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WORKFORCE MUST HAVE
EMPLOYABLE SKILLS**WORLD 9**
'ANATOMY OF A FALL' WINS
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TAX COLLECTION IN INDIA ONE OF
THE HIGHEST, REDUCE IT: BHALLA

BHUBANESWAR, MONDAY MAY 29, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹4



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India gets new temple of democracy

The new Parliament isn't just a building, it is a symbol of the aspirations of 140 cr people of India, says PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a 'tryst with destiny' moment, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday delivered his first speech in the new Parliament affirming that the august complex would "witness realisation of our developed India resolution" and the new building will become a means of "realising the dreams of our freedom fighters and will witness the sunrise of a self-reliant India."

Inaugurating the new Parliament, Modi first installed the scared 'Sengol' in the Lok Sabha chamber, right next to the Speaker's chair, after seeking the blessings of the 'Adheenams' from various temples in Tamil Nadu. Amid Vedic chants by priests from Karnataka's Shringeri Math, Modi performed 'Ganapati Homam' to invoke the gods to bless the inauguration of the new Parliament building. A multi-faith prayer was also held to mark the occasion.

In the second-leg of the event, Modi addressed packed new Parliament receiving a standing ovation from the attendees. He described the occasion as one that is "immortal." In the development journey of every country, some moments come which become immortal. 28th May is such a day," said Modi amidst thunderous applause. "The new Parliament isn't just a building, it is the symbol of the aspiration of the 140 crore people of India. It gives a message to the world about India's determination", he said.

"The new building will become a means of realising the dreams of our freedom fighters and will witness the sunrise of self-reliant India. This new building will see the fulfilment of the resolutions of a developed India", Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla lights a lamp at the inauguration of the new Parliament building, in New Delhi, Sunday

PTI

Sengol will inspire us in our duty, says Modi

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted the significance of Sengol as a symbol of transfer of power saying that the sceptre will continue to inspire the parliamentarians in their duty. In his address in the Lok Sabha chamber of the new Parliament to mark the inauguration of the building, Modi said the Sengol in 1947 symbolised of transfer of power under the guidance of Rajaji and the Adheenams. On the contrary, Congress has been claiming that there has been no documented evidence of Lord Mountbatten, C Rajagopalachari, and Jawaharlal Nehru describing the sceptre as a symbol of transfer of power by the British to India.

"I believe it is our good fortune that we have been able to restore the dignity of the sacred Sengol. Whenever proceedings begin in this Parliament House, Sengol will continue to inspire us all," Modi said. After the Sengol was installed in Lok Sabha Sunday morning, he said, "In the great Chola Empire, Sengol was considered a symbol of path of duty, the path of service and the path of nation ser-



Photo by PTI

Insult to tribal Prez, disdain for House procedures: Opp

CONGRESS CHIEF MALLIKARJUN KHARGE SAID DEMOCRACY DOES NOT RUN FROM THE BUILDINGS BUT FUNCTIONS THROUGH THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition parties on Sunday continued with their criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi after he inaugurated the new Parliament building, saying a "self-glorifying authoritarian PM with utter disdain for Parliamentary procedures"

opened the new complex. Around 20 Opposition parties, including the Congress, boycotted the event alleging that President Droupadi Murmu has been denied the right to inaugurate the building and called it an insult to the first woman President from the tribal community. Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge said democracy does not run from the buildings but functions through the voice of the people. Jairam Ramesh, the Congress general secretary, said, "On this day, May 28th: Nehru, the person who did the most to

nurture Parliamentary democracy in India, was cremated in 1964. Savarkar, the person whose ideological ecosystem led to the killing of Mahatma Gandhi, was born in 1883."

BJP raps RJD for 'coffin' dig at new Parl building

New Delhi/Patna: The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) on Sunday likened the architecture of the new Parliament building to a coffin, drawing a sharp response from the BJP which said people will bury the Bihar party in such a coffin in the 2024

Lok Sabha polls.

As the new building was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the ruling party in Bihar put out a tweet that showed a coffin and the new legislature building side by side and asked, "What is this.

New Delhi: With the new Parliament building inaugurated, the focus now shifts to the construction of the Vice-President Enclave, Common Central Secretariat buildings, Defence Enclave, MPs' chambers, and the Prime Minister's new residence and office. Infrastructure firm Larsen & Toubro Ltd is constructing the Executive Enclave housing the PMO, Cabinet Secretariat, India House and the National Security Council Secretariat at an estimated cost of Rs 1,189 crore.

Carpenters are busy constructing the three chariots of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra for the June 20 Rath Yatra at the Grand Road in Puri on Sunday.
Ranjan Ganguly: Pioneer

Anti-party comments

Moquim, Chiranjib served show-cause notices

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Two senior Congress leaders of Odisha, Barabati-Cuttack MLA Mohammed Moquim and former Jagatsinghpur MLA Chiranjib Biswal, have been served show-cause notices by the Disciplinary Committee of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) for their allegedly anti-party comments.

The two leaders were issued the notices for their statements at a meeting at the Jayadev Bhawan in Bhubaneswar on May 8.

The meeting convened by Mohammed Moquim was attended by many senior lead-



ers, including former Pradesh Congress Committee president Niranjan Patnaik and BJD MLA Soumya Ranjan Patnaik. At the meeting, Chiranjib stated that the selection of the party candidate for the Jharsuguda by-poll was wrong. He also questioned the PCC

Campaign Committee headed by Bijay Patnaik.

He further stated that though there are only nine MLAs in the party, 20 leaders are aspiring to become Chief Minister which has affected the unity in the party.

Moquim alleged that senior

party leaders were not invited to campaign for the party candidate at Jharsuguda.

Many PCC leaders were surprised at the statements of the two leaders. They also suspected the move of the two behind holding such a meeting in Bhubaneswar just a couple of days before the Jharsuguda by-poll.

However, Moquim said he had not received any notice as of yet.

Even as this is the first show-cause notice for Chiranjib, Moquim had earlier been served a show-cause notice for voting in favour of NDA candidate Droupadi Murmu during the Presidential polls.

A little precaution can keep Heat Stroke away

Take Care, Stay Safe

- Avoid exposure to sun and heavy work in hot weather from 11 AM to 3 PM.
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‘Poacher’ dies in custody Why kin won’t be paid Rs 7L, NHRC asks CS

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a show-cause notice to the Odisha Chief Secretary as to why compensation of Rs 7 lakh would not be paid to the family of a person who died while being in the custody of forest officials.

The commission directed that the response be filed within four weeks.

The NHRC passed the order taking cognisance of a petition filed by lawyer and human rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy.

The petitioner alleged that Dhanewar Behera from Khuntakata Satagochhia village under Athagarh block of Cuttack distict was picked up by Forest Department officials on charges of poaching a tusker in February 2023.

Later, he was found dead in the custody of forest officials. Locals and the victim's family are alleging that he thrashed to death by the forest officials.

Later, in reply to the NHRC, a report was received from the Odisha Principal Chief Conservator of Forest which stated that cases have been registered against six forest officials and they were arrested and forwarded to court.

Farmer electrocuted NHRC orders aid of Rs 4L for kin

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the Odisha Chief Secretary to pay compensation to the family of farmer Ramesh Chandra Nayak of Bauturapal village in Dhamanagar of Bhadrak district who was electrocuted.

The NHRC passed the order taking cognisance of a petition filed by lawyer and human rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy.

The petitioner alleged that

Ramesh came into contact with a live electric wire lying on the road while he was returning from the agricultural field. He died on the spot.

Tripathy alleged that the mishap occurred due to the inaction, negligence and failure of the Energy Department. He requested intervention of the commission in the matter to ensure adequate compensation to the victim's family and stringent action against the guilty officials.

Seva Dal workers in every booth: Cong

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Congress Seva Dal has a glorious history. The Dal members should act as commanders in their areas during the forthcoming elections, said PCC president Sarat Patnaik here on Sunday inaugurating a function of district Seva Dal functionaries.

Very soon, a State-level camp of the Seva Dal would be held by nominating a functionary from every block, it was decided.

Party leader Bijay Patnaik said that like earlier, Seva Dal programmes would be given prominence.



In the function presided over by Seva Dal State president Aryakumar Jnanendra, Panchanan Kanungo said Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the first president of the Seva Dal. Efforts would be made to

ensure that his ideals and thinking reach the common man.

Among others, Jatni MLA Suresh Rautray and Shibamanda Ray also spoke. Dilip Panda offered a vote of thanks.

Police raid city night clubs, bars



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Teams of the Commissionerate police on Saturday night conducted raids on various nightclubs and bars in the capital city on the allegation of openly flouting norms.

Three platoon police forces along with special squads conducted the late-night raids on several night clubs and bars at Chandrasekharpur, Infocity, and Patia for operating beyond the specified time limit.

Despite several warnings by police, the bars and nightclubs continue to operate beyond the specified timings in different parts of the city. The

nightclubs and bars were also found openly violating the terms and conditions of the Excise Department.

Many youngsters were spotted in a drunken state and dancing in the clubs late at night. Police sources said action would be initiated as per law against those nightclubs and bars that were found violating the norms. As per reports, the raids were part of the ongoing 'safe city' drive launched by the Commissionerate police.

However, it is alleged that despite the raids, the enforcement agencies have failed to crack the whip on the night clubs and bars which are brazenly flouting the rules.

Pandian reviews SAMALEI project

Asks for timely execution

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

5T Secretary VK Pandian visited the Maa Samaleswari Temple project, popularly known as SAMALEI-Maa Samaleswari Temple Area Management and Local Economic Initiative, on Sunday.

The project is being developed in an area of 30 acres; and 25 acres has already been acquired for the project and work is in progress.

Pandian interacted with a large gathering of pilgrims and then visited the entire site where construction of the heritage pond complex, podium, queue management system, cloak room and other associated components is underway. He directed the engineers to speed up the work so that it should be completed in time.



After viewing the plaza area with the heritage welcome gates under construction on three sides, he examined the under-construction heritage corridor.

He also inspected the vending zone, information counter, pilgrim facility and temple facility centre and an iconic watchtower which are

under fast progress.

Moving on to the riverfront area, Pandian instructed for finalisation of the design for an iconic foot over-bridge and to expedite progress of pitching and the river front column foundation works. He also visited the crematorium construction site and instructed to design the

colours with lighter themes and to celebrate human spirit.

The Samalei project is being executed under 5T initiative.

Works Principal Secretary Vir Vikram Yadav, Sambalpur Collector Ananya Das, OBCC MD JK Das and other senior officers and President of the Temple Trust Board were present.

Rs 4,949 cr biz ensured for 70L women in 6L SHGs

In convergence with 20 Govt depts

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With an aim to convert women self-help groups (SHGs) into MSEs, the State Government has facilitated business worth Rs 4,949 crore to the SHGs in convergence with 20 Government departments.

This was informed by Mission Shakti Secretary Sujata R Karthikeyan here on

Saturday. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday reviewed the performances of the Mission Shakti Department and implementation of promises made in the election manifesto in 2019.

The Department of Mission Shakti has 7 million women organised into 6 lakh Self Help Groups (SHGs). The convergence guidelines have been prepared to incentivize the role of SHG in different schemes. This has created opportunities for more than 1

lakh SHGs and enhanced their economic standing by generating a cumulative income of Rs 1,226 crore in the last 4 years. As many as 11,008 clusters have been promoted under different livelihood sectors, the Secretary said.

For the first time in the history credit flow to SHGs has crossed Rs 11,000 crore in 2022-23. This is a quantum leap over a period of 8 years, she said. The credit flow has been increased 19 times over a period of 8 years (2014-15 to 2022-23), Karthikeyan said.

The Secretary further said that the average loan size of SHGs has also seen a big jump from Rs 1.06 lakh in 2016-17 to Rs 3.01 lakh today. This quantum jump was boosted by the State Government decision to provide zero interest loans up to Rs 5 lakh.

Further, 102 Mission Shakti Cafes have been opened across the State to provide healthy and nutritious food to people in a homely setting while being a good source of revenue generation for SHG members. The SHGs have set up 1,147

Millet Enterprises, promoting healthy and sustainable food practices. Pisciculture is being done by 13,431 SHGs in 13,501 GP tanks, which led to a business turnover of Rs 139 crore. The Department has constructed 6,662 Mission Shakti Gruhas at GPs and Urban areas with an allocation of Rs 5 lakh (rural) and Rs 7.09 lakh (urban). Similarly, 127 Mission Shakti Bhawans were constructed at Block Level at a cost of Rs 50 lakh for each unit. Mission Shakti Bhawans constructed at district level

with an allocation of Rs 1 crore for each unit.

Besides, 119 Mission Shakti outlets opened in 22 districts. District Level Mission Shakti Bazaars are under construction. The State Level Mission Shakti Bazaar will be opened soon, she informed.

This budget has the Mission Shakti Scooter scheme, where two lakh members will be covered. Interest Subvention for loans up to Rs 1 lakh for purchase of scooter will be borne entirely by the State Government, she added.

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Gopabandhu Academy of Administration (GAA) has established a 'Mock Interviews' Cell, which helps the civil service aspirants in their preparations for interviews. The cell has been set up under the guidance of GAA Director General Raj Kumar Sharma.

In the UPSC examination 2022, nine candidates, including three women, who were qualified in the written examination, have participated in different sessions of mock interviews, experience sharing, etc. Experts and experienced subject matter specialists including senior bureaucrats (retired and in-service) have mentored the candidates.

Four out of the nine UPSC aspirants are shortlisted to be appointed in civil services as per the results of UPSC. They are Durga Prasad Adhikari (162 rank), Satya Prakash Mishra (261 rank), Sushree Suvangi Khuntia (248 rank) and Suvasnigdha Sethi (680 rank).

The Mock Interview sessions were organised under

expert panel members Aurobindo Behera, Akhila Bihari Ota, Saswat Mishra, Nikhil Pawan Kalyan, Prathamesh Arvind Rajeshirke and KVD Prakash through hybrid mode.

Four such Mock Interviews have been conducted under the chairmanship of eminent bureaucrats and academicians. Additionally, a series of sessions on current affairs, history and culture of Odisha have also been organised by experts.

The aspirants have not only got their doubts cleared but also got very important tips on how to appear and answer the set probable of questions in such interviews.

GAA Joint Director Mamatarani Naik was heading the Mock Interview Cell. Additional Commissioner and Course Director Himansu Bhusan Panda also participated in holding of the interviews.

The Director General informed that the Mock Interview Cell would continue as a regular arrangement in the coming years to help groom Odia aspirants for personality tests and interviews.

Naveen completes 4th yr of 5th term; charisma continues

Opp's claims notwithstanding, BJD most likely to repeat success in 2024

On May 29, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik completes his fourth year of the fifth-term and twenty-three consecutive years in office. The past four years of the fifth-term had presented various challenges to the State Government, but the the BJD Supremo has sailed through successfully.

The first year of the fifth term witnessed Covid-19 pandemic. While the Chief Ministers of many other States were seen failing in managing the pandemic, Patnaik could successfully deal with the deadly health-emergency. He not only saved the lives of the native as well as the migrant people of Odisha but also helped people of other States by supplying precious oxygen.

Secondly, he was able to pull back



LALIT MOHAN MISHRA

the State economy from the severe shock of Covid-19 within record time. The third challenge was the restoration of the education system which was done well by the State Government. The fourt challenge was to re-activate the efforts to attract the industrial investments which the State Government could achieve commendable feats.

Amidst the global Covid-19 pessimism, the Odisha Government could create history by constructing the world's largest hockey stadium at Rourkela in a

record time and hosting the Hockey Men's World Cup for the second time.

The most visible feature of Naveen's fifth term is the twin administrative reform initiatives of 5-T and Mo-Sarkar to make the Government more accountable, transparent and effective. The State Government's flagship programmes under 5 T, such as the transformation programme of the Government high-schools, development of heritage temples of different districts, construction of inter-district Biju-Expressway inter alia, could catch the imagination of the masses. Besides, the setting up of medical colleges and autonomous universities in every nook and corner of the State has boosted the popularity of Patnaik. The feedback system in Mo- Sarkar programme has improved the quality of governance.

In short, the fifth term of Patnaik's Chief Ministership has been filled with many welfaristic measures and development narratives that contribute to the

rise of his and his Government's popularity.

In the administrative reform segment, the field movement of the Chief Minister's Private Secretary cum 5T Secretary, VK Pandian has been a notable phenomenon during the fourth year of the fifth-term of the Chief Minister. While the opposition criticizes the field -visit programme of the Secetary, the public express their happiness. In reality, the field visit of Pandian as representative of the CM has connected the people with the Chief Minister and has been contributing to the increase in the popularity of the BJD Government as the development projects are expedited.

It will be naive to say that there was no political challenge to the BJD Supremo during the fifth-term. But Patnaik handled each of them successfully like in earlier times. Many senior MLAs of the BJD lost their lives, but the BJD could re-occupy the Assembly seats in by-elections. There was Panchayat, ULB and Co-operative elections in which the BJD could

perform much better than the previous elections. The supervision of the party's organisational secretary , former Minister and MLA, Pranab Prakas Das, the BJD could sweep all Zilla Parishad seats and occupy most Panchyat Samittees. This was a big electoral blow to the Opposition in the State.

Like the previous years, last year's political narrative in the State centered around Chief Minister Patnaik again. His equi-distance central politics and federal-cooperatism-administration have left the main opposition party, the State-BJP, in utter confusion regarding its political course for 2024 general election.

The State BJP tried negative narratives and even false political propaganda formula against the BJD and the State Government during the Assembly by-elections but had no success. Its dependency on the much-discussed, so-called Dhamnagar by-election's Raju Das model in the forthcoming general election as last resort shall bring more disaster than electoral success

to the party as it is a myth to assume that all Assembly constituencies are similar. The State BJP is still depending on the Modi wave for its 2024-electoral outcome and it is not able to decide on its Chief Minister face.

The State Congress on the other hand is still on its down-hill journey since 2000 when it lost power in the State. Now the unit is sloganeering for 90 Assembly seats in 2024 poll, comparing its performance with 1995. The party had won 10 Assembly seats in 1990 but could bag 80 seats in 1995 general election. But comparison between 1995 and 2024 is wrong. Though the Congress had won 10 seats in 1990, its vote -share was 30% and the party had lost deposit in 17 seats only. This constituency-strength of the party could catapult it to power in 1995.

But the situation is different today. The Congress had 16% vote share in 2019 poll and the forfeiture of deposits occurred in almost half of the Assembly seats. So '9 to 90' is not a feasible slogan. The good thing for the State Congress is the

party's revival at the national level. But that goodwill vote is not likely to change the constituency -situation. On the contrary, the performance of the Congress in the State shall depend on its organisational strength, internal solidarity, campaign, constituency-level manpower recruitment and pragmatic election plan.

As the Opposition in the State is reeling under confusion and factionalism, the BJD looks confident in repeating its victory in 2024, pursuing specific electoral strategy, delivering aggressive Government welfare and development programmes and working collectively in a disciplined manner, under the leadership of party boss. The establishment of the party's office at Bhubaneswar has boosted the morale of the grassroot cadets.

In this situation, it can be safely forecast that the BJD could win the 2024 Assembly election with a clear majority and Patnaik shall become the Chief Minister for the sixth consecutive term.

(M: 9439178588)

Postal cover released at Kotia Branch Post Office

To support claim that the region belongs to Odisha

PNS ■ KORAPUT

The Eastern India Philatelic Association along with the INTACH Odisha Chapter released a postal cover at the Kotia Branch Post Office on Saturday. The cover bearing the slogan “Kotia Belongs to Odisha” was stamped and cancelled at the Branch Post Office which falls under the Pottangi Sub-Post Office, both of which are under the Koraput Postal Division of the Odisha Postal Circle.

The cover was released by philatelists Anil Dhir and Dr Biswajit Mohanty in the presence of former State Election Commissioner Sanjib



Hota, who has also been the Collector of undivided Koraput earlier.

Sanjib Hota said Kotia has been and would remain as an integral part of Odisha and the territorial dispute should be solved as soon as possible. While all administrative and revenue offices of Odisha have been in place at Kotia since the formation of the State, the presence of the Post Office, which has been functioning foe decades, is another proof of Odisha's claim.

Biswajit Mohanty said

Andhra Pradesh is claiming the region as there are rich bauxite deposits in all the hills of Kotia panchayat. The Odisha Government has in the recent years developed infrastructures to a great extent in the panchayat.

Anil Dhir said the effort of releasing the cover in this remote Post Office was to support Odisha's claim. Nearly 300 covers were posted to stakeholders and persons who are involved in the dispute. Individual covers were dispatched to the Chief

Ministers of both AP and Odisha and the Prime Minister and the President. Covers were also sent to the lawyers who are fighting the case in the Supreme Court. Every MP and MLA of both States has been mailed the covers from the Post office with the cancellation and postmark of the Kotia Branch Post office with the Pin Code. There is excellent infrastructure in the region for ecotourism and the Odisha Government is developing the Deomali region by constructing cottages.

Interestingly, there are three other Post Offices in the country, one each in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which are named Kotia; hence, the Odisha Branch Office is spelled as ‘Kotiya’ with the assigned Pin Code being 764039.

In Jajpur

Divyang family not included in housing scheme



As bribe not paid

PNS ■ JAJPUR

A Divyang family of Kamrun Bibi of Neulapur village under Dharamsala block has been moving from pillar to post to get a house under a housing scheme.

They have approached the local representatives and the panchayat office with request

for a house in their favour but in vain. It is alleged that since they are unable to pay bribe, no one is listening to them.

Recently, Bibi's son and two daughters met the Dharmasala BDO and appealed for including them in a housing scheme.

BDO Devendra Prasad Bal informed that the problem will be solved soon.

Rs 2-cr ganja seized in Malkangiri

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI

Police seized more than 2,000 kg of ganja from a forest near Chittrakonda in Malkangiri district on Saturday night. The estimated street value of the seized contraband is around Rs 2 crore.

Acting on intelligence inputs about ganja smuggling, a team of the Chittrakonda police station conducted a raid in a forest near Sangmaguda village under Chittrakonda block in the district.

Taking advantage of the

darkness, the ganja smugglers managed to flee from the spot leaving behind the ganja packed in a large number of bags

The police team seized 2,152 kg of ganja from the spot. The Chittrakonda police have registered a NDPS case and started a probe in the matter.

"A case has been registered in this connection under various sections of the IPC and NDPS Act, and efforts are on to nab the absconding smugglers," Chittrakonda police station IIC Mukunda Meleka said.

'Crime Branch has failed to solve Naba murder'

Suresh Pujari demands CBI probe

RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■ JHARSUGUDA

The charge-sheet submitted by the Crime Branch in the murder case of former Minister Naba Kisore Das has failed to unravel the mystery behind the crime, leaving several unanswered questions.

The motive behind a confrontation between a Cabinet Minister and police ASI Gopal Das remains unclear. If Gopal truly feared for his life, why did he not report it to higher authorities? Moreover, how did he manage to stay in the district for twelve years if he had enmity with the most powerful politician of the area Naba Das?

Posing these questions, BJP MP Suresh Pujari at a Press meet here on Saturday said demands for a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry have persisted since the inception of the case. The reluctance of the State Government to involve the CBI raises suspicions about its intentions and a potential cover-up. The Crime Branch's charge-sheet seems flimsy and



insufficient. As a lawyer, Pujari believed that the charges under Section 302 are weak and should have included Sections 120(b), 149 of IPC and 34 CrPC.

The absence of the bullet that killed Naba Das further adds to the doubts surrounding the investigation. After 118 days, the Crime Branch has yet to establish the motive behind the murder. While the State Government had initially discussed seeking assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States, it has not taken the necessary steps to request their involvement, said Pujari.

To uphold justice and uncover the truth, Pujari urged the State Government to initiate a CBI inquiry for a transparent investigation into this high-profile murder case.

DCBL-NABARD MoU promotes poultry farming

Target to provide benefits to 300 families

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Limited (DCBL), a leading Indian cement major and a subsidiary of Dalmia Bharat Limited (DBL) in collaboration with NABARD has launched a new sustainable livelihood initiative, "Promotion and formation of farmer producer organization on backyard poultry farming" in Rajgangpur. As part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between DCBL and NABARD, the project will provide sustainable income



opportunities via poultry farming to 300 families in rural communities within a span of three years.

To spearhead this project effectively, a dedicated FPO named "Fleshy Chicken Farmer Producer Company Ltd" has been established and registered under the MSME sector. In the initial phase, 40 families from periphery villages had received

100 day-old broiler chicks each. Within 40 days of the programme's commencement, the initiative achieved outstanding progress, with each family earning between Rs 7,000 and Rs 10,500 per month. In FY 2023-24, the project is in the process of adding up to 100 families by this quarter.

To commemorate the remarkable milestone, the

DCBL organised an event at the registered office of the FPO in Bihabandh. The event was graced by esteemed dignitaries, including Executive Director and Unit Head of DCBL Rajgangpur Chetan Shrivastav, Dr Niladri Bhusan Parhi (AED-DCBL), Om Prakash Khelkar (AED-DCBL), District Development Manager of NABARD Sundargarh Tapas Kumar Behera, Branch Manager of UCO Bank, Rajgangpur Bikash Pattanaik and Fleshy Chicken Farmer Producer Company Ltd chairperson Lilendri Naik.

For the second phase of the project, 60 beneficiaries from the land affected villages have been identified to join the programme.

Kshitriya Samaj celebrates golden jubilee

Thousands of caste people join

AJIT PANDA ■ NUAPADA

The golden jubilee festival of the Kshitriya Samaj was held by the Khadial-Patana Kshitriya Samaj on Saturday on the 51st Foundation Day of Kshitriya Samaj at Khariar.

The occasion witnessed presence of thousands of caste people of Kshitriya Samaj of Khariar and Patnagarh regions of western Odisha. Several leading persons of the caste from different parts of Odisha as well as from other States were present. Kshitriya Samaj president Shambu Kishor Dandana presided over a meeting held on the occasion.

Community leader Shankar Patidar of Madhya Pradesh, who was chief guest, called for efforts for transformation of the society. He said mass marriage ceremonies should be organised and emphasis should be on women's



education. He promised to provide support of Rs 11,000 to each couple solemnising marriage in common ceremony.

Baimanu Charchi joined as chief speaker. Utkal Vikash Parishad president Basant Charan Swain attended as guest of honour. Advocate

Bibhudatta Chalan was distinguished speaker. Other guests present were Dev Dev Singh Deo, Phulidhar Naik and Kishore Kumar Naik.

"It is an occasion to celebrate the unity of our community and foster harmony among families and clans. It brings people from all

backgrounds together to enjoy the festivities and forge a stronger bond of unity. Such celebrations serve as a reminder to us about how much we can achieve when we come together in solidarity and embrace each other's differences," said organiser Parameswar Barik.

INBRIEF

PM HONOURS ODIA WORKER FOR NEW PARL HOUSE

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi felicitated a worker from Odisha who was engaged in construction of the new Parliament building here. Purnanjan Dalai from Chandipur of Baleswar district was among the workers felicitated by Modi at



the inauguration ceremony of the new Parliament House. Purnanjan had made arrangements for tea and water for all workers involved in making of the new Parliament House.

2 CRITICALLY HURT AS HOT DAL FALLS ON THEM AT SHREEMANDIR

Puri: Two persons engaged as Bojhia (people who carry Mahaprasad) at Jagannath temple in Puri sustained severe burn injuries on Saturday when hot dal fell on them while they were carrying the Mahaprasad on their heads to the shrine's Bhoga Mandap. Servitors along with devotees, who were present nearby, rescued the two and rushed them to the District Headquarters Hospital in Puri for treatment.

KRUSHNA CHANDRA DEATH ANNIV HELD IN B'PUR

Brahmapur: The 49th Death Anniversary of Gajapati Maharaja Krushna Chandra Dev of Paralakhemundi was celebrated here by various social organisations like Manab Adhikar Surakhya Manch (MASM), Puja Puja Samiti, Odisha Bhasa Andolan, Sanskarbadi, Ganjam Zilla Bikash Manch (GZBM) and Soundhika Samaja. Representatives from these organizations such as Abani Gaya, Bansidhar Bhuyan, Shyam Sundar Khadanga, Trinatha Moharana, Dr Siva Prasad Mishra, Rajendra Panda, Bhismacharya Choudhury, Prabhakar Sahu, Dinabandhu Sripalav, Sabita Sahukar, Sambasiba Rao among others spoke on the occasion. The Parala Maharaja's contributions for the formation of a separate Odisha State and the steps he took for development of agriculture, education, irrigation and healthcare in the State were recalled.



ADANI FOUNDATION HOLDS SUMMER CAMP FOR STUDENTS

Dhamra: The Adani Foundation, the CSR arm of the Adani Group of companies, organised a month-long summer camp as part of its flagship project Uthtan in over 40 schools in the Adani Dhamra Port vicinity.



Due to the heat waves, the State Government announced an early summer vacation on April 21 with schools scheduled to reopen on June 18, resulting in a 59-day-long holiday.

PETER ENGLAND UNVEILS REVAMPED STORE IN BBSR

Bhubaneswar: Peter England, a prominent fashion brand in India renowned for its high-quality men's clothing and stylish designs, unveiled a revamped store in Bhubaneswar on Saturday. Situated in Ashok Nagar, Janpath, the Peter England Store has been catering to the fashion needs of Odisha for an impres-



sive 23 years. Now, the store is undergoing a complete transformation, promising a fresh and more captivating look. The new avatar of the store will feature a larger space and a bolder aesthetic, along with an extensive collection of wedding attire.

CONTEMPORARIES

Milestone: More women shine in Civil Services exam

In the recently-declared All India Civil Services examination results, more than 34 per cent or one-third of the new recruits is women. Not only that, women occupied the top four ranks and 12 of the top 20 are women.

It's not unusual to see women toppers in the Civil Services exam which is a three-stage exam, considered to be one of the toughest in the world, but it is encouraging to know that there is a considerable increase in the number of women recruited. Out of the total 933 candidates recruited based on a written test and an interview, 320 are women. The number of women recruited in 2021 was



S JYOTIRANJANA

215(25.8%), 2020 was 238 (28.5%), and 2019 was 220 (23.9%).

At a time when the corporate world is struggling to have decent gender representation/diversity at

senior levels, the higher representation of women in the all-India services selected through a rigorous examination process makes it a milestone worth celebrating.

However, a mere celebration of the achievement is not sufficient; rather, the government should come up with adequate measures in place by a well-thought-of policy to ensure that this statistic of 34 per cent is not just an achievement of the moment but is properly endured and improved along with a work culture that is non-discriminatory even if the women officers work in a male-dominated ecosystem. Unlike the private sector where discrimination between men

and women is rampant especially in payment and other benefits, in case of civil services the measures ensuring equality are already built into the system like pay structures and redressal mechanisms are equal for men and women.

All India Civil Services have for long attracted both men and women firstly because it offers a career in government and secondly because this provides them an opportunity to serve the country, thirdly because it is a combination of both power and prestige and fourthly it is an wonderful opportunity that offers for upward social mobility. Therefore, having more women in the category of high-profile jobs that civil

services offer is surely an inspiration for all women.

There are many prominent women civil servants who have made all of us proud by their distinguished achievements like Kiran Bedi, IPS/ 1972- the first woman IPS officer in India, who initiated prison reforms, traffic management, etc., and who became a Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry. She was instrumental in bringing many reforms to the notorious Tihar Jail in Delhi. She won the Ramon Magsaysay Award. She was also the first Indian woman to be the Police Advisor to Secretary-General of the United Nations.

M Rama Devi, IAS/ 1988,

credited as the first woman IAS officer to be appointed as the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh; Sunita Sanghi, IAS/ 1987, first woman IAS officer from Jammu and Kashmir known for her work in rural development; Meeran C Borwankar, IPS/ 1981, first woman DGP of Maharashtra known for her work in prison reforms and women's safety; Nirupama Rao, IFS/1973 who became the second woman to be the Foreign Secretary of India in 2009. In 2001, she was also the first and so far the only woman spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs.

According to the World Bank, there is a drop in the formal participation of

working age women in the nation's workforce from 32% in 2005 to 25% in 2021, and under such circumstances, the recent development concerning the civil services results although has quite encouraging prospects in closing the gender gap in the mid to top ranks in the government needs to be carried forward in enhancing the graph in the future times.

However, it is deplorable that although India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies, here women are still belittled and suppressed by patriarchy. For example, women from affluent families with good educational accomplishments are discouraged from taking

work outside the home and remain as homemakers many times because of safety concerns at workplace and poor public transport in cities, etc. For India to attain true economic potential, it is important that women participation in workforce is increased and their increased numbers in civil services can really be very encouraging.

(The writer is Additional Central Government Standing Counsel, CAT, Cuttack Bench, Consulting Editor-Legal Affairs and Public Policy, The Pioneer, Bhubaneswar and a Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law and Media Studies, School of Mass Communication, KIIT University. Views are personal.)

Modi chairs meeting with BJP CMs

Discusses ‘effective implementation’ of Central schemes



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP National president JP Nadda and others dignitaries during 'Mukhyamantri Parishad' meeting, at BJP headquarters in New Delhi on Sunday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday held a meeting with the Chief Ministers of the BJP-ruled States at the party headquarters here discussing 'effective implementation' of the Central schemes in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls.

The meeting which lasted several hours was part of the BJP's good governance agenda with chief ministers sharing their best practices in governance and implementation of various welfare schemes in their respective States.

Chief Ministers gave

feedback to the Prime Minister about the development work in their states, some of which, including Madhya Pradesh, are to go to polls this year.

There was a discussion with all the Chief Ministers regarding the preparations for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, sources said.

BJP national president JP Nadda, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Maharashtra Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis, Goa CM Pramod Sawant, Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar, Assam CM Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath, Uttarakhand CM

Pushkar Singh Dhami, Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel, Nagaland Deputy CM Yanthungo Patton, Madhya Pradesh CM Shivrang Singh Chouhan, and Tripura CM Manik Saha were present at the meeting.

UP deputy-CMs Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak and Maharashtra Deputy-CM Devendra Fadnavis were also present at the meeting.

The meeting stated after the inauguration of new Parliament and the first address of the Prime Minister before the parliamentarians and other invitees.

PM hails Savarkar in Mann Ki Baat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday spoke about the contribution of Veer Savarkar on his birth anniversary recalling his "sacrifice and courage" as also about 'Yuva Sangam' initiative and construction of 75 'Amrit Sarovars' in each district in the country for water conservation.

Addressing the 101st episode of his monthly radio broadcast, 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi touched on a range of issues, including his visit to Hiroshima. He stressed that the latest edition was the beginning of its "second century" of his radio programme.

Marking Veer Savarkar's birth anniversary, the Prime Minister recalled his "sacrifice and courage".

"Veer Savarkar's personality was one of firmness and magnanimity. His fearless and self-respecting nature did not like the mentality of slavery at all. Not only the freedom movement, whatever Veer Savarkar did for social equality and social justice is remembered even today," said the Prime Minister.

He also hailed late Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and Telugu actor NT Rama Rao on his 100th birth anniversary, saying that "Rao left an indelible mark on Indian cinema and politics."

He went on to note that

June 4 is commemorated as the birth anniversary of poet Sant Kabir Das, who "showed us a path which is still relevant today".

The Prime Minister spoke about the new initiative of 'yuva Sangam' unifying the country and spoke with two youngsters one each from Arunachal Pradesh and Bihar who participated in it.

"The first round of Yuva Sangam, about 1,200 youths toured 22 states of the country", said Modi.

"Recently, we talked about Kashi Tamil Sangamam in Mann Ki Baat. Talked about Saurashtra Tamil Sangamam. Kashi Telugu Sangamam was also held in Varanasi some time back. One such unique effort has been made in the country to give strength to the great spirit of Ek Bharat. This is the effort of Yuva Sangam," the Prime Minister said.

Modi appreciated the large audience attracted by 'Mann ki baat' programme.

"When 'Mann Ki Baat' was broadcast, at that time in different countries of the world, in different time zones... Somewhere it was evening and somewhere it was late night. Despite this, a large number of people made time to listen to the 100th episode", said Modi.

Modi again emphasised on the need for water Conservation Reminding that water is very basic to every one's life.

LS Speaker calls for discipline, decorum in new Parl building



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Sunday urged fellow lawmakers to establish new standards of parliamentary discipline, decorum, and dignity in the new parliament building and become idols for democratic institutions across the world.

"The newly built Parliament House is an amazing amalgam of our rich culture, ancient heritage and our modern aspirations," Birla said addressing the inauguration of the new parliament building.

The Speaker said unity in diversity was the strength of the country which found expression in Parliament.

"It is in the Parliament, where members speak in one voice in national interest despite regional and ideological differences. This is the strength of our democracy. Parliament is the custodian of this proud democratic heritage," he said. Birla said the existing Parliament building was witness to many historic events, including India's independence and framing of the Constitution.

"It is our responsibility to take care of our precious heritage," the Lok Sabha Speaker said, adding that this was precisely why several parliamentarians had felt the need for a new Parliament House and urged the Prime Minister to build it.

"Parliamentarians will be able to utilise the new engineering and technology in the new Parliament building to improve their skills," Birla said.

Min Meghwal slams Opp for boycott, calls it cheap politics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Union minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Sunday dubbed the decision of various political parties to boycott of the inauguration of new Parliament building as an example of "cheap politics" and also slammed them for questioning the relevance of 'Sengol'.

The law minister said representatives of several opposition parties who had not supported the boycott call attended the event.

Several Supreme Court judges and those holding constitutional posts also attended the programme in Lok Sabha chamber of the new building, he pointed out.

"We kept on requesting them (to attend). Even senior leaders requested. They ignored our requests and boycotted the event. This is an example of cheap politics," Meghwal told PTI Video.

The minister recalled that when Meira Kumar was the Speaker during the UPA rule, there was a discussion on having a new Parliament building. But the idea was rejected and it was said a call will be taken when the next census takes place.

"Now, delimitation is near. The number of members of Parliament will go up. Where will they sit?" he questioned.

Responding to a question, he said those who boycotted the event will also appreciate the building when they see it, though they may not do so openly due to political compulsions.

He said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was making statements out of political compulsions. He also questioned Congress leaders doubting the role and significance of Sengol sceptre when the British transferred power to India.

'India faces very complicated challenge from China'

EAM: Govt has taken steps to ensure no attempts made to change status quo

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said India faces a "very complicated challenge" from China, and the Narendra Modi Government has taken steps to ensure no attempts are made to change the status quo in the border areas unilaterally. This challenge was "very visible" in border areas in the last three years, Jaishankar said on Saturday, adding that both the countries have to find an equilibrium in relationship, but it cannot be on the terms of the other party.

If peace and tranquillity between the two nations is disturbed, their relationship will not remain unaffected, the minister



said, delivering a talk on 'Modi's India: A Rising Power' at the Anant National University here.

"When I talk about big powers, of course we have a particular challenge from China. That challenge is a very complicated challenge, but in the last three years it has been particularly visible in the border areas," Jaishankar said, apparently referring to China's incursions in eastern Ladakh.

"There are clearly responses that are required, and those responses have been undertaken by the government. And a lot of it to ensure that no attempt is made to unilaterally change the status quo in the border areas," he said.

The two countries will have to find some kind of equilibrium, and all the past

governments in their own ways tried to find a balance, the External Affairs Minister said.

"But that balance cannot be on the terms of the other party. Then it is not a balance. There has to be something mutual," he said. Mutual respect, sensitivity and interest have to be the basis of the relationship, Jaishankar said.

"How can we get along long term if you don't respect me, if you are not sensitive to my concerns, if you ignore my interest?" he said, adding that if India sees respect, sensitivity and recognition, it can think of a better relationship with China. "But if we do not, I think we need to stand up for our rights, and we need to be firm in asserting opposition. And that, unfortunately, currently is the situation," he said.

Talking about India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Jaishankar stressed on the strengthening of relationship with immediate and extended neighbouring countries. Neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, which have always been close to India, are today linked with us through roads, railway, waterways and electricity grid connections, he said.

Modi to flag off Assam's 1st Vande Bharat today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off Assam's first Vande Bharat Express at 12 noon on Monday via video-conferencing, according to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

The state-of-the-art train will provide the people of the region the means to travel with speed and comfort. It will also boost tourism in the region, the statement said.

Connecting Guwahati with New Jalpaiguri, the train will help save about an hour of journey time, compared to the current fastest train connecting the two places. Vande Bharat will cover the journey in five-and-a-half hours, while the current fastest train takes about six-and-a-half hours to cover the distance.

Modi will also dedicate 182 route kilometres of newly-



electrified sections. This will help provide pollution-free transportation with trains running at a higher speed and

reduced running time. It will also open the doors for trains running on electric traction to enter Meghalaya.

The Prime Minister will inaugurate a newly-constructed DEMU/MEMU shed at Assam's Lumding. This new facility will be helpful for maintaining the DEMU rakes operating in the region, leading to better operational feasibility.

The Indian Railways is currently running 34 services of the train, covering 21 states. It has set a target of running at least one service in seven more states by June.

Journal: 20% healthy adults have pre-diabetes glucose metabolism'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

About 20 per cent or one in five adults considered healthy by medical standards, have glucose metabolism similar to those with pre-diabetes, according to a study published in the journal Mayo Clinic Proceedings: Digital Health.

These healthy adults were identified using a new method of analysis, developed by scientists at Klick Health, a US based life sciences company, that flags a precursor to prediabetes called impaired glucose homeostasis (IGH).

The team has stressed the need for intervention to stop these adults from becoming diabetic.

"For people with diabetes, blood glucose levels can rise and fall like a wild roller-coaster ride with steep drops and peaks," said Jaycee Kaufman, study lead author and research scientist at Klick Labs.

"We found a similar pattern in patients with IGH, albeit those patterns were more like gentle waves than dramatic peaks, but intervention on this population could limit the likelihood of progression to full diabetes," she added.

A total of 384 people were equipped with a continuous glucose monitor for the study and assessed by a physician over a two-week time period.

Participants were diagnosed diabetic, pre-



diabetic, or healthy, according to guidelines outlined by the American Diabetes Association.

After applying the mathematical model, patients were then re-classified into two groups based on their glucose homeostasis parameters: effective or impaired.

"What was most surprising is that 20 per cent of participants, who were assessed using the standard screening tools for diabetes and cleared as healthy by a physician, were then found to have impaired glucose homeostasis-reinforcing it is now possible to provide an earlier, more accurate and sensitive assessment of people's diabetic status," said Yan Fossat, Vice President of Klick Labs.

With research suggesting it is possible to reverse diabetes, or at least slow its progression, there is growing demand for screening tools that can flag at-risk individuals.

Screening and monitoring involve reviewing risk factors such as age, BMI, and family history; and diagnosis relies primarily on the blood tests like glycated haemoglobin (HbA1c) and Oral Glucose Tolerance Test (OGTT).

GS entertainment, director, CA booked in IDBI bank fraud

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked Mumbai-based firm GS Entertainment Pvt. Ltd., its directors Jaspreet Singh Walia and Guneet Singh Walia and Chartered Accountant Stany Saldanha in a case of bank fraud involving IDBI Bank that had financed 2009 Hindi film Lamhaa.



The case refers to sanction of foreign currency loan to the tune of USD 2.35 million (Rs 10 crore) and term loan of Rs 4.95 crore in June 2008 under the film financing scheme for production of Hindi film "Lamhaa". Later, the loans turned into non-performing asset (NPA).

The outstanding principal and interest to the principal borrower GSEPL stood at Rs 119.05 crore as on June 1, 2021.

The film was directed by Rahul Dholakia with lead actors Sanjay Dutt, Bipasha Basu and Kunal Kapoor as star cast.

Besides principal borrower GSEPL, the company's directors Jaspreet Singh Walia alias Bunty Walia and Guneet Singh Walia alias Jassi Walia, and Chartered Accountant and Statutory Auditor Stany Saldanha as also unknown public servants have been

After complaints in Australia, Japan, Hoya recalls all units of IntraOcular Lens in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cue from customer complaints in Australia and Japan with reports of damage (such as scratches) and fragment adhesion on the Hoya Surgical Optics manufactured Hoya Vivinex Toric IntraOcular Lens (IOLs), such units from various batches in India are also being recalled.

The top drug regulator DCGI here has issued an alert on a total of 3,822 units manufactured from June, 2022 to January, 2023.

Hoya, the global med-tech company in Tokyo and a leading supplier of innovative high-tech and medical products, informed the DCGI that the

recall is being made following customer complaints received in Australia and Japan with reports of damage (such as scratches) and fragment adhesion on the IOL optic surface.

The company also submitted the recall action notification for the lenses from the Department of Health, Therapeutics Goods Administration (TGA), Australian government, along with the alert recalling the product in India. The company has its Indian arm as Hoya Medical India Pvt Ltd, in New Delhi.

In its filing with the TGA, the company said that it has asked customers to place all impacted devices on hold in their inventory system and

quarantine them for collection by its responsible entity in the country. It also recommended that the patients involved, that is the cases where lenses with PP adhesion have been left in the eye, be monitored for the need for any future medical treatment.

Hoya says that Vivinex is made from a novel hydrophobic acrylic, using a proprietary manufacturing process that includes a unique, active oxygen posterior surface treatment. Combined with its square edge design and smooth, regular IOL surface, it has been demonstrated to provide a low incidence of Posterior Capsule Opacification (PCO) in several studies.

Ground water with arsenic harmful for farm products: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Groundwater should not be used for farming purposes to prevent arsenic (As) exposure for farm products, especially in the case of rice, a team of researchers has said citing the case of West Bengal where arsenic has been found in high content in groundwater. Large-scale arsenic (As) poisoning, mainly through food chain contamination, is deemed to be a lethal problem in the rice-growing areas of the

Bengal Delta Plain (BDP) and other parts of the world.

The study paper by scholars and researchers from the School of Environmental Studies, the National Institute of Biological Genomics and Australia's University of Newcastle pointed out that since groundwater is more prone to arsenic exposure, farm products produced by using that water also become prone to the same exposure.

To prevent this, the report has suggested stressing on rainy season farming so that rain-

water can be used. This remedy is extremely important considering that West Bengal is among those states which have extremely high arsenic concentration in groundwater. Historically as many as 83 blocks scattered over seven districts in West Bengal have arsenic levels in groundwater higher than the permissible limits.

The report, published in science magazine "Environmental Science & Pollution Research", suggests if rice is cooked using arsenic-



free water equivalent to three times of the quantity of rice being cooked, the level of arsenic exposure in that cooked rice comes down substantially. It has also suggested that

since selenium acts as instruments for combating arsenic, selenium fertilisers should be extensively used while paddy farming.

The research on this count was conducted on paddy varieties collected from Kolkata, North 24 Parganas, and West Midnapore. The research has revealed that of these varieties collected, the danger of arsenic exposure is maximum and also alarming in North 24 Parganas. While that from Kolkata is prone to moderate exposure, the one from West Midnapore

is relatively safe on this count.

Yet another study noted that West Bengal, the largest rice producing state in India, is heavily devastated by the chronic and acute health hazards associated with As. "More than 26 million people across 2600 villages in this state ingest this toxicant from food and water on a regular basis. Residents of rural Bengal consume, on average, 450 g rice per capita per day to meet 73% of their daily caloric needs which, in endemic regions, is found laced with As, it said.

Twitterati rave about ‘Akhand Bharat’ mural in new Parl

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A mural in the new Parliament building depicting the influence of ancient Indian thought in its immediate neighbourhood went viral on social media on Sunday with many claiming it represents the resolve for an Akhand Bharat, described as a “cultural concept” by the RSS.

The mural in the new Parliament building, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, marks important kingdoms and cities of the past, and shows the influence of ancient India in the then Taxila, in present-day Pakistan.

“The resolve is clear – Akhand Bharat,” Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Twitter.

The BJP’s Karnataka unit shared photographs of the artworks inside the new Parliament House, including the murals of ancient India, Chanakya, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and B R Ambedkar and the cultural diversity of the country.



“It is a symbol of the vitality of our proud great civilisation,” the Karnataka BJP said on its Twitter handle.

“Akhand Bharat in New Parliament. It represents our

powerful & self-reliant India,” Manoj Kotak, Lok Sabha member from Mumbai North-East, said on Twitter.

A number of Twitter users welcomed the depiction of

‘Akhand Bharat’ in the new Parliament building and wondered whether it was the reason for the Opposition boycott of the function.

“Our idea was to depict the influence of Indian thought during the ancient ages. It extended from the present day Afghanistan in the northwestern region to south-eastern Asia,” Adwaita Gadanayak, Director General, National Gallery of Modern Art said.

Gadanayak was involved in the selection of artworks displayed in the new Parliament building.

According to the RSS, the Akhand Bharat concept refers to the undivided India whose geographical expanse was very wide in ancient times -- present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand.

However, the RSS now maintains that the Akhand Bharat concept, in the present times, should be seen in the cultural context and not political given the partition of India on religious lines at the time of Independence.

Rituals performed show country being taken backwards: Pawar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar on Sunday said that various rituals performed at the inauguration of the new Parliament building in New Delhi by Prime Minister Narendra Modi show that the country was being taken backwards by decades.

He said the country’s first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had envisaged a society having a scientific temperament, but what happened at the new Parliament inauguration ceremony was opposite to that. PM Modi inaugurated the new building this morning at a grand ceremony which included a havan, a multi-faith prayer ceremony and the installation of the Sengol in a special enclosure in the Lok Sabha chamber.

Speaking to reporters in Pune, Pawar said, “There is a huge difference between the country’s first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru talking about the concept of modern India



and a series of rituals performed at the new Parliament building today in New Delhi. I fear that we are taking our country backward by decades.” “One cannot compromise on science.

Nehru was persistent about his wish to form a society with scientific temperament. But what is happening today at the inaugural ceremony of the new parliament building is exactly the opposite of what Nehru had envisaged,” he said.

The NCP was among the 20 opposition parties that boycotted the inauguration of the new Parliament building over the prime minister and not the president inaugurating the complex.

Census unlikely before LS polls; citizens to be asked about smartphones, internet, cereals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The decadal Census, which was postponed for an indefinite period due to the pandemic, is unlikely to be held before the next Lok Sabha elections that are due in April-May 2024, officials said.

Access to smartphones, internet, laptops, computers, cars, two-wheelers, main cereal consumed are some of the 31 questions to be asked in the Census, whenever it is held.

The house listing phase of the Census and the exercise to update the National Population Register (NPR) were scheduled to be carried out across the country from April 1 to September 30, 2020, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Census operation continues to be on hold and the government has not yet announced a new schedule.

In January, the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India conveyed that the date of freezing of administrative



boundaries -- creation of new districts or sub-districts -- has been extended to June 30, the officials said.

According to the norms, the Census can be conducted only three months after (post September 30) freezing of boundary limits of administrative units such as districts, sub-districts, tehsils, taluks and police stations.

Two to three months will also be required to train the entire 30 lakh government employees/teachers across India who will be engaged as enumerators for the Census.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission will kick start the process for the next general elections such as revision of voter lists, etc.

Taxpayers’ money wasted on Parl: TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Sunday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for wasting thousands of crores of taxpayers’ money in constructing lavish buildings like the new Parliament house when crores of his fellow citizens were fighting against unemployment and price rise.

Comparing the Prime Minister to the ancient Roman emperors Nero, TMC second-in-command Abhishek Banerjee said, “He (Prime Minister) is behaving like Nero who played flute when Rome was in fire otherwise what explains expenditure of so many thousands of crores in wasteful architectures like the new parliament house while people of the country are starving.”

Raising the issue of petro-price hike he said, “had he not spent these crores of rupees to construct big buildings then the price of the cooking gas



would have been around Rs 700 and petrol ... similarly petrol and kerosene prices too would have come down.”

Instead of spending billions for constructing a lavish Parliament building or a Prime Ministerial or the Vice Presidential palaces, the Prime Minister should have released the MNREGA funds and other dues of Bengal so as to feed the mounts of thousands of poor job card holders who had not been paid despite having worked in the hundred days’ work scheme.

Contrasting the BJP Government’s penchant for setting up tall monarchical architectures and its alleged refusal to provide small space

to the Opposition Banerjee who is also the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said, “of what use such an expensive building is when the Opposition MPs are not allowed to express their view in Parliament ... when their microphones are switched off when they rise up to speak.”

Questioning the presence of religious leaders during the inauguration of the new landmark building the TMC national general secretary said, “a Parliament building should be graced by the Prime Minister, his Cabinet, members of parliament and other such functionaries and not sadhus who should grace the

temples and other religious places ... their presence in parliament in overwhelming numbers only proves towards what direction he (Prime Minister) wants to take the nation.”

Saying that “this Sunday” would be remembered as a day marking the “BJP’s arrogance” in not inviting President Droupadi Murmu to inaugurate the new Parliament House, Banerjee who, like many other Opposition MPs boycotted the inauguration programme said “for the sake of elections they nominated a tribal woman candidate as the President of India but when it came to honouring her today he (Prime Minister) refused to let her inaugurate Parliament building ... by doing so he has insulted the tribal people, the women and also the President of India.”

Referring to Modi’s call for Acchhe Din (good days) and Parivartan (change) Banerjee said “I the name of change he (Prime Minister)

changed names of roads and institutions instead of changing the system ... he changed notes ... whereas he should have changed his conduct, his mindset towards looking at things,” adding, “tomorrow if they come to power once again then they will change the Constitution.”

Alleging that in spite of 63 percent people voting against the BJP in 2019 the Prime Minister was imposing his will on the people Banerjee said, “this time however the people will change you and your political career will witness a big change in the form of people ousting you from power.”

On the Prime Minister promise to instill integrity and honesty, Banerjee said “when he came to power he spoke of na khaunga ... na khane dunga (I will neither steal nor anyone to steal) ... but today we see how you have awarded people like Hemanta Biswa Sharma, Narayana Rane or Suwendu Adhikari with big posts.”

Stalin rides bullet train in Japan, bats for ‘equivalent’ service in India

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, who is on an official trip of Japan, on Sunday undertook a 500-km bullet train journey to its capital city Tokyo and said such a service could benefit the Indian citizens as well.

He also addressed Tamils living in Japan, while highlighting the link between the Tamil and Japanese languages.

On his train journey, he tweeted: “Traveling from Osaka to Tokyo on #BulletTrain: will cover a distance of about 500 km in less than two and a half hours,” and shared some related pictures.

“A railway service equivalent to #BulletTrain not only in design but also in speed and quality should come for use in our India as well. The poor and middle class people should benefit and their journey should become easier! #FutureIndia,” he added.



The Chief Minister had earlier embarked on a two-nation official trip of Singapore and Japan to attract more investments to Tamil Nadu.

Later in the day, he addressed a meeting of the Tamil diaspora living in Japan

and highlighted the various initiatives of his government aimed towards the welfare of such non-resident Tamil people.

Inviting them to his home state, he also extended his support to the Tamil people.

Rapist, woman peddler among seven hardcore criminals held in J&K’s Samba

PTI ■ JAMMU

Seven people with criminal history including a rapist and a woman drug peddler were arrested in Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, police said on Sunday.

Parvaz Ahmed, accused of abducting and raping a minor girl, has been arrested from Rakh Amb Talli, a police officer said.

Police have also arrested one Saleema Bibi, who was wanted in a case registered under Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, he said. She was arrested from the Bari Brahmana area.

“Bibi had been supplying heroin to addicted youths and was also involved in an attack on a Police party,” the officer said.



Another criminal, Badroo Din alias ‘Badaru’, was arrested from Vijaypur for his involvement in an attack on a police party recently, he said. He was the fifth accused arrested in the case.

Roshan Lal and Mohit Ram Patel were arrested from Bari Brahmana after they were named in a theft case, while

two cow smugglers were nabbed from Mansar, the officer said. Six cattle and two vehicles were seized with the arrest, he said.

Senior Superintendent of Police Samba Benam Tosh said a total of 82 thieves, 73 cow smugglers and 42 heroin suppliers have been arrested in the district in the past four months.

Bengal mango exports this season to start from early June

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Mango exports from West Bengal are expected to begin from early June with shipments to Middle East countries, an official said on Sunday.

There have also been inquiries for export orders from Europe, which are currently being finalised, the official said. “Exports are expected to commence from early June, as we are finalising the last shipments from some orchards. Orders have already been received from the Middle East,” said Ujjal Saha, president of the Malda Mango Association, in an interview with PTI. Saha also mentioned that despite the economic challenges faced by Europe, there is a growing interest in Bengal mangoes, and exporters are



actively engaging in negotiations. In the previous year, Malda exported 10 metric tonne of mangoes to Europe and 24 metric tonne to Middle East countries.

Officials from both the Union and State governments are working collaboratively to promote mango exports from West Bengal, as stated by the horticulture department.

Deputy Director of the

District Horticulture Department, Samanta Layek, said that exports from the district are expected to commence in the first week of June.

Meanwhile, mango growers in the district have raised concerns of the absence of a proper laboratory for fruit certification, which has hindered the export of Malda mangoes to other countries in recent years.

Azad: DPAP will fight for restoration of J&K’s statehood, land rights



PTI ■ JAMMU

DPAP chief Ghulam Nabi Azad on Sunday said he would fight for the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir’s statehood and the job and land rights of its people if the party wins the Assembly elections.

He said a progressive Jammu and Kashmir is possible only if people stand united and defeat the politics of hate as he called for unity and harmony among all communities.

“The people of J&K must rise above personal beliefs and find a common path to usher a new dawn of peace and prosperity as the Union Territory is lagging far behind due to divisive and petty politics by successive regimes,” Azad said addressing a party function in Akhnoor sector here.

Aam Aadmi Party leader Rattan Lal joined the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) along with his supporters on the occasion.

Welcoming the new entrants, Azad said a lot more needs to be done for the development of Jammu and Kashmir.

“When I was the chief minister, relief was provided to people and the speed of

developmental work was increased by introducing a three-shift work culture. After I went back to Delhi, it seems development has halted here,” he said.

Azad said if his party comes to power, he will focus on development and “will fight to restore jobs, land and statehood that was safeguarding the rights of the people.”

Urging the people to reject the “divisive forces who try to vitiate the brotherhood and harmony to gain political mileage”, Azad said he had made it clear that there is no place in DPAP for those who try to make money through illegal means or believe in divisive politics.

“Only those who believe in serving people can be allowed to join the DPAP,” he said.

Azad said he founded the DPAP for the same reasons and promised the people that Akhnoor will see development, including improved educational and health facilities, if the DPAP was elected to power. “We understand the sufferings of people living in the border belts because of hostile situations. The time has come for Akhnoor residents to overcome their sufferings,” he said.

Siddaramaiah gives Ministers target of winning 20 seats in LS elections

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who has formed a full-fledged government, has fixed targets for all his Cabinet colleagues, saying they should all strive to win at least 20 of the total 28 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. The Chief Minister on Saturday filled all 34 seats in his Cabinet by inducting 24 new ministers.

Noting that the Lok Sabha elections are coming in a year, Siddaramaiah said, “We should win at least 20 Lok Sabha constituencies as a gift to party national president Mallikarjun Kharge and seniors Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi.” The chief Minister has instructed the ministers to carry out their responsibilities by keeping this goal in mind and with commitment, honesty and agility, a statement from the chief minister’s office said.



“We should strive sincerely to ensure that the guarantees assured by us reach the people. The mistakes of the past should not be repeated this time,” he was quoted as saying in the statement. Siddaramaiah assured the ministers that portfolio allocation

will be completed shortly, and told them, “All of you must work actively. As a result of our struggle in the opposition, people have rejected the misrule of the BJP and held our hands.” Telling the ministers to “listen to the people’s problems and respond to them”, he reminded them that “the people of the state have given us an unprecedented majority and also a great responsibility. It is our responsibility to provide a pro-

people administration according to their expectations.” He added, “Take steps to solve problems locally and prevent them from running pillar to post even for small works. People should not be made to come to Vidhana Soudha (the seat of the state legislature and secretariat) to get their work done.”

“Through our pro-people work, we have to register an unprecedented victory in the Lok Sabha elections again,” he instructed the ministers. The situation is just right to end the misrule of the Centre through Karnataka, he said. “We must not forget this. Therefore, the ministers should travel to their districts extensively. The problems should be solved at the district and taluk level,” Siddaramaiah said.

Eviction drive in Assam’s Orang National Park to clear animal corridor

PTI ■ TEZPUR

A four-day-long eviction drive to clear an “encroached” animal corridor in Assam’s Orang National Park was launched by the government on Sunday amid heavy security, a senior official said. The operation will be carried out in Sonitpur district for the first two days while the exercise will be conducted for the remaining two days in Darrang district.

The Orang National Park is spread over an area of 89 sq km in Sonitpur and Darrang districts and the eviction exercise is being carried out to clear “encroached” land for an ani-



mal corridor to Kaziranga National Park.

Sonitpur deputy commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra said all the areas to be covered by the eviction drive are ‘char’ (riverine) areas in the district.

“Eviction drive was carried out in five char areas today and it will be done in another four such spots on Monday. The drive went off smoothly today,” he said.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Respect the temple

Leaders say Parliament is the temple of democracy, so they should not desecrate it with pandemonium

The inauguration of the new parliament building and installation of a historic sceptre 'Sengol' near the Lok Sabha Speaker's chair by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with other related activities on Sunday, will continue to be debated for some time. Supporters and members of the Government and Bharatiya Janata Party will reiterate grandiloquent statements, lauding the very idea of getting a new Parliament, its symbolism-heavy architecture and furnishing, and so on. The Opposition, on the other hand, will continue to make barbed remarks about the entire affair, as it has been in the last few days. Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor had earlier quoted Articles 60 and 111 of the Constitution, claiming that as head of Parliament, the President should have inaugurated the building. The TMC's reaction was a mix of condemnation and ridicule: the Prime Minister inaugurating the new Parliament building was akin to "I only love myself day," party MP Derek O'Brien said on Sunday. It is indubitable, however, that the country needed a new Parliament. The need was felt not just by this Government but also earlier. In 2012, Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar had constituted a high-powered committee to recommend an alternate complex to the old Parliament building. But the need was just on the grounds of functionality, though these were sufficient enough for the alternate building. The old structure, made a century ago, could not cope with the requirements that have arisen in this period. The Prime Minister rightly said that the new Parliament is not just a building but a reflection of the aspirations and dreams of 140 crore Indians.



"This is a temple of our democracy that gives a message of India's resolution to the world," he said. "This new Parliament building connects planning to reality, policy to realisation, willpower to execution, and sankalp to siddhi," he added. He went on to say, "India is not only a democratic nation but also the mother of democracy." For, he asserted, democracy is not just a system that is practiced in India but it is a culture, thought and tradition. The roots of democracy in our country, he correctly said, go back to the Vedas and Vaishali in modern Bihar. Parliament has been called the temple of democracy by many people, both from the Government and the Opposition. So, it is the duty of all political parties and leaders to ensure that the sanctity of this temple is upheld by everyone in every circumstance all the time. This temple should not suffer any desecration. It means that business is conducted in both Houses in the best traditions of democracy. Senior leaders should ensure that when an opponent is speaking, he or she is allowed to say whatever they want to, that they are not shouted down. Also, all parliamentarians should respect the chair, speak within the timeframe that is provided to them, and so on. This will strengthen our democracy.



Kashmiri Pandit devotees light earthen lamps during the Kheer Bhawani Mela, at Tulmula in Ganderbal district. PTI

Battling cultural taboos in Uttarakhand

The need for comprehensive menstrual education, access to hygienic sanitary products, and an end to discriminatory practices is paramount

Although menstruation is a natural process for women and girls, it continues to be associated with deep-rooted stigma, imposing daily challenges, and hindering their growth. Lack of scientific menstrual awareness and management pushes adolescent girls in most parts of India to seclusion and torment within their own homes, making it a harrowing experience. In villages that are tucked away in the hilly states, the situation is quite shocking. Disha (name changed), a 16-year-old from Pothing village in Bageshwar district, Uttarakhand, shares her distressing experience, "At times, I hide from my parents while I menstruate because it's a torture to stay in a cowshed. Often, I go through severe cramps, but as I don't inform my parents about getting periods, I refrain from sharing my pain. But I cannot put up this act every month because my mother ends up suspecting pregnancy."



exception. The practices around menstruation differ in each village but there are certain rules across the region that menstruating girls and women have to follow. In Pothing village, for instance, when a girl gets her period for the first time, she is banished to a cowshed outside the house for 21 days. Consequently, these girls spend a total of 60 days each year eating, sleeping, and studying with cattle. During this time, they not only stay away from their homes but are also forbidden from using the household toilet. "The most dreaded times are the bitterly cold months of December and January when we have to go to the river at 4-5 AM in the morning to take a bath. We try to use fewer blankets during winter

nights as washing them every day is quite laborious," reveals Nisha Gadiya, another adolescent girl from the village. Aside from the unsanitary conditions, the girls lack essential support during their periods. "During this time, we do not even receive timely meals, which leaves us feeling weak. Because of this, we can't study properly. Moreover, sanitary pads are not readily available even at the chemist shops located quite far away from our village, and affording them is another challenge. We resort to using clothes during our periods," adds Nisha. These practices have turned the menstrual cycle into a traumatic experience for adolescent girls as they fear staying alone outside their homes. "Younger girls are usually afraid to sleep alone away from home in the cowshed at night. When we were young, we dreaded being imprisoned for a few days each month, as if we had committed a crime. We would cry alone at night, thinking how good it would have been if our period had never come at all," expresses 17-year-old Maya.



DOLLY GADIYA

The villagers firmly believe that menstruating women are impure, and any physical contact during this period will make the other person fall sick. Purification rituals involving cow urine are performed to counter such perceived impurities. While highlighting the deep-rooted nature of these superstitions, Chandra Gadia, a teacher from the village, shares, "There is an urgent need to challenge these 'man'-made laws. It is imperative to put an end to any form of violence inflicted upon women and adolescent girls in the name of customs and rituals," emphasizes Chandra. The need for comprehensive menstrual education, access to hygienic sanitary products, and an end to discriminatory practices is paramount. Advocacy and awareness programs should be implemented, not only in Pothing Village but throughout the region, to combat these deep-seated taboos and foster a society that embraces menstrual health and dignity. (The writer is a recipient of the Sanjoy Ghose Media Awards 2022) Charkha Features

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(The writer is a recipient of the Sanjoy Ghose Media Awards 2022) Charkha Features

Workforce must have employable skills

The world of work is changing faster than the workforce. To survive technological developments and automation, workers must upgrade their skills

India surpasses China as the world's most populous country in demographic composition, with a staggering 65 per cent working-age population having an average age of 28 years old. This population has the potential to propel the nation towards remarkable socio-economic progress and has the ability for transformative global impact. To reap the benefit of demographic advantage, it is imperative to equip our working population with employable skills and knowledge that meet the requirements of the globalized labour market. Skill development in educational institutions is the critical enabler for improving employment outcomes and higher productivity leading to faster and more sustainable economic growth.

There is a significant gap between the skills imparted in educational institutions in India and the skills required for jobs. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has projected that India will face a 29 million skill deficit by 2030. Still, India's education system is unable to provide the necessary skills to its growing workforce. Many young people lack the required qualifications and vocational training to find suitable jobs. India Skills Report 2023 reveals a rise in employability of 52.8% with women and men at 47.2%. Women surpassed men in employability because, in the post-covid era, nursing, beauty and wellness and other soft skills showed the highest employability rates among the women. Not only for women but for men also the beauty and wellness sector has unlimited potential in terms of domestic and global markets. The beauty and wellness market in India was valued at Rs 901.07 billion in 2018 and is forecast to reach Rs 2,463.49 billion by 2024, expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 18.40 per cent during 2019-2024. There is an extra advantage in the employability of women because the companies have also adopted new recruitment strategies centred around soft skills like communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. However, institutes haven't adopted the



norm of educating their students on as of now employable skills, thus hurting the freshers entering the job market. The Department of School Education and Literacy is executing the rationalization of the School Education initiative under 'Samagra Shiksha' (holistic education) to integrate vocational education with general academics in secondary and senior secondary schools. The goal is to enhance youths' employability, entrepreneurship skills, work environment exposure, and career awareness. The ideal employee in the 21st century embodies a diverse set of skills which includes a perfect blend of technical and soft skills. India has a unique opportunity to capitalize on its 48 per cent population under the age of 25, and the working-age population is forecast to hit more than 1 billion in the current decade. An IMF report suggests that demographic dividend could add up to 2 percentage points to per capita GDP growth per annum. But the question remains, how can India capitalize on its demographic dividend? Developed countries like Singapore and South Korea demonstrate the potential for leveraging the demographic dividend to achieve remark-

INDIA HAS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO CAPITALISE ON ITS 48 PER CENT POPULATION UNDER THE AGE OF 25, AND THE WORKING-AGE POPULATION IS FORECAST TO HIT MORE THAN 1 BILLION IN THE CURRENT DECADE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RAMDEV SUPPORTS WRESTLERS
Sir — As per the report, Delhi's political quarters are abuzz with questions about the relationship between self-proclaimed 'godman' and 'Yoga guru' Baba Ramdev and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Ramdev recently spoke out against the sexual assault accused Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and demanded his immediate arrest. Ramdev who hogged national headlines during the UPA-2 by projecting himself as a "black money crusader" has conspicuously gone silent on the issue after BJP came to power in 2014. He either remained silent or defended the BJP regime on crucial issues. He said that the BJP MP Brij Bhushan was not being arrested even after FIRs were registered against him, Ramdev said, "He (Brij Bhushan) spews nonsense every day about mothers, sisters and daughters. This is an extremely condemnable evil act, a sin". The Delhi Police has filed two FIRs against the WFI president. While the first FIR relates to allegations by the minor wrestler and has been registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the second is related to outraging modesty.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai
AGENDAS FOR A NEW PARLIAMENT
Sir — As India enters a new era with its new parliament, there is a profound opportunity to introduce a fresh wave of legislation that addresses the needs and challenges of our diverse country. With a focus on fostering social progress, economic growth, and environmental sustainability, inter alia, the new parliament should prioritize the development of comprehensive and forward-thinking laws that promote inclusivity, protect human rights, encourage innovation, and ensure sustainable development. One of the primary areas of focus for the new parliament should be strengthening laws that promote social justice and

The 'Sengol' controversy rages on



The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) IT cell and well supported by government-controlled media houses, Sengol has suddenly become the talk of the town and the main question of 'why New Parliament Bhavan was not inaugurated by the President' has gone into the background. This is also not a big issue as the Sengol is going to be moved from its archive to the centre of the Parliament in a ceremonial function- 'Sengol Saatchi' is a common term in Tamil which means

inclusivity. It is crucial to develop and enforce stronger protections for marginalized communities, ensuring that they have equal access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and housing. In the digital age, the protection of individual privacy and responsible use of technology is of paramount importance. The new parliament should introduce robust data protection laws that safeguard citizens' personal information, establishing clear guidelines for data collection, storage, and usage by both government and private entities. To strengthen democracy and ensure transparency in the electoral process, the new parliament should focus on electoral reforms. Measures can include enhancing campaign finance regulations, promoting political party accountability, and adopting technology-driven solutions for voter registration and election monitoring. **Shivanshu K Srivastava | Lucknow**
PLIGHT OF WORKERS
Sir — The article 'Tragedy for workers...'

good government- Unnecessary daily debates on this issue is getting to be tiresome as we have seen photographs of the first Prime Minister (PM) of India Jawaharlal Nehru accepting the Sengol. Ultimately all events planned by the government are going to happen on 28th May (though some parties are still hanging on to this presidential narrative). Seers have already arrived and I understand that a mock ceremony has also been conducted. But the big question, one side, Sengol was originally used by kings to signify the transfer of power. Kings did not rule a democracy. The Sengol is out of place here. It was never used by subsequent PMs to hand over the reins of the government. Unable to understand how an astute politician like PM Modi should not have been able to gauge what the public sentiment would be in this situation **Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad**
depicts the exact picture of the workers in the present economic scenario. Contract, contingent, casual, outsourced, daily wages, employees on honorarium and so many such exploited categories are seen working in various departments and fields and all the more in government services also. Directive principles expect the government to be a model employer but it has turned out to be a model exploiter. The minimum wage declared is meant only for employees in the Schedule. In most of the States, upward revision of minimum wage is not done after 2007 and the worst is that even the Minimum Wage Board is not there to look into this matter. The Union government's Labour Codes added oil to the fire by introducing Fixed Term employment and removing 47 labour laws which were giving some sort of protection at least. But the sacrifice of workers goes unrecognised. **A G Rajmohan | Anantapur**
Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

‘SENGOL’ GETS ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE

The ‘Sengol’ has been installed next to the Speaker’s chair by the PM in new Parliament




THIRUVANNATHAPURAM S **RAMAKRISHNAN**

‘Sengol’ has been quoted in Tamil literature very extensively for the various attributes it presents. The essential meaning of righteousness for SENGOL refers to a ruler’s dispensation of justice to his citizens, even if it is detrimental to the King or the King’s family. If the King fails in his duty either due to failure to cross-verify the facts, deliver justice in haste, overlook the facts before him, or due to circumstantial evidence or sheer human error, he is bound to fall from the grace of people, and he is also expected to face the punishment for failing to give justice, which must be imposed on him by himself.

This is where the King is expected to have the grace of the Almighty in acquitting himself well while delivering justice in extremely complicated cases. There were times when to know the truth, the King prayed to the Almighty to give a clue of what went on at the crime scene, and when he got the clue, he gave the right judgement. A lady was pierced with an arrow and died when she was under the tree with her husband.

The husband noticed a hunter with a bow and arrow in the surroundings, and he accused the hunter of killing his wife with his arrow. But the hunter firmly denied that he did not shoot the arrow. The King came to know the truth with the Divine Grace: the arrow had been pierced in one of the leaves of the tree earlier, and when the couple was resting under the tree, it fell on the lady, and thereby the lady lost her life.



When the King delivers a wrong judgement, even an ordinary citizen may reach out to him in his assembly and raise the wrongdoing of the King with evidence. When Kannaki’s husband was wrongly executed by the then Pandya King for stealing the anklet of the Queen, she proved before him that her anklets were made of rubies, whereas the Queen’s anklets were made of pearls. The Pandya King realised his mistake of delivering wrong justice, fell from his seat, and expired instantly after uttering, "I am not the King, and I am the thief". The SENGOL also gave dutiful power to the King to punish those who disturb the peace in society and those who resort to heinous crimes of theft, robbery, and murder.

The lyrics written by SANGAM lady poet Avvaiyar indicate the prosperity angle of Sengol'. In her lyrics, she said, "When the paddy field embankment height increases, the water level in the field raises, thereby the paddy crop grows well, resulting in a high yield, and that will raise the economic condition of the citizens (farmers in particular), and as a result, the Senkol' will raise, and ultimately it will result in the increase in the status of the King himself. In a democratic setup, we rule ourselves; the king refers to the citizenry, and hence, as the paddy field embankment rises, the SENGOL rises, and the country and its citizenry will prosper.

The Sengol' embodied the good governance, prosperity, justice and fairness, unity, safety, security, and well-being of the citizens, as well as the authority, might, legitimacy, unity, integrity, and sovereignty of a nation. It is befitting on the part of the Indian government to bring back the Indian pride from Prayagraj Nehru Museum and install it as Sengol' next to the Lok Sabha speaker in the new Parliament Hall.

(The author is a Public Policy Analyst)

Ever increasing threat of transnational terrorism



DR SUDHIR **HINDWAN**

The purpose of terrorism is to create an state of extreme fear among target groups to alter their behaviour and bring about a radical change



The recent attacks by terrorists in Rajouri that killed 4 soldiers and a few days earlier ambushed an Army vehicle in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir in which 5 Army Soldiers have been martyred ahead of G 20 meeting have confirmed that terrorists were down but not wiped out. The purpose of these attacks is to destabilize security and create a vulnerable atmosphere in the region. This is not an isolated incident but just an addition to the long saga of terrorist violence in the region. Earlier the series of terrorist attacks in Sopore, Budgam, Chadoora, Noorbagh and Dooru Shahabad raised serious concerns for security agencies.

Both the Central and State Governments have done an excellent job to resolve the issues but terrorists are deliberately creating problems as they work to the tune of outsiders. Besides, to a large extent, clinging to terrorism provides livelihood to terrorists who have nothing to lose except their lives for some money and self-generated fake popularity among their masters as a bonus. Be it the case of Ajmal Kasab and a few others who were misled and driven to commit a most heinous crime in Mumbai. Although the central government has made efforts to find a solution to the problem plaguing the region by initiating talks with Pakistan and addressing the grievances of the separatists yet insurgent activities against the government and clashes between terrorists and the Army have continued unabated.

The region provides an excellent base for the rebels to carry out guerrilla activities. Several security officials have died in controlling the terrorist onslaught for many years. World over, the new breed of terrorists seems to be reasonably confident of their access to vantage points.



VIOLENCE IS NOT THEIR IMMEDIATE GOAL, AND THAT'S WHY THEY INSIST UPON PSYCHOLOGICAL RATHER THAN PRACTICAL RESULTS

(The writer is the recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award. He is a Professor and an Expert on Strategic Affairs. Views expressed are personal)

Moreover, their strategies have become more sophisticated and they are successful in acquiring more lethal weapons from across the border. The rapid international transportation and use of sophisticated weapons like assault rifles and plastic explosives (RDX) have helped to facilitate the expansion of terrorist networks around the world. Besides, the new suicide squads of terrorists have left the entire security apparatus of the affected states in a state of shock.

The recent incidents in Europe and Asia and Africa need to be understood properly. History bears testimony to various such tragic events.

Mr. Alison Jamieson, a British analyst on organized crime and political violence commented that the distinction between terrorism and organized crime has become very blurred recently. Italian organised crime expert Professor Ernesto says “The goal is different.

The terrorist’s goal is an ideological one, while organized crime’s goal is financial, but the instrument is the same. They both need money and arms”. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers engage in drug trafficking to finance their struggle, in north-eastern India guerrillas kidnap tea planters and hold them to ransom to help fund their fight for independence. In Chechnya, the secessionists were heavily involved in drug distribution. These days terrorists are more confident than ever before of their access to vulnerable points before carrying out any of their attacks and they plan their attack in a heroic manner for the justification and fulfilment of a cause that they think is just.

Thus, they attempt, by their acts, to inspire and manipulate fear to achieve a variety of purposes. William Henry once explained the problem of international terrorism and commented that “some politically motivated acts are rooted so deeply in dedication to a cause that no sanction can deter them, other acts of terrorism spring from frustration of legitimate means, caused in turn by acts of government repression and terrorism.” It is basically a self-created perception of misled people to give an ideological fervour to their misdeeds. Terrorist groups are generally too small and weak to operate successfully against governments.

Therefore, violence is not their immediate goal and that’s why they insist upon psychological rather than practical results.

The purpose of terrorism, therefore, is to create an emotional state of extreme fear among specific groups, and thereby, ultimately alter their behavior and bring about general or particular changes in the structure of society and government. Therefore, scholars working on strategic affairs in the international arena need to examine and analyze the genesis and changing nature of the problem of international terrorism and its causes. It is true that present anti-terrorism laws such as extradition treaties, etc are sufficient enough in handling the problem provided they are implemented promptly and effectively. Besides, Intelligence, Interception and close surveillance are the most effective ways of combating modern terrorism. In this regard the following suggestions may be worth considering:

- (a) Carefully examining important incidents and preparing detailed action-oriented reports on terrorist-affected areas.
- (b) Building a sophisticated communication network as part of a wider modernization drive that gives access to the latest technology.
- (c) Better management of local contacts and sources of assistance. #developing new techniques of security and maintenance of secrecy.
- (d) Developing the capability to anticipate security needs. This is possible by conducting specialized courses for monitoring security situations

Although individual counter-measures have been taken against terrorism, the world is not yet in a position to completely eliminate this curse of human civilization. The important task is to find out the emerging new cause of terrorism or analyze the psychology.

The efforts of the state to maintain security in the face of terrorist threats should go hand in hand with a new international mechanism bolstered by a multi-dimensional and multilayered approach based on coordination and intelligence sharing. The world has got tremendous opportunities and excellent platforms such as G 20 and Quad wherein a lot of sharing and learning can generate a solid combating mechanism.

Transition from road to rail is an opportunity worth exploiting

Chugging along the sustainability track, the railway holds tremendous potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and an opportunity for logistic providers



NIKHIL **AGARWAL**

(The writer is President-CJ DARCL Logistics)

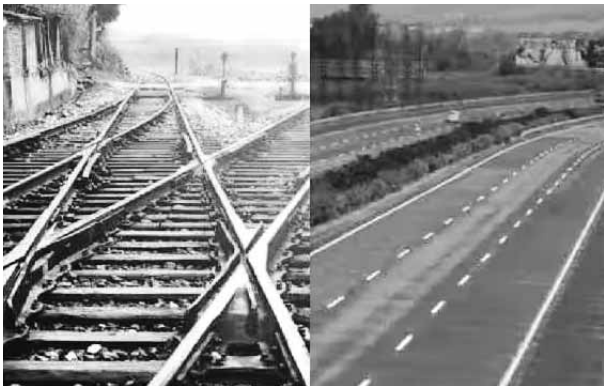
Transition from Road to rail’, a topic of great traction from all quarters, is finally gaining heat with the concerted efforts from all the stakeholders – government, logistics players and the user fraternity. But why is this shift necessary? According to some research estimates, Rail produces 75% fewer CO2 emissions per tonne-kilometre than that of road freight transport. This wake-up call is for the industries to switch to alternative modes of transport.

As per the Boston Consulting Group, “No form of mass transport has more potential to aid in the fight against global warming than rail. It is one of the most energy-efficient transport modes, responsible for 9% of global

motorized passenger movement and 7% of freight shipping—but only 3% of transport energy use, according to the International Energy Agency.

In fact, a Niti Ayog study found that the transition would help encourage cleaner fuels, India can save 10 Giga tonnes of CO2, 500-kilo tonnes of particulate matter (PM) and 15 million tonnes of nitrogen oxide (NOx) caused by freight transport by 2050.

Despite having the fourth largest network of railways globally, about 71% of inland cargo transportation in the country happens via road, and just about 17% of cargo is moved via rail. Road transportation is not just time-consuming; it also results in



massive greenhouse gas emissions while Rail emits about one-fifth of trucks’ GHG emissions.

THE PROMISING LANDSCAPE

As per the Ministry of Railways, the Government

has set a target of 33% emissions intensity reduction, with the transport sector being one of the key sectors with substantial emission mitigation potential. One of the most vital transportation emissions mitigation strategies agreed to by the Government of India was increasing the share of Indian Railways in the movement of freight from the current ~35-36% to 45% by 2030.” To achieve this, Indian Railways has prepared a National Rail Plan (NRP) for India – 2030.

There has been a massive investment lined up towards the development of Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs), which is touted as the most important step towards increasing the efficiency of this sector. The first phase of the DFCs project alone is estimated to reduce emissions by about 457-million-ton CO2 over a 30-year period. Looking at the promising potential this project holds, in this year’s Union Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman allocated Rs27,482 crore to the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCC) for the financial year 2023-24 (FY24). As a result, the regular operation of freight trains has been started on the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC), the country’s largest railway line for freight and almost 60% of the freight trains operations on the main New Delhi-Howrah (up to Chunar) have switched on to EDFC.

Additionally, modal integration across, rail, road, and sea freight and the investments for better train-port-road integration are also important factors that will reinforce the Indian rail freight industry. To top it all, robust private sector investments and the public-private partnership for project financing are only accentuating this shift. Railways are also working to improve energy efficiency for both diesel and electric traction to further reduce GHG emissions.

Though capturing a smaller share compared to road transportation as of date, a swift switch from road to rail would mean lesser emissions, lesser congestion on roads, effective utilization of all transportation modes and a highly efficient end-to-end logistical network. With policymakers fast acting to advance the rail infrastructure, a golden opportunity awaits the logistics players to capture major market share by acing their rail freight proposition.

Joe, McCarthy reach debt ceiling deal

Congress nod a must to prevent calamitous default

AP ■ WASHINGTON

An “agreement in principle” between President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy would raise the nation’s legal debt ceiling, but now Congress has only days to approve a package that includes spending cuts and would avert a potentially disastrous US default. The compromise announced late Saturday risks angering both Democratic and Republican lawmakers as they begin to unpack the concessions. Negotiators agreed to some Republican demands for increased work requirements for recipients of food stamps that House Democrats had called a nonstarter. But bargainers stopped short of greater spending cuts overall that Republicans wanted.

Support from both parties will be needed to win congressional approval before a projected June 5 government default on US debts.

Lawmakers are not expected to return to work from the Memorial Day weekend before Tuesday, at the earliest, and McCarthy has promised lawmakers he will abide by the rule to post any bill for 72 hours before voting.

White House officials planned to brief House Democrats on a video call Sunday.

The Democratic president and Republican speaker reached the agreement after the two spoke Saturday evening by phone. The country and the world have been watching and waiting for a resolution to a political standoff that threatened the US and global economies. “The agreement represents a compromise, which means not everyone gets what they want,” Biden said in a statement. “That’s the responsibility of governing.”

Biden said the deal was “good news for the American people because it prevents what could have been a catastrophic default and would have led



House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California speaks during a news conference after President Joe Biden and McCarthy reached an “agreement in principle” to resolve the looming debt crisis on Saturday on Capitol Hill in Washington. Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-NC, right, and Rep Garret Graves, R-La., left listen

AP/PTI

to an economic recession, retirement accounts devastated, and millions of jobs lost”.

McCarthy told reporters at the Capitol on Sunday that the agreement “doesn’t get everything everybody wanted,” but that is to be expected in a divided government. “At the end of the day, people can look together to be able to pass this.”

With the outlines of an agreement in place, the legislative package could be drafted and shared with lawmakers in time for House votes as soon as Wednesday, and later in the coming week in the Senate.

Central to the compromise is a two-year budget deal that would hold spending flat for 2024 and increase it by 1% for 2025 in exchange for raising the debt limit for two years, which would push the volatile political issue past the next presidential election.

Driving hard for a deal to impose tougher work requirements on government aid recipients, Republicans achieved some but not all of what they wanted. The agreement would raise the age for existing work requirements on able-bodied adults, from 49 to 54, without children. Biden was able to secure waivers for veterans and the homeless.

The two sides had also reached for an ambitious overhaul of federal permitting to ease development of energy projects. Instead, the agreement would put in place changes in the landmark National Environmental Policy Act that will designate “a single lead agency” to develop environmental reviews, in hopes of streamlining the process.

The deal came together after Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told Congress that the United States could default on its debt obligations by June 5 — four days later than previously estimated — if lawmakers did not act in time.

Lifting he nation’s debt limit, now at USD 31 trillion, allows more borrowing to pay the nation’s already incurred bills.

McCarthy commands only a slim Republican majority in the House, where hard-right conservatives may resist any deal as insufficient as they try to slash spending. By compromising with Democrats for votes, he risks losing support from his own rank and file, setting up a career-challenging moment for the new speaker.

“I think you’re going to get a majority of Republicans voting for this bill,” McCarthy said on “Fox News Sunday.”

1 killed in ‘largest drone attack’ on Kyiv Day

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine’s capital was subjected to the largest drone attack since the start of Russia’s war, local officials said, as Kyiv prepared to mark the anniversary of its founding on Sunday.

At least one person was killed. Russia launched the “most massive attack” on the city overnight Saturday with Iranian-made Shahed drones, said Serhii Popko, a senior Kyiv military official.

The attack lasted more than five hours, with air defense reportedly shooting down more than 40 drones.

A 41-year-old man was killed and a 35-year-old woman was hospitalised when debris fell on a seven-story nonresidential building and started a fire, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Debris from a drone damaged the building of the Ukrainian Society of the Blind.

On Sunday morning, organisation member Volodymyr Golubenko came to pick up his things.

He was helped by his son

Mykola, who searched for his father’s belongings among the rubble and at the same time tried to describe to his father what his office looks like now.

“This wall on the right is destroyed and on left also,” said Mykola to his father.

Volodymyr Golubenko worked at this place for more than 40 years. He says it is a home for many blind people, because they come here to talk and support each other.

“If you don’t even have a job, it’s difficult to get a job now, because these events (war) have been going on since last year. At least people come here to chat,” said Volodymyr.

Like Golubenko, many people in his district heard the sound of Shahed drones for the first time. Among them was 36-year-old Yana, who has three boys. The family hid in a corridor all night. “Something started to explode above us. The children ran here in fear,” said Yana.

Ukraine’s air force said that Saturday night was also record-breaking in terms of Shahed drone attacks across the coun-

try.

Of the 54 drones launched, 52 were shot down by air defense systems.

In the northeastern Kharkiv province, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said a 61-year-old woman and a 60-year-old man were killed in two separate shelling attacks.

Kyiv Day marks the anniversary of the city’s official founding. The day is usually celebrated with live concerts, street fairs, exhibitions and fireworks. Scaled-back festivities were planned for this year, the city’s 1,541st anniversary.

The timing of the drone attacks was likely not coincidental, Ukrainian officials said.

“The history of Ukraine is a long-standing irritant for the insecure Russians,” Ukraine’s chief presidential aide, Andriy Yermak, said on Telegram.

“Today, the enemy decided to congratulate the people of Kyiv on Kyiv Day with the help of their deadly UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles),” Popko also wrote on the messaging app. Local officials in Russia’s southern Krasnodar

region said that air defence systems destroyed several drones as they approached the Ilsky oil refinery. Russia’s southern Belgorod region, bordering Ukraine, also came under attack from Ukrainian forces on Saturday, local officials said.

Regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov reported Sunday that a 15-year-old girl and a 17-year-old boy were wounded in the shelling.

Drone attacks against Russian border regions have been a regular occurrence since the start of the invasion in February 2022, with attacks increasing last month.

Earlier this month, an oil refinery in Krasnodar was attacked by drones on two straight days.

Ukrainian air defences, bolstered by sophisticated Western-supplied systems, have been adept at thwarting Russian air attacks — both drones and aircraft missiles.

Earlier in May, Ukraine prevented an intense Russian air attack on Kyiv, shooting down all missiles aimed at the capital. The bombardment, which

additionally targeted locations across Ukraine, included six Russian Kinzhal aero-ballistic hypersonic missiles, repeatedly touted by Russian President Vladimir Putin as providing a key strategic competitive advantage and among the most advanced weapons in his country’s arsenal.

Sophisticated Western air defence systems, including American-made Patriot missiles, have helped spare Kyiv from the kind of destruction witnessed along the main front line in the country’s east and south. While most of the ground fighting is stalemated along that front line, both sides are targeting other territory with long-range weapons.

Against the backdrop of Saturday night’s drone attacks, Russia’s ambassador to the UK, Andrei Kelin, warned of an escalation in Ukraine. He told the BBC on Sunday his country had “enormous resources” and it was yet to “act very seriously,” cautioning that Western supplies of weapons to Ukraine risked escalating the war to a “new dimension.”

US, Saudi call for warring sides in Sudan to extend ceasefire

AP ■ CAIRO

The United States and Saudi Arabia called on warring sides in Sudan to extend a fragile cease-fire due to expire Monday, as weeks of fighting reached a stalemate in the capital and elsewhere in the African country.

The Sudanese army and a rival paramilitary force, battling for control of Sudan since mid-April, had agreed last week to the weeklong truce, brokered by the US and the Saudis.

However, the cease-fire, like others before it, did not stop the fighting in the capital of Khartoum and elsewhere in the country.

In a joint statement early Sunday, the US and Saudi Arabia called for an extension of the current truce which expires at 9.45 pm local time Monday. “While imperfect, an extension nonetheless will facilitate the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance to the Sudanese people,”



People line up in front of a bakery during a cease-fire in Khartoum, Sudan on Saturday.

AP/PTI

the statement said.

The statement also urged Sudan’s military government and the rival Rapid Support Forces to continue negotiations to reach an agreement on extending the cease-fire.

The fighting broke out in mid-April between the military and the powerful RSF.

Both military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan and RSF

leader Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo led the 2021 coup that removed the Western-backed government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. It turned Khartoum and the adjacent city of Omdurman into a battleground.

The clashes also spread elsewhere in the country, including the war-wracked

Darfur region. The conflict has killed hundreds of people, wounded thousands and pushed the country to near collapse. It forced more than 1.3 million out of their homes to safer areas inside Sudan, or to neighbouring nations.

Residents reported renewed sporadic clashes Sunday in parts of Omdurman, where the army’s aircraft were seen flying over the city.

Fighting was also reported in al-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur.

The conflict has come to a stalemate as neither side has been able to deliver a decisive blow to the other after more than five weeks of fighting. In the first two weeks of the war, army airstrikes targeted RSF camps in and outside the capital, stripping the paramilitary force from its bases. That forced the RSF to deploy in densely populated areas, where they seized people’s houses and other property, and are using them as cover against the military’s airstrikes.

Sudan military ruler seeks removal of UN diplomat

Cairo (AP): Sudan’s military ruler demanded in a letter to the UN secretary general that the UN envoy to his country be removed, officials said Saturday. The UN chief was “shocked” by the letter, a spokesman said.

The envoy, Volker Perthes, has been a key mediator in Sudan, first during the country’s fitful attempts to transition to democracy and then after worsening tensions between military rivals exploded into open fighting last month.

The fighting pits troops loyal to military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan against a powerful paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces, headed by Gen Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

Burhan’s letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was received Friday.

“The Secretary-General is shocked by the letter he received this morning,” U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. “The Secretary-General is proud of the work done by Volker Perthes and reaffirms his full confidence in his Special Representative.”

Dujarric didn’t reveal the contents of the letter. A senior Sudanese military official said Burhan’s letter asked Guterres to replace Perthes who was appointed to the post in 2021.

According to the official, Burhan accused Perthes of “being partisan,” and that his approach in pre-war talks between the generals and the pro-democracy movement helped inflame the conflict. The talks had aimed at restoring the country’s democratic transition, which was derailed by a military coup in Oct. 2021.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief media. Later on Saturday, the US State Department said it supports Perthes and that he “continues to have our confidence.” A statement by spokesman Matthew Miller said that “we express our concern over the letter from the Sudanese Armed Forces calling for his (Perthes’) resignation.”

Florida man pleads not guilty for death of Indian migrants

PTI ■ HOUSTON

A Florida man has pleaded not guilty to human smuggling charges in a case linked to the discovery last year of a family of four migrants from India found frozen to death just steps from the Canada-US border, according to media reports.

Steve Shand, 48, waived the reading of the indictment before entering the plea via videoconference as part of a brief but long-awaited arraignment in Duluth, Minnesota.

Shand is accused of illegally bringing migrants from India into the US during a frigid January night in 2022, the Grand Forks Herald newspaper reported. “Not guilty,” Shand said when asked by Minnesota magistrate Judge Leo Brisbois how he was pleading to the charges — one count each of bringing people into the US illegally and of transporting

them inside the country.

He was arrested in January 2022 in a remote area of northern Minnesota, where US border agents encountered him with two Indian nationals in a rented passenger van.

Just over the border in Manitoba, approximately 12 metres from the Canada-US border, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) discovered the bodies of four people authorities believe froze to death while trying to slip into the US undetected. The Canadian Press news agency reported. Relatives have identified the victims as Jagdish Patel, 39, his wife Vaishaliben, 37, and their two children: daughter Vihangi, 11, and three-year-old son Dharmik.

Three persons in India are facing charges in the deaths of the Patel family.

The family of four died from exposure.

Authorities also found five more Indians walking in dangerous conditions along the same road Shand was arrested.

One of them was carrying a backpack containing children’s clothes, toys and a diaper that he said belonged to a family of four that got separated from the larger group during their 12-hour overnight odyssey. Shands faces up to 20 years in prison if he is found guilty. A jury trial had been scheduled for July 17 in Fergus Falls, but Brisbois — who has yet to rule on a number of discovery and production motions — said the final date depends on the trial judge. Authorities in the US suspect the case is linked to a larger human smuggling operation — a problem long associated with activity along the southern border with Mexico, but that some Capitol Hill lawmakers say is growing in scope up north.

Nepal Prez pardons 501 prisoners

Kathmandu (PTI): Nepal President Ramchandra Poudel on Sunday pardoned 501 convicts including Tharuhat leader and Nagarik Unmukti Party chief Resham Chaudhary who is serving life imprisonment. Earlier in the morning, a meeting of the Council of Ministers decided to recommend a presidential pardon for 501 jail inmates, including 19 political prisoners, according to the President’s Office. Chaudhary has been serving life imprisonment for brutally killing nine people, including eight policemen, during a riot linked to the Tharuhat movement in the Tikapur area of the Kailali district in 2015. On Friday, President Poudel refused to waive the life sentence of Chaudhary as recommended by the government. Former bureaucrats have expressed concern over the government’s latest move.



Fireworks explode over the Neva River during celebrations for the 320th anniversary of St. Petersburg, in St. Petersburg, Russia on Sunday. At right is the city’s landmark, the equestrian statue of Russian Tsar Peter the Great, known as the Bronze Horseman.

AP/PTI

Oman’s sultan visits Iran

AP ■ TEHRAN

Oman’s ruler arrived on Sunday in Tehran for talks with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and other top officials, state television reported.

Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said was officially welcomed by Raisi at the capital’s Saadabad Palace, state media said.

The sultan’s visit followed an official invitation by the Iranian president. It is his first visit to Iran since he ascended the throne.

Iranian television said Sultan Haitham headed a large delegation including the ministers of defence, foreign affairs, economy and investment.

Oman has a long record of being a key broker between Iran and the West, amid volatile



regional tensions. Belgium and Iran exchanged prisoners on Friday after mediation by Omani officials.

Oman also recently hosted rounds of talks between Iran and its rival Saudi Arabia, facilitating an agreement to

resume diplomatic relations after a seven-year rift.

State-run IRNA news agency said investment, oil and gas issues will be discussed during the Omani’s ruler’s stay in the Iranian capital.

Rescue team unable to find missing Indian-origin climber

Singapore (PTI): A search and rescue team was unable to locate a missing Indian-origin climber who reached the Mount Everest summit on May 19, despite its best efforts, his wife said in an Instagram post on Saturday. Interspersing her message between pictures of her husband Shrinivas Sainis Dattatraya on various mountain peaks, Sushma Soma, a 36-year-old musician, said, “He was 39, and in his glorious and rich life, he lived fearlessly and to the fullest. He explored the depth of the sea and scaled the greatest

heights of the Earth.” “And now, Shri is in the mountains, where he felt most at home,” The Straits Times quoted Soma from the post.

Shrinivas scaled the Mount Everest on May 19 but told his wife he had come down with high-altitude cerebral oedema and was unlikely to make it down the mountain. Groups of three Sherpas each had been searching for the Singaporean, Nepal Guide Treks and Expedition — one of the companies that co-organised Shrinivas’ expedition — had told The Straits Times earlier.

New Delhi-inspired House of Ming Chinese restaurant opens in London

PTI ■ LONDON

A restaurant inspired by New Delhi’s popular House of Ming opened its doors in London on Sunday with culinary additions specific to the UK capital. London’s House of Ming is housed within the historic setting of Taj St. James’ Court Hotel in central London and promises to offer authentic Sichuan and Cantonese cuisine.

The new chic diner incorporates elements of traditional Chinese design to create a dining space with bespoke craftsmanship and artistry inspired by the country’s imperial Ming dynasty dating back to the 14th century. “We are delighted to welcome House of Ming to the

Taj Hotels in London, and we are excited for the restaurant to make its mark into the London food scene with unrivalled Sichuan and Cantonese cuisine matched with astonishingly beautiful interiors,” said Mehrnavaz Avari, UK Area Director at Taj St. James’ Court Hotel.

The interiors of the new restaurant are reminiscent of the ancient Ming Dynasty, reimagined by award-winning London-based designers Atelier Wren incorporating elements of traditional Chinese design with a strong focus on craftsmanship. Apart from the cuisine, the Ming nobility also brought botanicals from China which have been incorporated in intrin-

sically designed ginkgo leaves, a sacred concept of yin and yang symbolising longevity and vitality.

The 56-seater restaurant has handcrafted furniture and ceilings hand-painted onto canvas by Lara Fiorentino with designs inspired by Chinese silk screen painting from the Ming dynasty.

Large, embroidered silk panels have been created by award winning artist Jacky Puzey. “Opening house of meeting was a massive collaborative effort, the builders, the carpenters, the upholsterers, the artists and the light-fitting makers, candlestick makers, everyone pushed their skills to the limit,” said Jake Raslan, one of the designers behind the project.

Turkiye elections: Erdogan takes lead in unofficial count

AP ■ ANKARA

Preliminary, unofficial results from Türkiye's state Anadolu news agency showed incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ahead with 67 per cent of ballot boxes counted, while a competing news agency gave a slight lead to the opposition candidate in a presidential runoff that will decide whether the country's longtime leader stretches his increasingly authoritarian rule into a third decade. Anadolu showed Erdogan at 55 per cent, and his challenger, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, at 45 per cent.

Meanwhile, the ANKA news agency, close to the opposition, showed the results at 51 per cent for Kilicdaroglu and Erdogan at 49 per cent, with 69 per cent of ballot boxes counted. The outcome could have implications far beyond Ankara. Türkiye stands at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and it plays a key role in NATO.

Erdogan's government vetoed Sweden's bid to join NATO and purchased Russian missile-defence systems, which prompted the United States to oust Türkiye from a US-led fighter-jet project. But it also helped broker a crucial deal that allowed Ukrainian grain shipments and averted a global food crisis.

Divergent early results were also reported in the May 14

elections. The competing news agencies get their data from completed ballot box counts that are gathered by personnel on the field, and are strong in different regions, explaining some of the variation in preliminary data.

Anadolu's numbers were disputed in the May 14 first round election by opposition politicians, who said the news agency was biased in favour of Erdogan.

Anadolu rejected the accusation and the final results did not reveal a discrepancy. Erdogan came out more than 4 per cent ahead of Kilicdaroglu, but just short of outright victory, leading to the second round on Sunday.

Türkiye's electoral board sends its own data to political parties throughout the vote count but doesn't declare official results until days later.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been at Türkiye's helm for 20 years, was favoured to win a new five-year term in the second-round runoff, after coming just short of outright victory in the first round on May 14.

The divisive populist finished four percentage points ahead of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the candidate of a six-party alliance. Erdogan's performance came despite crippling inflation and the effects of a devastating earthquake three months ago. It was the first time he didn't



win an election where he ran as a candidate.

The two candidates offered sharply different visions of the country's future, and its recent past.

"This election took place under very difficult circumstances, there was all sorts of slander and defamation," the 74-year-old Kilicdaroglu (pronounced KEH-lich-DAHR-OH-loo) told reporters after casting his ballot.

"But I trust in the common sense of the people. Democracy will come, freedom will come, people will be able to wander the streets and freely criticize

politicians."

Speaking to reporters after casting his vote at a school in Istanbul, Erdogan noted that it's the first presidential runoff election in Türkiye's history.

He also praised high voter turnout in the first round and said he expected participation to be high again on Sunday. He voted at the same time as Kilicdaroglu, as local television showed the rivals casting ballots on split screens.

"I pray to God, that it (the election) will be beneficial for our country and nation," he said.

Critics blame Erdogan's

unconventional economic policies for skyrocketing inflation that has fuelled a cost-of-living crisis. Many also faulted his government for a slow response to the earthquake that killed more than 50,000 people in Türkiye.

In the mainly Kurdish-populated province of Diyarbakir — one of 11 regions that was hit by the February 6 earthquake — 60-year-old retiree Mustafa Yesil said he voted for "change."

"I'm not happy at all with the way this country is going. Let me be clear, if this current administration continues, I

don't see good things for the future," he said. "I see that it will end badly — this administration has to change."

Mehmet Yurttas, an Erdogan supporter, disagreed. "I believe that our homeland is at the peak, in a very good condition," the 57-year-old shop owner said. "Our country's trajectory is very good and it will continue being good."

Erdogan has retained the backing of conservative voters who remain devoted to him for lifting Islam's profile in Türkiye, which was founded on secular principles, and for raising the country's influence in world politics.

If he wins, Erdogan, 69, could remain in power until 2028. A devout Muslim, he heads the conservative and religious Justice and Development Party, or AKP. Erdogan transformed the presidency from a largely ceremonial role to a powerful office through a narrowly won 2017 referendum that scrapped Türkiye's parliamentary system of governance. He was the first directly elected president in 2014, and won the 2018 election that ushered in the executive presidency.

The first half of Erdogan's tenure included reforms that allowed the country to begin talks to join the European Union, and economic growth that lifted many out of poverty.

But he later moved to suppress freedoms and the media and concentrated more power in his own hands, especially after a failed coup attempt that Türkiye says was orchestrated by the US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen. The cleric denies involvement.

Erdogan's rival is a soft-mannered former civil servant who has led the pro-secular Republican People's Party, or CHP, since 2010. Kilicdaroglu campaigned on promises to reverse Erdogan's democratic backsliding, to restore the economy by reverting to more conventional policies, and to improve ties with the West.

In a frantic effort to reach out to nationalist voters in the runoff, Kilicdaroglu vowed to send back refugees and ruled out peace negotiations with Kurdish militants if he is elected. A defeat for Kilicdaroglu would add to a long list of electoral losses to Erdogan, and put pressure on him to step down as party chairman.

Erdogan's AKP party and its allies retained a majority of seats in parliament following a legislative election that was also held on May 14.

Erdogan's party dominated in the earthquake-hit region, winning 10 out of 11 provinces in an area that has traditionally supported the president. Erdogan came in ahead in the first round presidential race in eight of those provinces.

Pakistan's ruling coalition rejects Imran's offer

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's ruling coalition has rejected former prime minister Imran Khan's offer for dialogue, saying that talks were held with politicians, not terrorists, a media report said on Sunday. The government also stated that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief was now himself seeking a National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO), the Express Tribune newspaper reported. The development came as Khan constituted a seven-member team to hold talks with the government - for developing consensus on a date for general elections - amid a massive crackdown on his party.

The crackdown launched after May 9 violent protests have thrown the PTI into a deep existential crisis with dozens of key party leaders jumping ship every day.

The prominent leaders who have quit the party include Secretary General Asad Umar, senior leader Fawad Chaudhry and former minister Shireen Mazari.

On May 9, violent protests erupted after paramilitary Rangers arrested Khan from the Islamabad High Court premises. His party workers vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Lahore Corps Commander's House, the Mianwali airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad in response to Khan's arrest.

The mob also stormed the Army headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi for the first time.

Thousands of Khan's supporters were arrested following the violence that the powerful

Army described as a "dark day" in the history of the country.

Responding to the talks offer, the supreme leader of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Nawaz Sharif, took to Twitter to state that talks are held only with politicians. "There will be no talks with a group of terrorists and saboteurs who burn memorials of martyrs and set the country on fire," he said.

In a statement, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said: "Those who attack the state are punished; they are not negotiated with."

She claimed that Khan's appeal for talks is an appeal for a National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO).

When in power, Khan often said former military ruler Pervez Musharraf ended criminal cases against the leaders of various parties including the PML-N and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) through the NRO but that he would not give "looters" any NRO.

Marriyum said holding talks with those who desecrated the memorials of martyrs is a "desecration of martyrs".

She said Khan wants talks after burning ambulances, hospitals, and schools and poisoning youths' minds, adding there will be no talks with him.

"Imran has called for talks when his party leaders have abandoned him in flocks," he said.

She reminded Khan that he had not talked with the opposition on the economy, Kashmir, national security issues, Covid-19 and the FATF issue but he is now urging for talks.

'Intercepted phone call reveals plot by Khan's party to stage fake raid'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has claimed that the intelligence agencies have intercepted a conversation indicating that Imran Khan's party was hatching a plot to defame law enforcement authorities.

Addressing a hastily staged press conference on Saturday night, Sanaullah alleged that the objective of the move was to falsely implicate the law-enforcement agencies in the crime and subsequently raise the issue at the international level.

"The country's agencies intercepted a conversation revealing disturbing plots and planned actions, including a raid on the PTI leader's house and a staged rape," the interior



minister claimed.

Sanaullah, however, did not provide proof to substantiate his claims. Khan, the chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, hit back at Sanaullah on Sunday, saying the minister was "so obviously" trying to cover up "horror stories" about to break in the media. "If there were any doubts about women

being mistreated in jails, this press conference from this certified criminal should remove all such doubts," Khan tweeted.

"Women have never been so mistreated and harassed by the state as they have been by this fascist govt when they were exercising their right to protest peacefully," he added.

Over 60 leaders from Khan's party have parted ways after the May 9 incidents.

The prominent leaders who have quit the party include Secretary General Asad Umar, senior leader Fawad Chaudhry and former minister Shireen Mazari.

On Saturday, Imran Ismail, the former Sindh governor Khan's close aide parted ways with PTI, hours after an anti-terrorism court ordered his release from prison.

Pak police arrest 9 TTP militants

Lahore (PTI): Pakistan police on Sunday arrested twelve militants, nine of them belonging to the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) outfit, who were planning to target sensitive installations and places of worship in Lahore and other parts of Punjab province.

The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab Police conducted 54 intelligence-based operations in different parts of the Punjab province over the last week. Subsequently, they arrested twelve militants, of which nine are active members of the TTP, two owed their allegiance to Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and one from the Islamic State (ISIS). According to the CTD officials, the militants were planning to target sensitive installations and places of worship in Lahore and other

parts of Punjab province.

During the operation, the police recovered over 4,000-gm explosives, a suicide jacket, a hand-grenade, eight detonators, twelve-feet safety fuse wire, 9.28 feet of prima card, four pistols, 20 bullets, and banned pamphlets from these militants, they said.

In recent times, Pakistan has been hit by a wave of terrorist activities orchestrated by the TTP. In November last year, the TTP called off an indefinite ceasefire agreed with the federal government and ordered its militants to carry out attacks on Pakistan's security forces. On January 30, a Taliban suicide bomber blew himself up during the afternoon prayers in a mosque in Peshawar, killing 101 people and injuring more than 200 others.

6.0 magnitude quake hits parts of Pakistan

Islamabad (PTI): A powerful 6.0-magnitude earthquake jolted several parts of Pakistan on Sunday morning, sparking panic and forcing residents to flee their homes.

The epicentre of the quake was the border region of Afghanistan and Tajikistan and it originated at a depth of 223 km, which considerably reduced its devastating impact, according to the National Seismic Monitoring in Islamabad.

The shocks were reported in Islamabad, Peshawar, Swat, Haripur, Malakand, Abbottabad, Batgram, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Texlia, Pind Dadan Khan and several other parts of the country.

China's first domestically-built plane debuts

PTI ■ BEIJING/SHANGHAI

China's first indigenously built passenger aircraft C919 on Sunday successfully completed its first commercial flight, marking its official entry into the civil aviation market as part of the country's bid to compete with Western rivals like Boeing and Airbus.

The first commercial flight of C919 from the eastern metropolis of Shanghai to Beijing was operated by the state-run China Eastern Airlines.

The plane carried 128 passengers on board. The flight time between Shanghai and Beijing was about two hours and twenty-five minutes, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The single-aisle, twin-engined aircraft has 164 seats.



The plane was greeted with a water salute after touching down at Beijing Capital International Airport at 12:31 pm on Sunday, the report said.

The water salute ceremony is performed as a symbol of respect and honour for the aircraft, its crew, and passengers.

The C919 is China's first self-developed trunk jetliner in accordance with international airworthiness standards and

owns independent intellectual property rights.

The C919 is developed by the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) and it was granted a type certificate by the Civil Aviation Administration of China last September.

With a range of up to 5,555 kilometres, the C919 will take on Airbus and Boeing, the world's major aircraft manufac-

turers. It will be a direct competitor to their A320 and B737 narrowbody jets, most commonly used for domestic and regional international flights, CNN reported.

"The first commercial flight is a coming-of-age ceremony of the new aircraft, and C919 will get better and better if it stands the test of the market," Xinhua quoted Zhang Xiaoguang, director of the marketing and sales department of COMAC, as saying.

A male passenger named Li told Xinhua that he was satisfied with the trip. "The experience was comfortable. I didn't hear much noise, and the aisle and the seats are spacious."

Passengers were served a themed meal. On top of the pudding were printed the

image of the airplane and red patterns showing "the world's first C919" in both Chinese and English.

The plane conducted a successful maiden flight in 2017.

In the following years, the C919 conducted several test flights in different locations to test its capabilities.

The C919 has gone through tests in various types of extreme natural environments including high temperature, high humidity, severe cold, gusts and freeze.

Its safety, reliability, and environmental protection performance have been comprehensively assessed, the Xinhua report said. On December 9, 2022, the first C919 aircraft was delivered to its first customer, China Eastern Airlines.

'Anatomy of a Fall' wins Palme d'Or at Cannes

AP ■ CANNES

Justine Triet's "Anatomy of a Fall" won the Palme d'Or at the 76th Cannes Film Festival in a ceremony Saturday that handed the festival's prestigious top prize to a twisty French Alps courtroom drama. "Anatomy of a Fall," which stars Sandra Hüller as a writer trying to prove her innocence in her husband's death, is only the third film directed by a woman to win the Palme d'Or. One of the two previous winners, Julia Ducournau, was on this year's jury.

Cannes' Grand Prix, its second prize, went to Jonathan Glazer's "The Zone of Interest," a chilling Martin Amis adaptation about a German family living next door to Auschwitz.

The awards were decided by a jury presided over by two-time Palme winner Ruben Östlund, the Swedish director



who won the prize last year for "Triangle of Sadness." The ceremony preceded the festival's closing night film, the Pixar animation "Elemental."

The jury prize went to Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki's "Fallen Leaves," a deadpan love story about a romance that blooms in a love-

less workaday world where dispatches from the war in Ukraine regularly play on the radio.

Best actor went to veteran Japanese star Koji Yakusho, who plays a reflective, middle-aged Tokyo man who cleans toilets in Wim Wenders' "Perfect Days." Wenders' film is

a gentle, quotidian character study.

The Turkish actor Merve Dizdar took best actress for the Nuri Bilge Ceylan's "About Dry Grasses." Ceylan's expansive tale is set in snowy eastern Anatolia about a teacher, Samet (Deniz Celiloglu), accused of misconduct by a young female student. Dizdar plays as a friend both attracted and repelled by Samet.

"The character I portray in the film is someone who is fighting for her life and she's overcome a lot of difficulties. Under normal circumstances, I would have had to work hard on this character," said Dizdar.

"I understand what it's like to be a woman in this area of the country," she continued. "I would like to dedicate this prize to all the women who are fighting to exist and overcome difficulties in this world and to restrain hope."

Vietnamese-French director Trần Anh Hùng took best director for "Pot-au-Feu," a lush, foodie love story starring Juliette Binoche and Benoît Magimel and set in a 19th century French gourmet chateau.

Best screenplay was won by Yuji Sakamoto for "Monster." Sakamoto penned Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda's nuanced drama, with shifting perspectives, about two boys struggling for acceptance in their school at home. "Monster" also won the Queer Palm, an honor bestowed by journalists for the festival's strongest LGBTQ-themed film.

Quentin Tarantino, who won Cannes' top award for "Pulp Fiction," attended the ceremony to present a tribute to filmmaker Roger Corman. Tarantino praised Corman for filling him and countless moviegoers with "unadulterated cinema pleasure."

Nigeria's hard-hit families seek justice as armed groups seek control

Abuja (AP): Christian Jonathan's mother was holding the 9-month-old boy in her arms when she was shot dead during an attack on their village in northwestern Nigeria. The assailants cut off one of Christian's fingers and abandoned him by the side of the road with a bullet wound in his tiny leg.

"They left him on the ground beside his mother's body," said Joshua Jonathan, Christian's father. "They thought the boy was dead."

The late-night attack in April in Runji in Kaduna State left 33 people dead, most of them burned alive or shot dead.

Many more have been killed since in the continuing clashes between nomadic cattle herders and farming communities in northwest and



central regions of the West African nation, including more than 100 this month in Plateau state.

The decades long violence is becoming more deadly, killing at least 2,600 people in 2021, according to the most recent data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Once armed with sticks,

the groups now fight with guns that have been smuggled into the country.

Both sides accuse the government of injustice and marginalisation, but the clashes have also taken on a religious dimension, giving rise to militias that side with the herders, who are primarily Muslim, or the farmers from Christian communities.

The growing security crisis presents a huge challenge for Nigeria's incoming president, Bola Tinubu, who rose to power in Nigeria — Africa's largest economy and among its top oil producers — promising to improve the lives of affected communities and address the root causes of the crisis by providing jobs and ensuring justice.

Tinubu's inauguration is scheduled for Monday.

CBIC issues SoPs for scrutiny of GST returns for FY'20 onwards

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC has come out with a standard operating procedure (SoP) for scrutiny of GST returns for fiscal 2019-20 onwards under which the analytics unit will identify returns for scrutiny depending on various risk parameters.

As per the SoP, the selection of returns for scrutiny will be done by the Directorate General of Analytics and Risk Management (DGARM) based on various risk parameters identified by them. DGARM will select the GSTINs registered with the Central Tax



authorities, and the details of the GSTINs selected will be made available on the scrutiny dashboard of the concerned Central Tax officer on the ACES-GST application.

"The details of the risk parameters, in respect of which risk has been identified for a particular GSTIN, and the amount of tax/ discrepancy involved in respect of the con-

cerned risk parameters (i.e. Likely revenue implication), will also be shown on the scrutiny dashboard of the proper officer for their convenience," the SoP said.

Earlier this month, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) had rolled out a module for automated scrutiny of GST returns.

The module enables tax officers to carry out scrutiny of GST returns of Centre administered taxpayers selected on the basis of data analytics and risks identified by the System.

The SoP further said that as the data made available on the

dashboard has been generated at a particular point in time for the calculation of risk parameters, this data may undergo a change at the time of scrutiny of returns, due to subsequent compliances carried out by the taxpayer or by the suppliers of the taxpayer. The concerned tax officer shall, therefore, rely upon the latest available data, it added.

The concerned Central Tax officer would have to conduct scrutiny of returns pertaining to a minimum of 4 GSTINs every month, which would include scrutiny of all returns pertaining to a financial year for which

the said GSTIN has been selected for scrutiny.

"As far as possible, scrutiny of return should have a minimal interface between the proper officer and the registered person and, there should normally not be any need for seeking documents/ records from the registered persons before issuance of Form GST ASMT-10," it added.

GST ASMT-10 is a scrutiny notice that a tax officer would send to an assessee.

On receipt of such notice in GST ASMT-10 on the common portal, the registered person may accept the discrepancy

mentioned in the said notice, and pay the tax, interest and any other amount arising from such discrepancy and inform the same or may furnish an explanation for the discrepancy in Form GST ASMT-11, through the common portal, to the proper officer within the specified time period of 30 days, the SoP added.

Abhishek Jain, Partner & National Head - Indirect Tax, KPMG in India said these SOP would bring a uniform and consistent methodology to authorities to perform the scrutiny of returns filed by taxpayers. Now businesses should

take a proactive step and prepare requisite reconciliations with intact reasons/ records to substantiate such differences.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said DG Systems has developed the functionality "Scrutiny of Returns", and this will further boost the efforts of the department to leverage technology and risk-based tools to encourage self-compliance and to conduct scrutiny of returns with minimal human interaction. This will arrest clerical errors and identify unscrupulous elements in the supply chain using extensive data available.

'UPI to account for 90% of retail digital payments by 2026-27'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Growing at a steady pace, UPI transactions are likely to reach 1 billion per day by 2026-27, accounting for 90 per cent of the retail digital payments in the country, said a PwC India report.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which is driving the digital payments revolution, accounted for about 75 per cent of the total transaction volume in the retail segment during 2022-23, said the PwC report titled "The Indian Payments Handbook - 2022-27".

UPI is projected to account for 90 per cent of the total transaction volume in retail digital payments over the next five years, the report said.

The Indian digital payments market saw steady growth at a CAGR of 50 per cent (volume-wise) and is expected to reach 411 billion transactions in FY 2026-27 from 103 billion in FY 2022-23, the report said.

"It is estimated that UPI will record 1 billion transactions per day by FY2026-2027, going from 83.71 billion transactions in 2022-23 to 379 billion transactions by 2026-27," it added.

It further said the credit card segment continues to



grow at a healthy rate, as card (both debit and credit) payment is one of the most used instruments for retail digital payments after UPI. The volume of transactions in credit cards is expected to surpass debit cards by FY 2024-2025.

While credit card issuance is expected to grow at a healthy CAGR of 21 per cent in the next five years, debit card issuance is expected to have a stagnant growth with a CAGR of 3 per cent in the same period, the report said.

"The decline in debit card usage is because the major use case of debit card transactions is cash withdrawal, which can now be replaced by an easier way of withdrawing cash using UPI," it added.

Mihir Gandhi, Partner and Payments Transformation Leader, PwC India, said that in the next five years, the payments industry is expected to

focus on ecosystem expansion and new use cases for existing payment platforms.

"Areas like embedded and ecosystem finance, digital lending based on payment transactions and offline payments will drive the next phase of growth for the payments industry. In the ever-evolving Indian payments landscape, innovation and inclusion are paving the way for a seamless digital economy," Gandhi said.

The PwC report further said revenue through the credit card business accounts for nearly 76 per cent of the overall cards' revenue in 2022-2023, making it a lucrative business segment for banks, NBFCs and FinTech.

The revenue for credit card issuance increased by 42 per cent in 2022-2023 compared to 2021-2022 and is likely to grow by a CAGR of 33 per cent for the next five years, it added.

Global trends, macroeconomic data to drive equity markets this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets would be largely driven by macroeconomic data, auto sales numbers, FII inflows and global trends this week, analysts said. The US debt ceiling negotiations and institutional flows will also be watched by investors.

"This week, market participants will closely monitor institutional flows, as there is a historical observation that when both FIIs and DIIs become net buyers simultaneously, there is a likelihood of some profit-booking in the market," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

On the global front, the US debt ceiling issue holds significant importance, alongside US macroeconomic indicators, movement of the US bond yields, the dollar index and crude oil prices, Meena added.

President Joe Biden said a deal to resolve the government's debt ceiling crisis seemed "very close" late Friday, even as the deadline for a potentially catastrophic default was pushed back to June 5.

"Domestically, attention will be directed towards key macroeconomic data, including GDP figures and monthly auto



sales numbers," he said.

"This week marks the beginning of the new month also so participants will be eyeing high-frequency data viz. Auto sales, manufacturing PMI and services PMI data. Before that, GDP data scheduled on May 31, will also be on their radar," said Ajit Mishra, VP Research, Religare Broking.

PMI data for the manufacturing sector is scheduled to come on Thursday.

Apart from these factors, the performance of the US markets amid the ongoing debt ceiling talks will be in focus, he added. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 772.01 points or 1.25 per cent.

Stock markets ended a two-week-long consolidation phase and gained over one-and-a-half per cent.

"After a firm start, the benchmark remained range bound in the middle, tracking mixed global cues however

strong recovery in the final sessions changed the tone. Consequently, Nifty managed to surpass the hurdle at 18,400 and settled around the week's high at 18,499.30 levels," Mishra said.

All sectors contributed to the move wherein metal, pharma and IT were the top gainers. The buoyancy continued on the broader front, with the midcap index scaling to a new high.

"Nifty looks set for a new high after the consolidation breakout, thanks to improved participation from across sectors. However, stability on the global front would be critical else the momentum could derail," Mishra added.

"As we are entering into the last leg of the earnings season, we have companies like Adani Ports, IRCTC and PFC, who will be announcing their numbers during the week, Mishra said.

PFC Q4 net profit rises 42% to ₹6,128.63 cr; FY23 profit at ₹1,179 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned non-bank lender Power Finance Corporation (PFC) has posted a 42.66 per cent jump in its consolidated net profit at Rs 6,128.63 crore during March FY23 quarter, helped by higher income.

It had clocked Rs 4,295.90 crore net profit from "continuing and discontinued operations" in January-March quarter of preceding financial year (FY) 2021-22, the company said in a regulatory filing on Saturday.

Total income increased to Rs 20,074.11 crore from Rs 18,873.55 crore in the year-ago quarter, registering a year-on-year (y-o-y) rise of 6 per cent.

In a separate statement, the company said "PFC Group clocked the highest PAT (profit after tax) with a 13 per cent increase from Rs 18,768 crore in FY22 to Rs 21,179 crore in FY'23." As on March 31, 2023, the consolidated net worth of



company increased to Rs 1,11,981 crore from Rs 96,275 crore as on March 31, 2022.

Consolidated loan asset book grew by 13 per cent to Rs 8,57,500 crore in FY23 over Rs 7,58,496 crore in FY22.

In FY23, PFC Group has collectively sanctioned Rs 1,05,566 crore and disbursed Rs 32,909 crore under Late Payment Surcharge (LPS) rules.

The government launched LPS in June 2022 to reduce the mounting dues of discoms (power distribution companies) and in less than a year of its introduction, the outstanding dues of discoms to gencos (power generating companies) have reduced by more than 40 per cent.

Data protection Bill will drive behavioural changes for platforms, says Chandrasekhar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming Digital Personal Data Protection Bill will drive "deep behavioural changes" among those platforms in India that have for long exploited or misused personal data, Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has asserted.

In an interview to PTI, the minister of state for IT and electronics also sought to allay concerns around the issue of government-appointed fact check body, saying the move is not about censorship at all, rather it gives the Centre an opportunity to clarify and respond to any misinformation related to it, something that is critical in a democracy.

Misinformation, he said, is not to be confused with right to free speech. The minister noted that misinformation tends to travel 10-15 times faster, and reaches an audience 20-50 times more, than truth. He emphasised that it is absolutely critical that in a democracy if someone says something false about the



government, to create hatred, to incite violence, or to just create mistrust, "the government must have an opportunity to say no, this is not true".

"So there is no censorship, there no restriction on free speech. This is simply about saying what is patently false, is patently false. And that is certainly not to be confused or deliberately distorted to imply that this is a crackdown on free speech," Chandrasekhar said.

The minister's comment assumes significance as the decision to notify an entity that will flag false information posted online pertaining to the government has raised concerns in some quarters on whether it gives government absolute powers.

"I think there is some misunderstanding about what it is we are trying to do," the minister said when asked about the issue.

"Misinformation is expressly an area that has already been prescribed in the rules as an area that platforms have to do significant work in moderating misinformation if they are to enjoy Section 79 protection. It is already mandated in the rules of October 2022," he said.

Rather, the fact check unit aims to help platforms in identifying false content posted about the government.

"It is not an opinion. It is not about saying that we will create another narrative about the government," Chandrasekhar added.

On the digital personal data protection (DPDP) bill, which will be introduced in the coming session of Parliament, the minister said the draft legislation has undergone a lot of consultation and is designed as "a truly world class piece of legislation".

Cabinet Secy-led panel to interview candidates for RBI Deputy Guv's post

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Secretary-headed panel is scheduled to interview shortlisted candidates on June 1 for the post of RBI deputy governor, which falls vacant on June 21 after M K Jain completes his extended tenure.

This vacancy for the RBI deputy governor's post has been reserved for a commercial banker. According to sources, five candidates have been shortlisted, including a non-executive chairman of a public sector bank.

The Financial Sector Regulatory Appointment Search Committee (FSRASC) headed by Cabinet Secretary would interview candidates in Delhi, the sources said.

The selected name from the interview will be sent to the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister, for final



approval.

Besides the Cabinet Secretary, other members of FSRASC include the RBI governor, the financial services secretary and two independent members.

According to the RBI Act, 1934, the central bank should have four deputy governors - two from within the ranks, one commercial banker and an economist to head the monetary policy department.

Currently, the RBI has four deputy governors -- M K Jain, Michael Debabrata Patra, M Rajeshwar Rao and T Rabi Sankar.

India sees 31% surge in malware attacks in 2022: Report



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India experienced a 31 per cent surge in malware attacks in 2022, which should prompt companies to intensify their efforts in safeguarding themselves against cyberattacks, said a SonicWall report.

The report also highlighted a 10 per cent increase in "intrusion attempts" and a staggering 53 per cent rise in "ransomware attacks" compared to the previous year.

Furthermore, the '2023 SonicWall Cyber Threat Report' revealed a noteworthy surge of 116 per cent in "crypto-jacking attacks" and an 84 per cent increase in "IoT attacks".

Organisations adopting sustainability reporting get competitive edge

SANJEEV SINGHAL AND NIDHIGARG ■ NEW DELHI

Organizations that adopt sustainability reporting get a competitive edge in a market where consumer awareness is rising, in addition to helping the world's efforts to address urgent environmental and social concerns. Investors are give due importance to ESG aspects into their decision-making processes, and consumers are expecting more goods and services from businesses that exhibit ethical and sustainable business practices. Governments and regulatory organizations are also stressing on the need of achieving sustainable development and enforcing higher reporting standards.

As a statutory body, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) regulates the profession of Chartered Accountants in India. A strong tradition of public ser-

vice and economic development has distinguished the ICAI as the world's leading body of knowledge for accountancy. With the mission to formulate comprehensive and globally comparable standards for measuring and disclosing non-financial information about an entity's progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, the ICAI constituted the Sustainability Reporting Standards Board (SRSB) in February 2020. Several initiatives have been launched by the Board over the years to revolutionize the ideology behind sustainable reporting such as introduction of Sustainability Assurance Engagement Standards, certificate course on BRSR reporting, social audit standards etc.

In May 2021, SEBI made a notable shift towards the adoption of Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework in recognition of the need for a more com-

prehensive and integrated approach towards sustainability reporting. The BRSR framework acknowledges that sustainability issues should not be ignored or considered as a side issue, instead, they ought to be thoroughly incorporated into a company's overall operations and strategies by acknowledging the connection between sustainability and commercial performance. BRSR framework focuses on transparency and comparability. Organizations can give stakeholders reliable information about their sustainability practices by adopting a standardized approach to reporting and can also better streamline decision-making, increase transparency, and align sustainability with their core business strategy. This makes it possible for stakeholders like consumers, employees, and investors to assess the sustainability performance of various businesses and make educated decisions. The sustainabil-



ity board of ICAI has come out with an innovative approach towards measuring an organs ion maturity towards BRSR. On 18th March 2021, SRSB launched its Sustainability Reporting Maturity Model (SRMM Version 1.0)" as a grading/scoring methodology for BRSR released by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) as part of its initiatives to build the sustainability ecosystem in the nation. This maturity model records an organization's progress towards sustainability reporting through four distinct degrees of sustainability maturity. Based

on the changes brought in by the SEBI BRSR circular, SRMM Version 1.0, was further updated to Version 2.0 by the board. To assist organizations in implementing the SRMM, the SRSB has also set up a network of training and support facilities and tools and resources.

The SRMM is a self-assessment tool which gives organizations a clear structure and path so they can evaluate where they are now and where they need to improve. Second, the model also encourages organizations to go up through the levels, promoting the maturity of sustainability reporting. The approach helps organizations gradually improve their reporting procedures and incorporate sustainability into their primary business strategy by outlining a clear path. The model has four unique stages, each of which corresponds to a different level of sustainability reporting maturity. All 4 levels are defined based on the overall

range of scores that a corporate entity has scored within a fiscal year using the BRSR scoring system. The SRMM has a total score of 300 points divided across all the sections of BRSR. By assigning a score of 75 out of 300 to leadership indicators, firms are encouraged to set goals for achieving them.

A company scoring up to 25% falls in the first stage or the Formative stage of SRMM. This stage implies that the company is in the nascent stage of reporting and is still outlining the fundamental facts and identifying the need and responsibility of BRSR. These companies are actively trying to collect data and establish policies related to sustainability. A company scoring more than 25% and up to 50% falls under the Emerging stage which is the 2nd stage in the SRMM. Level 2 organizations tend to be more aware of the importance of BRSR and have a strong mechanism for reporting

the same, but these businesses are constantly working towards enhancing and establishing the current internal control system and collecting data for disclosures.

Level 3 or the Established Stage is achieved when a company has a BRSR score of more than 50% and up to 75%. These organizations have established business strategy and functional systems for reporting BRSR parameters efficiently. Such organizations are actively involved in compliance functions and are more focused on improving and accelerating the qualitative aspects of their business.

A company with a score of more than 75% qualifies for the highest level of sustainability reporting maturity - Level 4 and is in the stage of leading by examples. At this level, sustainability is deeply ingrained in the culture and ethos of the company. Organizations actively work to have a beneficial social, envi-

ronmental, and economic impact. They demonstrate creativity and adopt cutting-edge sustainability trends and best practices. Companies who are a part of Level 4 are constantly involved in innovative methods so as to enhance their disclosures and work towards becoming a market leader.

Organizations go through a transformative process as they advance from Level 1 to Level 4, which includes incorporating sustainability into their fundamental business strategies, setting up reliable reporting systems, and interacting with stakeholders. As they advance through the levels, organizations become industry leaders in sustainability reporting, link sustainability with their core business strategy, enhance transparency and accountability, and create value. The SRMM is a useful tool in the effort to create a company environment that is more ethical and sustainable.

PSG win record 11th French title

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain clinched a French record 11th league title on Saturday as Lionel Messi scored in a 1-1 draw away at Strasbourg.

Messi's opener was cancelled out by a Kevin Gameiro equaliser, but the result gave PSG an unassailable four-point lead over second-placed Lens with one match of the season remaining.

PSG moved ahead of the previous record of 10 titles set by Saint-Etienne in 1981 and which they equalled a year ago under former coach Mauricio Pochettino.

It is PSG's ninth title in the last 11 seasons, a period in which they have dominated French football under Qatari ownership.

"This afternoon I watched the last day of the season in the Bundesliga and you can see that it is very difficult to win the league, any league," PSG coach Christophe Galtier told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"The reigning champions in all European leagues have often had problems this season, so we appreciate what this means.

"It is a title and we must not believe it is normal to win, even if we are Paris Saint-Germain."

PSG started the penultimate weekend of the season six points clear of nearest rivals Lens with just six points to play for, and with a far better goal difference.

A Lens slip-up would have



seen the capital side crowned champions with a game to spare even in defeat, but in the end they needed the draw as their challengers eased to a 3-0 win over already-relegated Ajaccio.

Kylian Mbappe set up Messi to put PSG ahead just before the hour with his 16th

Ligue 1 goal this season.

Ex-Paris striker Gameiro equalised with 11 minutes left, bundling in the rebound after Gianluigi Donnarumma had saved from Morgan Sanson.

The draw ultimately suited both teams as it enabled Strasbourg to guarantee their

top-flight survival.

PSG started the season superbly and did not lose a game in any competition before the World Cup.

However, they lost six of their first 17 league games in 2023 and were eliminated from the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern

Munich and in the French Cup at the same stage.

Those results increased speculation that Galtier -- who also won the title with Lille two years ago -- will be replaced in the close season.

Messi is expected to depart when his contract expires at the end of the cam-

Rico in 'serious' condition after horse riding accident



AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain back-up goalkeeper Sergio Rico is in "serious" condition after a horse riding accident, the French club confirmed on Sunday.

The 29-year-old Spaniard was on the bench for PSG as they won the

Ligue 1 title on Saturday before heading to Spain, where the accident happened in El Rocío.

"He is in serious condition," said a PSG spokesperson, while Spanish newspaper Marca report he is "stable".

Rico was taken by helicopter to Seville's Virgen del Rocío hospital, where he was placed on life support, according to local TV channel Canal Sur, citing medical sources.

"Lots of strength and a speedy recovery," wrote Sevilla, whom he played for previously, on Twitter.

Rico, born in Seville, won two Europa Leagues with his hometown side before moving on loan to Premier League side Fulham in 2019.

The goalkeeper then moved to PSG on loan in 2019 before making the move permanent in 2020.

enter the Champions League in the third qualifying round.

Beneath them, Lille are in pole position to qualify for the Europa League after coming from behind to beat Nantes 2-1 and move up to fourth position.

Quentin Merlin put relegation-threatened Nantes in front in the far north, but two second-half penalties from Canada's Jonathan David gave Lille the victory.

Lille are now a point above both Rennes and Monaco, who met on Saturday, with the Brittany side winning 2-0 thanks to second-half goals by Lovro Majer and Amine Gouiri.

Rennes are fifth, above Monaco on goal difference. Fifth place goes into next season's Europa Conference League while sixth will not qualify for Europe at all.

Lyon's European hopes were effectively ended despite a 3-0 win over Reims in which Alexandre Lacazette scored his 27th Ligue 1 goal this season, leaving him just one behind Mbappe, the division's top marksman.

Nantes will go into the final weekend having to win to stand a chance of avoiding relegation as they sit 17th, two points behind Auxerre, who drew 1-1 at Toulouse.

Angers, Ajaccio and Troyes have already been relegated. Four teams go down and only two come up from Ligue 2 as the top flight is reduced from 20 clubs to 18 for next season.

There were also wins on Saturday for Angers, Nice and Clermont.

Rodrygo's brace earns Real Madrid victory over Sevilla



AP ■ SEVILLE

Rodrygo hit a brace to earn Real Madrid a 2-1 win over Sevilla in La Liga on Saturday, sending his side four points clear of third-place rivals Atletico Madrid.

Madrid were without injured winger Vinicius Junior, who drew global support during the week after he was racially abused by Valencia fans last weekend.

Carlo Ancelotti's team were also missing injured duo Karim Benzema and Marco Asensio in attack.

Rodrygo was Madrid's only fit regular starting forward. After Rafa Mir gave the Europa League finalists, who face Roma on Wednesday, the lead, Rodrygo made his chance count with two goals, the first from a free kick.

"It's hard to choose. They were both nice goals, maybe the second a little bit more but scoring from a free-kick is always special," Rodrygo told DAZN.

"We always practice them and talk about it before, whoever is the most confident takes it and I took the ball."

Ancelotti took off Rodrygo with 10 minutes remaining.

"I was a bit annoyed with him because I wanted to score one more, a hat-trick, but it's OK, he told me that like this we would win," said Rodrygo.

Bayern back Tuchel after sackings and confirm Rummenigge return

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich chairman Herbert Hainer on Sunday promised manager Thomas Tuchel's job is safe with the freshly-minted German champions, while confirming the return of former executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

Bayern on Saturday overcame a two-point deficit to leaders Borussia Dortmund to win their 11th straight German title, but announced the sacking of CEO Oliver Kahn and sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic at full-time.

In a specially convened press conference on Sunday, Hainer explained the duo were sacked because the club's "performance in the second-half of the season was not how we imagine FC Bayern to be," but said the club had "absolutely no thoughts" of firing Tuchel.

"We are absolutely convinced by Thomas Tuchel. He is one of the best managers in Europe and has shown that at several clubs.

"I don't know why Thomas Tuchel should not be our coach."

Tuchel was appointed in March after Kahn and Salihamidzic sacked then manager Julian Nagelsmann.

While Kahn was replaced by former CFO Jan-Christian Dreesen, a new sporting director has not yet been appointed.

Hainer however confirmed the return of Rummenigge, who played for the club for a decade and served as CEO until he was replaced by Kahn in 2021.

The chairman said the club would lean heavily on Bayern's sporting expertise, including the returned Rummenigge as well as giving Tuchel a bigger role.



Hainer also revealed that the Kahn and Salihamidzic had been told of the decision on Thursday, "early enough so that they would have time to deal with the situation" and

because he was "too emotional".

Hainer said Salihamidzic took the decision "very well" but "we had the same conversation with Oliver Kahn and unfortunately it did not go so well."

"We were unable to end it amicably" said Hainer "and because of this, he couldn't go to Cologne on Saturday."

Kahn spoke out on Twitter on Saturday saying "I would love to celebrate with (the players), but unfortunately I can't because the club has prohibited me from doing so."

On Sunday, Kahn hit back at reports he had reacted emotionally, saying "the claim that I freaked out when I was informed about the dismissal is definitely not true", with the former goalkeeper saying he "calmly accepted the decision" that he could not go to the game.

Benfica win Portuguese Primeira Liga

AP ■ LISBON

Benfica won the Portuguese Primeira Liga for a record-extending 38th time by beating Santa Clara 3-0 on Saturday, four years after they last lifted the trophy.

Last season's champions Porto finished second after they also beat Vitoria Guimaraes 3-0, but they needed Benfica to lose to have a chance of retaining the title on the final day.

Goncalo Ramos, Rafa Silva and Alejandro Grimaldo struck for the hosts at the Estadio da Luz in Lisbon, as Roger Schmidt's side saw off bottom-of-the-table Santa Clara with ease.



Benfica, who blew a chance to lift the title last weekend by drawing with Sporting Lisbon, made no mistake this time.

Only a defeat would have foiled their title challenge and Ramos headed home from inside the six-yard box after

seven minutes to put his side on the right track.

Despite selling midfielder Enzo Fernandez to Chelsea in January after his triumphant World Cup campaign with Argentina, Benfica have had a strong campaign and also

reached the Champions League quarter-finals.

Silva hit the second for Benfica at the end of a razor-sharp break, exchanging passes with Joao Mario and then firing home with the aid of a deflection.

Former Barcelona defender Grimaldo netted the third from the penalty spot after an hour and produced an emotional celebration, in his last game for the club before he joins Bayer Leverkusen.

Porto did their job at home against Guimaraes with goals from Mehdi Taremi, Otavio and Evanilson, but ultimately fell short, finishing two points behind the new champions.

Tsitsipas survives scare to reach second round



AP ■ PARIS

Stefanos Tsitsipas held off a spirited comeback from Jiri Vesely to reach the second round of the French Open on Sunday with a four-set win.

The Greek fifth seed, who blew a two-set lead to lose the 2021 final to Novak Djokovic, won 7-5, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) on Court Philippe Chatrier.

He will next face either Spaniard Roberto Carballes Baena or qualifier Emilio Nava.

Tsitsipas appeared to be cruising to victory after battling through the first two sets. But world number 455 Vesely, who had previously only played in two second-tier Challenger events this year, forced a fourth set.

The Czech left-hander should have pushed the match into a decider, but saw four set points slip away in the fourth-set tie-break before Tsitsipas clinched a round-two place with a crunching forehand winner.

No extra pressure on Alcaraz at French Open: Ferrero

AP ■ PARIS

There is no added pressure on Carlos Alcaraz to win his second Grand Slam title at the French Open, his coach Juan Carlos Ferrero said on Sunday.

The world number one will start his first Slam tournament since winning last year's US Open in the next two days, attempting to step into the absent Rafael Nadal's shoes by lifting the trophy.

Alcaraz will play Italian qualifier Flavio Cobolli in the first round.

"I think of course (having) won a Grand Slam already, 19 years old, now 20, it's gonna help him to believe that he can make it again," said Ferrero, who won the Roland Garros title 20 years ago.

"I think it's all help, not more pres-



sure. So that's what we believe, and I think we are prepared to make a great tournament.

"Of course everybody can lose in the first round, you don't have a clue.

"But I think we (have) played a very good clay season at the moment, and this is the last one, so we are gonna try to give our best to make the best tournament possible with no pressure."

Alcaraz, the youngest man to ever reach the top of the world rankings, has successfully defended the Barcelona and Madrid Open titles in the clay-court season.

The 20-year-old Spaniard, who lost in the quarter-finals at the French Open to Alexander Zverev last year, faces a tricky path to a potential semi-final against Novak Djokovic.

He could face in-form youngster Lorenzo Musetti in the last 16, while 2021 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas is a possible quarter-final opponent.

Ferrero thinks that Alcaraz is better equipped to go all the way than he was 12 months ago.

"As a person, I would say he's more mature," he said.

"I would say he's better than last year. I think he has more experience."

"The experience that he's won the US Open and, living the experience on the court that he did, I think makes him grow faster than maybe other people, so definitely he's a better player."

Alcaraz has reclaimed the world number one ranking from Djokovic despite missing the Australian Open at the start of the year with a leg injury suffered in training.

Kostyuk refuses to shake hands with Sabalenka

AP ■ PARIS

Aryna Sabalenka kept her cool to win a politically-charged French Open duel against Marta Kostyuk on Sunday as jeers rained down after the defeated Ukrainian refused to shake hands with her Belarusian opponent.

World number two and Australian Open champion Sabalenka swept 10 of the last 12 games to win 6-3, 6-2 as she kick-started her push to reach the second week in Paris for the first time.

Kostyuk honoured her pledge not to shake hands with Sabalenka in protest at Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow.

"It was a very tough match, tough emotionally. I didn't know if the booing was against me but thank you so much for your support, it's really important," said Sabalenka who performed a theatrical bow to the sparse Court Philippe Chatrier crowd.

Kostyuk, 20, famously refused to shake hands with Sabalenka's Belarusian compatriot and former world number one Victoria Azarenka at the US Open last year.

She opted instead for a cursory touch of racquets at the net.

The 39th-ranked Kostyuk has been a vociferous critic of the decision to allow Russian and Belarusian players to keep com-



peting on tour since the invasion of her country.

When she won her first career WTA title in Austin earlier this year with victory over Russia's Varvara Gracheva, she dedicated it to her country and "all the people who are fighting and dying."

On Sunday, Kostyuk, ranked 39, enjoyed the first break of the match to lead 3-2 but the more powerful Sabalenka roared back, sweeping the next four games to claim the opener.

Australian Open champion Sabalenka, who has never got past the third round in Paris, broke in the opening game of the second set and backed it up with a hold for 2-0.

There was no way back for Kostyuk as Sabalenka set up a second round clash with either compatriot Iryna Shymanovich or Panna Udvardy of Hungary.

