotsav Committee Kavindra Malhotra, and Deepak

Shrikhande said that a 'bhandara' was also organised on the occasion and 'prasad' was distributed among people. The

processions were welcomed at various places by traders, office-bearers of Adarsh Vyapar Mandal, citizens and devotees.

Woman alleges molestation, torture by brother-in-law

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A woman alleged molestation by her husband's elder brother and also accused him of attempting to turn her out of their house in connivance with his mother, in Indira Nagar. The incident took place on March 22 but a case in this regard was registered on March 29.

As per the complainant, she is taking care of her husband who is sick and bedridden these days. Around 7 pm on March 22, her brother-in-law allegedly caught her by her neck after entering her room. "He threatened to kill me and asked me to leave the house. I somehow managed to wriggle myself free," she alleged.

The woman said her brother-in-law and his mother were against her and would harass her off and on. "I have no issue from the marriage, and my mother-in-law and brother-in-law torture me. On one occasion, my brother-in-law tore my clothes and molested me. I had reported the matter to the police but no help came my way. Both the tormentors want to drive me out of the house," the complainant alleged.

She further alleged that her mother-in-law forced her to bring money from her parents. "I am living in fear as they can harm me any time," she stated in the complaint. Police registered a case in this connection

Youth caught filming woman in bathroom

Lucknow (PNS): A youth was caught red-handed while filming a woman taking a bath, in Hazratganj police station area on Wednesday. Reports said that the woman, who is resident of a colony on Gokhale Marg, was having a shower in her bathroom around 11 am when she felt the presence of someone snooping on her and filming it with his mobile phone camera. He fled the scene when the woman shouted at her.

She later narrated the incident to her husband, who went to the house of the youth and confronted him. "The

accused abused me and threatened to kill me when I sought an explanation from him," he said, adding that he and his wife identified the accused who lives in the same colony.

A police spokesman said a case was registered under Section 354 (c) — watching, or capturing the image of a woman engaging in a private act in circumstances where she would usually have the expectation of not being observed either by the perpetrator or by any other person at the behest of the perpetrator, and for abusing the woman's husband.

and started investigation.

Meanwhile, director of TSA-INDIA (Turtle Survival Alliance Foundation India) Dr Shailendra Singh was accused of eve-teasing by three interns in Jankipuram police station area. The case was registered after the National Commission for Women sent a letter to the UP DGP.

As per reports, the interns in their Instagram posts accused Shailendra Singh of eve-teasing and disrespecting their modesty. One of the

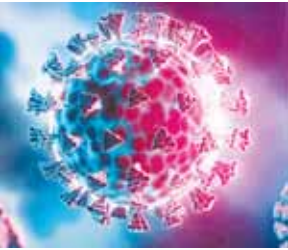
interns alleged that Shailendra, while being tipsy, tried to molest her in the bedroom on a occasion of a new year party in 2016. Another intern alleged that he asked her to defecate in open when she asked him to get a toilet constructed in a camp. "During a camp in Chambal for research on turtles, I asked him to get a toilet constructed. However, he told us to defecate in the open," one of the complainants said. Police registered a case in this connection.

New onset of irritable bowel syndrome likely in 10% cases after Covid

Lucknow (PNS): After recovery from Covid, ten per cent of the patients can develop new onset of irritable bowel syndrome, according to the findings of a research carried out by the head of SGPGI's gastroenterology department Dr UC Ghoshal. Similar researches cropped up in other parts of the world after the findings of this research were released.

"Amongst all the patients who suffered from Covid, ten per cent of them continued to have gastrointestinal disorders beyond six months. This is called post Covid irritable bowel syndrome. Interestingly, this irritable bowel syndrome in post-Covid patients has been shown across the world in India by us. India is leading the world in this research," he said.

"The patients who suffered from no irritable bowel syndrome during the time they had Covid will not suffer from this but the Covid patients also having stomach problem will have a chance of getting irritable bowel syndrome. If patients were mentally tense when they were suffering from Covid, they will also have a higher chance of getting irritable bowel syndrome. It shows the relationship between the brain and stomach. Therefore, to avoid having the syndrome, one should keep away from



mental tension. Also, if a patient has suffered from a loss of smell and taste during Covid, they have a chance of developing irritable bowel syndrome post Covid," he explained.

This study was carried out in collaboration with Bangladesh and with 280 Covid patients and 264 healthy control people. After our research was carried out, another was done by Italy and America.

"As a research follow-up, we are trying to find out why ten per cent of the patients continued to have irritable bowel syndrome after Covid. We tried to find out why and came to know that coronavirus did not stay in the stomach for a long time. We then tried to find out whether this is happening because of inflammation of the inner lining of intestine and came to know that some of the people have continuous inflammation of mucosa. We are still working on it," he added, explaining.

1,461 unauthorised buildings sealed by LDA in 3 months

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Over 1,461 unauthorised structures have been sealed and public land worth Rs 1,000 crore taken back from the clutches of grabbers during a three-month drive by the Lucknow Development Authority. Only six buildings located in different places of the city have been bulldozed during the drive.

In a meeting held here on Thursday, LDA Vice-Chairperson Indramani Tripathi reviewed the ongoing anti-encroachment drive which was started on the instructions of Chief Minister

Yogi Adityanath. An executive engineer said the chief minister wants to get all the records digitised so that detailed information could be accessed in future with ease. The LDA VC said constant vigil was needed to check the growth of illegal structures and violation of land use. Tripathi said a lot of work had to be done to make the city pollution-free with clean surroundings. "It will be difficult for the anti-encroachment squad to demolish or seal the unauthorised structures in narrow streets, especially in the old city," the vice-chairperson said.

He pointed out that the

anti-encroachment exercise had helped increase the land bank.

The achievements and performance of the on-going drive was not remarkable one but on an average said to be better. It is compared with the ones which was launched in the past. They were conducted for the name sake not for the result oriented. The LDA vice-chairperson said its anti-encroachment squad has not gone to sleep but still working on the strategy of other unauthorised structures and violation of land use and building act which have or are coming up aiming to remove them.

Pancreatic pseudocyst treated by EUS method

Lucknow (PNS): In a first, pseudocyst in pancreas was treated with the help of endoscopic ultrasound (EUS) method in the department of gastroenterology, KGMU. Spokesperson Dr Sudhir Singh said that pipe insertion or surgery had to be performed for it till now.

Harshit Yadav (22), a resident of Prayagraj, was suffering from pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) and a lot of filth had accumulated in his stomach due to putrefaction around the pancreas, due to which there was constant pain in the stomach, fever, and

vomiting. Besides, he was unable to eat anything. Due to the pseudocyst, the surrounding blood vessels were also blocked. "The patient consulted Dr Anil Gangwar of the department of gastroenterology. With the consent of the patient, a metal stand was inserted through the stomach with the help of EUS. The method took only 10 minutes. The patient was discharged on the second day and he is completely healthy," Dr Singh said.

Dr Anil Gangwar said this method is called endoscopic ultrasound cystogastrostomy. KGMU Vice-Chancellor

Dr Bipin Puri and head of the gastroenterology department Dr Sumit Rungta congratulated the entire team.

Dr Gangwar said pancreatitis is a fatal and complicated disease. "This is mainly due to the use of stones and alcohol in the gallbladder. In this disease, pus gets collected around the pancreas and it later on gives rise to many problems. To reduce complications from surgery, the treatment was done by EUS, which only takes about 10-20 minutes. All the facilities of endoscopic ultrasound are available in KGMU," he added.



NOTICE

I have Changed My Name From SHAHEZ ELAHI To SHAHZEED ELAHI S/O Intizam Elahi R/o 15/52, Gulab Babu Ka Hata, Civil Lines Kanpur, For all future purpose.

NOTICE

I have Changed My Name From Rajat Anand To Rajat Kumar Anand S/O Sanjeev Anand R/o 126/63, F Block, Govind Nagar Kanpur, For all future purpose.

NOTICE

I have Changed My Name From Waseem Ahmad To Waseem Ahmad Khan for all future purpose, Waseem Ahmad Khan S/o Habibulla Khan R/o 88/88, Chamanganj, Fahimabad, Kanpur Nagar

CORRIGENDUM

In the advertisement of share holder Dinesh Kumar published The Pioneer Lucknow on 24.03.2023 the date of 5.11.2021 has been printed wrongly whereas the correct date is 20.03.2023. The correct date 20.03.2023 should be read.

CITYBRIEFS

RAINS PREDICTED

The Met department has forecast rains and thundershowers in the state for the next 48 hours. Officials said rains were likely because of the western disturbance over Rajasthan and Pakistan. Met officials said that from Thursday itself, thunderstorm with lightning was likely in many districts across the state. On Friday and Saturday, thunderstorm, along with lightning and gusty winds is likely in many districts.

DIVINE EDUCATION CONFERENCE



City Montessori School, United World campus, organised its 'Divine Education Conference' in the Gomti Nagar Extension premises on Thursday. CMS founder Jagdish Gandhi inaugurated the function by lighting the lamp of learning. He said that the basis of world unity and world peace is knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech. On the occasion, students made several colourful educational-cultural presentations, spreading the message of unity and spirituality that kept the parents and guardians glued to their seats.

MoU SIGNED

Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University Prof Alok Kumar Rai and director of Central Tasar Research and Training Institute (CTR & TI) in Ranchi (Jharkhand) Dr K Sathyanarayan have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Central Silk Board (CSB), Ministry of Textiles, Bengaluru, and IU. The MoU will facilitate mutual support in planning and executing programmes for promoting excellence in respective areas of research, as per the New Education Policy, 2020. The MoU will promote vocational education and catalyse quality academic research. It will promote exchange of scientists, faculties, facilitating projects and infrastructure in relevant fields.

Forest dept working on Terai Elephant Reserve action plan

Lucknow (PNS): The Forest department is working on a dedicated action plan for the Terai Elephant Reserve notified recently in Uttar Pradesh. Chief Wildlife Warden Sunil Chaudhary said that under the plan, they can get funds from the Centre's Project Elephant which they are planning to use for elephants' habitat development.

He said that the Terai Elephant Reserve covers the Dudhwa region of north Kheri, south Kheri and Katarniyaghat. "There are a substantial number of elephants which have come here from Nepal in the past 10-15 years and formed a migratory population, but the population has stabilised over the years. At present, there are over 118 elephants in the reserve," he said.

Chaudhary said they already have one elephant corridor which covers Shivalik, Saharanpur interlinking with Rajaji Park and Bijnor. Made in 2007-2008, it comes under the conservator, Moradabad.

"The Terai Elephant Reserve was made primarily because whatever funds are available with the Government of India will be released through the Project Elephant. The money can be used in the maintenance of the elephant corridor and for the establishment of elephant habitat. Earlier, we were getting it under Project Tiger. Now when we submit our project for conservation, we can press upon funds under Project Elephant and have a dedicated team working for the pachyderm. Funds can also be used for the management of human conflict with elephants," he said, adding that they would work on elephant feeding and strengthening of elephant corridors so that the jumbos have the freedom of movement.

SBSP, BJP fighting for poor: Dayashankar

Lucknow (PTI): Uttar Pradesh minister Dayashankar Singh met with Suheldev Bahujan Samaj Party (SBSP) chief Om Prakash Rajbhar here Thursday and asserted that the party was ideologically closer to the BJP since "both are fighting for the poor and the downtrodden".

Both Singh and Rajbhar interacted with news persons after the meeting. While Singh mentioned that "staying together" would be beneficial for both the parties, Rajbhar denied any possibility of an alliance "at the moment".

"Omprakash Rajbhar is ideologically closer to the BJP. He fights for the poor, the Dalits and the downtrodden. BJP is also doing the same thing, so naturally he is closer to BJP," the state minister said.

The SBSP had contested the 2017 assembly elections in alliance with the BJP and Rajbhar was also made a cabinet minister. The parties parted ways over differences between the SBSP chief and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Rajbhar's party contested last year's state assembly elections in alliance with the Samajwadi Party, but they went their separate ways after the alliance failed to achieve desired results.

Dayashankar Singh further said that even when Rajbhar was with the SP, he used to tell the SBSP chief that he was going on the wrong path. "You think for the poor, backwards and labourers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath are also doing the same thing. You come to our side," Singh recalled having told Rajbhar.

On the possibility of an alliance between the two parties in the upcoming

"OMPRAKASH RAJBHAR IS IDEOLOGICALLY CLOSER TO THE BJP. HE FIGHTS FOR THE POOR, THE DALITS AND THE DOWNTRODDEN. BJP IS ALSO DOING THE SAME THING, SO NATURALLY HE IS CLOSER TO BJP"

Lok Sabha elections, Singh said, "It would be a good thing to have an equation. Staying together is beneficial for both of us. The whole world rests on hope. Possibilities can never be denied in politics." When asked about the chances of his party coming together with the BJP, Rajbhar, however, denied any possibility at the moment. "We will contest the coming civic elections on our own. All the rest will be seen when the Lok Sabha elections come," he said.

To an another question, the SBSP chief accused Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav of colluding with the BJP. He alleged that Yadav talks about opposition unity but refuses to meet with Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati and the Congress leadership. "If the opposition wants to unite, consider Mayawati as its leader and consider her a Dalit face to make her the prime ministerial candidate," he added. The SBSP has six MLAs in the 403-member Uttar Pradesh Assembly at present.

UP Cong leader says police not registering plaint about threat call

Lucknow (PTI): Uttar Pradesh Congress media convener Lalan Kumar has accused the Lucknow police of not registering his complaint about a threat call to kill party leader Rahul Gandhi and him. Kumar also raised the issue with Lucknow Police Commissioner SB Shiradkar through Twitter on Wednesday night. He alleged that on March 25, a person called him on his phone, identified himself as Manoj Kumar Rai of Gorkhpur, and used casteist slurs against Gandhi.

Kumar claimed the caller threatened to kill Gandhi and him, and added that the same person had given similar threats to him in the past.

"I informed about this at the Chinhat police station on March 25 itself, but the police have not registered a case yet. Looks like the police are waiting for some kind of accident to happen to me," the Congress leader said. He shared the complaint letter given to Chinhat police station on Twitter and tagged Police Commissioner Shiradkar. Kumar alleged that days have passed but his FIR in the matter is not being registered. Chinhat station in-charge Alok Rai said there is no call recording of the incident but the matter was being investigated.

Religion gives a sense of duty, says Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, while greeting the people of the state on the occasion of Mahanavami of Vasantik Navratri and Ram Navami, the birth anniversary of Lord Shri Ram, said that one should not mistake religion for just a medium of worshipping.

“Religion gives a sense of duty. Religion connects us with virtue, duty and moral values and leads us towards a positive and creative tendency by walking on the right path,” he said while addressing the media after completing the rituals of ‘Kanya Pujan’ and Shri Ram Janmotsav in Gorakhnath temple on Thursday.

He said that the gaiety and enthusiasm seen on Sri Rama Navami showed that virtue and creativity in the society had progressed rapidly. “New India is being formed with positivity and creativity under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi,” Yogi Adityanath said. He went on to say that the whole world was realising the power of a strong and powerful India. “The concept of Ram rajya is also being realised in ‘Samarth Bharat,’” he said. In Ram rajya, the benefits of the schemes of governance are reaching every section of society without any discrimination, he added.

The chief minister said that the whole world had seen the strength and sensitivity of India during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Many public wel-

...performs ‘Kanya Pujan’ in Gkp

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

On the occasion of Navami, the ninth day of Chaitra Navratri, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath performed ‘Kanya Pujan’ and offered prayers to ‘Matri Shakti’ by washing the feet of maidens in Gorakhpur.

Yogi Adityanath worshipped nine girls, symbolising nine manifestations of Goddess Durga. As part of the ritual, the girls were asked to stand on a metallic plate and Yogi Adityanath washed their feet, applied tilak on their foreheads, and performed their ‘aarti’ amid chanting of mantras.

The chief minister also served food to the girls and gave them ‘dakshina’ and gifts while seeking their blessings during the ‘Kanya Pujan’ organised in the Anna Kshetra (Naveen Bhandara Bhawan) of Gorakhnath temple.

Following the tradition, the chief minister also performed Batuk Puja. Batuks are manifestations of Kal Bhairav.

After worshipping the nine girls, Yogi Adityanath also performed ‘aarti’ of about three hundred girls and batuks present there.

Yogi Kamal Nath, the head priest of the temple, applied ‘tilak’ to all. Along with ‘chunri’ and ‘gamchha’, everyone



was also provided ‘dakshina’. After puja, Yogi served these girls food cooked in the temple kitchen.

Apart from the girls, the ‘batuks’ who arrived in large numbers were also fed and given gifts and ‘dakshina’.

Before this, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath offered prayers to Maa Siddhidatri in the Shaktipeeth of the temple.

fare programmes are in front of everyone. The needy were given free accommodation, toilets, cooking gas connections, electricity connections without any discrimination. Not only this, free ration was also made available to every poor in times of crisis. Efforts are being made to bring about comprehensive change in the life of every citizen,” he said. Describing the leadership of G-20 as a pride for the country, The chief minister said that the theme of G-20 was the contribution of the Indian sage who explained the vast form of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

Praying to Mother Jagatjanani Bhagwati and Maryada Purushottam Lord Shri Ram for a happy and prosperous life for all citizens, the chief minister said that along with the worship of Mother Siddhidatri on navami tithi, the birth anniversary of Shri Ram was being celebrated with enthusiasm.

“Grand programmes have been organised at different places of the state. There is a lot of enthusiasm at every temple in Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram. Since yesterday, more than 15 lakh devotees have visited Hanuman Garhi and Shri Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya after bathing in the holy river Saryu.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also participated in the birth anniversary of Prabhu Shri Ram organised at Mukhtakashi stage of Gorakhnath temple complex. He also performed the ‘aarti’.

CM: Govt to keep providing basic amenities to people

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has stated that his government has done a great job in terms of providing basic amenities like roads, housing and electricity to the common citizens and will continue to provide them better facilities. Before performing ‘Kanya Pujan’ on the occasion of Ram Navami on Thursday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath listened to the problems of about 300 people at the Janata Darshan held in front of Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Auditorium in Gorakhnath temple.

Chief Minister Yogi said: “Those having housing issues would receive housing. Any village or locality that has connectivity issues would get roads repaired and constructed there as per the need. Electricity bills that have not yet been paid would no longer be a burden because after being revised, the option of payments in installments would be made available to them.”

The chief minister assured everyone present at the Janata Darshan that the solution to every person's problem was the priority of his government. In response to a request from a woman for housing, Chief Minister Yogi assured her of the same soon and advised her not to be disappointed or upset over the issue.

Furthermore, the chief minister instructed the officials

to ensure that no poor person was homeless. “If someone neither has land nor the money to build a house, it should be arranged under a government scheme,” the chief minister said.

Chief Minister Yogi also assured construction of roads when another woman raised the issue of lack of roads in her area, and issued instructions to the officials in this regard.

Yet another woman told the chief minister about her unpaid electricity bills and sought his help in depositing the bills in installments to which the chief minister said that she would not only be given the option to pay the outstanding bills in installments, but would also have her electricity bills revised to minimise the amount of arrears. He also gave instructions to the officials to act quickly in this regard. The woman was overwhelmed by this personal initiative of the chief minister.

Chief Minister Yogi gave instructions for prompt, effective and satisfactory action on police and revenue related issues.

At the same time, he gave assurances to those who had come seeking financial support for treatment that lack of funds would not hamper their treatment.

He said funds would be released from the Chief Minister's Discretionary Fund as soon as the process of estimation was completed.

COVID-19: Govt steps up precautionary measures

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Stepping up precautionary measures in view of a small rise in COVID-19 cases, the Yogi Adityanath government has put all the frontline workers and government as well as private hospitals on ‘alert mode’.

Instructions have been given by the government to take necessary action immediately in districts where confirmed COVID-19 cases are found. Along with this, instructions have also been given to strictly monitor the cases of respiratory tract infection (RTI), influenza like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) in all the districts.

As of March 28, the number of active COVID-19 patients in Uttar Pradesh was 340. The instructions were issued during a presentation on communicable disease control and Dastak abhiyan before the chief secretary.

Accordingly, the district officials have been directed to inform the senior officials immediately about the increase in RTI, ILI, SARI cases. Besides, there are also orders for intensive sampling at places where COVID-19 cases are reported. The samples will then be sent for genome sequencing to the King George's Medical University in Lucknow.

The government has also asked officials to take special care and precautions for elderly patients. Apart from this, instructions have been given to ensure availability of logistics,

medicines, personal protection equipment (PPE) kits, gloves, masks and equipment, oxygen plant and concentrator in hospitals.

The district administration has been asked to ensure that dedicated hospitals and wards are activated immediately.

As of March 28, the districts most affected by COVID-19 are Gautam Buddha Nagar (57), Ghaziabad (55), Lakhimpur Kheri (44), Lucknow (27), Bijnor (12), Lalitpur (9) and Saharanpur (8).

The officials have been directed to carefully monitor the present situation in these districts. Directions have also been issued for increasing testing and treatment in the affected districts and for taking special precautions in districts that were most affected in the previous COVID-19 waves.

Meanwhile, a communicable disease control campaign will be launched in the state from April 1 to April 30. The Dastak campaign will run from April 17 to 30. Under this, arrangements will be made for cleanliness and removal of water-logging in rural and urban areas. Along with this, intensive vector, mosquito control activities will be carried out in high risk areas with inter-departmental cooperation.

Awareness activities will be organised in schools for prevention of diseases. During the Dastak campaign, screening and treatment of symptomatic persons identified by the frontline workers will be ensured.

No student up to Class 8 to fail

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

All the students from classes 1-8 studying in schools under the Basic Shiksha Parishad (Basic Education Council) will be promoted to the next class without examination, said a notification released by the secretary, Basic Education Council.

According to the order, the promotion of students from classes 1 to 8 in the academic session 2022-23 will not be stopped in state-run schools and recognised schools run under the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Council.

“They (students) will be given admission to the next class as per rules,” Secretary, Basic Education Council, Pratap Singh Baghel, said.

Apart from this, instructions have also been given to distribute report cards of students on the basis of annual examination and evaluation.

In the Right to Education Act, there is a provision to promote children from classes 1 to 8 to the next class. They cannot be denied promotion under any circumstances.

Baghel said this decision will benefit lakhs of students as they will be promoted to the next class.

Director General School Education Vijay Kiran Anand said that the state government had no retention policy. According to this, no child will fail. This order is in accordance with the RTE Act.

Regarding the confusion among teachers about the report card, he said that the result would be prepared as per the order issued last year.

It has been said in the order that on the basis of annual examination and evaluation, the report card will be made available to the students by the principal of the school.

A meeting of the school management committee will also be organised on the day of declaration of annual results. The evaluated answer sheets of the students will be shown to the students and guardians and report cards will also be provided at the same time.

25 lakh people take dip in Saryu in Ayodhya

PTI ■ AYODHYA

About 25 lakh people took a dip in river Saryu in Ayodhya on Thursday and visited temples in the city to mark the Ram Navami festivities, administrative officials said.

They said lakhs of devotees thronged the temple town on the occasion of Chaitra Ram Navami amid tight security arrangements by the administration.

The celebrations got off early in the morning. Special prayers were performed in all the temples of Ayodhya at midday.

People sang devotional songs and took out ‘Rath Yatras’ of Ram, his wife Sita, brother Lakshman and Hanuman from many temples. District Magistrate Nitish Kumar said around



25 lakh devotees took a dip in the Saryu on Thursday morning and visited major temples, including Kanak Bhawan, Hanumanagarhi and Nageshwarnaath.

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust had made beautiful decorations with fresh flowers in the premises of the Ram Janmabhoomi site. Special prayer services were offered by chief priest Acharya Satyendra Das and the idol of Ram Lalla was decked up in green-coloured clothes.

Ayodhya Superintendent of Police (City) Madhuban Singh said police and paramilitary forces were deployed all over the temple town to ensure the security and safety of devotees.

“There is no threat to this large religious gathering of Ram Navami Mela, but we have made all possible arrangements,” he added.

Youth kills parents in Aligarh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In two shocking cases, a youth brutally hacked his aged parents in Aligarh while in Bulandshahr, a minor girl was arrested for killing her mother and father.

The incident in Aligarh took place in Zakir Nagar (Lane No. 7) in the Quarsi area late Wednesday night. Local police reached the spot after being informed of the double-murder and sent the bodies for autopsy and arrested the accused son. Reports said that 60-year-old Ishaq and his 57-year-old wife Shehzadi Begum, were living with their son Ghulamuddin. Ishaq was imam in a local mosque. They hailed from Suar area of Rampur district. The accused is a student of BCom in Aligarh Muslim University.

According to reports, Ghulamuddin was having a rift with his parents for the last few days. Due to this rift, he killed his parents late Wednesday night.

Senior Superintendent of Police Kalanidhi Naithani said that the police control room received information that a youth had killed his parents by stabbing them with scissors in Zakir Nagar Gali No. 7. After this he locked himself in the room.

The SSP said the police nabbed the youth after finding the bodies of his parents lying in pools of blood. The youth confessed to have killed them but did not disclose the immediate motive. Further investigations are going on.

In Bulandshahr, police apprehended a 15-year-old girl for the murder of her parents, who were axed to death a fortnight ago.

The minor girl confessed to the murder. The teenager told the police that she hated the atmosphere at home and “was fed up with the violent behaviour of her parents towards her”. She said that her mother would frequently beat her up and also had an illicit relationship with a man.

The couple, Hafiz Khan and

Rihana, was found dead on the morning of March 15.

Sources, however, said that the accused girl was unhappy with her parents as they objected to her talking to boys on the phone and also meeting them.

Being annoyed with her parents, the teenager conspired to kill them.

Bulandshahr SSP Shlok Kumar, said, “The girl confessed to murdering her parents with an axe after lacing their food with a heavy dose of sleeping pills.” The police also arrested the youth who arranged the pills and the shop owner who sold the pills, under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

“It was a difficult case to crack as there were no clues. While checking the mobile phone of a family member, we could find that the minor girl had a communication with a man in December and asked him to arrange sleeping pills but he refused,” the police officer said.

The police said that two days prior to the double-murder, the girl had arranged a pack of 20 sleeping pills.

“The girl mixed five tablets in the tea she prepared for her mother and 10 tablets in the milk for her 50-year-old father. The couple used to sleep outside their house while the accused and her younger sister had their beds inside the house,” said the police officer. The police said that on the fateful night, the girl scaled the roof of a neighbour with the help of a ladder and came to the front of her house where she killed her parents by repeatedly hitting the axe on their heads. They died on the spot and she went back to sleep.

The girl has been sent to the juvenile home in Bulandshahr, while the two men were sent to jail after being produced in a local court.

The SSP said that the police had recovered the axe used in the double-murder. It was hidden in the heap of fodder in the house.

Booth level women’s wing to help BSP in urban bodies polls

Lucknow (PNS): Already taking the lead over other parties by announcing a mayoral candidate, Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati is all set to ensure active participation of women in the coming urban bodies’ polls in Uttar Pradesh. The BSP supremo is going to call a meeting of the coordinators soon in Lucknow to initiate formation of committees of women to take their services till the booth level in the urban bodies’ polls.

Sources said that the BSP would form a women's wing at each booth level. This has been planned as after a poor show in the last assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, the party is desperate to ensure a comeback before the parliamentary elections scheduled for next year.

The sources said that Mayawati had instructed all coordinators to review and prepare a complete record of the campaign going on at the booth level so that a final decision regarding the election campaign for the urban bodies’ polls could

be chalked and the party could go full steam to ensure victory of maximum candidates. Like others, BSP has also made special preparations for the local bodies polls. The sources said that the party would prepare a separate team of women at every booth, in which females having a good academic and political background would be included so that they could carry forward the party's agenda even after the urban bodies polls till the next parliamentary elections. The sources also said that the party supremo had set five points for selection of candidates in the women's wing. These include clean image, education, social circle, business and political background. In the meeting, the party might also decide how to go with the decision to field Shaista Parveen, the wife of mafia Atiq Ahmed, as the mayoral candidate from Prayagraj.

It may be mentioned that the UP Police have announced a cash reward on Shaista in connection with the recent killing of Umesh Pal, an eyewitness in BSP

MLA Raju Pal murder case.

Taking a lead in declaring candidates for mayoral elections in the state, the BSP supremo has already named Saima Masood, wife of Imran Masood, party coordinator for western UP, as mayoral candidate from Saharanpur. Imran Masood joined BSP in October after quitting Samajwadi Party which he had joined in January 2022 just before assembly polls.

Mayawati, who wants to win back her clout among the Muslim voters, not only took Masood in BSP but also gave him a significant responsibility -- that of wooing Muslims in favour of BSP in the elections. Masood enjoys a considerable influence in western UP. His uncle Rashid Masood was a Union minister and had been with the Janata Party, Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party at different points of time in his political career. Masood, too, had been switching sides between Samajwadi Party and Congress before joining the BSP in October.

Silk agriculture fair inaugurated



Gorakhpur (PTI): Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday inaugurated silk agriculture fair at Yagiraj Baba Gambhirnath auditorium here.

He also laid the foundation stone of a Rs 11.38-crore worm rearing facility, community centres and thread machine shades and distributed monetary aid for silkworm house among beneficiaries on the occasion.

While addressing people, Adityanath said that the government was aiming to increase the income of farmers manifold and make Uttar Pradesh among the top states of the country with the prosperity and happiness of farmers.

Silk worm rearing along

with traditional farming could increase the income of farmers 2-2.5 folds, he said.

He said that the schemes and plans are made according to the development opportunities. “Uttar Pradesh is the state with the largest population in the country and top food grain producing state. Here the land for agriculture is 12 per cent but it contributes 20 per cent food grain in the country. The state has 9 climate zones and crops are cultivated in different seasons,” he said.

The chief minister said that the country can't be made prosperous without its farmers' prosperity and suggested new ways like natural farming and also making hedge of the farms with mulberries.

Minor lovers found hanging

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a suspected case of honour killing, the bodies of two minor lovers were found hanging from a tree in front of a temple in Salkhan village in Sonbhadra district on Thursday morning.

Suspicion that both were killed was aroused as the feet of the two lovers were touching the ground and there were injury marks on the girl's body. The cops sent the bodies for post-mortem and are waiting for the report before heading with the investigation.

According to reports, the devotees visiting the temple in Shivala Tola area of Salkhan village under Chopan police station on Ram Navami were shocked to see the bodies of a minor girl and a boy hanging with the same rope from a tree opposite the temple. After the identification of the couple, the information was given to their respective families. The family members rushed to the spot and claimed that the two seemed to have committed suicide sometime on

Wednesday night. They did not disclose any reason for the suicide.

Some villagers, however, claimed that both were in love for some time and wanted to get married but their families were opposed to it as they were still minor.

The villagers claimed that murder was suspected as the feet of both the victims were touching the ground and the girl had a deep wound on her head.

Chopan police reached the spot and sent the bodies for autopsy and were making further investigations. They claimed that the age of the boy was 17 and that of the girl 15. Both belonged to different castes.

Meanwhile, in Mathura, a mad youth brutally hacked a devotee to death when the victim was praying inside a temple on Ram Navami. The accused later tried to flee but the other devotees nabbed him and handed him over to the police.

Reports said that a devotee, Yashpal from Rajasthan, was

praying at Gayatri Tapobhoomi temple in Mathura on Wednesday evening when a youth suddenly attacked him with a blunt object, killing him on the spot. The accused later rushed outside the temple but as the witnesses raised an alarm other devotees outside the temple nabbed him.

In another incident, the body of a minor girl, missing for the last three days, was recovered from the Rapti river in Shravasti district on Thursday morning.

Reports said that a 12-year-old girl hailing from Tigharwa village of Malhipur police station of Shravasti disappeared under mysterious circumstances last Monday afternoon.

On Thursday morning, the cops learnt about a body lying in Rapti river and fished it out. The deceased was identified as the girl who was missing since Monday.

Superintendent of Police Prachi Singh said that they were waiting for the post-mortem report before making any further investigation.

Decomposed body found

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A badly decomposed body was found floating in a nullah on Trimurti Mandir Road in Gandhigram locality under Chakeri police station area on Thursday morning. Local corporator Manoj Yadav informed the police which rushed to the spot and carried out investigation. The body appeared to be very old. Yadav said the Nagar Nigam employees refused to take out the body from the nullah. The deceased was wearing jeans and T-shirt. The identity of the deceased could not be ascertained. Investigation was on in the matter.

MISHAP: Two brothers were killed while their friend was seriously injured when a speeding container knocked down their bike in Asiwani police station area of Unnao late on

Wednesday night. The police sent the bodies for an autopsy and admitted the injured to the Miyanganj CHC from where he was referred to the district hospital. The police have impounded the container. Adil (28) along with younger brother Quadir (25), sons of Zakir of Hyderabad village, Asiwani (Unnao) and friend Mobin (27) of Rasoolabad (Kanpur Dehat) had gone to Kanpur on bike on Wednesday night to attend a marriage ceremony. While returning late at night, the speeding container knocked down their bike at Miyanganj chauraha under Asiwani police area. As a result both the brothers were killed on the spot after coming under the wheels of the container and their bodies were lying on the street for a long time. On the information of passers-by, the police rushed to the spot and informed the kin

of the deceased. Due to serious condition of Mobin, the doctors referred him to he district hospital.

Meanwhile, a homeguard Kanhaiyalal (58) was killed and his colleague Gyanmani (50) was seriously injured when a speeding pickup ran over them near Durgaganj village under Aung police station area of Fatehpur late on Wednesday night. The incident took place when both the homeguards were patrolling on bike. The injured homeguard was admitted to the district hospital. The deceased Kanhaiyalal was a resident of Khadra village in Aung police area while the injured Gyanmani a native of Banthara (Jahanabad). They had left for on patrolling and were run over by the pickup on Prayagraj lane. SHO Vrindavan Rai said efforts were on to locate the pickup. The injured homeguard was sent to the hospital, he said.

Muslim women offer aarti to Lord Ram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Like the previous years, a section of Muslim women led by chief of Muslim Mahila Foundation (MMF) Nazneen Ansari offered aarti to Lord Ram on the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami at Subhash Bhavan, Lamhi here on Thursday. They also sought the blessings of Lord Rama so that the Muslim women across the world can get the right to live. They also raised the demands that the social evil like halala should end and prayers at Adi Vishweshwar temple should start by making it free from the stigma of Aurangzeb. They said that the world should move towards Ramrajya and the people from all over India connect themselves with their roots of ancestors, traditions etc. They appealed to the Muslims to declare a complete ban on cow slaughter and Kashmir should be completely free from terrorism.

One held with stolen jewellery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Police have arrested an employee of the firm engaged in opening of the inoperative bank lockers and recovered stolen jewellery from him on Thursday.

On being quizzed, he confessed to have stolen jewellery from the lockers of Bank of Baroda, Kidwai Nagar branch, while police claimed that it was not possible to commit the crime by a single man only. Meanwhile, investigations were still on suspecting the role of some other bank officers and employees in the incident. One of the victims has identified her more than half of the stolen jew-

ellery recovered from the accused. Jewellery worth around ₹1.50 crore of Rama Awasthi of Basant Vihar was found stolen from the locker of BOB's Kidwai Nagar branch and she had lodged a first information report (FIR) against the branch manager and employees with the police on March 23. The Naubasta police carried out investigations and quizzed many bank officers including the regional manager, deputy regional manager, branch manager and other employees. Thereafter, police also quizzed the employees of the firm engaged by the bank for drill opening the inoperative lockers when one of them identified as

Rohit Pal confessed his involvement in the crime. At his behest, police have recovered the stolen jewellery from him. Rohit Pal confessed to have stolen jewellery alone from the locker.

Station House Officer (SHO) Sanjay Pandey said one employee of the locker opening company had been arrested and stolen jewellery recovered from him. Victims Ajay Gupta and Rama Awasthi who had lodged FIRs in 2021 and on March 23 respectively had been called to identify their jewellery.

Meanwhile, probe is still on about the role of bank officers and employees in the crime, he said.

GM inaugurates renovated operation theatre in BLW

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

General Manager (GM) Basudev Panda inaugurated the renovated major operation theatre (Operation Room-3) and Emergency Ward in the Central Hospital of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) by unveiling the plaque and cutting the ribbon here on Thursday. Till now there were two operating rooms in BLW hospital, due to which the patients had to wait for their turn to surgery. With the opening of this major OT room, more complex operations of BLW employees can also be done in the hospital. Besides, with the opening of the updated Emergency Ward, better medical services can be provided to the beneficiaries immediately during the emergency.

On the occasion, the GM made a thorough inspection of other operation theatres, Intensive Care Unit (ICU), male and female wards, mother-child ward, various cabins etc in the hospital. He suggested extending the old running



GM Basudev Panda inaugurating renovated OT at BLW Central Hospital in Varanasi on Thursday.

OPD complex till the registration room so that proper distance standards can be ensured and all doctors will be able to provide all types of consultation facilities in the same complex. In order to provide high-level facilities to the indoor patients, the GM also stressed on the need for well-equipped wards. Panda also took stock of the

progress of the already approved work in the isolation ward, OPD expansion and modular operation room and gave necessary guidelines to the doctors present during the inspection. The GM also asked the Civil and Electrical department officers to provide better facilities in the hospital. During the inspection, the representa-

tives of Staff Council, OBC Association etc were also present and they expressed their happiness over the GM's initiatives to provide better medical facilities at the BLW Hospital. They also gave their suggestions so that the patients can get better facilities with the cooperation of all departments. Principal Chief Electrical Engineer Sushil Kumar Srivastava, Principal Chief Material Manager Rajneesh Gupta, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer PK Shaha, Principal Chief Personnel Officer Renu Sharma, Principal Chief Security Commissioner RS Chauhan, Principal Financial Advisor Amar Kumar Sinha, Principal Chief Engineer Prabin Khorana, Principal Chief Medical Officer Dr Devesh Kumar, Chief Vigilance Officer PK Chowdhary, Chief Engineer (Project) Praveen Kumar, Senior Deputy General Manager Vijay, Public Relations Officer Rajesh Kumar, Joint Secretary of Staff Council Shrikant Yadav and many others were also present.

Varanasi ranks 2nd in health dashboard

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Continuous strengthening and quality improvement of medical and health services is being done in the district. As a result of this, Varanasi has got the second best position in the state this month in the health ranking dashboard of Uttar Pradesh. Last month also Varanasi got the second position. This month's score has gained more than five per cent from the previous month's score. This information was given by Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary.

The CMO said that for the last two months, Varanasi has remained at the second position in the health ranking dashboard. It is known from this that quality services are being provided at all government hospitals, community and primary health sub-centres, Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres and sub-centres of the district. The best performance has been seen in the caesarean delivery at the district hospital and community health centres (CHCs), in which Varanasi has secured the first position in the state.

Apart from this, it has made a place in the best 10 for the use of permanent means of family planning for a limited and happy family. The three blocks of Varanasi out of eight namely Arajilne, Badagaon and Harahua have performed better and Arajilne block CHC has remained at the first position in the dashboard for the last three months. The CMO said the performance of all the blocks in screening pregnant women for HIV is good on the indicators of the health ranking dashboard.

The performance of Badagaon, Harahua, Kashi Vidyapeeth and District Hospital is 100 per cent in regular vaccination of children. Arajilne, Chiraigaon, Cholapur, Harahua, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Sewapuri and Pindra blocks have 100 per cent performance for home based newborn care. The performance of Badagaon, Cholapur, Harahua and Kashi Vidyapeeth has been seen to be good in institutional delivery. Apart from this, all the blocks including the district hospital have better performance in at least four prenatal checkups. The performance

of all Arajilne, Chiraigaon, Badagaon, Harahua, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Sewapuri and Pindra is better in the use of permanent means of family planning for a limited and happy family. Apart from this, there are other indicators including the current birth ratio, TB notification which needs further improvement. The CMO said that the areas where deficiency has been noticed will be completed soon. For this, all programme nodal officers, block programme managers, block community process managers, data operators, ANMs and other health workers have been directed to ensure 100 per cent data of all indicators as soon as possible.

VETERINARY COUNCIL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

In a major boost for the students pursuing Bachelor of Veterinary Sciences and Animal Husbandry from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and those aspiring for it, the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) has recommended final recognition for the programme to the Ministry of

Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Government of India. The council in its 71st meeting held recently recommended to the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, of the ministry, final recognition for the BVSc & AH being conducted under the Faculty of Veterinary & Animal Sciences, Institute of Agricultural Sciences, in the Rajiv Gandhi South Campus (RGSC) of BHU at Barkachha.

The council made the recommendation for recognition under Section 15 of the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984. The council's recommendation will benefit students from the 2017-18 batch onwards. After the Government of India's assent to the council's recommendation, BHU would become one of the select institutions in India authorised to award the degree and the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences & Animal Husbandry will be able to take 60 admissions in the programme annually. Vice-Chancellor Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain and Director, Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Prof Yashwant Singh have congratulated the members of the faculty on the VCI's recommendations.

DM's stress on following RUCO directives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Magistrate Visakh G Iyer while inaugurating the stakeholders' meeting on food fortification and Repurpose Used Cooking Oil (RUCO) directed the authorities of FSSAI local chapter to ensure 100 per cent hygiene rating of the eateries. He said there was also need to create awareness among stakeholders to ensure they followed strictly RUCO directives. He said later the rules will be implemented in the right earnest and there may be no respite as well.

He said reheating or reusing cooking oil was one proven reason for getting more acidity or why one's cholesterol levels were increasing. He said umpteen studies had categorically stated that reheating cooking oil can release harmful toxins, increase the percentage of trans fats in it and became rancid, giving rise to free radicals and to some very harmful reactions. He said reheating oil can take a toll on people's health by resulting in several harmful effects.

He said anything that is carcinogenic had the possibility of causing cancer. He said the root cause of most diseases including obesity, heart disease and diabetes was the reuse of cooking oil which was reheated several times. He said high inflammation in the body can also reduce immunity and make one prone to infections.

The FSSAI officials in their address focused on RUCO and advised that home-cooked food was the most fresh and healthiest variety of food one can eat. They said cooking



District Magistrate Visakh G Iyer addressing the meeting on RUCO

food at home empowered one to decide what ingredients went in one's food. They also recommended that the effective way to reduce excess cooking oil was to calculate the amount of food one needed for a particular meal to avoid food wastage. They said families need to cook fresh food as frequently as possible and cooking food in small quantities can also help one practice portion control. FSSAI inspector VB Tripathi said RUCO was a project that plans to convert vegetable oils, animal fats or restaurant grease that has already been used in cooking into biodiesel for running diesel vehicles or indeed any equipment that used diesel. He said the initiative had been launched nearly a month after the food safety regulator notified standards for used cooking oil. He said according to

FSSAI regulations the maximum permissible limits for Total Polar Compounds (TPC) had been set at 25 per cent beyond which the cooking oil was unsafe for consumption.

He said the FSSAI's new guidelines require large food business operators to store UCO separately which they can then sell to authorised UCO aggregators or collection agencies registered with the BDAI, state biodiesel boards and other agencies nominated by state government. As of November 2019, there are 11 authorised aggregators in the country. The FSSAI also requires all food business operators to refrain from buying UCO and to monitor the quality of oil that they use for cooking. It has notified the limit of total polar compounds (TPC) used in cooking at 25 per cent. TPC is used to measure the quality of

oil and its level increases every time oil is re-heated. TPC beyond 25 per cent is considered unfit for human consumption.

He said RUCO in a way will reduce India's oil import bill and the government hoped to address two other issues through RUCO, first, preventing adulteration of new cooking oil with UCO in the market and second, reducing repeated usage of the same UCO by food joints keen to increase profit margins. He said all the UCO collecting agencies were expected to pay food business operators immediately at the time of collection of UCO, based on the quantity and quality. He said the RUCO label on a food business provider would indicate that it conformed to the RUCO ecosystem and did not reuse the cooking oil.

Awareness programme to promote technology prototypes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Startup Incubation and Innovation Centre (SIIC), the technology business incubator of IIT Kanpur, organised a comprehensive 10-day awareness programme aimed at promoting technology prototypes in and around Kanpur and the National Capital Region (NCR). The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) had acknowledged SIIC, IIT Kanpur as the Implementing Agency for the "Design" sub-component of the MSME Innovative Scheme.

The 10 awareness programmes aimed at creating awareness about this sought-after scheme and to promote technology interventions among aspiring MSMEs, innovators, budding entrepreneurs,

and young minds looking to start their own businesses. The programmes attracted participants from over 250 MSMEs, including budding innovators, early-stage MSMEs, and established enterprises from various industrial hubs and MSME clusters. The programmes garnered enthusiastic participation from the attendees who presented their ideas that held the potential to be converted into marketable products. The government was making various efforts to bolster the MSME sector by establishing institutions and developing a roadmap to overcome hurdles and drive growth. As a result of the unwavering support of the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, SIIC IIT Kanpur was emerging as a centre for innovative ideas and

technological advancements. Through various programmes, SIIC IIT Kanpur was striving to bridge the gap and facilitate the growth of the MSME ecosystem. Under the scheme in 2020-2022 FY, the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, had identified and recognised five enterprises, namely, Kanpur Flowercycling Pvt. Ltd. (KFPL) (Phool Co), Jalconserve Technologies Pvt Ltd., Primary Healthcare Pvt Ltd., Cultech Wave Pvt Ltd and Biocraft Innovation Pvt Ltd. The short-listed enterprises had been actively involved in developing sustainable prototypes that aimed to foster the establishment of both toy and non-toy clusters featuring innovative designs. Moreover, in the current fiscal year (2022-23), the Ministry of MSME and IIT Kanpur had

extended support to nine micro-enterprises to execute pioneering design projects. These enterprises had been selected under the Design Component of the MSME Innovation Scheme, thereby reflecting the government's commitment to promoting innovation and growth in the MSME sector. The Design Innovative Scheme by the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, Government of India, is a unique scheme that provides grants to the final year UG and PG students engaged in design development and MSMEs working in the design domain. The grant range for the students is up to ₹1.5 lakh and between ₹15 to 40 lakh for the MSMEs. These funds are channelled towards prototype development for one year.

SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE CO. LTD.
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NOTICE U/S 13(2) OF SECURITISATION & RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT 2002 (HEREINAFTER CALLED 'ACT')

It is to bring to your notice that your loan account has been declared as NPA by secured creditor Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited having its registered office at D-305, Ground Floor, Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi - 110017 (herein after called 'SHDFCL') and you are liable to pay total outstanding against your loan to SHDFCL. You are also liable to pay future interest at the contractual rate on the aforesaid amount together with incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. Therefore, we hereby call upon you to discharge in full your liabilities to SHDFCL within 60 days from the date of this notice failing which SHDFCL will be empowered to exercise the power under Section 13(4) of the ACT. The details of borrowers and secured assets are as under:

S. No.	Loan Account No. Borrower(s) Name	Applicant Address	Demand Notice Amount & Date	Secured Asset
1.	OKAN181100005016307, Mohd Kashif, Farida Sultana	39 /03, Malda Bazar Meeston Road , Near Kotwali Chouraha, Kanpur Dehat Uttar Pradesh -208001	Rs. 10,83,807/- & 22-03-2023	Ground Floor Of House No. 39/50, Situated At Malda Bazar Kanpur Nagar Uttar Pradesh -208001
2.	OLKW210200005035069, & OLKW210600005037044, Mohammad Arif, Mohd Rafiq, Afroz Jahan	551KA/105, Bihawan Alambagh Near Ali Hospital, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226005	Rs. 7,65,333/- & Rs. 6,36,558/- & 22-03-2023	H.No. 551 GA/134A (Old H.No. 551 GA/32) Old Sardari Khwa Ward Om Nagar Alambagh Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226018
3.	LKW_1401_016148, Hari Narayan Chaudhri, Vinita Devi	13-B, Preeti Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226024	Rs. 5,50,137/- & 22-03-2023	Plot No-3, Khasra No-51, Vill- Daud Nagar Ward- Faizullaganj, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226024
4.	OLKW1905000050202127, Mannohan Lal, Purnima Devi	Shahpur Bhamrauli Sardar Nagar Colony Kakori Sd Convent School, Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -227107	Rs. 3,12,336/- & 22-03-2023	House No.596, BHK-N- 308, Khasra/Gata No. 308, Situated at Gram- Bhamrauli Shahpur Ward-Haiderganj Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226001
5.	OLKW190500005017002, Kuldeep Kumar, Kiran Mishra	Nai Basti Kothideeh Vikash Bhawan Nawab Ganj Bara Banki Prathmik Vidya Mandir Faizabad Uttar Pradesh -224116	Rs. 2,84,807/- & 22-03-2023	Khasra No. 173, KA Kothideen Nawabganj Distt- Barabanki Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh -226001
6.	OLKW190500005014808, Rajendra Kumar, Mamta, Padam Singh	11/223, Vikas Nagar, Near Tata Motors Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226022	Rs. 8,46,237/- & 22-03-2023	House No KLP/652/42, Kanhai Lal KA Purwa Ward Shankar Purwa,Tehsil and Distt- Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226001

PLACE: GURGAON, DATE: 30-03-2023

AUTHORIZED OFFICER, SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE COMPANY LTD.

'Need to know history to be strong'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Journalism has laid down its influence on the people in every way. Journalism has its impact manifolds in the present time than earlier. Today, we could become the centre of the world even sitting in a small room but we could compete with others only being updated with everything. There is a need to include new things in the syllabus but at the same time, there is also a need to know the history to be strong from the root. Today, the value is the biggest question in journalism and to separate journalism from nationalism is at present not possible. These words were expressed by V-C of MGKV Prof Anand Kumar Tyagi while delivering presidential speech in Alumni Meet-2023 'Suhani Yaden' of Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya Institute of Hindi Journalism on Wednesday.

'Impacts of climate change inter-related'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Noted meteorologist, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Dr Sunil Pandey while addressing a special session during the ongoing NSS camp on Thursday expressed concern over several species of animals and plants becoming extinct. He said climate change was the impact of the climate changes on Mother Earth. He said it would be no exaggeration to state that frequent and intense drought, storms, heat waves, rising sea levels, melting glaciers and warming oceans were directly harming animals, destroying places they live, and wreak havoc on people's livelihoods and communities. He said as climate change worsened, dangerous weather events were becoming more frequent or severe.

He said the impacts of climate change on different sectors of society were inter-related and added drought can harm food production and human health while flooding can lead to disease spread and damages to ecosystems and infrastructure. He said human health issues can increase mortality, impact food availability, and limit worker productivity and climate change impacts were seen throughout



Meteorologist, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Dr Sunil Pandey addressing a special camp for students on Thursday.

every aspect of the world and often uneven across the country and the world even within a single community, climate change impacts can differ between neighbourhoods or individuals. He said long-standing socioeconomic inequities can make underserved groups, who often have the highest exposure to hazards and the fewest resources to respond, more vulnerable. Dr Pandey said the projections of a climate change-impacted future were not inevitable. Many of the problems and solutions offsite link were known and ongoing research continued to provide new ones. He said scientists believed there was

still time to avoid the most negative of outcomes by limiting warming offsite link and reducing emissions to zero as quickly as possible. He said reducing emissions of greenhouse gases will require investment in new technology and infrastructure which will spur job growth.

He said rising temperatures had allowed certain disease-causing fungi to spread into new areas that previously were too cold for them to survive. He added that climate change affected the social and environmental determinants of health—clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter. He cautioned that between 2030 and 2050, climate change was expected to cause approximately 2,50,000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress. He said countries like India will be least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond. He said to state climate change today was the biggest threat to humanity was no exaggeration and was the single biggest health threat facing humanity and health professionals worldwide were already responding to the health harms caused by this unfolding crisis. This was followed by a cultural programme presented by the students.

Ram Navami celebrated with gaiety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Amidst the singing of 'Bhay Pragat Kripala Dindayala Kaushalya Hitkari...', the lines from Ramchaitrmanas, the festival of Ram Navami was celebrated in this city of Lord Shiva with all the traditional gaiety and religious fervour here on Thursday. Apart from celebrations of the festival at several temples including Shri Ram Janaki temple (Teliana), a grand tableau was decorated at unique Ram Ramapati Bank (Tripura Bhairavi Ghat near Dashashwamedh), while a group of women took out Ram Dhvaj Yatra in Lamhi area.

The function held at Ram Ramapati Bank was unique as in this 'bank' the devotees deposit 'Ramnaam' and in case of crisis, they can also seek loans of these 'Ramnaam'. Right from the morning, the devotees reached there to celebrate the festival by opening their new accounts in this unique 96 years old bank. Believe it or not, nearly 2,000 crore Ramnaams have been deposited there.

Besides, the festival was celebrated with great pomp at Shri Ram Janaki temple and



Women taking out Ram Dhvaj Yatra on the occasion of Ram Navami in Varanasi on Thursday.

Pioneer

throughout the day, the singers presented bhajans there amidst the beats of the drums and other traditional instruments. In his discourses, Mahant Ramdas said that Lord Rama incarnated on the land for the benefit of Brahmins, cows, deities and saints. The aarti of Shri Ram Darbar held in the afternoon and important

among those who were also present were Vishnudas, Kewal Kushwaha, Shivam Agrahari, Vidyashankar Maurya, Utkarsh Kushwaha and Santosh Sahu.

Besides, a group of women carrying flags in their hands, took out Ram Dhvaj Yatra from Shri Ram Ashram Lamhi to Ramlila Maidan. Carrying

kalash (urns) on their heads, the women walked chanting bhajans in favour of Lord Ram. The yatra was led by Mahant Balak Das of Patalpuri Math and it was also attended by Dr Rajeev Shriguruj, Dr Archana Bharatvanshi, Dr Mridula Jaiswal, Gyan Prakash, Suraj Chaudhary, Khushi, Ili and Ujala.

Kanya puja held at Kinaram Ashram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Hundreds of devotees thronged Baba Kinaram Ashram at Ravindrapuri Colony on the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navami here on Thursday when Peethadhishwar Baba Siddhartha Gautam Ram offered prayers of nine Kanya (girls) and a Bhairav. He also offered meals to the girls who were in forms of various incarnations of Goddess Durga and sought their blessings. At several places, such Kanya puja was also held on the occasion of Ashtami a day ago. Acharya Prakash and many others were also present.

Besides, hundreds of devotees thronged Mahalaxmi Gauri at Laxmi Kund on the last and auspicious occasion of Navami (ninth day) of Vasantik Navratri. A good number of



Kanya Puja ritual being held at Kinaram Ashram in Varanasi on Thursday.

devotees also reached the old temple of Mata Siddhidatri at Siddhanta Gali near Golghar. Besides, a heavy rush of devotees reached the famous Durga Mandir at Durga Kund as usual.

This religious city has separate temples of all the nine Devis and nine Gauris where the devotees offer prayers on different days of Shardiya and Vasantik Navratri respectively. A large number of devotees

also went to Vindhyachal in Mirzapur district while a rush of devotees was also seen at the old Durga Mandir (Ramnagar) and Sheetla Mata temple (Adalpur).

Meanwhile, the activists of Namami Gange, along with the personnel of 137 Composite Ecological Task Force (CETF) Battalion (Territorial Army) and 39 Gorkha Rifle Task Force offered their shramdaan to make the river Ganga clean at Assi ghat.

On the occasion of Ram Navami, they appealed to the people to keep the river clean and pollution free. Speaking on the occasion, regional convenor of Namami Gange Rajesh Shukla said that most of the life of Lord Rama passed living close to nature. Subedar Shivendra Singh of Ganga Task Force and many others were also present.

DM inspects Kajjakkpura ROB site

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam conducted an inspection of the under-construction Kajjakkpura Railway Over Bridge (ROB) site here on Thursday. The piling work of the ROB being constructed by the Uttar Pradesh Rajya Setu Nigam was to be completed by February 15, but out of 226 pilings, 204 pilings were done and 22 pilings are still pending. Out of 51 pile caps, only two piles have been capped. During his inspection, when the DM wanted to know the reason for the delay in the project, the officials of Setu Nigam, Jal Nigam and Jalkal informed about the problems being faced in shifting of sewer lines, electric line poles and demolition of houses etc.

The DM took the officers present there to the task for neither informing the district administration about the obstruction in the work for almost four months nor holding any meeting for making efforts to speed up the work. After inspection, the DM directed that the work of shifting of sewer lines should be



DM S Rajalingam inspecting under-construction Kajjakkpura ROB in Varanasi on Thursday.

Pioneer

started immediately. Apart from this, DCP Kashi was directed to provide force during the demolition of the houses and SDM Sadar to remain present as a magistrate while measurements being done by the tehsil employees. After this, along with the PWD engineers, the DM inspected the site of the flyover to be built next to Baruipur Sarnath WTP to connect Sarnath with Ring Road.

Earlier, Rajalingam held a meeting at his camp office and reviewed the progress made so

far regarding the preparations for the G-20 meetings and directed all the concerned officials to get all the work done at a fast pace. He instructed the cultural officer to prepare the list of cultural programmes to be presented during the arrival of the guests at the airport, hotels and during the routes of the guests. He said that a list of artists and venues of the cultural programmes should also be prepared.

He directed the Tourism department to ensure that all the guides and liaisoning offi-

cers should be well trained and everyone must have information about all the basic points of Varanasi. He expressed dissatisfaction over the slow progress of beautification work in the city and instructed the Varanasi Development Authority (VDA), Nagar Nigam and PWD to speed up the work. He directed the Nagar Nigam to complete all works by April 10 and the PWD by April 5. The DM also asked the officers that arrangements for cleanliness, lighting, light and sound shows and cruises etc of all tourist places should be made in time apart from attractive lighting arrangements on buildings of historical and cultural importance and removal of illegal encroachments from tourist places. The meeting was also attended by Vice Chairman (VC) of VDA Abhishek Goyal, Municipal Commissioner Shipu Giri, Chief Development Officer Himanshu Nagpal, ADM (Administration) Ranvijay Singh, ADM (City) Gulab Chandra, ADM (Protocol) Bachchu Lal and senior officers of various other departments.

CP flags off Ganga Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With an objective to make the people aware of the holy river Ganga, the Ganga Yatra was on Thursday taken out from Assi Ghat, here. The joint teams of Varanasi Police Commissionerate, 34th Vahini PAC, 36th Vahini PAC Varanasi, NDRF and SDRF participated in it with the motor boats. The Commissioner of Police (CP) Ashok Mutha Jain flagged off the Ganga Yatra and said that Ganga is giver of life as well as salvation. The Ganga Yatra began from Assi Ghat in the morning and reached Panchganga Ghat. From there, it culminated at Dashashwamedh Ghat. Before the flagging off the Ganga Yatra, the Sena Nayak of 34th



CP AM Jain flagging off Ganga Yatra in Varanasi on Thursday.

Pioneer

Vahini PAC Dr Rajiv Narayan Mishra while addressing the gathering at Assi Ghat threw lights on the significance of Ganga Yatra. The Ganga Aarti was also performed. More than two dozen motor boats participated in the Ganga Yatra.

The devotees and com-

mon people in large numbers were present at ghats to watch it and they also encouraged the participants by raising slogans. The LEDs were installed at ghats to telecast the Ganga Yatra live. The brass band of PAC presented patriotic songs on the both occasions of begin-

ning and culmination of Ganga Yatra. Prominent among those present on the occasion were Sena Nayak of 36th Vahini PAC Anil Kumar Pandey, Chandrakant Meena, ACP Awadhesh Pandey and Assistant Sena Nayaks Naresh Yadav & Shiv Narayan Yadav.

With Atiq conviction, BSP likely to dump Shaista

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is no more interested in continuing with Shaista Parveen, wife of mafia don Atiq Ahmad, as its mayoral candidate for the Prayagraj Nagar Nigam.

To fulfil her political ambitions Shaista first joined AIMIM of Owaisi and made plans to contest Assembly election, but later she switched her loyalty to Mayawati who assured mayoral ticket to her from Prayagraj.

The murder of Umesh Pal came as a hurdle between the dreams of Shaista and its realisation, because she was also named in the FIR along with other members of Atiq family, barring his two minor sons.

As an immediate reaction after the incident, Mayawati had said till Shaista is arrested, she will be the party candidate for Prayagraj Nagar Nigam mayor. But the conviction of Atiq Ahmad by the MP/MLA Court of Prayagraj, and life imprisonment to him compelled Mayawati to think twice and take a decision which goes against Shaista Parveen who had started campaigning with sharp shooters of the Atiq gang after getting

green signal from the BSP. Analysing the whole scenario, Mayawati, decided to snap relations with Shaista Parveen. Now the party will field any other candidate for the seat of Prayagraj mayor. Meanwhile at one time the fear of Atiq Ahmad was prevalent not only among the common people but also in the Police department. In the Raju Pal murder case four investigating officers changed in four years. There was so much pressure on the investigating officer that no one wanted to investigate the incident. Now the CBI is investigating it.

Narayan Singh Parihar, the fourth investigator in the Raju Pal murder case, not only filed a charge sheet against Atiq-Ashraf and their henchmen, but also included six more accused in the FIR, including Guddu Muslim.

Many times he received threatening calls from Pakistan numbers on his mobile. MLA Raju Pal was gunned down in broad daylight on January 25, 2005. The first investigation was given to the then Police Station SHO Dhoomanganj Parshuram Singh. After this the investigation was handed over to inspector Kotwali Surendra Singh.

Surendra Singh prepared the charge sheet after working hard for months. In the charge sheet, the names of two more people, including Abdul Kavi, were added but he was transferred. After this, investigation was handed over to inspector Kotwali, HS Rai. The case continued. HS Rai wrote that there is no person named Abdul Kavi. In 2008, the fourth investigator Narayan Singh Parihar was entrusted with the investigation, who has now retired.

Narayan Singh says that the names of six more people were added to his analysis. Guddu Muslim was also added. While he was investigating, he received several threatening phone calls from numbers in Pakistan. It was said "if you implicate 'Bhai', you will not survive". He gave complete information to the officials. He told the DGP. After this, he started keeping a paper in his pocket and briefcase of the house, in which it was written that if he died due to any reason, Atiq Ahmad would be responsible for it. Once he was offered Rs 50 lakh.

After Narayan Singh Parihar in the Raju Pal murder case, the investigation was

handed over to CB-CID in 2009. Now, the CBI is investigating this case since 2016.

FIR REGISTERED: A case of attempt to attack SP MLA Pooja Pal's brother Rahul Pal with a bomb has come to light. He has given a complaint to the police in this connection on Wednesday evening. On Tuesday evening when he was going somewhere an explosion took place behind his car. When he turned around, he saw smoke rising. After this, another explosion occurred in a short while. Rahul complained about it to the Dhoomanganj police on Wednesday.

The police registered an FIR and started investigating the matter. According to the police, the two places where Rahul Pal had reported the bomb attack, investigation was carried out there. The remains of crackers have been found at those places. When people around were questioned, it was found that the crackers were burst by the children. No evidence related to the bomb was found on the spot nor was such a thing told by anyone. When the video footage on the spot was also examined, no evidence like a bomb attack was found.

Beli Hospital carves a niche for itself

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Tej Bahadur Sapru Hospital popularly known as Beli Hospital here has once again succeeded in making its own place in the whole country. The government in the past had started the initiative of getting prescription slip made through online registration i.e. tokens in all government hospitals. In it the patient is being given the facility to download the app on smart-phone and get the form made through it.

In this more activism was seen in Beli Hospital. As a

result, Beli Hospital was ranked among the top 10 in the list released by the NHA (National Health Authority). This hospital has got the eighth place in the country where the maximum number of online form of more than 22,000 patients has been made.

On behalf of NHA, Dr Sharda Chowdhary, CMS of Beli Hospital has been congratulated by sending a congratulatory letter for this initiative. The efforts of Shekhar Singh, manager of the hospital and Ishan Singh, manager of the e-hospital, were commendable in this work.

For the convenience of the patients, the government has made changes in the system of making prescription slip. A mobile app named Driefcase ABHA has been developed, in which once the details of patient are filled, it will be saved forever. In all major government hospitals of the state, including Prayagraj, the patient will have to scan the bar code from the mobile, after which he/she will get a token number on the mobile itself.

On getting the number, he/she will go to the registration counter and on showing the token, the staff there will

give the printout of the slip. In a short time the patient will have the prescription slip in his hand and will be able to go directly to the OPD and consult the doctor.

Ishaan explains that details of 11 family members can be filled in this app. Till now, when the patient used to reach the counter to get the prescription slip made, he had to tell the full details, including his name, to the staff. Sometimes errors also happen in this. But through this system, the patient or attendant will have to fill their complete details through the app themselves.

CORE creates a new record

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE) has surpassed its previous best of 4,283 RKM of electrification.

Continuing its relentless march towards 100 per cent electrification of broad gauge routes by December '23 in mis-

sion mode, CORE created a new record by surpassing its previous best electrification of 4,283 RKM in the financial year 2021-22.

The CORE achieved this accomplishment with the electrification of record 478 RKM of sections on Wednesday across India. With the year ending round the corner, hec-

tic activities are going on in sections where the works are nearing completion to ensure that statutory inspections are completed before March 31.

Till March 29, 4,387 RKM of electrification had been done of which 1,527 RKM was completed in March alone and in the remaining two days till

March 31 an additional 400 RKM of electrification is expected.

With this, it is certain that CORE will create an unbeatable record of highest ever electrification in FY 2022-23.

General Manager Pramod Kumar congratulated all concerned on this major achievement.

Shobha yatra taken out from Ram Mandir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Ram Navami was celebrated with great religious fervour in the city on Thursday. Devotees lined up outside the temples of Alopei Devi, Kalyani and Lalita Dev to pay obeisance since morning. A 'shobha yatra' was also taken out from Ram Mandir Johnstonganj which after passing through different parts of the city culminated on Zero road. Apart from the daily 'shringaar', 'hawan' and 'poornaahuti' were also performed in different temples where visitors gathered in large numbers for 'darshan' of Lord Rama. Rama Navami is celebrated on the ninth day of Hindu month of Chaitra. Ram Navami marks the end of nine-day-long festival called Chaitra Navratri or Vasant Navratri.

On this auspicious day devotees observed fast, visit temples to offer special prayers, take out religious processions and special readings of 'Ramayana' were also held, said a prominent priest Pandit Kailash Tripathi.

He said a devotee kept a strict fast on Ram Navami because the Ram Navami 'vrata' was considered to be one of the five most important 'vrata' in ancient times. According to ancient religious texts, it is imperative for every devotee to observe the Ram Navami 'vrat', as it was the only easy means to attain happiness in the material world and attain salvation as well, he added.

Cultural programmes were also organised at different places. Meanwhile, the members of Akhil Bhartiya Samajik Samarsata Abhiyan celebrated Ram Navmi at a temple located at High Court with great gaiety and enthusiasm. They also burst fire crackers and distributed sweets among the people there.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Pawan Srivastava said character of Lord Rama was considered ideal in India.

PROMOTED: IFFCO Phulpur unit Executive Director (unit head) Sanjay Kudesia has been promoted to the post of senior executive director. On getting the responsibility of the post of senior executive director on Wednesday, he expressed his gratitude to Managing Director Dr Uday Shankar Awasthi. Sanjay Kudesia is a resident of Jaipur, Rajasthan. He studied Chemical Engineering from BHU-IT and joined IFFCO Kandla in the year 1987 as a graduate engineer trainee. With his dedication and commitment he is leading the IFFCO Phulpur unit. He has a wide experience of more than 35 years in plant. He has served in various projects of IFFCO

including Aonla plant, Paradip plant, OM-IFCO located in Oman, HR department. Kudesia has an experienced leadership capability and is working towards balanced fertiliser, fertiliser quality and increasing farmer's income in agriculture sector. Recently, he has played an important role in the establishment and operation of Nano Urea (liquid) plant. The All India IFFCO Officers' Association president Jitendra Tiwari, JGMs respectively Sanjay Vaish, MD Mishra, AP Rajendran, PK Singh, Sanjay Bhandari, PK Patel, Ratnesh Kumar and Arun Kumar, HOD Human Resources Shambhu Shekhar, IFFCO Officers' Association president Sonu Tiwari and general secretary Swayam Prakash, IFFCO Employees' Union president Pankaj Pandey and general secretary Vinay Yadav.

ple there. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Pawan Srivastava said character of Lord Rama was considered ideal in India.

Three accused sent to jail

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

The Santnagar police sent three accused to jail on Wednesday. Station Officer Kamal Tawari said a dispute between two groups had taken place in Ghuda Kada village on February 27 and seriously injured Rampati (70) who was under treatment in a hospital at Prayagraj died on Tuesday. The SO said a case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder was registered. The police arrested Chandralochan, Ramlochan and Bachcha on Wednesday and sent them to jail. Meanwhile the Raigarh police arrested three members of a inter-district biker's gang and recovered three bikes on Wednesday. CO Madihan Anil Kumar Pandey said the police during routine patrolling on Tuesday night intercepted a suspect riding a motorcycle. He failed to show the documents of the bike. During interrogation he divulged that the motorcycle was of a stolen one and he had a gang involved in

stealing vehicles in the adjacent districts. He was identified as Vikas Kumar Maurya of Dhaurahra village under Karma police station, Sonbhadra. On the identification of the nabbed accused Pankaj of Tikuria and Upendra Yadav of Chaandi village were nabbed with two other motorcycles. During frisking three mobile phones and Rs 400 cash was also recovered. After registering the case the accused were sent to jail.

'OPERATION NANHEY

FARISHTHEY' : Under its 'Operation Nanhey Farishtey' the RPF handed over two minors to childline help desk on Wednesday. The RPF personnel saw a minor girl (15) and minor boy (16) on a bench on platform No 2 in suspicious condition. They said they had left their house due to annoyance and belonged to an area under Manda police station, Prayagraj. The RPF informed Vivekanand Shiksha Samiti and handed over the minors to the team.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Fighting hate speech

Some sort of mechanism must be developed to curb hate speech, but it'd be better if it is informal

The Supreme Court and the Government made important points about hate speech on Wednesday. A bench of Justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna 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 cracks are coming up in the idea of fraternity. There has to be some restraint. Some sort of mechanism needs to be developed by the state so that we can curb these kinds of statements." The apex court's insistence on restraint is welcome, but the objective conditions are not conducive for it. The biggest reason is that politics, as practiced by all parties, has been reduced to realpolitik, in which principles and scruples play a very little role; emphasis is on winning elections, whatever be the cost. Hence mindless populism, with politicians vying with each other in offering freebies, throwing fiscal prudence and caution to the wind. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has underlined the perils of freebie culture but there is little to suggest that parties are willing to behave responsibly. Then there is the instinct to play to the gallery and appeal to the lowest common denominator. There are leaders who became popular and important not by public service but by making deplorable remarks. This is not surprising because political debate is rarely illumined by cogent arguments and elevating oration; it is rather animated by loud sloganeering and sanctimonious posturing.

On the subject of hate speeches, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta also made an important remark: such speeches are also made against Hindus. On the face of it, this might appear whataboutery, but this is factually accurate. Two wrongs don't make a right, so statements against Muslims or Christians are not justifiable because similar ones are also made against Hindus. Mehta informed the court that in Tamil Nadu, "a spokesperson of DMK" said "whatever Periyar says should have been done... if you want equality, you must butcher all Brahmins." Against such a backdrop, as the Supreme Court said, some mechanism has to be developed, but it would be better that this mechanism is informal rather than formal. There are already a zillion laws; what is needed is a code of behaviour that political parties, rather than the Indian State, should evolve together. Something like the model code of conduct that governs the behaviour of parties and candidates before elections. It is not legally enforceable, yet it is widely adhered to. We should not forget that behavioural patterns are difficult to change with laws, rules, and fiat; when people themselves realise that something should be avoided, they avoid that. After all, politicians do observe the code of conduct. Therefore, the best way out would be a consensus among politicians and parties that decency in political discourse would be nice.



Artistes dressed as Hindu deities distribute sweet juice and buttermilk to celebrate Ram Navami, in Bengaluru PTI

Let them write an essay on Khalistan

This protest has no content except vilification and terror. It dodges issues of territory, Government form, State-religion ties and economy

Indian diplomatic missions in the UK, USA, Australia and Canada have recently been subjected to violent and abusive protests by pro-Khalistan Sikhs. If I were at Ground Zero, I would have simply walked around with a sheaf of foolscap papers and asked the agitators to write an essay about the proposed Khalistan. The essay must address the issues of territory, a form of government, the relationship between the state and church (SGPC), economy, demography (38 per cent non-Sikhs in Punjab, and Sikhs in the rest of India) etc. However, the essay reveals the "Khalistan" (empty space) that exists in their minds.

Over the last 50 years, the 'movement' has preferred to dodge these fundamental questions. Thousands of lives have been lost in an organised misconception. Territory is the basic component of a sovereign state. The maps of the proposed Khalistan are ludicrous. In the 1980s, Khushwant Singh purchased a Khalistan map published in England, for £2. "According to 1992," "Khalistan will include



Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, New Delhi, chunks of UP, Rajasthan and Saurashtra to give the state an outlet to the sea. By rough reckoning, the Sikh population will be 13 per cent. What kind of Sikh state will this be? Clearly, not democratic." (*My Bleeding Punjab*, P.155-156). A recent example of this lack of clarity is the fanciful Khalistan map issued by Gurbhag Singh Pannun, of Sikhs For Justice, in June 2022 at the Lahore Press Club. Besides the Indian Punjab, it encompasses almost the whole of Haryana, Himachal, five Rajasthan districts, several Uttarakhand districts (including Dehradun and Haridwar), and a number of districts of UP. It included

Gurugram, though Delhi was left out. Shimla was the capital of Khalistan, though Sikhs comprised 1.95 per cent of the city. Pro-Khalistani graffiti was actually found pasted on the Assembly Building at Dharamsala (Kangra district) on May 8, 2022, and scribes in Himachal Pradesh received pre-recorded Khalistani threat calls on their mobiles. However, in the Melbourne round of a referendum by the outfit in January, the question was whether "Indian-governed Punjab should be an independent country—Yes or No". Where does that leave the June 2022 map?

As per the referendum, sovereign Khalistan would be a landlocked country between India and Pakistan. Punjab farmers, overwhelmingly Jatt Sikhs, are heavily dependent on rice and wheat from the Centre. This was borne out by the massive farmers' agitation (2020-21) compelling the Government to cancel the farm laws. One would be interested in knowing how Khalistan proponents plan to offload Punjab rice and wheat mounds.

Nobody has yet seen a draft Khalistan constitution

even after 50 years. The Khalsa Raj Party Constitution issued by Lt Col Partap Singh (Retd) on May 15, 1991, at Chandigarh, issued towards the end of the Khalistani insurgency, was expected to condense all wisdom on Khalistan. It advocates an independent, sovereign Sikh homeland and restricts its boundaries to Punjab and adjoining Punjabi-speaking areas 'fraudulently kept out during a Punjab reorganisation in 1966'. Herein, Lt Col Singh assumes all Punjabi-speaking persons in India are Sikhs, and vice versa, wherein in reality 38 per cent of Punjab population according to Census 2011 is Hindu. Will Khalistan be a democracy and a theocracy at the same time? It is open to multiple interpretations but it says nothing about the SGPC. The 'movement' is a bundle of imponderables, deliberately retained by its sponsors. It fits American author Paul Elridge's description, "Man is willing to die for any idea, provided that idea is not clear to him."

(The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi)



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

China resorts to 'buying' support

Globally, China is rapidly gaining influence over the US and asserting its diplomatic muscle by investing disproportionately in seedy regimes

In 2000, China accounted for less than 2% of South America's exports which spiralled thereafter at over 30% annually to reach \$180 billion in 2010, \$450 billion by 2021, and expected to exceed \$700 billion by 2035! Beijing is now South America's top trade partner with countries like Chile accounting for nearly 40% of their exports to China. It didn't happen by chance, but by concerted Chinese design. China had invested disproportionately and knowingly with a 'no-strings-attached' policy that necessitated no preachy conditions or reform insistence. This leniency appealed to a host of illiberal and undemocratic regimes (e.g., pariahised Venezuela was given loans of more than \$64 billion, causing fears of a debt trap to arise). China's internal 'South-South cooperation' policy was further bolstered by the inclusion of initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or even the more recent 'Covid-19 diplomacy' that ensured transactional support and investments. Besides the reciprocal gratification of raw materials and the emergence of an alternative power centre, China replaced US control and assert its diplomatic muscle and leverage on the world stage.

One obvious element of quid pro quo sought by the Chinese for loosening their purse strings in economically struggling South America was the switch to derecognize its nemesis Taiwan (Republic of China) to the 'One-China' policy (with the assumption that Taiwan is an essential part of the Chinese mainland, to be reunified one day). South American countries were especially in large numbers among those who recognised Taiwan as the Chinese had little or no leverage, historically – today, with its deep pockets and flexing of bargaining muscle, one South American country after the other flipped sides in favour of China. Oddly enough, even the US and India remain vested in the 'One-China' stance, grandstanding and sabre-rattling notwithstanding.

Honduras became the latest to fall prey to the Chinese 'buy-out' as its President, Xiomara Castro, did a brazen flip-flop within weeks of downplaying



rumours of a switchover. Xiomara remained garbled in her justification, "a sign of my determination to fulfil the government plan and expand borders", but her foreign minister, Eduardo Reina, did some plain speak when he said that the switchover was about, "pragmatism, not ideology" and that Honduras was in desperate need of finances as its urgent requirements were, "drowning the country"! This leaves the shrinking list of those countries that still recognise Taiwan to just 13 out of the 193 UN member states i.e., the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Tuvalu, Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, the Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis, St Lucia, Eswatini, the Holy See and St Vincent and the Grenadines. Access to the Chinese market and Treasury triumphs over all moral and diplomatic positions. Ironically, Taiwan remains formally unrecognised even by its most prominent allies, the USA (despite bipartisan unity on Taiwan). Jimmy Carter's abandonment of diplomatic ties with Taiwan to recognise Beijing instead, initiated a complexity and absurdity of relationship that the USA continues to grapple with as it supplies weapons to a nation that it does not fully recognise. China's unofficial mouth-

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piece, Global Times noted bluntly, "The US does not have enough resources to assist Honduras or make any effective pledges to Honduras in exchange for Honduras' change of mind. The case of Honduras shows that as long as countries stay firm, US obstruction and interference will not work. This will have a domino effect on Taiwan's remaining 'allies' such as Guatemala, Belize and Paraguay." The Chinese have no qualms about simply 'buying out' the last bastions in South America, as the USA cannot make a counteroffer that is financially attractive enough to spurn Beijing's advances. As if to confirm its intent, the Global Times concludes, "The sleepwalking of 'Taiwan independence' is ending."

Taiwan or its allies in Capitol Hill cannot compete with the Chinese coffers and are getting outbid, but that does not mean that there are no underlying concerns in accepting the Chinese terms. The reality of Chinese debt traps is legendary and short-term bailouts do not end well. Micronesia's outgoing President, David Panuelo had accused Beijing of 'political warfare' by insinuating that it was interfering and preventing the switchover from China to Taiwan. China remains hyper-

sensitive to the Taiwan issue and shows very short patience with what it insists are its internal issues. Recent developments in the wars in Afghanistan and Ukraine have exposed the limits of the so-called 'superpowers' ability to take over and control the targeted landmass infinitely. Therefore, ensnaring and controlling those regions through 'buyouts' is decidedly easier, and even more sustainable.

Honduras recognised the Taipei government for 82 years. However, the wanton lure of a hydroelectric dam and billions of dollars in 'aid' was irresistible. Not too many believe the Chinese line of Honduras sees through 'Washington's bullying diplomacy' as the pattern and accompanying terms of the switchover are eerily consistent and seemingly generous (initially). The price for the switchover was the upfront admission by the Honduran authorities that there is "only one China in the world". The days of principled diplomatic stands are over, and commerce and coercion define the new global order. China is the high temple of realpolitik.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WELCOME MOVE BY HIMACHAL BY CM

Sir — Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri who announced in the HP Vidhan Sabha on March 28 that no appointment would be made on an out-sourced basis in the Jal Shakti Department in future is a praiseworthy decision. Outsourcing recruitment is a backdoor entry. It violates all recruitment requirements, such as ads inviting applications, competitive tests followed by personal interviews, meanwhile germinating corruption and exploitation by service providers because it is typically only known individuals who are appointed. The employees recruited through the outsourcing method need to be stopped in every department which generates corruption and hampers government functioning. The government should appoint the required staff regularly in all departments after following the due selection process.

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

RAHUL'S MANOEUVRES

Sir — After being disqualified as an MP, Rahul Gandhi appeared before the media and said that whatever may come, he would keep asking questions in the Adani case. Rahul Gandhi's attention is more focused on the political fight than on the legal fight. Rahul Gandhi and Congress want to turn this court sentence into BJP revenge. But Rahul Gandhi and Congress have to accept that Rahul Gandhi has been punished for defamation. Rahul Gandhi has 30 days to appeal. It will be interesting to see how Rahul Gandhi's politics overshadow the BJP in the coming days and how Rahul Gandhi overcomes these difficulties.

Rohit Pandey | New Delhi

AMERICA'S DIVERSIONARY TACTICS

Sir — Playing blame games is the order of the day. As a result, our politicians play a crucial role in making the public feel bad about our country's expansion abroad. Moreover, they seek the help of a superpower and are not ready to face

Why not set up a JPC on Adani?



Addressing a gathering after inaugurating an extension of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) headquarters in Delhi, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi linked the coming together of opposition parties against the BJP to his Government's campaign against corruption and said "anti-India" forces are attacking constitutional institutions — the "strong foundation of a rising India" — to stall the country's growth. To hear this, an aam aadmi with heavy hearts wants to know from PM Modi, why the Government is not investigating Adani. In addition, what about shell companies, stock parking, and stock inflation? And don't forget the recent controversy over Elara and Shell's companies receiving defence contracts — what is going on there? People want to know if corporate cronies were given undue favours to jump from 600 to the top 10 in top business

rankings under your rule? They also want to know if the Government was involved.

Moreover, why the reluctance to call out fugitives Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Vijaya Mallya? The public wants transparency and accountability, and it's time for the government to answer these burning questions. Not only this, PM Modi fought to change the election funding law to secretly allow black money. Is PM Modi not the same who supports his Karnataka MLAs to take crores of bribes? He remains silent, even when BJP politicians get caught "red-handed" there, with crores of cash? Why are there no investigations by the CBI, ED or IT? Why do corrupt politicians from opposition parties join the BJP, and cases against them miraculously disappear? It means all BJP MPs/MLAs/politicians are absolutely above corruption. As people wonder when the honest PM Modi implemented demonetisation and secretly converted his friend's money from Black to White, or who changed coal mining tender rules for Adani so that he would benefit from them? Is he not the PM who doesn't have a problem with foreign companies owning defence projects? And the list goes on and on. In view of this, before PM Modi's declaration that all those involved in corruption have come together on one platform, the anti-corruption crusader should set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to investigate the Adani matter. Alas! He has no courage.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

elections in India as the winning chances are dim. It is impossible for a country as large and about to be the most populous in the world as India to function according to the whims and fancies of Johnnies and Alices in Wonderland at the US Department. The US has no *locus standi* to lecture India on democratic values. As the US's pathetic position worsens, they left their business and entered the Indian politics scene.. When the US could not play a decisive role in bringing about its own economy's revival, the show

diverted towards India. That country's GDP is falling drastically and there is no hope for immediate improvement. India is better placed and so it could not see Indian progress and wanted to exhibit and poke its nose into Indian political scenario. However, India stands united and the erroneous elements will be eliminated sooner or later.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

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FIRST COLUMN

JAPANESE THRUST TO OUR LOOK EAST POLICY

The policy needs more push for stronger relations with SE Asia through NE States



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India's vision of a 'Look East' policy and Japan's vision regarding a free and open Indo Pacific meet in India's landlocked northeast. India for long has championed its 'Look East' policy. This aims to develop deeper relations with countries in South East Asia and the Bay of Bengal region through northeastern (much to be tapped) States as a major gateway. Meanwhile, for more than a decade, Japan has been focusing on free, open and fair Indo Pacific policy, with emphasis on free movement of people, trade across land, sea and air routes, all through the region. India's northeastern States form an important access node.

Last week Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, during his India visit, reemphasised the desire to pursue a more engaged Indo Pacific policy. This has for the past two years become the most strategic foreign policy component for the US and Europe. It is also the glue holding together India, US, Australia and Japan in their QUAD grouping. Japan has been promoting key infrastructure projects in India's



northeast to create seamless trade and transport routes. It has been assisting in developing northeast road network connectivity improvement projects in Assam and Meghalaya, sewage and water supply projects in Assam, development of schools in Manipur, projects related to forest management in Tripura and Nagaland and sustainable agriculture projects in Mizoram. Japan's investment in the northeast is \$2 billion so far. In addition, the Japanese Government has picked up key infrastructure projects such as the MatarBari deep water port in Bangladesh. This will be complemented by the construction of connecting roads in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. Once completed, these infrastructure projects would provide seamless access from the northeast to Bay of Bengal sea ports. In addition, they would serve as a major trade transit route for goods from Southeast Asia and beyond.

This promises to bring more prosperity to the entire region, not just within India's geographical boundaries. It fits well into the Japanese vision of comprehensive economic and regional development, based on law. It may be noteworthy that the other Asian giant, China, has rapidly expanded its sphere of influence in the region through its opaque Belt and Road Initiative. This has tied many of these countries into multiyear fatal debt traps. India and Japan are the major economies not part of China's debt trap infrastructure financing projects. Their vision for the Indo Pacific is different from China's.

India and Japan, during the leadership meeting in New Delhi, highlighted the need for expanding the partnership to more ASEAN countries. Even the QUAD Foreign Ministers' meeting in March emphasised the centrality of ASEAN and the need for greater engagement. It is significant that Japan is working in a structured manner in India's neighbourhood. This is with some of India's most trusted allies such as Bangladesh on a path of regional prosperity. Japan has been working with India since 2017 to support NE's development. Japan has clearly articulated that it is keen to tie the two ports, one in Bangladesh and the other in India's NE, for greater economic cooperation.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh while addressing a BIMSTEC meet in Kolkata this week stressed the need for India's north eastern region to be the leading edge of India's Act East diplomacy. He emphasised the need for developing transportation facilities and trade within BIMSTEC partners. His caution for BIMSTEC countries was to follow a modest yet practical approach. Any creative solutions for increasing trade in this region also click well with Japan's push for increased economic prosperity and connectivity for the Indo Pacific.

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

Societal needs stretch beyond skill formation



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The current overemphasis on acquiring skills at the cost of compromising life fundamentals would be counterproductive in the long run and needs a relook

Nowadays, the most popular phrases are skill formation and employability. There's nothing wrong with that. These are apparently innocent favourites which also contribute to social growth. Even innocent phrases can have ramifications, even for the purpose of social growth. Illustratively, skill formation would reference educational institutions. Educational institutions cannot just focus on 'skill formation' and 'employability'. Educational institutions must have as their priority training the mind, educating a person and making him a worthy member of society capable of contributing to overall growth. There is indeed a school of thought which argues that education requires as its end objectives character building, preparing for responsible citizenship and the like. Ever since the current system of university education with its segmented approach to degrees came into being, there has been a running debate on the objectives of education.

Mind training and general orientation towards learning are multi-layered processes. Liberal education is supposed to cater for them. It is difficult to conceive of a skilled person who is not a good human being, ethical and contributes to collective welfare.

Individual growth, by definition, is embedded in a social environment with sound values and norms. There is clearly not much debate on the issues outlined above. However, factoring in the economic context, including gaps and shifts in livelihood processes, becomes a poignant element in its own right. An illustration may be in order; consider India's rural sector. There are various processes and learning segments in agriculture which give the farmer a position of primacy in the country's economic framework.

However, a closer look at the lay of the land, both literally and methodologically, will show two things. The amount of land on the subcontinent is constant. Other variables are not. The number of people who rely on a livelihood from agriculture has exponentially increased. This means, the number of people deriving their livelihood from agriculture has grown to the extent that the land available per head has substantially 'receded'. Further even as the productivity of agriculture has grown, the revenues to the farmer per head have declined. This is, also, because the portion of land per head has become smaller with an increasing population.

That is not the end of the story. Additionally, there is the factor of the switch in crops, at times, from cereal to cash crops, and from cash crops to cereal. This means that, in certain cases, the total income from agricultural products has gone down for various reasons. Not the least of which would be the consequences of continuing cereal cultivation. Further, however, if the farmer switched to cash crops, it would be difficult to sustain. This is due to a lack of understanding of how to choose, cultivate and market cash crops.

The problem does not end there. There are other shifts because of the economic transition as cereal land value declines. There emerges an exponentially rising demand for tertiary sector earnings in rural areas, such as for carpenters, blacksmiths, electrical workers, and the



AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, FEW STATES HAVE SHOWN A TENDENCY OR PROPENSITY TO FRAME ECONOMIC POLICIES THAT WOULD HELP CREATE A SOCIAL FEEDBACK LOOP

(The author is an internationally acclaimed management consultant. The views expressed are personal)



like. This is different from the earlier dispensation. Then, it is not as if the blacksmith and the cobbler were not required. However, the rising demand for their numbers was consistent with the rise in population growth. If the income from the tertiary sector in the rural areas grew it still did not divert people, in terms of percentages, from agriculture in any significant way. In agriculture itself the market was not a prime determinant of switching from cash to cereal crops or vice versa. The market remained essentially local. The introduction of technology changed all that.

Technology caused a serious disruption of the economy and disturbed the economic viability and health of the existing socio-economic system of the villages. The present excessive serenading of technology virtues eschews taking a balanced view of the prerequisites and consequences of the technology factor.

To illustrate the point, consider a family of five young men living with an elderly gentleman (their father?). If three of them entered the wage market of the tertiary sector and two of them continued making their livelihood by tilling the land, even then there would be further land fragmentation. As a result, the return per head would go down since the 'elderly gentleman's' labour and talent would now be split among two

heads. This would be a generational issue.

Whether the output was cereal or cash crops would be a separate consideration. The one producing cash crops would likely be better off than the one producing cereals. So in effect, among the five young men in the family, there would be an income differential among those (three of the five) who earned from the tertiary sector and even between the two still tilling the land.

This economic reality is the outcome of social disturbances, which could affect the collective social fabric of the village's occupational profile. If allowed to run its course, the real need is economic policies at a local level. This would rationalise and smoothen the disruptions caused.

Unfortunately, at a local level, few states have shown a tendency or propensity to frame economic policies that would help create a social feedback loop. This will grow talent in each of the required income-generating avenues.

This is a serious matter that seems to be escaping the attention of policymakers at a time when it needs to be addressed. For a stable society, with proper wage-earning channels and comparable lifestyles arising therefrom, a requirement is viable and organic economic growth. Having a system so severely divided will create gaps in the economic framework

in general, not only in the hinterland but elsewhere. This could lead to manpower shortages in critical sectors of the economy and, among others, encourage population growth in urban areas. Social and economic equity require talent and compensation to be available in equal measure in all critical sectors of the nation's life.

As noted earlier it is not as if in the earlier dispensation the blacksmith and the cobbler were not required. It has also been analysed how, as the population grows and the income from the tertiary sector in the rural areas grows, fewer and fewer people take an interest in the tilling of the land. Further, even in the tilling of the land, cash crops are preferred over cereals.

It has further been argued that this is a serious distortion of the economy. It creates dissonance in the economic viability and health of the social fabric of the villages. Many professionals and policy makers seem to have missed the point, and employment promotion based on catchy slogans seems to confuse the issue.

To conclude, nobody grudges the emphasis on skill formation, but like everything else, overemphasis on skill formation to the neglect of fundamentals of life and distorted by profit oriented economics, is something which requires a good second and third look.

A film festival with its heart in the right place

The Habitat International Film Festival, an annual treat for the Delhi-NCR film lovers, was back in its full-fledged form this year

The 10-day Habitat International Film Festival (HIFF) was a visual treat for film-loving communities in Delhi and the NCR. Thanks to Sunit Tandon (Director, India Habitat Centre) and Vidyun Singh (Programme Head) along with her team to bring the award-winning, critically acclaimed films from Cannes, Berlin and other renowned film festivals.

This year, HIFF screened 60 films from 20 countries, with Australia as the focus country. From factual to fantastical, from surreal to sci-fi, this edition took place from March 17 to 26.

Tandon says, "The HIFF is back in its full-fledged form this year. We also bring a cutting-edge VR Section to the festival for the first time.



SANTANU GANGULY

(The writer is a Delhi-based film festival curator, freelance writer, filmmaker and producer)

Aspiring filmmakers will not want to miss the unique opportunity provided by Kieslowski Film School Documentary Workshop."

From Australia, six of the finest contemporary films of 2022 and 2023 have been screened with the opening film, *The Dreamlife of Georgie Stone*, showcasing the elliptical memories of the teen activists historic fight for transgender rights; Ivan Sen's *Limbo* arrives fresh off the boat from its Berlinale 2023 premiere; others include *The Lonely Spirits Variety Hour*, *Sweet As*, and *Survival of Kindness*.

Filmmakers and editors from the Kielowski Film School from Poland trained the young minds in a four-day documentary workshop. Grzegorz Paprzycki, an

acclaimed upcoming voice in contemporary Polish cinema and Kieslowski Film School alumni was one of the workshop trainers. A hands-on workshop, with live editing sessions, discussions and practical exercises designed to hone their skills as filmmakers was an added advantage for the local young filmmakers.

For the first time as part of the festival, cinema's latest innovation — VR and 360° video — was presented in partnership with the Goethe Institute. The Virtual Reality programme — a package of animation, short and documentary films — explores the relationship between the past and present. It also adds a whole new dimension to film watching for the audience.

Four films in the MUBI

Friday section that approach the anarchy of love and its expression across different eras — the classic *In The Mood For Love* by Wong Kar-wai, to the contemporary *Paris, 13th district* by Jacques Audiard and *The Worst Person in the World* by Joachim Trier, even the futuristic *Crimes of The Future* by David Cronenberg.

Eight biggest attraction at HIFF were: *Elvis*, the buzzing Austin Butler-starrer, Baz Luhrmann biopic that premiered at Cannes (and has won many awards subsequently); *Rheingold*, Fatih Akin's (Germany, Netherlands, Morocco, Mexico) high-octane adaptation of the swagger and bombast of German rap star Xatar's 2015 autobiography *All Or Nothing*; winner

of 16 awards and 51 nominations, including the much-coveted Golden Bear (Berlinale 2022) - Carla Simon's (Spain), *Alcarras*, a deeply intelligent and empathetic humane drama that engulfs you in the heat and dust and dysfunction created by market forces; *Perfect Number* - the return of veteran Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Zanussi and his search for philosophical answers in mathematical theories; the poignant *We are Still Here*, an anthology film about stories of indigenous heroes from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific; winner of the Best Screenplay at Cannes 2022, *Boy From Heaven*, takes us into the heart of a ruthless power struggle between Egypt's religious and political elites; the

latest Berlinale awardee (2023), *The Survival of Kindness*, follows a black woman's escape from a cage in the middle of the desert to the city, recapture, and tragedy; and Oscar nominee *EO* by Jerzy Skolimowski (Poland) follows a donkey that encounters good and bad people, experiences joy and pain, exploring a vision of modern Europe.

Further enriching the feature line-up are some equally remarkable documentaries, shorts, and animation films. DOC NYC 2022 nominee *Closed Circuit* by Tel Inbar (Israel) is a documentary that captures the heart-pounding trauma of the 2016 terrorist attack in Tel Aviv's Saron Market; Winner of 'Best Documentary Feature' at The Roxbury International Film

Festival and Filmocracy Fest, *Hostile* by UK filmmaker Sonita Gale explores the UK's complicated relationship with its migrant communities; Winner at the Warsaw Film Festival 2022, *Region of Heroes* by Artur Lerman (Ukraine) is the story of those who selflessly saved thousands of Ukrainians during the Russian occupation; winner of the Special Jury Award at Roxbury Film Festival and the International Humanitarian Award at Flickers' Rhode Island International Film Festival, *The Bengali* by Kavery Kaul (USA) is the story of a writer from Louisiana who embarks on a quest to India to look for her grandfather's descendants. Curated packages from Poland and Sri Lanka also embellished the festival.

Amritpal mocks Punjab govt again

Will soon appear before world, says fugitive in new video

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

A day after daring the Punjab police to arrest him, radical preacher Amritpal Singh surfaced in a fresh video on Thursday, asserting he was not a fugitive and would soon appear before the world.

The purported video surfaced hours after his audio clip came out on social media in which he debunked speculation he was negotiating his surrender.

"Those who feel that I have turned fugitive and I have left my associates, they should not keep this illusion in their mind. I do not fear death," he said in the video in Punjabi.

"And soon will appear before the world and will also be amongst the 'Sangat,'" he said.

Police have stepped up security in and around Amritsar and Bathinda amid reports that Amritpal Singh may surrender after entering any of the two Sikh shrines - Golden Temple in Amritsar and Takht Sri Damdama Sahib in Bathinda.

The pro-Khalistan preacher said he was not like those who would flee the country. "One has to face a lot during the days of rebellion... These days of rebellion are difficult to pass," he said.

It was his second video since being on the run amid a police crackdown on his outfit 'Waris Punjab De'.

The police action began on March 18, weeks after Amritpal Singh's supporters stormed a police station in Ajnala, near Amritsar, to secure the release of one of his associates. The

preacher escaped the police net in Jalandhar district by switching vehicles and changing appearances multiple times.

In the first video, which appeared on social media on Wednesday, he asked the Jathedar of Akal Takht, the highest temporal body of Sikhs, to summon a congregation to discuss issues concerning the community. He and his associates have been booked under several criminal cases related to spreading disharmony among classes, attempt to murder, attack on police personnel and creating obstructions in the lawful discharge of duty by public servants.

Earlier, in an audio clip, Amritpal debunked speculation that he is negotiating his surrender and nudged the Akal Takht again to summon a "sarbhat khalsa" congregation.

"I have urged the jathedar to call the *sarbhat khalsa*. Call the *sarbhat khalsa*, and prove that you are the jathedar," he said in the new audio clip.

Piling pressure on the Sikh body, he said, "If we are going to play politics even today, doing the same things we used to do earlier, then what's the point of being a jathedar in the future," he said in Punjabi.

"We should understand that today is the time for the entire community to come together," he added, calling for "unity" among Sikh bodies.

Jathedar Harpreet Singh had earlier issued an "ultimatum" to the state government to release the Sikh youths picked up during the crackdown that began on March 18.

There was no immediate comment by police on the authenticity of the nearly two-

minute audio clip in which the pro-Khalistan preacher accuses the government of committing "oppression".

"But I am not scared and I don't fear going to jail, or torture in police custody. Let them do whatever they want," he said.

He also referred to some media reports suggesting that he had put conditions for his surrender, including that he should not be subjected to torture. He has not spoken to anyone over offering arrest, and there have been no conditions put by him, the fugitive said.

On Thursday, a drone was deployed over the village in Hoshiarpur where some suspects abandoned their car two days back after a police chase. There was speculation that the preacher could have been in that vehicle.

Defence Ministry inks ₹1,700 cr deal with BEL

For Lynx-U2 fire control systems for Indian Navy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



In a fillip to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, the defence ministry on Thursday signed a contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bangalore for procurement of 13 Lynx-U2 Fire Control Systems for Indian Navy at a total cost of over Rs 1,700 crore. The systems will be procured under Buy (Indian - IDMM (Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured)) category.

The Lynx-U2 System is a Naval Gun Fire Control System designed and developed indigenously. It is capable of accurately tracking and engaging targets amidst sea clutter as well as air and surface targets.

The fourth generation, completely indigenous systems, will be installed on New Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels to be built indigenously at Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers and Goa Shipyard Limited.

This move will generate an employment of two lakh man-days over a period of four years and encourage active participation of various Indian industries, including MSMEs, thus significantly contributing to the Government's efforts to achieve 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence.

On Wednesday, the ministry signed three contracts worth Rs 5,400 crore to bolster defence capabilities of the armed forces. While two deals were with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Ghaziabad, the contract was with NewSpace India Limited (NSIL).

Giving details of the deals,

officials said here the first contract with the BEL pertains to procurement of Automated Air Defence Control and Reporting System 'Project Akashteer' worth Rs 1,982 crore for the Indian Army.

The second contract with the BEL relates to acquisition of Sarang Electronic Support Measure (ESM) systems along with associated Engineering Support Package from BEL, Hyderabad at an overall cost of Rs 412 crore for the Indian Navy.

The contract with NSIL, a Central Public Sector Enterprise under Department of Space, Bengaluru pertains to procurement of an advanced Communication Satellite, GSAT 7B, which will provide High Throughput Services to the Indian Army at an overall cost of Rs 2,963 crore. All these projects are under Buy (Indian - IDMM (Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured)) category.

The Automated Air Defence Control and Reporting System 'Project Akashteer' will empower the Air Defence units of the Indian Army with an indigenous, state-of-the-art capability, to effectively operate in an integrated manner.

Akashteer will enable monitoring of low level airspace over the battle areas of the Indian Army and effectively control the Ground Based Air Defence Weapon Systems.

Sarang is an advanced Electronic Support Measure system for helicopters of Indian Navy, designed and developed indigenously by Defence Electronics Research Laboratory, Hyderabad under programme Samudrika. The scheme will generate an employment of approximately two lakh man-days over a period of three years. Both the projects will encourage participation of Indian Electronics and associated industries, including MSMEs, who are sub vendors of BEL.

The advanced Communication Satellite will considerably enhance the communication capability of the Indian Army by providing mission critical beyond line of sight communication to troops and formations as well as weapon and airborne platforms. The geostationary satellite, being a first-of-its-kind in the five-tonne category, will be developed indigenously by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

India rising as one of strongest nations under Modi: Min

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said here on Thursday from secure borders and self-reliance to a strong economy and transformed global image, India is rising as one of the strongest countries under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He also said Lord Ram is India's identity and not merely an embodiment in stone or wood and asserted that the government will construct hospitals, schools, set up industries and also build temples.

Making this assertion while addressing the 'Rising India Conclave' organised by a private media organization, he pointed out that all sectors, especially defence, have been witnessing a transformative change in the last few years, which has guided India to a respectable position on the world map.

Rajnath credited the bold approach and unwavering resolve of the government, which has ensured secured borders and a battle-ready Armed Forces backed by a self-reliant defence industry.

Terming national security as Government's top priority and self-reliance as the only medium to achieve it, he asserted that relentless efforts are being



Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) this year is proof that India's stature is continuously growing on the world stage.

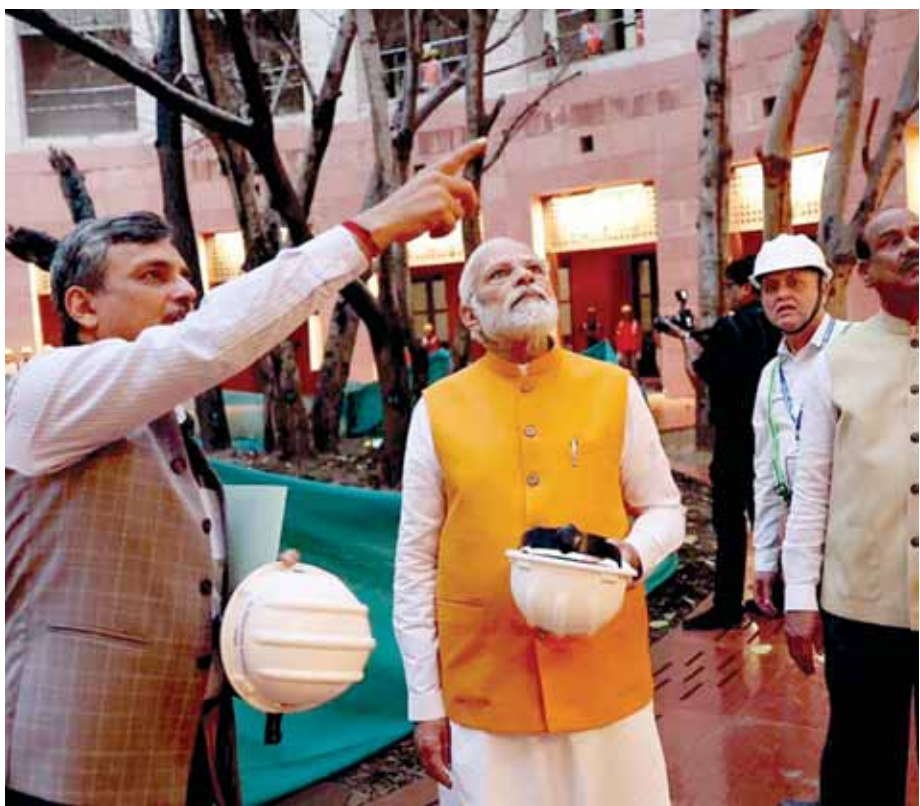
Rajnath added that India has led the world on issues like terrorism and has been successful in garnering support to eliminate the menace.

He emphasised that countries, which use terrorism as a tool, are well aware of the fact that India never harms anyone unnecessarily, nor does it spare anyone who tries to hurt its unity, integrity and sovereignty.

Mentioning about the surgical strikes, he stated that the move broke the back of terrorists and sent a strong message to the world that India will eliminate terrorism on its own soil, and if need be, on foreign land as well.

He added that "Whether it was the stand-off with China or ill intentions from Pakistan, our forces have been giving a befitting reply, whenever required."

The defence minister termed the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir as another example of the strong will of the Government. He stated that the Union Territory has ushered in a new era of peace and progress due to the decision.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes a surprise visit to the new Parliament building on Thursday evening in New Delhi and inspected various works as well as interacted with construction workers

BSY hints at fielding son against Cong strongman Siddaramaiah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As Karnataka gears up full swing for an evenly matched political contest between the political rivals, former BJP Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Thursday indicated that his son B Y Vijayendra may be fielded against Congress strongman and former state CM Siddaramaiah from Varuna constituency for the May 10 Assembly polls.

Congress and JD(S) have announced their first list of candidates even before the elections were announced and Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai have announced that the BJP would release its list "soon" within a week's time.

The 80-year-old Lingayat caste leader Yediyurappa gave indications that his son Vijayendra who is also state Vice-President may be fielded against the opposition leader Siddaramaiah from Varuan assembly constituency in Mysuru, southern Karnataka.

Varuna is among the key seats to watch out for as Siddaramaiah, the Congress legislature party leader has thrown his hat in the ring in this assembly segment, currently held by his son Yathindra.

Siddaramaiah is an influential leader of the Kurba (Shepherd community), the third largest caste in the state after Lingayats and Vokkaligas.

When asked by newsmen whether Vijayendra would be fielded from Varuna, Yediyurappa said, "Discussions are going on. Siddaramaiah knows that his ground is slipping away. I don't think it is so easy for him. We will field a good candidate. We will give a tough fight. Let's see what happens."

The BJP veteran and four-time Chief Minister said the decision on whether to give the Varuna ticket to Vijayendra, who is the state BJP vice-president, would be left to the party's central leadership.

BJP General Secretary and



former state Minister CT Ravi had earlier expressed unhappiness and objected to "premature" announcement for assembly candidates by Yediyurappa saying it was the prerogative of the Parliamentary Board.

On his part, Siddaramaiah told newsmen that he was not bothered about the candidate who would contest against him with Congress state president D K Shivakumar quipping that his party would welcome it if Yediyurappa himself decided to contest from Varuna.

Meanwhile, ahead of May 10 assembly elections, former JD(S) MLA S R Srinivas on Thursday became the third legislator to resign from the post, and join Congress, this month.

Planners of 2008 Mumbai terror attack should pay heavy price, says Speaker of Israeli Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/JERUSALEM



Underlining that fight against terrorism is common concern for both countries, the Speaker of Israel's Parliament has said the planners of the "abominable" 2008 Mumbai terror attack should pay a heavy price for it. He made these remarks ahead of his four-day visit to India starting Friday.

Amir Ohana, a close confidante of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will be on his first official visit abroad after assuming office in December last year.

Stating that the menace of terrorism is a common concern, Ohana, a former Shin Bet (Israeli internal security agency) official, told PTI that the fight to counter it requires all the progressive countries to come together.

Both India and Israel face the problem of terrorism, and the fight against it is a joint one, Ohana said.

"We all remember the abominable terrorist attacks on Mumbai in 2008 in which

over 207 people were murdered, of which 178 were Indians. Among the foreigners who were murdered were unfortunately also Israelis and Jews who came to the Chabad house," Ohana pointed out.

"It was an attack not only on India but also on Jews and free people everywhere," the Knesset Speaker said, adding that it was an attack on the shared values of India and Israel. "Whoever planned and sent the terrorists from the terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba should pay a heavy price for it," he said.

"The attack on the Chabad house (in Mumbai) symbolises a common pain for India and Israel, but also our partnership in the uncompromising fight against terrorism," Ohana said.

₹9K-cr deal signed for Akash weapon system, weapon locating radars

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Boosting the capabilities of the armed forces to guard the Line of Actual Control (LAC) facing China, the defence ministry on Thursday inked contracts for procurement of improved Akash Weapon System and 12 Weapon Locating Radars, WLR Swathi (Plains) for the Indian Army at an overall cost of over Rs 9,100 crore.

The contract for procurement of improved Akash Weapon System (AWS) for 3rd & 4th Regiments of Army Air Defence, comprising live Missiles & Launchers with upgrades, Ground Support Equipment, Vehicles and Infrastructure was signed with Bharat Electronics Limited, worth over Rs 8,160 crore.

The AWS is a Short Range Surface to Air Missile (SRSAM) Air Defence System, indigenously designed and developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). In order to meet aerial threats, two additional Regiments of AWS with Upgradation are being procured for Indian Army for the Northern borders (China).

Improved AWS has Seeker

Technology, Reduced Foot Print, 360° Engagement Capability and improved environmental parameters.

The project will give a boost to the Indian missile manufacturing industry in particular and the indigenous defence manufacturing ecosystem as a whole.

The project has overall indigenous content of 82% which will be increased to 93% by 2026-27.

The induction of the improved AWS into the Indian Army will increase India's self-reliance in Short Range Missile capability. This project will play a role in boosting the overall economy by avoiding outgo of precious foreign exchange to other countries, increasing employment avenues in India and encouraging Indian MSMEs through components manufacturing.

Around 60% of the project cost will be awarded to the private industry, including MSMEs, in maintaining the supply chain of the weapon system, thereby creating large scale of direct and indirect employment.

The contract for WLR Swathi (Plains) was signed with Bharat Electronic Limited (BEL) at a cost of over Rs 990 crore. It is an indigenously designed WLR which is capable of locating guns, mortars and rockets firing own troops, thereby facilitating their destruction through Counter Bombardment by own fire-power resources.

This will enable troops to carry out their operational tasks without any interference from the enemy and also provide them safety against enemy fire. Induction is planned to be completed in 24 months.

NIA files chargesheet against 2 LeT operatives in Udhampur IED blast case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Following investigations into the Udhampur IED blast cases by the banned terror group Lashkar-e-Tayabba (LeT) through their Pakistan-based handlers, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday filed a chargesheet against two Lashkar operatives.

Accused Mohd Aslam Sheikh alias Adil and Mohd Amin Bhat alias Abu Khubaib have been charged for their efforts towards revival of terrorist activities in Jammu by carrying out recruitment from the pool of over ground workers (OGWs) and surrendered terrorists and activating and motivating them to carry out terrorist acts.

The NIA had taken over investigations into the case on November 15 last year from Jammu and Kashmir Police.

NIA Investigations revealed that Mohd Aslam Sheikh was in touch with Mohd Amin Bhat, an 'individual terrorist' of the LeT listed by the Union government, who was now operating from Pakistan.

Pinna recruited Adil to carry out the two IED blasts on buses parked in the public areas of Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir, which had inflicted injuries to two persons.

Mohd Amin Bhat was initially a resident of Doda district in the Valley. In 1997, he joined the terrorist ranks of Hizb Ul Mujahideen and was involved in the execution of various terrorist acts in Jammu and Kashmir. Later, he escaped to Pakistan in 2009 and is presently an active LeT handler who is playing a vital role to revive and accelerate terrorist activities in the Jammu region, the NIA has alleged in the chargesheet.

Navy ships make port call at Port Victoria after joint surveillance with Seychelles Coast Guard



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The ships of First Training Squadron (INS Tir, Sujata and ICGS Sarathi) on overseas deployment made port call at Port Victoria, Seychelles on Wednesday after undertaking joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance with Seychelles Coast Guard.

Giving details here on Thursday, navy officials said Senior Officer First Training Squadron along with Commanding Officers of ships

called on High Commissioner of India Kartik Pande and Brigadier Michel Rosette, Chief of Defence Force (CDF), Seychelles Defence Forces.

In a ceremony onboard INS Tir, machinery spares and stores meant for Seychelles Coast Guard were handed over to CDF. The squadron presently has trainees from six friendly foreign countries in addition to 120 Indian trainees. It was a proud moment for young Trainee Benjamin from Seychelles to interact with his CDF.

Same-sex marriage issue: Minority groups write to CJI



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Some minority religious groups have written to Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud to cite their religious beliefs to express opposition to same-sex marriage, an issue being heard by the Supreme Court.

Sayed Salman Chishty of the Chishty Foundation, Ajmer, has conveyed his "concerns and reservations" to CJI, claiming that any legal validation for same-sex marriage will contradict India's religious, social and moral values, and cause "havo" with the delicate balance of personal laws and accepted societal values.

India sees 3,016 fresh Covid cases

Highest in nearly six months

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India saw a single-day rise of 3,016 fresh coronavirus cases, the highest in nearly six months, while the active cases increased to 13,509, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Thursday.

A total of 3,375 cases were recorded on October 2 last year. The country's COVID-19 death toll has increased to 5,30,862 with 14 latest fatalities —three reported by Maharashtra, two from Delhi and one reported by Himachal Pradesh in a span of 24 hours and eight reconciled by Kerala.

According to the ministry data updated at 8 am, the daily positivity was recorded at 2.73 per cent, while the weekly positivity was pegged at



1.71 per cent. The infection tally stands at 4.47 crore (4,47,12,692).

The active cases now comprise 0.03 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has been recorded at 98.78 per cent, according to the health ministry website.

The number of people

who have recuperated from the disease surged to 4,41,68,321, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.19 per cent. According to the ministry's website, 220.65 crore doses of Covid vaccine have been administered in the country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive.

Delegates warm up for G20 Sherpa meeting in Kerala

PTI ■ KUMARAKOM

Thousands of miles away from her country with much of it being below sea level, a woman diplomat of Netherlands was excited to see a bicycle placed at a resort on the bank of a beautiful lake in this scenic Kerala village where side events of the second G20 Sherpa meeting are currently underway.

The bicycle was placed in front of a screen that was erected to showcase CoWIN, a powerful example of how digital technology can expand public health programmes, and reflects the strides India, world's most populated nation, continues to make in digital technology for public services. As she pedaled the stationary bicycle, the screen displayed the fascinating story of India which as of March, 20, 2023 delivered 2.2 billion vaccination doses to 1.1 billion registered persons.

Cycling is part of Dutch life and a very patriotic means of



transportation for them. "I did experiment cycling. As a Dutch woman, I love cycling", she told PTL. Dr Kalyani Raju, a young medical doctor assigned to narrate India's success story to the delegates, said the Dutch delegates really enjoyed pedalling the cycle and took note of the presentation.

She informed the delegates about the historic achievement of the nation after Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled CoWIN along with the launch of the national

Covid-19 vaccination campaign on January 16, 2021. Indian officials said it was indeed a moment marking the beginning of a story that touched over a billion lives in less than 18 months.

They said it took almost nine months to reach the 100 crore mark and another nine months to reach the 200 crore vaccination mark, with the highest single day vaccination record of over 2.5 crore doses achieved on 17 September 2021.

Ex-civil servants criticise Rijiju for his comments on judiciary in open letter

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former civil servants in an open letter on Thursday criticised Law Minister Kiren Rijiju for several of his comments which, they said, constituted a concerted attack by the government on the collegium system of appointments and on judicial independence.

The open letter, signed by 90 former bureaucrats, argued that preserving the independence of the judiciary is non-negotiable, and any sign of executive overreach cannot be accepted in a democracy.

"We write to you today in response to comments you made on various occasions and very recently at the India Today Conclave on March 18, 2023. Your statements that day are the latest in what is emerging as a concerted attack by the government on the collegium system of appointments, the Supreme Court of India and,

ultimately, on judicial independence. We unequivocally condemn this onslaught," the letter said. In the appointment of judges to the High Courts and Supreme Court it appears that it is the government that is stonewalling appointments, it said.

"Names forwarded by the collegium are left pending for years, only to be finally returned without approval. Candidates with distinguished careers marked by their commitment to due process and to constitutional norms are turned down by the government," said the letter, written by the former civil servants under the banner of Constitutional Conduct Group.

Rather than engage constructively with the Supreme Court and collegium, high offices of the executive such as yours, and that of the Vice President, have responded with venomous barbs, it said.

CM compares BJP regime to one run by Tughlaq Will unite Opp to oust BJP: Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Days after asserting her Ekla Chalo (go it alone) policy in the 2024 general elections Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday made a somersault championing the cause of Opposition unity warning the Narendra Modi Government that she would now proceed to unite the Opposition parties with the sole purpose of ousting the BJP from power.

On the concluding day of her two-day dharna against central deprivation of Bengal the Chief Minister said that a time had come when the wily and whimsical BJP Government — which had no feeling for the common people and no respect for democratic norms — should be thrown out of power.

Comparing the present saffron regime to the one run by Md bin Tughlaq in the medieval period Banerjee said "they will collect GST from the states and spend it on fanciful projects and if you raise a question they will send CBI, ED, Income Tax, CAG and NIA



to your house." Banerjee said how the BJP sends protesters to her residence when she goes to Delhi adding, "now enough is enough ... if I descend to unite the opposition I will do it at any cost ... so as to throw this Government out of power." The BJP Government would not last beyond 2024, she asserted adding the saffron outfit's fall would begin from Karnataka.

"For Bengal they will hold 8-9 phase elections and in Karnataka they will complete polling in one day thinking that they will win their."

But this time they are going

to be defeated in that State," Banerjee said. On the question of leadership she earlier said that the issue could be decided later.

"First it is the question of defeating the BJP. And the Khela (game) will start from Uttar Pradesh where we will play alongside the Samajwadi Party of Akhilesh Yadav." Attacking the BJP for blocking funds she said "it is the constitutional obligation of the government to pay the wages for getting the works done but here in Bengal they have blocked the wages of 17 lakh families."

Saying that she had

"approached the Prime Minister Narendra Modi four times and Home Minister Amit Shah once with the State's request to clear its dues Banerjee said, "please listen to me BJP ... when we are asking for the MNREGA funds we are asking for our rights ... we are not your servants ... we are not your bonded labourers ... after repeated requests you have not cleared the State's dues and have forced me to sit in a dharna ... and even after that not a tiny leader of the BJP showed up to give some assurance ... now I will take thousands of youth from Bengal and jam Delhi to get our rights."

Curiously the TMC supremo had fallen comparatively silent in the past several months particularly after the arrest of her senior ministerial colleagues and a number of party leaders in recruitment scam and cattle smuggling case.

The latest rise in the decibel level of her anti-BJP voice comes days after ED notices being sent to some of her close relatives regarding some cases, sources said.

India's new edu policy based on Gandhi's teachings: Shah

PTI ■ HARIDWAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday hailed the central government's New Education Policy for its emphasis on learning in mother tongue and universal education based on the teachings of Indian visionaries such as Mahatma Gandhi and Dayanand Saraswati.

Addressing the 113th convocation of the Gurukula Kangri here, Shah credited the university (deemed to be) for the revival of vedic education in India and combining it with modern education.

Shah paid tributes to the university's founder Swami Shraddhanand saying he set India's education system free from the stranglehold of the British and revived the country's vedic education system, all the while emphasising on culture and modern education.

Shah praised the NEP brought by the Narendra Modi-led central government saying it represents the combined visions of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Swami



Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks at the 113th convocation of the Gurukula Kangri University, in Haridwar, on Thursday

PTI

Shraddhanand, Mahatma Gandhi, and Lala Lajpat Rai." The new education policy, which is the country's third, contains the visions of four great people.

Accessible education as propagated by Maharshi Dayanand, combining vedic education with modern as propagated by Swami Shraddhanand, Mahatma

Gandhi's education in mother tongue, and Lala Lajpat Rai's principle of education for all are at the core of this policy," Shah said. Education in engineering courses has begun to be imparted in the mother tongues of 10 states, while people appearing in JEE, NEET, and IAS exams have the option of taking the tests in their own mother tongues, he said. The

NEP makes education streamless and classless, with no barriers to science and arts streams, and freedom to learn anything in accordance with one's interest and aptitude, he said. He said Prime Minister Modi has brought international glory to India and Indianness.

"Narendra Modi readily took decisions which the country was not able to take for decades. Be it abolition of article 370 or securing the boundaries of the country through such measures as surgical strikes or making the country jump from the world's 11th to the 5th largest economy in the world, the Prime Minister has done everything to make the country proud," Shah said.

Congratulations the 1,800 students conferred with degrees at the convocation, he said they should be proud of having studied in a great institution such as the Gurukula Kangri University, and urged them to apply their learning in nation building so that it emerges as the world's leading country in its 100th year.

FROM PAGE 1

FURORE OVER GERMAN INTERFERENCE

The ruling party described Singh and his party as a "disgrace to the nation".

The BJP leaders reacted after he thanked the German Foreign Ministry and Richard Walker, Chief International Editor of Deutsche Welle, for "taking note of how Democracy is being compromised in India through the persecution of Rahul Gandhi".

Attacking the Congress over Singh's tweet, Information and Broadcasting minister Anurag Thakur said, "disgrace to nation, @INCIndia & @RahulGandhi don't believe to fight India's democratic, political and legal battle within country, hence, invite foreign powers to interfere in our internal matter. But New India headed by @narendramodi Ji will not tolerate any foreign intervention."

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also slammed the Congress over Singh's tweet. "Apparent that @INCIndia wants foreign interference in our affairs. Sign Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Communist Party of China with opaque contents. During interactions abroad, plead for help to change government. Thank them when help forthcoming. Any more proof needed?" she said.

Appearing to be in damage control mode, the Congress said it firmly believes that India's democratic processes themselves have to deal with the threats posed to its democracy. It also hit out at the BJP, accusing it of attempting to divert attention from the Adani issue.

Without taking names, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on Twitter, "@INCIndia firmly believes that India's democratic processes themselves have to deal with the threats posed to our democracy by Mr. Modi's assault on our institutions & his politics of vendetta, intimidation, threats & harassment."

The Congress and Opposition parties will take him on fearlessly, Ramesh said. Attacking Rijiju for his comments, Congress' media depart-

ment head Pawan Khara said, "Mr. Rijiju, why divert from the main issue? The issue is that the Prime Minister cannot answer Rahul Gandhi's questions about Adani." Instead of "misleading" people, please answer the questions, Khara said.

Earlier, tagging Singh's tweet, BJP's foreign affairs department head leader Vijay Chauthaiwale said on Twitter, "Look how happy @digvijaya_28 ji with comments from Germany. It only shows how they are desperate to involve external agencies in domestic matters."

BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya also tagged Singh's tweet and said, "Shameful that Congress continues to lean on foreign agencies and seek their intervention in India's internal affairs."

"Rahul Gandhi had recently sought Europe and US intervention and now it is Digvijay Singh. But Law is the Law... Unless somebody thinks Law is not the Law for them," he said.

The BJP tweeted, "Let this be on record. For the first time in Independent India's history, Congress leaders are pleading foreign powers to intervene in India's democratic process and weigh in on our judicial decisions... It is a brazen attempt to undermine people's will and India's sovereignty."

GLOBAL SCAMSTERS COMING TO HELP, CONG SLAMS LALIT

"A new low for PM Modi, that global scammers are coming to his defence," Venugopal said.

"Taking a dig at the BJP, Congress' media and publicity department chief Pawan Khara said, "Is now Saheb taking help from abroad to threaten Rahulji with legal action?" He went on to say, "Will pressure be put on Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, Vijay Malviya, etc.? To file a case against Rahul Gandhi?"

The Opposition party has been attacking the BJP for allegedly allowing economic offenders such as Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi and Mehul Choksi get away and flee abroad with people's money.

In a series of tweets, Lalit Modi

said, "I see just about every Tom, Dick and Gandhi associates again and again saying I am a fugitive of justice. Why? How? and when was I... Convicted of same?"

"Unlike #Papu aka @RahulGandhi now an ordinary citizen saying it and it seems one and all opposition leaders have nothing else to do so they too are either ill-informed or just vendetta prone. I have decided to take the @RahulGandhi... To court in UK right away. I am sure he will have to come up with some solid evidence. I look forward to seeing him make a complete fool of himself," he tweeted.

NOW, H-1B VISA HOLDERS' SPOUSES CAN WORK IN US

The judge wrote that Congress has expressly and knowingly empowered the US Government to authorise employment as a permissible condition of an H-4 spouse's stay in the United States. The fact that the federal Government has had longstanding and open responsibility for authorizing employment for similar visa classes further manifests Congress' approval of it exercising that authority, she said.

The Department of Homeland Security and its predecessors have authorised employment not just for students, but also for their spouses and dependents, Judge Chutkan wrote in the ruling.

Also, the Department of Homeland Security has long extended work authorisation to spouses of foreign Government officials and spouses of employees or officers of international organisations, the judge wrote as she dismissed the lawsuit filed by Save Jobs USA.

Ajay Bhutoria, a prominent community leader and advocate for immigrant rights, has applauded the decision by the court to allow H1B spouses to work and support their families. "With the court's decision to allow H1B visa holders' spouses to work, thousands of families across the country will be able to breathe a little easier. This decision will provide

much-needed relief to families who have been struggling to make ends meet and it will help to ensure that these families can stay together and thrive," Bhutoria said.

"Allowing H1B spouses to work is not just a matter of economic fairness, but it is also a matter of family unity and stability. I applaud the court's decision, and I hope that this is just the first step towards a more compassionate and equitable immigration system," he said.

CELEBRATIONS TURN TO TRAGEDY IN INDORE

He was citing eyewitness accounts. Earlier, a witness had put the number at nearly 25.

The CM said he has ordered a probe into the incident. According to Chouhan, 19 persons were rescued and taken to the hospital but one of them succumbed to his injuries.

He announced financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh each to the kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for every injured person.

Expressing anguish soon after the accident, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had tweeted, "Extremely pained by the mishap in Indore. Spoke to CM Shivraj Chouhan Ji and took an update on the situation. The state government is spearheading rescue and relief work at a quick pace. My prayers with all those affected and their families."

The temple was constructed by laying a slab over the bawdi in a covered campus, Home Minister Mishra said. A probe has been ordered into the matter, particularly to find out how the temple was allowed to be constructed over a bawdi, Mishra said. Kantibhai Patel, president of Patel Nagar Residents Association, said no ambulance reached the spot for an hour even after authorities were alerted about the accident.

Officials have identified the deceased persons as Lakshmi Patel (70), Bharti Kukreja (58), Jaivanti Khohobchandani (84), Daksha Patel (60), Madhu Bhammani (48), Manisha Motwani (40), Ganga Patel (58), Kanak Patel (32), Pushpa Patel

(49), Bhumika Khanchandani (31) and Indra Kumar Harwani (53).

An eyewitness said that during the religious programme, there was a huge crowd of devotees on the roof of the bawdi in the temple. As the structure could not bear the load of so many people, it caved in, he said.

After the accident, people gathered around the temple looking for their family members who were present on the premises at the time of the tragedy.

CLASHES IN MAHA, BENGAL, GUJARAT MAR FESTIVITIES

The locality that houses the famous Ram temple, they said. The police used tear gas and fired some plastic bullets as well as live rounds to control the mob, the officials said, adding that eight teams have been formed to identify and arrest the perpetrators.

Stones were hurled at two Ram Navami processions in Gujarat's Vadodara city on Thursday, police said, adding that some persons were injured in one of the incidents. While the first incident took place near Panjrigar mohalla in Fatehpura area in the afternoon, the second took place in nearby Kumbharwada in the evening. While no one was injured in the Fatehpura incident, some persons including women were injured in the stone pelting by a mob in Kumbharwada, police said. The procession that came under attack in Panjrigar mohalla had been organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). The other procession had been organised by local residents.

Elsewhere, leaders of the BJP and RSS led processions in different parts of West Bengal where the RSS organised about 1,000 small and large rallies across the state.

Chanting slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram', thousands of people took part in those processions in Howrah, Kharagpur, Barrackpore, Bhadreswar, Siliguri and Asansol. Drumbats, saffron flags and large cutouts of Lord Ram featured prominently in these processions. Some of those participating in the processions

were carrying swords and trishulas.

Violence broke out between two groups when a Ram Navami procession was taken out in West Bengal's Howrah city, where several vehicles were torched and shops were ransacked on Thursday evening. Police said a number of people were detained in this connection. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is on a dharna, said strict action will be taken against the culprits. A police officer said the incident occurred when the procession was passing through the Kazipara locality. Several shops and auto-rickshaws were ransacked during the violence while a number of cars including a few police vehicles were set on fire. Four fire tenders were pressed into service to extinguish the blaze. The police used force to disperse the mob. A large contingent of police was deployed in the locality where the situation is stated to be under control.

Banerjee slammed the BJP for allegedly trying to stoke communal tension during the Ram Navami procession in Howrah and said those involved in the incident will not be spared.

GOVT INKS ₹36.4K-CR DEF DEALS WITH INDIAN FIRMS

including MSMEs. With the majority of the equipment and systems sourced from indigenous manufacturers, these vessels will be a proud flag bearer of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, the release said.

The Ministry also signed a Rs 8,160-crore deal with Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) for procurement of improved the Akash Weapon System (AWS). This is for 3rd & 4th Regiments of Army Air Defence, comprising live missiles and launchers with upgrades, ground support equipment, vehicles and infrastructure.

The Ministry also signed a contract with Bharat Electronics Limited, Bangalore, for the procurement of 13 Lynx-U2 fire control systems for the Indian Navy at a total cost of over Rs 1,700 crore.

There needs to be equal treatment of all States, says ex-Cabinet Secy

New Delhi: The Centre is the engine for every government and there needs to be equal treatment of all states. We have to be Team India and have to incorporate differences that are part of Team India, KM Chandrasekhar, former Union Cabinet Secretary in the UPA Government said recently.

He was speaking at a session on 'Reflections on Governance' based on his memoir, "As Good as My Word" which dwells in detail on his experiments in public administration, his experiences as India's ambassador to the World Trade Organization, his working relationship with the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, his run-ins with some notable ministers of the time, and his reflections on Indian democracy, economy, and defence.

The ex-administrator said that the civil service gives lots of opportunities in diverse areas and the wide range of functions performed is unparalleled.

He also added that whatever he achieved has been because of teamwork. He further added that officers need to take risks and have courage to achieve results as the cost of delays is very high.

He also remarked that officers have to work in a result-oriented manner rather than just being process-oriented. He said, "I totally worship the Constitution and Democracy."

Also present on the occasion was Amitabh Kant, ex CEO NITI Aayog and currently G20 Sherpa, who said that he has learned to Think Big, Think multi Disciplinary and also to take risks in his career.

Taliban terrorist attack in Pak kills 4 cops, injures 6

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Taliban terrorists opened fire at a vehicle ferrying security forces in northwest Pakistan on Thursday, killing at least four policemen, including an officer, and wounding six others.

The terrorists attacked the police mobile van in Lakki Marwat district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. The vehicle was on its way to the Saddar police station when it came under the attack, police said.

Four policemen, including a deputy superintendent of police (DSP), were killed and six others were injured in the attack, they said, adding that Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa police chief Akhtar Hayat Khan has ordered an inquiry into the incident.

Lakki Marwat police spokesperson said the attack was launched in the early hours of Thursday, resulting in an exchange of fire between the police and the terrorists. During the gunfight, six policemen were injured, he said. A police statement said that the militants were equipped with advanced and



heavy weaponry, the Dawn newspaper reported.

“The police were on alert and the attackers had to flee when the police returned fire,” it said. The terrorists fled while taking advantage of the darkness, it added. The outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed the attack in a statement, the report said. Condemning the incident, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the sacrifices of police officers in the war against terrorism were unforgettable and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured persons. “Police are performing magnificent duties against the terrorist as the first line of defence.

Elimination of terrorism is a must for Pakistan’s survival and development,” Shehbaz said in a statement.

The latest attack comes as terrorism-related incidents are surging in Pakistan. Over the past few months, the law and order situation in the country — especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan has worsened — with terrorist groups conducting attacks with near impunity across the country. Since the talks with the Taliban group broke down in November, the TTP has intensified its attacks, particularly targeting the police.

In January, a powerful suicide blast in a mosque in Peshawar Police Lines killed 84 people and injured many others. According to statistics released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based think-tank, January 2023 remained one of the deadliest months since July 2018, as 134 people lost their lives — a 139 per cent spike — and 254 received injuries in at least 44 militant attacks across the country, the report said.

Pakistan court strikes down sedition law

PTI ■ LAHORE

A high court in Pakistan on Thursday struck down a colonial-era sedition law that criminalised criticism of the federal and provincial governments, terming it inconsistent with the Constitution.

Justice Shahid Karim of the Lahore High Court (LHC) annulled Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) dealing with sedition, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Justice Karim pronounced the verdict in response to identical petitions seeking to annul the sedition law, the paper said.

One of the petitions, filed by a citizen named Haroon Farooq, which was identical to all other pleas urged the court to declare Section 124-A of the PPC as “ultra-vires in terms of Article 8 of the Constitution being inconsistent with and in derogation of fundamental rights provided under Article 9, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19, 19A of the Constitution”.

The law states: “Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Federal or Provincial

Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.”

It was argued in the petition that the sedition act was enacted in 1860 which is a sign of British colonial rule, Geo News reported. The petition added that this law was used for slaves under which a case can be registered at anyone’s request.

It was stated in the petition that the Constitution of Pakistan gives every citizen the right to freedom of expression but still, Section 124-A is imposed for making speeches against the rulers.

According to the petition, the law has been recklessly used in Pakistan as a tool of exploitation to curb the right to free speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution.

The petition said the law was serving as “a notorious tool for the suppression of dissent, free speech and criticism in free and independent Pakistan”. Over the past few years, the petition argued, various politicians, journalists and activists had been booked under Section 124-A.

Three more Khalistan supporters held in Aus

Melbourne (PTI): Australian police have arrested three more people in connection with two incidents of brawl that broke out between Khalistan activists and pro-India demonstrators here in late January, police said on Thursday. The alleged incidents happened during the so-called ‘Punjab independence referendum’ where two fights broke out between the two groups which injured several people on January 29, Victoria Police said in a statement.

Apparently, flag poles were used by several men as weapons which caused physical injuries to multiple victims, the statement said.

The US-based Sikhs for Justice, the group spearheading the non-binding referendum, is a banned organisation in India.

The three arrested include a 23-year-old man charged with affray and unlawful assault while a 36-year-old and 39-year-old have been charged with affray and violent disorder, the police said.

The identities of the arrested men have not been disclosed. Earlier, two men aged 34 and 39 were arrested and issued a penalty notice for riotous behaviour.

All those charged this week have been bailed to appear at the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court on August 8. Further investigation is underway and police are making enquiries to identify and apprehend any further alleged offenders from the day, the statement added. India has asked the Australian government to curb the anti-India activities of the Khalistani separatists and frequent attacks on the Hindu temples in the country. Narendra Modi raised concerns over the recent attacks on temples in Australia as well as pro-Khalistan activities there with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese during their meeting in New Delhi this month.

Russia arrests WSJ reporter for spying

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia’s security service arrested an American reporter for The Wall Street Journal on espionage charges, the first time a US correspondent has been detained on spying accusations since the Cold War.

The newspaper denied the allegations and demanded his release.

Evan Gershkovich was detained in the city of Yekaterinburg while allegedly trying to obtain classified information, the Federal Security Service, known by the acronym FSB, said Thursday.

The service, which is the top domestic security agency and main successor to the Soviet-era KGB, alleged that Gershkovich “was acting on instructions from the

American side to collect information about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military-industrial complex that constitutes a state secret.”

The Journal “vehemently denies the allegations from the FSB and seeks the immediate release of our trusted and dedicated reporter, Evan Gershkovich,” the newspaper said. “We stand in solidarity with Evan and his family.”

The arrest comes at a moment of bitter tensions between the West and Moscow over its war in Ukraine and as the Kremlin intensifies a crackdown on opposition activists, independent journalists and civil society groups.

The sweeping campaign of repression is unprecedented since the Soviet era. Activists

say it often means the very profession of journalism is criminalized, along with the activities of ordinary Russians who oppose the war.

Earlier this week, a Russian court convicted a father over social media posts critical of the war and sentenced him to two years in prison. His 13-year-old daughter was sent to an orphanage.

Gershkovich is the first American reporter to be arrested on espionage charges in Russia since September 1986, when Nicholas Daniloff, a Moscow correspondent for US News and World Report, was arrested by the KGB. Daniloff was released without charge 20 days later in a swap for an employee of the Soviet Union’s United Nations mission who was arrested by the FBI, also on

spying charges.

At a hearing Thursday, a Moscow court quickly ruled that Gershkovich would be kept behind bars pending the investigation.

While previous American detainees have been freed in prisoner swaps, a top Russian official said it was too early to talk about any such deal.

In Washington, the Biden administration said it had spoken with the Journal and Gershkovich’s family. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre condemned the arrest “in the strongest terms” and urged Americans to heed government warnings not to travel to Russia.

The State Department was in direct touch with the Russian government and seeking access

to Gershkovich, Jean-Pierre said.

Gershkovich, who covers Russia, Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations as a correspondent in the Journal’s Moscow bureau, could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of espionage.

Prominent lawyers noted that past investigations into espionage cases took a year to 18 months, during which time he may have little contact with the outside world.

The FSB noted that Gershkovich had accreditation from the Russian Foreign Ministry to work as a journalist, but ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova alleged that Gershkovich was using his credentials as cover for “activities that have nothing to do with journalism.”

‘China-sponsored hacking group highly active’

Bangkok (AP): A Chinese hacking group that is likely state-sponsored and has been linked previously to attacks on US state government computers is still “highly active” and is focusing on a broad range of targets that may be of strategic interest to China’s government and security services, a private American cybersecurity firm said in a new report Thursday. The hacking group, which the report calls RedGolf, shares such close overlap with groups tracked by other security companies under the names APT41 and BARIUM that it is thought they are either the same or very closely affiliated, said Jon Condra, director of strategic and persistent threats for Insikt Group, the threat research division of Massachusetts-based cybersecurity company Recorded Future. Following up on previous reports of APT41 and BARIUM activities and monitoring

the targets that were attacked, Insikt Group said it had identified a cluster of domains and infrastructure “highly likely used across multiple campaigns by RedGolf” over the past two years. “We believe this activity is likely being conducted for intelligence purposes rather than financial gain due to the overlaps with previously reported cyberespionage campaigns,” Condra said in an emailed response to questions from The Associated Press.

China’s Foreign Ministry denied the accusations, saying, “This company has produced false information on so-called Chinese hacker attacks” more than once in the past. Their relevant actions are groundless accusations, far fetched, and lack professionalism.” Chinese authorities have consistently denied any form of state-sponsored hacking, instead saying China itself is a major target of cyberattacks.

Ruling parties in Nepal fail to reach consensus on power sharing

Kathmandu (PTI): Nepal’s 10-party ruling alliance on Thursday failed to reach a consensus on the power-sharing deal, causing yet another delay in the expansion of the Cabinet led by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal “Prachanda”.

Top leaders held meetings at the Prime Minister’s official residence here at Baluwatar to reach an agreement on the distribution of ministries among various political parties. Power sharing and the distribution of ministerial portfolios were the major bottlenecks among the members of the ruling alliance as the demand for Cabinet posts was exceeding the number of ministries available, officials said.

Prachanda is now likely to expand his Cabinet on Friday.

NATO, US forces join Romania-led Black Sea military drills

Mahmudia (Romania): Romania’s navy led multinational military drills in the Black Sea region Thursday that brought together US and NATO troops as the 30-nation alliance looks to boost security on its southeastern flank amid Russia’s ongoing war in Ukraine.

The sea and air exercises are part of a series of drills known as Sea Shield 2023 that involve some 3,400 military personnel from 12 NATO member countries and some partner nations.

Romania’s navy said Thursday’s drills in the Mahmudia region of the Danube Delta, which flows into the Black Sea, would demonstrate how the combined forces would “neutralise an enemy air landing” in an area adjacent to such a waterway. More than 30

naval ships, 14 aircraft and 15 “fast intervention” boats and other patrol vessels are taking part in Sea Shield 2023, which started March 20 and runs until April 2. Anti-explosive divers have participated in drills, as have chemical, biological, and nuclear defence specialists.

In response to Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, NATO bolstered its presence on Europe’s eastern flank by sending additional multinational battlegroups to alliance members Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. Romania, which joined NATO in 2004, has played an increasingly large role in the alliance throughout the war, including hosting a NATO meeting of foreign ministers in November. **AP**

UAE leader designates his son as crown prince

AP ■ DUBAI

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the president of the United Arab Emirates, appointed his eldest son Khaled as crown prince of Abu Dhabi on Wednesday, placing him as next in line to take over as the leader of the federation.

The state-run WAM news agency announced the appointment of Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan as crown prince late Wednesday, without providing further details. After Sheikh Mohammed, who is commonly known as MBZ, ascended to the presidency last year, rumors swirled about whether he would make one of his brothers his heir.

In that case, the front-runners would have been Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed, the pow-



erful national security chief, Sheikh Mansour, the owner of the Manchester City football club, or the foreign minister, Sheikh Abdullah.

Sheikh Khaled was appointed chairman of the country’s intelligence agency in 2016. The United Arab Emirates, a close U.S. ally, is best known as the home of Dubai, a major international hub for business and travel.

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the first president of the UAE and the driving force

behind its creation, ruled from 1971 until his death in 2004. He appointed his eldest son Khalifa as his successor and MBZ as deputy crown prince.

Sheikh Mohammed has been the nation’s de facto leader since Sheikh Khalifa suffered a stroke in 2014. Sheikh Khalifa died eight years later, in May 2022. During Sheikh Mohammed’s rule, the UAE cultivated close ties with neighboring Saudi Arabia, initially joining it in its war against Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels before exiting the conflict years later. The UAE has sought to project military power across the region as it has opposed the rise of Islamist groups. In 2020, the UAE normalized relations with Israel in the first of the so-called Abraham Accords, followed by Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.

Jair Bolsonaro returns to Brazil after 3-month stint in Florida

Brasilia (AP): Former President Jair Bolsonaro arrived back in Brazil on Thursday after a three-month stay in Florida, seeking a new role on the political scene as authorities in the capital braced for the far-right populist’s return. Hundreds of supporters dressed in yellow and green chanted for him as they waited in the capital city of Brasilia, where the far-right leader is the subject of several investigations. The District’s security secretariat mobilised hundreds of police officers and the Esplanade of Ministries was closed to prevent gatherings. Bolsonaro left Brazil just before the end of his presidential term. In so doing, he broke with tradition by declining to hand the presidential sash to his successor, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who won the October election with the narrowest finish since Brazil’s return to democracy over three decades earlier. While in the US, Bolsonaro mostly kept a low profile, although he delivered several speeches to Brazilian expats and conservatives, including at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Maryland.

Kenya opp in fresh protests amid warning by government

Nairobi (AP): Kenya’s opposition leader Raila Odinga has led thousands of protesters in a third round of anti-government demonstrations on Thursday as the government warned that no more violent protests would be tolerated. The opposition is blaming President William Ruto for the rising cost of living and alleges he illegally manipulated his election in last year’s polls, although the Supreme Court has upheld the validity of the election results.

Odinga says the protests will only stop after the government lowers the cost of basic food items and allows access to the 2022 election results from the electoral commission’s main computers.

Ruto, who on Thursday arrived back in the country from a four-day trip in Belgium and Germany, has remained adamant that the ongoing protests are illegal. Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki, who is in charge of the police, on Wednesday said no more violent protests would be tolerated, stating “we must halt the descent.” US Senator Chris Coons on Wednesday met Kenya’s Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua for what the Kenyan leader described as

“strengthening ties.”

Coons also met opposition leader Odinga for talks about “upholding the constitution and the rule of law,” according to the Kenyan politician. Police have been using force to disperse protesters and so far four people are reported to have died since the protests started last week. Odinga said the protests will be held twice every week until the opposition’s demands are met. A governor from Odinga’s stronghold of Kisumu county had banned protests in the area but quickly rescinded and local government officials joined in Thursday’s demonstrations.

The protests have sparked counter violence against opposition targets. Last Monday saw the destruction of private property at former President Uhuru Kenyatta’s family farm outside the capital, Odinga’s gas cylinder manufacturing firm near the central business district and the burning of shops in Odinga’s stronghold of Kibera slums. The independent Policing Oversight Authority is investigating four incidents of police shooting and killing protesters as well as allegations that police failed to respond to a report on the damaging of private property.

King Charles III addresses German parliament

Berlin (AP): King Charles III became the first monarch to address Germany’s parliament, the Bundestag, on Thursday as part of a high-profile visit by the U.K. head of state aimed at bolstering ties between the two European powers. Speaking to lawmakers and other dignitaries in the packed lower house, Charles stressed the close bonds between the United Kingdom and Germany going back centuries, including his own family links to the royal House of Hannover, and the present-day economic, scientific, cultural and military cooperation between the two coun-

tries. Charles noted that London and Berlin have provided considerable aid to Ukraine in its efforts to fend off Russia’s invasion, a point that will appeal to German government officials more used to hearing how their country isn’t doing enough to help Kyiv. “Germany’s decision to provide so much military support to Ukraine is extremely brave, important and welcome,” Charles said. Speaking mostly in fluent German, he noted how the intertwined history of the two nations could be seen in the home of the Bundestag itself. The restoration in the

1990s of the former Reichstag building, that was heavily damaged during World War II, was capped with a glass cupola designed by British architect Norman Foster intended as a symbol of transparency and accountability. “From here the citizens can actually watch their politicians work,” Charles said. “Democracy in action.”

The 74-year-old largely trod on safe territory, making gentle jokes about soccer rivalry, national humour and mutual admiration for each other’s cultures — from the Beatles to Kraftwerk and from Brahms to Byron.

Pope’s health improving

Rome (AP): Pope Francis rested well overnight and was “progressively improving” Thursday, the Vatican said, after he was hospitalised with a respiratory infection that has called into question his participation in Palm Sunday and upcoming Holy Week events.

The 86-year-old pontiff, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, ate breakfast, read the newspapers and was working from his hospital room at Rome’s Gemelli hospital, according to a statement from Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni.

Before lunch he went to the little chapel in the private apartment, where he gathered in prayer and received the

Eucharist,” the statement said. Francis was hospitalised Wednesday after having trouble breathing in recent days and was diagnosed with a respiratory infection that wasn’t COVID-19.

The Vatican said he would remain for a few days of treatment; his audiences were cancelled through Friday.

Despite his absence, the Vatican was abuzz with activity Thursday: Two Vatican offices issued an historic statement repudiating the “Doctrine of Discovery,” the legal theory backed by 15th century papal bulls that legitimised the colonial-era seizure of Native lands and form the basis of some property law today.

Covid during pregnancy may increase obesity risk in children: Study

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Children born to mothers who contract COVID-19 during pregnancy may be more likely to develop obesity, according to a new study.

More than 100 million COVID-19 cases have been reported in the United States since 2019, and there is limited information on the long-term health effects of the infection. Pregnant women make up 9 per cent of reproductive-aged women with COVID-19, which expos-

es millions of babies to maternal infection during foetal development over the next five years.

“Our findings suggest that children exposed in utero to maternal COVID-19 have an altered growth pattern in early life that may increase their risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease over time,” said Lindsay T Fourman, MD, of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Mass.

“There is still a lot of research needed to understand the effects of

COVID-19 on pregnant women and their children,” she said.

The researchers studied 150 infants born to mothers who had COVID-19 during pregnancy and found they had lower birth weight followed by greater weight gain in the first year of life as compared to 130 babies whose mothers did not have a prenatal infection. “These changes have been associated with an increased risk for obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease in childhood and beyond.

“Our findings emphasise the importance of long-term follow-up of children exposed in utero to maternal COVID-19 infection, as well as the widespread implementation of COVID-19 prevention strategies among pregnant individuals,” said Andrea G Ellow, MD, of Massachusetts General Hospital. “Larger studies with longer follow-up duration are needed to confirm these associations,” she said. The study was published in the Endocrine Society’s Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Me

CIRSTEA UPSETS SABALENKA IN MIAMI



AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

World number two Aryna Sabalenka suffered a shock straight sets Miami Open quarter-final loss to resurgent Romanian Sorana Cirstea, who reached her first WTA 1000 semi-final in a decade. Cirstea, ranked 74th in the world, triumphed 6-4, 6-4 against the Australian Open champion to secure her first WTA 1000 semi-final since Toronto in 2013.

The 32-year-old is enjoying

an upturn in form since taking on Swede Thomas Johansson as her coach, reaching the quarter-finals at Indian Wells and beating world number four Caroline Garcia of France in both legs of the "Sunshine Swing."

In her first meeting with the big-serving Belarusian, Cirstea looked comfortable and composed as she broke Sabalenka's first service game.

The 24-year-old from Minsk, who is now based in Miami, broke back to make it 4-4 but Cirstea swiftly got back in

front and held to win take the opening set with her opponent looking visibly irritated and frustrated as she laboured in the early afternoon heat and humidity. Again, Cirstea broke on her opponent's first serve game and then at 5-4 up, she survived two break points before a superb ace down the middle gave her match point, which she converted when Sabalenka went long.

The veteran reacted with a broad smile and a fist pump and conceded she was surprised by the victory.

"I am a bit speechless," she said. "I came out hoping that it would be a really tough match. I tried to hold my ground. I'm very happy with my performance today, it is a bit unexpected to be honest."

"I had confidence in my game. I knew I was playing well, and I knew that if I come out swinging and being aggressive, I would have my chance," she added.

"I'm very happy to get the win against Aryna, because she has been playing great lately.

She's probably one of the two or three best at the moment. So this gives me a lot of confidence."

Sabalenka, whose year began with victory at the Australia Open before she reached the final in Indian Wells, losing to Elena Rybakina, said she had struggled with the heat.

"It definitely wasn't my best match. I was struggling a lot with the conditions, like heat. I felt like balls were flying too much and I couldn't find control," she said.

"I was just trying to do my

best 'til the last point. I just couldn't adjust to these conditions unfortunately."

"The first three months of the year were fantastic for me. I'm just proud of the consistency of my game and I have to keep working, keep improving," said the Belarusian.

In the last four, Cirstea will face the winner of the quarter-final between Ekaterina Alexandrova and Petra Kvitová which was postponed due to heavy rain and will be moved to Thursday.

Sinner into Miami semis after beating Ruusuvuori

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

Italy's Jannik Sinner eased into the semi-finals of the Miami Open after a comfortable 6-3, 6-1 win over Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori on Wednesday.

The game was delayed for two hours by rain with Sinner 2-0 up in the second set but the stoppage did nothing to change the momentum of the match.

In the last four, Sinner will face the winner of the other quarter-final between world number one Carlos Alcaraz and American Taylor Fritz which was postponed due to heavy rain on Wednesday and is expected to be played on Thursday.

The 23-year-old Ruusuvuori was the first Finnish player to feature in a Masters 1000 quarter-final since Jarkko Nieminen a decade ago, but he came up against Sinner in determined mood.

The 21-year-old from South Tyrol has not dropped a set so far in Miami and he coped well with the first break point of the match, holding in the fourth game.

The Italian, who has not lost to a player



outside the top 50 this year, never looked back after that brief threat, breaking the Finn's serve for 3-2 and again to win the set.

An early break in the second further established his control of the match and while the rain made him wait for victory, he needed just 74 minutes on court to finish off the 54th-ranked Finn.

"I just won the important points, especially in the first set, and I am happy with my level today," said Sinner.

"After the rain, the condition was different and I think I adapted well," he added.

With his 20-4 record, Sinner could face another semi-final meeting with Alcaraz who beat him in the last four in Indian Wells earlier this month.

While Sinner said he would see both the Spaniard and Fritz as challenging opponents, it is clear he would relish the chance of revenge against Alcaraz, who also beat the Italian en route to the US Open title in September.

"I would be happy to play against him again because I look forward to these kind of matches. I feel like he makes me a better player," he said.

FIFA strips Indonesia of Under-20 WC

AP ■ LAUSANNE

FIFA announced on Wednesday it had removed Indonesia as hosts of this year's under-20 World Cup amid political turmoil over Israel's participation.

The decision was made "due to the current circumstances", FIFA said in a statement without specifying details.

"A new host will be announced as soon as possible, with the dates of the tournament currently remaining unchanged," it added.

The draw for 24-team tournament beginning on May 20 was due to be held on Friday in Bali, but FIFA cancelled the event last week without offering a reason or setting a new date.

Indonesia and Israel do not have formal diplomatic relations, and support for the Palestinian cause in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation runs high, fuelling local opposition to hosting the Israeli team.

As well as Bali's governor calling for Israel to be kicked out of the tournament, around a hundred conservative Muslim demonstrators marched in the capital Jakarta this month to protest its participation.

Indonesian officials earlier this week said any failure to host the tournament could result in sanctions that would leave them out of other international football competitions including qualifiers for the World Cup and the Asian Cup.

They said losing the tournament could result in trillions of rupiah (1 trillion rupiah = \$66 mn) in economic losses.

FIFA added that potential sanctions against the Indonesian football association (PSSI) "may also be decided at a later stage".

Barca thrash Roma, Arsenal beat Bayern to reach Women's CL semis

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona booked their place in the Women's Champions League semi-finals by thrashing Roma 5-1 on Wednesday as Arsenal came from behind to knock out Bayern Munich 2-1 on aggregate thanks to a 2-0 win at the Emirates.

Tournament favourites Barca had been held to a slender 1-0 advantage from the first leg in the Italian capital last week.

But last season's runners-up stormed into a 3-0 lead before half-time in front of 55,000 at the Camp Nou.

Swedish international Fridolina Rolfö struck twice in the first half either side of Mapi Leon's spectacular long-range effort.

Asisat Oshoala netted from close range immediately after the break and Patri Guijarro headed home the fifth from a corner.

Annamaria Serturini pulled one back for Roma against a Barcelona side who have won 100 percent of their games in the Spanish league and only suffered one defeat all season, against Bayern in the group phase.

Barca have now reached the semi-finals



in five consecutive seasons and will face either defending champions Lyon or Chelsea in the last four.

"We can't hide that our aspirations are at the max," said Barcelona coach Jonatan Giraldez.

"Olympique (Lyon) and Chelsea are the best in Europe, it's a reality and it will be difficult, but it's true that playing the second leg at home gives us a feeling of strength."

Arsenal overcame a 1-0 first leg defeat to reach the last four for the first time in 10 years in front of a record crowd of over 20,000 for a Women's Champions League game in England.

Despite the absence of injured star forwards Vivianne Miedema and Beth Mead, the Gunners blew Bayern away in the first half. Frida Maanum levelled the tie with a blistering strike in off the underside of the crossbar on 20 minutes.

Moments later Arsenal led as Stina Blackstenius had the simple task of rounding off a brilliant team move with a header into an unguarded goal from Katie McCabe's cross.

Spurs managing director Paratici handed worldwide FIFA ban

AP ■ LONDON

Tottenham managing director of football Fabio Paratici has been given a worldwide ban by FIFA that could end his time with the north London club.

Paratici was handed a 30-month ban from Italian football in January after his former club Juventus were found guilty of false accounting.

The 50-year-old Italian was sporting director and managing director at Juventus before joining Tottenham in June 2021.

His initial ban only applied to his homeland, meaning he was free to continue working at Tottenham, where he was involved in Sunday's departure of manager Antonio Conte and the start of the search for a new boss.

But a statement issued by FIFA on Wednesday threatened to cut short his spell at Tottenham, with the global governing body saying: "FIFA can confirm



that following a request by the Italian FA (FIGC), the chairperson of FIFA disciplinary committee has decided to extend the sanctions imposed by FIGC on several football officials to have worldwide effect."

Both Paratici and Juventus have appealed against the initial decision.

Tottenham published a lengthy interview with Paratici on Tuesday in which he insist-

ed Conte's exit was "the right decision for everyone". Paratici said the club were "focused" on backing interim head coach Cristian Stellini as they try to qualify for the Champions League by securing a top-four finish in the Premier League.

Tottenham said they are seeking further clarification from FIFA as they believe Paratici's ban would not kick in until his appeal has been heard.

Hamilton says he will be with Mercedes till 'last days'



AP ■ MELBOURNE

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton on Thursday emphatically put to bed any concerns that he wanted to leave Mercedes, saying he planned to be the team "till my last days".

The Briton's disappointment after the season-opening grand prix in Bahrain, where he finished a distant fifth in his under-performing W14 car, led to claims that he was set to seek a move elsewhere.

He insisted that was not the case after a more competitive

race in Saudi Arabia a fortnight ago. And to make it crystal clear, the 38-year-old said ahead of the Australian Grand Prix that he wanted to finish his career with the once all-conquering Silver Arrows.

"I feel amazing about it (the future), I continue to feel very, very much at home, it's a family," he said in Melbourne of remaining with a team that has been his home for a decade.

"I see myself being with Mercedes till my last days."

"If you look at the legends, Sir Stirling Moss was with Mercedes till the end of his days, and that's been the dream for me, to one day have that. I mean, I have that, so just continue on with that, continue to build with the brand."

Hamilton's first race for Mercedes was in Melbourne in 2013, and he has since delivered them an unprecedented 82 wins and 77 pole positions.

LOCAL EVENTS

MAMTA SCORES HATTRICK



Mamta Oram scored a hat-trick to help Sports Hostel Odisha crush Salute Hockey Academy 19-0 in a pool B match of Khelo India Under-21 Women's Hockey League at SAI Regional Centre on Thursday. Mamta scored in the 7th, 10th and 41st minute to complete her hat-trick. Tanuja Toppo, Sunta xaxa, Munmunidas, Arti Xalxo, Sunnelita and Supriya Kujur scored braces.

Earlier, in another pool B match, Sports Authority of India (bal team) played a 2-2 draw with Har Hockey Academy. In pool A, Sports Authority of India blanked Bhai Bhelo Hockey Academy 9-0 while Pritam Siwach Sports crushed Khalsa Hockey Academy 9-1.

UP TAEKWONDO PLAYERS SHINE



The Uttar Pradesh sub-junior taekwondo team put up an outstanding performance at the 36th National Sub-Junior and 11th Poomsae National Sub-Junior Taekwondo Championship held in Cuttack, winning eight medals. In the championship held at the JN Indoor Stadium from March 25 to 27, Uttar Pradesh's players won a gold medal in poomsae and 5 silver and 2 bronze medals in various weight categories of Kyorugi.

The medal winners: Gold: Rustam Patel, **Silver:** Jain Ali, Sambhav Sharma, Vineet Singh, Yashasvi, Dishu Singh; **Bronze:** Prakhar Tiwari, Riju Singh.

Man Utd fans would be 'backbone' of Zilliacus' proposed takeover

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Thomas Zilliacus said in an interview published on Thursday that Manchester United supporters would be at the centre of his proposed takeover of the Premier League club, with a say on major issues such as ground redevelopment and squad building.

The Finnish businessman recently joined the race to buy United from the Glazer family, who announced in November they were considering selling the 20-time English champions.

The 69-year-old Zilliacus, who founded investment company Mobile FutureWorks, is the third potential buyer to go public with his interest in the club.

Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim

Bin Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jaber Al Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe have also thrown their hats into the ring.

Both parties made second bids last week.

US hedge fund Elliott Investment Management, which sold AC Milan for \$1.3 billion last year, has reportedly made a bid for a minority stake in the club.

No figures have been revealed by the Raine Group, which is handling the offers on behalf of the Glazers, but one or more of the initial bids is understood to be in the region of £4.5 billion (\$5.5 billion).

The Glazers have reportedly put a price tag of £6 billion on the three-time Champions League winners.

Zilliacus, said to be a United sup-



porter, favours a model in which his consortium would buy the club and then sell shares to supporters worldwide.

"It (United) was there long before all these people who are bidding for it were born and it will be here long after all these people who are bidding for it have passed away," he told the I newspaper.

"The backbone of that institution is the fans and in that respect it's hugely important the fans are at the centre of the decisions."

United fans have spent years complaining about the Glazers, even breaking into Old Trafford to force the postponement of a match against Liverpool in 2021 in protest at the Americans' unpopular reign.

Zilliacus said if his bid is chosen, fans would be given a say on major

issues such as potential redevelopment of Old Trafford and squad building, but not team selection.

Although he is a latecomer in the takeover battle, Zilliacus is adamant his investment group should be considered a serious contender.

"I have been doing business all my life. I have started companies, bought companies, sold companies so I have a global network and I have done this on a global scale — first with the largest phone company in the world, Nokia, then with my own group," he said.

"I have a network that spans the globe of people who want to participate in interesting ventures, and this certainly is one."

"To put together financing for something like this — and this is a big sum — is something I'm used to."

IPL TURNS ‘SWEET 16’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The never-ending speculations about Mahendra Singh Dhoni's impending 'last dance', Virat Kohli's endless pursuit of an elusive silverware and Rohit Sharma's customary nonchalance are things that make the IPL starting Friday a heady cocktail of cricket and entertainment.

Megastars Dhoni, Kohli and Rohit have been the IPL's driving force in the past 15 seasons, getting the cricket crazy Indian fans hooked on the event for nearly two months every year.

As it enters the 16th season, innovations introduced in the form of potential game changer like the 'Impact Player' rule, DRS on wides and waist-high no balls, and two broadcasting giants locked in an ugly war of 'TV vs Digital' act as ingredients garnishing the mouth-watering dish, which will be devoured by millions for more than 50 days.

However, the product will remain the driving force and players the main stakeholders, as the likes of Dhoni, Kohli and Rohit set the narratives for their respective franchises with amazing fan bases.

Nearing 42, Dhoni has defied the law of diminishing returns when it comes to his manic following among CSK fans, who thronged the Chepauk to see their 'Thala' hit towering sixes at his spiritual home.

They say it will be his last year in the 'canary yellow' jersey, but when it comes to MSD, never say never. Even Rohit agrees with that, and won't be surprised if his 'captain' continues playing till 45.

Having finished outside the play-offs in 2022, Dhoni would like to equal Mumbai Indians' record with five titles, and he knows how to get the best out of the resources available at his disposal.

He will have Ben Stokes in his roster to give him the firepower in batting — in powerplay and at the back-end.

Devon Conway and Ruturaj Gaikwad both understand the grammar of IPL cricket and Ambati Rayudu with the willow and Deepak

CSK, MI remain premier contenders as RCB eye fresh start



Chahar with the white Kookaburra have all been there and done that.

CSK have never been a grooming school. There it's more about the finished product or those in whom the skipper sees the potential, like he saw in Simarjeet Singh last year, or someone like Matheesa Pathirana, who could be an 'Impact Player' if the CSK begin with three foreigners. Stokes, Moeen Ali and Conway look sure-shot starters as of now.

For Rohit, it will be a season in which he would like to sing the redemption song. Rohit has a casual exterior but scratch the surface, and

he can be as intense as anybody, and being the most successful skipper in the history of IPL, losing isn't an option. Before last year, Rohit never knew what it feels to be the wooden spooner. This season however, Mumbai Indians appear to be the team to beat, at least on paper.

A lot will depend on the skipper's own batting form and the two marquee men in Ishan Kishan and the world's No. 1 T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav, who would like to brush off the three first-ball ducks against Australia recently as an aberration in an otherwise sterling journey.

Jofra Archer's presence does boost the pace attack, but Jasprit Bumrah's absence, to some extent, nullifies the advantage.

But what MI is doing is to prepare a team for the next five years with young guns like Dewald Brevis, Tim David, Cameron Green, Tilak Verma, Hritvik Shokeen and Kumar Kartikeya set to serve them for the longest time. This core will be a formidable one in the years to come.

Just like Dhoni and Rohit, Kohli has landed up in every IPL with fire in his belly, but the rub of the green hasn't gone his way.

He has had a 973-run season, in 2016, something that will be difficult to surpass even in these day and age where the shelf life of records is too less. He has played a few finals but, as far as winning the title is concerned, the IPL has had a fickle relationship with one of India's greatest batters. He is no longer the skipper and is probably in the best mental phase that he has been in the past three to four years.

The hunger is intact, but the desperation isn't there. The swagger remains, but the aggression is no longer there to be found.

With Michael Bracewell, Glenn Maxwell and Dinesh Karthik ready to do the heavy-lifting, Kohli will be free to play his own game and also help skipper Faf du Plessis in putting his best foot forward.

This season holds special significance for Hardik Pandya. Having led Gujarat Titans to title triumph in only their inaugural year, the 16th IPL will be a platform for Pandya to soar higher and higher with bigger ambitions.

With coach Ashish Nehra for company, he would want the Rashid Khans, Mohammed Shamis and the Shubman Gill to maintain the tempo of last year from start to finish. An encore would certainly make him Rohit's heir apparent in the ODI format post the World Cup.

The only tactical shift is the absence of Lockie Ferguson and the jury is still out on whether trading him to bring in Shivam Mavi was a good choice or not. For Aiden Markram, it will be an onerous task to lift a perennially under-performing Sunrisers Hyderabad.

However, the composition is better compared to previous years with talented Indian players like Mayank Agarwal, Rahul Tripathi and Abhishek Sharma in their ranks. Glenn Phillips and Harry Brook are among some top overseas batting recruits.

However, bowling remains a worry with Umran Malik, now well studied by analysts, and Bhuvneshwar Kumar past his prime. A lot will depend on whether SRH are able to use their fourth foreign player as per conditions. There is Marco Jansen with his left-arm seamers and Adil Rashid with his wrist spinners.

Punjab Kings under Shikhar Dhawan is another team that has never believed in continuity and never got results since their runners-up finish in 2014.

They have kept on changing captains, unceremoniously dumping coaches after one bad season, and the team never had any stability. This time they have got Sam Curran in excess of USD 2 million dollars.

A good start is key but not getting Liam Livingstone (injury),

Kagiso Rabada (national duty) in the first couple of games could upset the team's tempo.

Save Arshdeep Singh, the Indian pace unit lacks quality and the PBKS could again be out of the play-off race. The team simply doesn't inspire confidence and the composition indicates lack of proper homework.

KL Rahul is having a nightmare 2023 and a good IPL can raise his profile which has been on a downward spiral despite him being a top performer in the league. Rahul's captaincy has been devoid of any tangible improvisation and his style of run gathering is archaic.

LSG have a balanced team and in Gautam Gambhir a tactician par excellence, one who could safely be called the non-playing captain. The presence of utility players like Krunal Pandya, Deepak Hooda and Ayush Badoni in the middle-order adds a lot of depth, while Mark Wood's 150 click thunderbolts will be a nightmare for the opposition.

Nicholas Pooran, who was paid an astronomical Rs 16 crore, would look to justify that billing after a forgettable last season with SRH.

When it comes to remote-control captaincy, there can't be a better example than KKR head coach Chandrakant Pandit, who will have to do all the planning and plotting on behalf of Nitish Rana, who will be leading a side that isn't looking very strong in the absence of regular skipper Shreyas Iyer.

In fact, Andre Russell and Sunil Narine's form will dictate how far KKR progress.

Ditto for Delhi Capitals, who will find it difficult to have anyone get remotely close to Rishabh Pant's impact, even though David Warner wouldn't mind winning a second IPL trophy.

Amid all the chaos in some teams, Rajasthan Royals look the most sorted outfit. The world's most dangerous T20 hitter Jos Buttler, wily wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, and the best cricketing brain, R Ashwin, will look to ensure that the legend of skipper Sanju Samson grows exponentially.

Its Dhoni vs Hardik in IPL 2023 opener

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Hardik Pandya's youthful leadership template will meet its match in Mahendra Singh Dhoni's time-tested improvisations as defending champions Gujarat Titans clash with eternal title contenders Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League opener here on Friday.

The 2022 was Pandya's first year as an IPL captain and despite his flamboyance on and off the field, he did invoke a certain sense of calm in Titans' campaign that had the an identical start to finish tempo, unmatched by any other team.

With Shubman Gill in the form of his life, Rashid Khan not losing one bit of his consistency and Pandya himself having his worth weight in gold, Gujarat are once again the team to beat.

David Miller's absence from the opener due to national duty will reduce some middle-order muscle but Rahul Tewatia, who has improved by leaps and bounds in recent years, could compensate for the temporary miss.

Kane Williamson might not be most sought after in this format but in low-scoring games on difficult surfaces, he could still be the man to watch out for.

Pandya has never shied away from admitting that he has learnt the ropes of leadership from Dhoni, who has always been his 'Mentor'.

But at 42, playing from IPL to IPL, Dhoni knows the template of IPL success only too well. There have been blips here and there, like last time when they failed to qualify for the play-offs but even with shut eyes, one can vouch that there was no fault in planning but the execution wasn't on expected lines.

On Friday, as the 16th edition starts, it will be very different from earlier ones as 12 players per side will take part in the pitched battle at the Motera Stadium with the 'Impact Player' rule coming into play for the first time.

Dhoni, who manoeuvres his resources having put in a lot of thought into his actions, might well make himself the 'Impact Player' if need be during games.

That for sure won't happen in the first few games as both teams try to make opti-



mal use of the rule.

For CSK, the presence of Ben Stokes is sure to make the opposition wary but to Gujarat Titans' delight, the England Test captain perhaps won't bowl at least in the initial phase of the tournament.

That makes him an ideal candidate as 'Impact Player' depending on whether the team bats first or second and accordingly Dhoni can think of playing three foreigners instead of four.

Devon Conway, Stokes and Moeen Ali at this point look the non-negotiable three starters in the playing eleven.

A lot will depend on how well Ravindra Jadeja, Ambati Rayudu and Dhoni himself perform with willow as the Indian pace bowling unit of Deepak Chahar and Simarjeet Singh will have their task cut out.

How well Dhoni can use either spinner Mahesh Theekshana or slinger Matheesa Pathirana will also go a long way establish-

ing a pattern in selections.

As far as GT is concerned, there is one strategic decision which has been baffling and that is release of tearaway quick Lockie Ferguson and bringing in Shivam Mavi. However Alazarri Joseph's presence is a bit reassuring in this format.

Save Mohammed Shami, the only other pacer of repute is the skipper himself. Yash Dayal had a good first season hasn't been in great form in Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with only 2 wickets from 6 games but to be fair, he was coming back from injury. Pradeep Sangwan and Mohit Sharma are both experienced campaigners but they are now well past their prime.

The other cause of worry for GT will be keeper's slot. While Wriddhiman Saha was decent as an opener last year, they have a better T20 batter in Kona Bharat this time round, who incidentally bats in the top order in the shortest format.

Vice-captaincy is reward of my hard work: Patel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Axar Patel is excited about his new role as Delhi Capitals vice-captain, terming the responsibility entrusted upon him as a reward for all the hardwork he has put in for the franchise over past few seasons.

"In my opinion, if you have gotten this role that means you are growing as a senior player. It's like getting a reward for all that you've done for the team. I'm excited about this role," the lanky all-rounder said in a video posted on DC's twitter handle.

"Our team is mostly the same, we have the same players from the last 3-4 years. We know our players well and that will be an important point."

Axar will be deputy to Australian David Warner, who has been named as DC skipper for this season in place of Rishabh Pant, who is currently undergoing rehabilitation following a horrific car accident in December. Axar said that he would provide full support to new skipper Warner.

"David is a talented player. I will provide him with an atmosphere where he can make best use of his abilities. It's a different feeling altogether when you join DC Camp. It's been 3-4 years with the franchise now and it feels like home," Axar said. DC will start their campaign with an away game against Lucknow Super Giants on April 1 before returning to their home base to play defending champions Gujarat Titans on April 4.

Flower expresses full faith in Rahul's batting prowess

SHALABH SAXENA ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants head coach Andy Flower expressed full faith in skipper KL Rahul's batting prowess.

"He may not be among runs in his recent outings but he batted brilliantly in the last edition and I am confident that this season he will lead the team to victory with his batting and leadership skills," he said.

Talking about the team's plan, Flower said, "Our plan is to win the tournament and the first major step for this is to reach the playoffs but like every good side we have chunk down our goals and are currently focusing on our first game."

"Delhi is a quality side and full of match winners but we have plans for every individual," he added.

Commenting on the pitch at Ekana, the former Zimbabwe skipper said, "Right now I cannot comment on the pitch as I have not seen the pitch No. 4 on which the game is to be played, but we believe that the pitch will provide equal opportunities to both teams, and we need to trust our team's strength rather than overthink about the pitch and any other factor for that matter."

On the injury of Lucknow Super Giants fast bowler Mohsin Khan, Flower said, "His services will definitely be missed as he done wonderfully well for us last season, but we have many talented players to fill his place."

He also disclosed that West Indian Nicholas Pooran, one of the costliest players in IPL, had joined the team after playing the T20 series against



South Africa.

Regarding the use of the impact player in the Indian Premier League for the first time, Andy Flower said it was a fantastic experiment, especially for those players who would be included in the bench strength. "It would be a special opportunity for all of us to learn here. It would make the game even more exciting," he added.

LUCKNOW PLAYERS TOIL HARD

Lucknow Super Giants players on Thursday toiled hard in the nets under the supervision of coach Andy Flower. Mark Wood, Jaydev Unadkat, Daniel Sams and Afghanistan all-rounder Naveen-ul-Haq bowled long spells while West Indian all-rounder Romario Shepherd practised long hits. He played lofty shots on slow bowlers and pacers as well.

DELHI CAPITALS ARRIVE

Delhi Capitals on Thursday arrived in Lucknow to play their opening game against home team Lucknow Super Giants at Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana International Stadium on April 1. Local manager of the team, Kamalkant Kanaujia, said that

the team had arrived without their skipper David Warner, who would join the team after the inauguration ceremony of the tournament. Warner replaced Rishabh Pant as skipper as Pant is recuperating from the injuries he sustained in a major accident three months back.

LSG-THEMED METRO TRAINS LAUNCHED



Lucknow Super Giants themed Metro trains have been launched in the city to facilitate the movement of cricket lovers to Ekana Stadium during the IPL matches.

The trains were inaugurated by LSG players Karan Sharma, Yudhveer Singh and Mohsin Khan, along with team CEO Col Vinod Bisht and UP Metro Rail Corporation MD Sushil Kumar.

The Lucknow Metro team has collaborated with the LSG team management to run three special Metro trains. These trains will depart from CCS Airport and Munshipulia Metro stations at 12:30 am on match days. Low-floor feeder bus services will also be arranged from Indira Nagar and Transport Nagar Metro stations to Ekana Stadium through Shaheed Path.



Hazlewood to miss initial stage of IPL, Maxwell uncertain for RCB's opener

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bangalore fast bowler Josh Hazlewood is set to miss the initial stages of the Indian Premier League beginning in Ahmedabad on Friday. According to a report in cricket.Com.Au, Hazlewood is, however, hopeful of playing a part in the later stages of the T20 tournament.

The 32-year-old is currently recovering from an Achilles problem which kept him out of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India. Hazlewood will consult Cricket Australia's medical staff



before deciding on his participation in the IPL, the report said.

In another big development, all-rounder Glenn Maxwell, who missed Australia's final two ODIs against India earlier this month, is also doubtful for RCB's opening game against Mumbai Indians on April 2 in Bengaluru as he is yet to recover from a leg injury.

'IPL-16 wonderful opportunity for Bharat to showcase talent'

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Former national selection committee chairman MSK Prasad says the IPL-16 is a "wonderful opportunity" for wicketkeeper KS Bharat to showcase his talent in white-ball cricket and stake a claim for India selection.

"Bharat is a Test cricketer and now he has an opportunity to showcase his talent in white-ball cricket. So, it will be a wonderful opportunity for him to do that," Prasad said of the Andhra stumper, who made

his Test debut in the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia.

The wicketkeeper, however, came in for some criticism over his not being able to make big contributions with the bat.

Prasad, a former India player, said in an interaction, "He (Bharat) is there in a good franchise like Gujarat Titans, so, it's a good opportunity for him to showcase his talent as a white-ball cricketer, too."

Noting that Bharat has performed reasonably well in

domestic cricket (in white-ball), Prasad said it was a chance for him to deliver again.

"See, now it is in his hands. So he has done reasonably well in domestic cricket, so in a few opportunities that he got for RCB, he did well. So, this is a wonderful opportunity for him to again deliver in white-ball cricket and put himself in a positive position," he added.

Bharat was drafted into the Test XI after the flamboyant Rishabh Pant was unavailable after being injured in a horrific road mishap late last year.