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Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol.34 Issue 91
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY APRIL 2, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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Kejriwal named two AAP Ministers in liquorgate: ED

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Trouble could be mounting for Delhi Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj after AAP supremo and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was sent to 15 days judicial custody till April 15, in Tihar, reportedly named them in the Liquorgate policy scam case, as claimed by Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju, appearing for the ED, on Monday told the special judge Kaveri Baweja, hearing the Kejriwal case at the Rouse Avenue Court, that Delhi Chief Minister has told that the controversial middleman Vijay Nair reported to Atishi and Bharadwaj not him.

“Kejriwal’s conduct has been totally non-cooperative and he has tried to mislead the interrogation. He said Vijay Nair does not report to me but to Atishi. Kejriwal is not sharing the password for his phone,” ASG Raju submitted in the court. “How far are these arguments relevant to the application for Judicial Custody,” the Court asked.

“We reserve the right to seek his ED custody at a later stage,” the ASG replied. Kejriwal’s wife Sunita and



File photo: Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

party colleagues and AAP MLAs Atishi, Bharadwaj and Gopal Rai were inside the courtroom on Monday.

The special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court sent the 55-year-old Kejriwal, also the national convener of the AAP, to judicial custody till April 15 in connection with the money laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped.

In its remand application, the

ED said during Kejriwal’s custodial interrogation, he gave “evasive replies” and concealed information. It said the Chief Minister’s statements were taken over a period of nine days and he was confronted with the statements of different witnesses, approvers and other co-accused. The plea listed “a few of the glaring examples of evasive and misleading replies” given by Kejriwal.

Nair was the former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a

Mumbai-based entertainment and event management company named Only Much Louder (OML). He worked as a ‘part-time volunteer’ of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), in the run-up to the 2020 Delhi State Legislative Assembly polls. During his stint with the Kejriwal-led party, he helped organise party events and manage social media handles.

The statements of Nair, however, revealed that he stayed in a Cabinet Minister’s bungalow and worked from

the Chief Minister’s camp office, the remand application said.

“It was also put to the arrestee to explain that why would someone, who reported to other leaders of AAP, work from his camp office which anyways is meant for the work of the CM of Delhi and not for the party. Kejriwal evaded replying to this by claiming unawareness to the persons who work at the CM camp office,” it said.

The plea underlined that Nair was not some small time volunteer in the party but head of media and communications. “The arrestee (Kejriwal) has not answered the questions posed to him by questioning the authenticity of digital evidence shown to him. The arrestee also did not reveal the passwords of his digital devices which inhibits the evidence collection and also shows his non-cooperation,” it said.

The application said Kejriwal was shown the evidence of more than 10 meetings of Nair with other co-accused persons involved in liquor business including liquor manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and even middlemen like Dinesh Arora and Abhishek Boinpally.

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Major tax relief for Congress

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief for the Congress, the Income Tax department on Monday told the Supreme Court that it will not take any coercive action against the opposition party for tax demand notices of ₹3,500 crore approximately in view of Lok Sabha elections.

A bench of justices BV Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih recorded the statement of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the IT department that no precipitative action will be taken in the prevailing circumstances till the final adjudication of the matter.

“At the commencement of the hearing on this application, the Solicitor General appearing for the respondent department, submitted that there is no dispute that on several dates in the month of March 2024, demands have been raised as against the appellant herein totalling approximately ₹3,500 crore,” the bench noted.

It further recorded, “It is further submitted (by SG Tushar Mehta) that issues which arise in these appeals are yet to be adjudicated upon but having regard to the situations now, the department does not wish to precipitate the matter as much as no coercive steps shall be taken by the respondent department with regard to the aforesaid demand of ₹3,500 crore approximately.”

The bench posted the



Congress’ plea against different tax demand notices for hearing on July 24, 2024.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the Congress party, appreciated the gesture terming it ‘gracious’ and said that all demand notices were issued in February and March for different years totalling ₹3,500 crore approximately.

“I am very rarely rendered speechless. By my learned friend’s intervention, I have been rendered speechless. Kindly have it in July,” he said. At the outset, Mehta said, “To balance the equity.”

“The petitioner is a political party. Based upon the 2016 judgement, which is under challenge, we have raised the demand of ₹1,700 crore. Since the election is going on, we would not like any problem to arise for any party and therefore, till the matter is heard after the election, we will not take any action for recovery of ₹1,700 crore.”

He said that the impugned judgement of the Delhi high court is of March 23, 2016, and based upon the parameters set by it, a tax

demand was raised against the party in 2021.

“They were given an option to pay 20 per cent of that demand but they did not avail. Thereafter, nothing was paid. Therefore in 2024, we recovered ₹135 crore of 2021 demand and based upon the same parameters, now we have issued a demand of ₹1,700 crore approximately,” Mehta submitted.

He added that the I-T department has a lot to say on the merit of the issue and they would like to file a reply to the main petition filed against the High Court’s verdict. Justice Nagarathna asked Mehta whether the demand notices were the subject matter of the petition.

Mehta replied, “No, that is not the subject matter of the petition.” Elaborating on the sequence of events, Mehta said in 2016, the High Court gave the judgement and laid down parameters. “Based upon that we (I-T department) have raised the demand of Rs 135 crore and it is recovered.”

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US to cut visa wait time for Indians

PIONEER NEW SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the robust ties between the two countries, US Ambassador to New Delhi Eric Garcetti has said President Joe Biden told him to bring down the visa times, claiming it was the first time an Ambassador was given such an instruction in any country.

Garcetti emphasised that part of the green card backlog issue is a legislative matter that Congress needs to address. He noted that adjudicating more visas has reduced the waiting time by 75 per cent.

Garcetti said, “This is a legislative issue Congress needs to tackle, whether it’s the number of legal immigrants, green cards, or citizenships. Like any country, there are limits. This can be frustrating for Indians, as there are many

who wish to come to America. Last year, India had the highest number of student visas, double the second-largest.”

In an interaction with ANI, he said, “We’ve increased visa adjudications by 60 per cent in India in just one year, maintaining the same staff, and reduced wait times by 75 per cent. The Congress needs to address this further.”

Asked about the 250-day waiting period despite the 75 per cent reduction, Garcetti responded, “The 250 days is still too long. The President told me to reduce visa wait times in India. I believe it’s the first time a President has ever said that to an ambassador in any country. However, the typical wait time is actually under 200 days. It’s challenging with our current resources.”

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Leopard causes panic in Wazirabad, rescued

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A leopard entered a house in the national Capital’s Wazirabad area in daylight, creating panic among the residents, and injured at least eight people on Monday morning. According to officials, the leopard had jumped from the terrace of a house in Jagatpur village early in the morning and barged into the next building where it was locked in a room.

Videos on social media showed the leopard being chased by some people and others running in panic. The leopard attacked eight persons who have been identified as Mahender, Akash, Nitin, Pankaj, Nasir, Vipin, Satish and Nishu, all residents of the village.

Delhi Fire Service chief Atul Garg said the leopard was later rescued. According to the Delhi Fire Service, information about the incident was received around 6.20 am and two fire tenders were sent to the spot. “With the help of the locals, the officials locked the leopard in a room. The injured were sent to a hospital,” Garg said. A resident said the leopard was first spotted around 4.30 am and a PCR call was made



Forest Department personnel capture a leopard which entered a house in Wazirabad on Monday

at 5.15 am. It tried to attack over a dozen people and injured some of them, he said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) M K Meena said a call about the leopard entering a house was received from Jagatpur village, following which the local police reached the spot and forest department officials were informed.

Seven persons from the Forest Team and a team from the Fire Department along with local police were present on the spot. The leopard was contained in a room and subsequently, it was rescued from the area. A local said the village is

surrounded by jungle but there is no fencing or any other kind of security.

The family of Mahender Singh, a retired Government employee, woke up on Monday morning to find an unexpected guest in their house — a leopard. The animal injured his two sons, Singh, his two daughters-in-law and four grandchildren had a narrow escape.

“Around 8 am, I saw the leopard and went to my neighbour’s house. I did not notice that the main gate of my house was open and that the animal went inside,” he said.

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Heatwave havoc casts shadow over election

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As India gears up for its upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the world’s largest democratic exercise starting from April 19 to June 1, a significant challenge looms large for voters and political parties: The onslaught of scorching summer heat. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday issued warning about the expected severity of high temperatures during the crucial April to June period, particularly impacting central and western regions of the country.

In the April-June period various parts of the country could record 10 to 20 heatwave days compared to the normal four to eight days, Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director-general of the IMD, told a virtual news conference here on Monday.

With nearly 97 crore eligible voters, concerns arise not only for voter turnout but also for the well-being of vulnerable voters like those with disabilities and elderly populations amidst the sweltering heat.

As election campaigning has already begun, many political parties are also chalking out strategies on how to bring the voters to the electoral booth to cast their votes in case heat becomes unbearable as predicted by the IMD.

“People with disabilities (PwD), elders and those with serious ailments but keen to exercise their right to vote at the polling booth will likely face tough times during the scorching heat in most of the States where high heatwaves is predicted,” said a campaign strategist from a political party.

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Katchatheevu takes centre stage in TN

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The Katchatheevu islet issue between India and Sri Lanka has reached a flash point by Monday. As the DMK and the Congress lambasted the Narendra Modi Government for doing nothing to retrieve the islet from Sri Lanka which was seceded to the island nation in 1975 by the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Minister for External Affairs Dr S Jayashankar told a media briefing that the then DMK Government led by M Karunanidhi was briefed about the transfer deal by the Government of India during all stages of the transfer.

The issue of Katchatheevu has come haunting Tamil Nadu politics as the DMK has mentioned in its Lok Sabha election manifesto that the Central Government should retrieve the islet from Sri Lanka. The manifesto also blamed the Modi Government for its failure to retrieve the islet despite it ruling the country since 2014. But the events of the last few days show that the DMK and its president M K Stalin has bitten more than they could chew.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his campaign speeches at Meerut and Rajasthan has given a vivid account of what transpired in the Katchatheevu issue. But the DMK and the Congress got a jolt as the speech made by the then Chief Minister Jayalalitha in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly in 2016 went viral by Monday.

Intervening in the Katchatheevu issue which was broached by the DMK in the House, Jayalalitha thundered in the Assembly that the DMK has no moral right to utter the word Katchatheevu.

“The transfer of the Katchatheevu took place in 1975 and it happened as per the dictat of the Congress Party and the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.”

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Gamcha craze picks up as poll heat soars

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

As temperatures continue to climb above 40 degrees Celsius across various Indian States, a quintessential accessory has taken centre stage in the realm of political campaigning: The humble ‘gamcha’ or cotton scarf.

Originating from regions like Tanda in Uttar Pradesh and Bhagalpur in Bihar, these versatile cotton cloths are not only serving as face wipes but also making bold fashion statements for politicians crisscrossing the Gangetic belt.

Tanda and Bhagalpur have emerged as pivotal suppliers of gamchas to political parties,

with prices ranging from ₹25 to ₹40 per piece. Available in a myriad of shapes, sizes, and colours, these gamchas cater to the specific requirements of different political factions.

The demand for gamchas has witnessed a significant surge, with weavers in Tanda and Bhagalpur experiencing an enthusiastic response.

In Tanda alone, over 100 small units engage more than 5,000 weavers, fulfilling orders worth approximately ₹50 lakh in just two months. Similarly, in Bhagalpur, over 3,000 weavers are engaged in crafting gamchas, with each weaver producing an average of 24 pieces daily, earning ₹200-300 per day. These weavers are also receiving

orders from States like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.

Mehran Hasan Ansari, owner of Gulshan Khadi in Tanda, Akbarpur, Uttar Pradesh, highlighted the exponential rise in demand during election periods. “Many political parties distribute gamchas to their supporters — which not only gives them identity but also much-needed publicity,” he said.

Different political parties are associated with distinct colours. Saffron is for BJP, yellow for Suheldeo Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP), blue for Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), white for Congress, and green



for RJD. RJD even prefers its election symbol, the lantern, to be displayed in white on green gamchas. Beyond political symbolism,

gamchas also offer protection from the scorching summer heat. Dr SK Pandey of Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences in Lucknow

emphasised the benefits, stating, “Covering the head with a gamcha reduces the possibility of heat stroke by almost 60 per cent.”

“It is advisable to cover one’s head during summer with a cap or scarf while working outside.”

With several States placing orders for millions of saffron gamchas, the demand for Bhagalpuri gamchas has surged by 30 per cent compared to the previous year. Additionally, women leaders and workers are opting for Bhagalpuri suits and dupattas in various colours, reflecting the election fervour. Orders for green gamchas and caps have also flooded in, with each priced between ₹100-120

and ₹80-120 respectively. Notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself sports a designer gamcha during election campaigns, while Chief Minister Nitish Kumar prefers khadi gamchas over garlands.

The surge in demand for gamchas recalls the 2019 elections when khadi apparel sales soared to a record high of ₹3,215 crore, marking a 29 per cent increase from the previous fiscal year. As India braces for scorching summer temperatures and heated political campaigns, the gamcha remains not just a practical accessory but a symbol of political identity and style on the campaign trail.



BJP manifesto to include themes from each State

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP's Lok Sabha election manifesto is likely to have a catch-line, encapsulating all issues, "Modi ki Guarantee" and may include one or two themes from each State related to the aspirations of people of that state. It has received over 3.75 lakh suggestions through its missed call service and nearly 1.70 lakh on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's app (Namo) for the manifesto. The road map for the government's "Viksit Bharat" agenda took centre stage at the first meeting of the BJP's election manifesto committee on Monday as eight Union Ministers and three chief ministers joined other party leaders to deliberate on its key promises for the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP's manifesto committee headed by Defence minister and former BJP president Rajnath Singh met on Monday to discuss the manifesto. The meeting was attended by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who is its convener and several other Union ministers, the chief ministers of states such as Gujarat, Assam and Madhya Pradesh, and sea-



soned hands like Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Vasundhara Raje are among its members. "The road map for Viksit Bharat by 2047 was discussed in the meeting. People's enthusiastic participation for our manifesto shows their trust in the prime minister and their expectations from him," he said. BJP leaders said all the suggestions received from people will be sorted out under different categories and narrowed down for the committee's next meeting. With Modi constantly highlighting his government's priority for the poor, youth, women and farmers, the ruling party is likely to give prominence to the issues related to them. Union Minister Piyush Goyal, the co-convener of the committee, noted that 916 video

vans were also driven through 3,500 assembly constituencies in the country, reaching out to people and seeking their views for the manifesto. The BJP had on March 30 announced the 27-member committee. That this is the first time in many decades that some of the core ideological promises of the BJP may not find mention in its election manifesto has added to the general curiosity about what will be the highlights of the ruling party's poll pledges this time. With Article 370 repealed by the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in its second term and the Ram temple construction in full swing and already open to devotees, two of the party's core promises for the last several polls stand fulfilled. Its governments in some states are also working to implement the Uniform Civil Code, another of its foundational pledges. With PM Modi often asserting that his third term will be marked by big decisions, the buzz around its manifesto has been gaining in traction. The Lok Sabha polls are scheduled to be held between April 19 and June 1.

Modi charges DMK with double standards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after taking a dig at the Congress on the Katchatheevu island issue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday targeted the DMK over it alleging the ruling party of Tamil Nadu did nothing to safeguard the state's interests and charged it with "double standards." New details emerging on the issue of India handing over the Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka have unmasked the DMK's double standards totally, he said on X, citing a news report which claimed that then chief minister M Karunanidhi had given his concurrence to the agreement despite his party the DMK's public posturing against the deal. The media report is based on an RTI reply received by Tamil Nadu BJP president K Annamalai to his queries on the 1974 agreement between India and Lanka when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister. Modi said, "Rhetoric aside, DMK has done NOTHING to safeguard Tamil Nadu's interests. New details emerging on Katchatheevu have UNMASKED the DMK's double standards totally." "The Congress and DMK are family units. They only care that their own sons and daughters rise. They don't

care for anyone else. Their callousness on Katchatheevu has harmed the interests of our poor fishermen and fisherwomen in particular," he added. The prime minister on Sunday targeted the Congress over the issue. He said, "Weakening India's unity, integrity and interests has been the Congress' way of working for 75 years and counting." The BJP is hopeful that the issue will come in handy in its efforts to gain political traction in the Dravidian territory during the Lok Sabha polls, more so as it involves neighbouring Sri Lanka whose treatment of its own Tamilian citizens and Tamil Nadu fishermen has long been a charged political issue in the state. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar claimed that prime ministers from the Congress displayed indifference about Katchatheevu island and gave away Indian fishermen's rights despite legal views to the contrary. Prime ministers such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi dubbed Katchatheevu, given to Sri Lanka in 1974 as part of a maritime boundary agreement, as a "little island" and "little rock," he told a press conference, asserting that the issue has not cropped up abruptly but was always a live matter.

It has been frequently raised in Parliament and has been a matter of frequent correspondence between the Centre and the state government, Jaishankar said, adding that he has replied to the chief minister at least 21 times. Attacking the DMK over its public posturing against the agreement, Jaishankar said its leader and then chief minister M Karunanidhi was kept fully informed about the agreement, first reached in 1974 between India and Sri Lanka. The Congress and DMK raised the issue in Parliament as if they bear no responsibility for it, while they are the parties which did it, he said, adding the DMK very much "connived" with the Congress in 1974 and afterwards in creating this situation. In 20 years, 6,184 Indian fishermen have been detained by Sri Lanka and their 1,175 fishing vessels seized by the neighbouring country, Jaishankar said. It is the Narendra Modi government which has been working to ensure that the Indian fishermen are released, he said, adding, "We have to find a solution. We have to sit down and work it out with the Sri Lankan government." He claimed the people of Tamil Nadu have long been misled over the issue and that he was speaking on the matter to inform the masses.

NC fields Gujjar leader from Anantnag Rajouri seat

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU



Setting the stage for a triangular contest on the newly carved-out Anantnag-Rajouri Parliamentary Constituency, the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Monday fielded tallest Gujjar leader Mian Altaf Ahmad replacing sitting MP Justice (Retd) Hasnain Masoodi from the seat. By giving a mandate to the son of a Veteran Gujjar leader and Padma Bhushan awardee Mian Bashir Ahmed, the National Conference's top brass has decided to launch an aggressive poll campaign to woo the sizable Gujjar Bakerwal vote bank in the wake of a reservation granted to the Pahari ethnic group by the ruling BJP led government at the centre. Mian Altaf belongs to the politico-religious family of central Kashmir's Ganderbal district. His great grandfather, Mian Abdullah Larvi, was a saint with influence on both Gujjar and Pahari communities. His grandfather, Mian Nazim ud Din, had contested as an independent candidate, while his father, Mian Bashir Ahmad, won the assembly elections from Kangan on the Congress ticket. The Anantnag constituency,

which spreads across the Pir Panjal range to include Rajouri and Poonch areas after the delimitation, will go to polls on May 7 in the third phase of Lok Sabha elections. The Lok Sabha seat was won by the National Conference in 2019 and PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are yet to formally clear the names of their party candidates from the prized Lok Sabha seat. The candidature of a five-time MLA from the Kangan assembly segment may force the BJP to change its mind. As per the grapevine, PDP Chief and former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti is once again planning to throw her hat in the poll arena while BJP is still weighing its options on whether to field their candidate or support a joint candidate of another like-minded party from the valley.

SC refuses to stay scientific survey of Bhojshala complex

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to stay a "scientific survey" of Bhojshala, a medieval-era structure in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district which both Hindus and Muslims claim as their own, but said no action should be taken without its permission on the outcome of the exercise. Hindus consider Bhojshala, an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected 11th-century monument, to be a temple dedicated to Vagdevi (Goddess Saraswati), while the Muslim community calls it Kamal Maula mosque. Under an arrangement made by the ASI on April 7, 2003, Hindus perform puja on the Bhojshala premises on Tuesdays and Muslims offer 'namaz' in the complex on Fridays. A bench of justices Hrishikesh Roy and P K Mishra issued notices to the Centre, the Madhya Pradesh government, the ASI and others on the plea filed by the Maulana Kamaluddin Welfare Society challenging the March 11 order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on the "scientific survey". "Issue notice returnable in four weeks. In the interim, no action should be taken without

the leave of this court on the outcome of the ordered impugned survey. "It is made clear that no physical excavation should be taken which will change the character of the premises in question," the bench said. In its March 11 order, the high court order had directed the ASI to carry out a "scientific survey" of the Bhojshala complex within six weeks. "A proper documented comprehensive report prepared by an Expert Committee of not less than five (5) senior-most officers of ASI headed by the Director General/Additional Director General of the ASI himself be submitted before this Court within a period of six weeks from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order," the court said in its 30-page order. The HC order came on an application filed by an organisation called the Hindu Front for Justice (HFJ). According to the plea, the ASI survey is a statutory duty which should have fulfilled long back at the inspection stage when the "mystery and confusion" about the true character of Bhojshala Saraswati temple (Bhojshala Temple)-cum-Maulana Kamal Maula mosque arose, leading to disputes about its true status.

TMC delegation meets EC, demands level playing field

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A delegation of Trinamool Congress MPs on Monday met the Election Commission with a demand of a level-playing field for the Opposition parties. Referring to the "samatal bhumi or level-playing field as promised by the EC... we have also drawn the attention of the Commission to the spending of public money... the tax-payers' money by the Prime Minister in his election publicity... that is surely not a level-playing field." Sen a member of the Rajya Sabha also referred to a recent telephonic conversation between the Prime Minister and Krishnagar BJP candidate Amrita Roy where he was heard asking Roy to go, tell the people about his plans to return the (corruption) money seized by the Enforcement Directorate to the people. "We referred to the Prime

Minister's conversation with the BJP candidate wherein she was asked to make public his plans to distribute the seized Rs 3,000 crore by the ED among the people... but the question is whether it is not a new jumla — like the previous one where he promised putting Rs 15 lakh to all the citizens' accounts after bringing the entire black money back to India foreign banks — because the money seized by the ED is a part of the proceedings pending in the courts... further more these proceedings may take years to end... so by letting such Jumlas to get viral amounts to violation of model code of conduct which is not expected from a person as high as Prime Minister," Sen said adding such promises only mislead the people. "We referred to the Prime

Minister's conversation with the BJP candidate wherein she was asked to make public his plans to distribute the seized Rs 3,000 crore by the ED among the people... but the question is whether it is not a new jumla — like the previous one where he promised putting Rs 15 lakh to all the citizens' accounts after bringing the entire black money back to India foreign banks — because the money seized by the ED is a part of the proceedings pending in the courts... further more these proceedings may take years to end... so by letting such Jumlas to get viral amounts to violation of model code of conduct which is not expected from a person as high as Prime Minister," Sen said adding such promises only mislead the people. "We referred to the Prime

Modi raked up island row with eye on polls: Priyanka

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena leader and Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi on Monday charged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had — "without a thought to the chair he holds" — had made a serious accusation that late Indira Gandhi "ceded" Katchatheevu island to score a political point and to divide the electorate by casting aspersions on the former Prime Minister. In a statement put on micro-blogging site "X", Priyanka said: "A sitting PM has made some serious allegations against India's former PM Indira Gandhi of having 'ceded' Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka by quoting an RTI response. Without a thought to the chair he holds and the accusations he makes for polit-

ical point scoring in the upcoming elections in the hope that they can win some seats in Tamil Nadu and with the intention to divide the electorate by casting aspersions." "Let's remember such decisions are taken by governments, which includes inputs and advice from professionals like diplomats, military officers, legal advisors and bureaucrats. To reduce them to one leader or one party is undemocratic, because a government is more than just one person," Priyanka said. "The way PM is raking the 1974 agreement to withdraw claim on this island publicly and trying to show earlier government down and question India's international agreement with a neighbour is not in good stead for India's neighbourhood security," Priyanka said.

Political storm after tornado hits North Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after the severe tornado hit parts of North Bengal killing five people and injuring scores of others besides damaging properties worth crores the Trinamool Congress on Monday attacked the BJP for doing nothing for the people in the hours of crises except attacking the ruling outfit which take immediate actions to stand by the people. "This is not the time to talk politics but I must reply to the opposition leaders who have been making acerbic remarks against the government," TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee who surveyed the affected areas said.

Kejriwal named...

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"It was put to the arrestee to explain the authority with which Nair attended these meetings, the arrestee evaded the question by claiming unawareness of these persons and it is clear that a senior functionary like Nair who closely worked with the arrestee wouldn't be able to assert himself without the sanction and approval of the head of the party," it said. It had also claimed that Nair "arranged a video call through facetime (a video calling facility on iPhone) on his phone for Sameer (Mahandru) and Kejriwal, where Kejriwal told Sameer that, Vijay is his boy and that Sameer should trust him and carry on with him". Sameer, a liquor businessman, was arrested in this case by the ED. The ED said it asked Kejriwal why Nair was staying in the bungalow of a Cabinet Minister (Gahlot) and worked at the CM's camp office but he claimed "unawareness" about the persons who worked at his camp office. "This is also because the ultimate benefit of these conspiracies or meetings was reaped by the AAP in the Goa election campaign," the remand application added. It said Kejriwal was shown the evidence of hawala transfers of around Rs 45 crore, which was

corroborated with CDR locations, call records, WhatsApp chats, seized data of the hawala firm in Goa and proof of payments being made. He was also shown multiple statements of witnesses who worked on the AAP campaign in Goa and who received cash from one Chanpreet Singh who was working for the AAP campaign in Goa, the plea said. It said, "Even after showing all the above evidence, the arrestee claimed unawareness even though the beneficiary of these funds is the AAP which is headed by him." The application said Kejriwal provided "false and contrary evidence vis-a-vis other members of the AAP". It said AAPs national treasurer ND Gupta had stated that national convener of the party, Kejriwal, appointed the State election in-charge or 'prabhari', who managed all matters regarding election campaigns. Durgesh Pathak was chosen as the 'prabhari' for Goa elections. Kejriwal, however, stated that it is the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) which decided the State election in-charge, the remand application said. It said, "Kejriwal who first says that ND Gupta is an active member of the party and is a member of PAC and has knowledge of the party functioning but when confronted with Gupta's statement revealing that the national convener takes such decisions, Kejriwal calls the national treasurer (Gupta) confused."

US to cut visa...

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Garcetti praised India's system, stating, "...India is doing quite well in our system. Our system is looking at how it can continue to improve and possibly increase the numbers. This will require bipartisan cooperation." The US Embassy in India announced that for the third consecutive year, a record number of Indian students travelled to the US for higher education. According to the Open Doors Report (ODR), there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of Indian international students in the US, reaching an all-time high of 268,923 students in the 2022-23 academic year. Garcetti also disclosed ongoing discussions about opening two new consulates in India, one in Bangalore and the other in Ahmedabad. He said, "We're considering opening two new consulates soon, one in Bangalore and another in Ahmedabad. We're working with the Ministry of External Affairs to increase our presence in India."

Leopard causes...

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"When my elder son Vipin came out of the washroom, he was attacked by the leopard from behind. Later, the animal attacked my younger son Nitin. After this, we went outside and tried to attack the leopard but it entered a room which we locked from outside," said Singh, who sustained minor injuries in the incident. Singh said his four grandchildren were asleep inside the house when the leopard went in but they were unharmed as their room was locked from outside. On December 1 last year, a leopard was sighted at Sainik Farms in South Delhi with some videos showing the spotted big cat strolling in the lanes of the residential area. It was last seen on December 6 and the Forest Department suspected it had returned to the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary. A week later, a leopard was killed after being hit by a car on National Highway 44 near Khatushyam temple in north Delhi's Alipur. Last week, a forest guard Kailas Bhalerao from Junnar forest division was injured in a leopard attack during a rescue operation. Before the incident, a bike rider, who was crossing the Pune - Nashik Highway near Alephata, was injured in an attack reportedly by the same leopard. As per reports, there have been multiple leopard sightings in various areas in Junnar.

Katchatheevu takes...

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Supreme Court in response to the notice issued by the apex court with regard to her notice. "I was told by officials that Karunanidhi asked them to wait till the Centre filed an affidavit and then files an affidavit kowtowing the Centre's line. Karunanidhi or DMK were not interested in retrieving the islet from Sri Lanka," said Jayalalitha. When a DMK member rose with a point of order, Amma, warned him that if the DMK spoke too much about Katchatheevu, she would be forced to make some more disclosures.

Major tax relief for...

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Now, based upon that very parameter which has been laid down by the high court in 2016, in different proceedings for different reasons, which I am not going into because that will muddy the water, but I have much to say, we have raised the demand of Rs 1700 crore," he said. The bench asked if he meant to keep the demand raised in abeyance. Mehta said, "No, I don't want to keep the demand in abeyance. I am saying that please record my statement that till the matter is heard in the second week of June or

Heatwave havoc casts shadow over...

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wave impact. The commission, in its advisory, has reportedly underscored the importance of adhering to the guidelines provided by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). These guidelines include refraining from outdoor activities, especially between 12:00 noon and 3:00 pm, to minimise exposure to the scorching sun while individuals are urged to stay hydrated by consuming ample water and to avoid consuming stale food to prevent dehydration and related health issues. In a bid to ensure the well-

being of voters and polling staff, the commission has instructed CEOs to guarantee basic facilities such as access to drinking water and adequate shade at all polling stations, the move deemed essential to safeguard against the adverse effects of prolonged exposure to high temperatures, particularly during the electoral process. The IMD has warned that regions such as Gujarat, central Maharashtra, north Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, north Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh are expected to be significantly affected by heatwaves.

Kejriwal aims to run Government from Tihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

While serving custody in the largest prison of Asia, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been granted access to his home tiffins, Isabgol, glucose, toffees, banana with scheduled diet since he is diabetic. From waking up as early as 5:30 am along with all inmates of Tihar Jail, the Delhi CM has expressed his desires to conduct the daily meetings related to governance and has sought permission to flip through the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata besides a couple of authored books. The current prison rules however do not allow for meetings and this sets up a possible explosive clash between the AAP and the Central Government. Kejriwal who made his up with his political ambition as an anti-corruption crusader, has

been lodged in Jail number 2, where he will have home-cooked meals, bottled drinking water, and a supply of toffees in case of a sudden drop in blood sugar levels. Kejriwal is the fourth leader from Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to be kept in Tihar Jail. Former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who is also an accused in the liquor policy case, has been imprisoned in jail number 1 while former Health Minister Satyendar Jain has been kept in jail number 7. Raja Sabha MP Sanjay Singh is serving his custody in jail number 5 while the Bharat Rashtra Samithi's K Kavitha is in Jail number 6 of the women's jail. It is not clear that whether Kejriwal will be allowed an increased number of meetings — with Government officials and Ministers — given he remains Delhi's Chief Minister. According to an application,

the applicant is suffering from Hyperglycemia (diabetes), which requires continuous monitoring by frequently checking the sugar level by using a sugar sensor, charger of sugar machine, sensor reader and Glucometer. Due to which his immune system is very weak and he is prone to allergies and other infections and in order to avoid spread of any infection and in best interest of the applicant's health, concerned authorities may be directed to permit the accused to use his own mattress, bed-sheet, two pillows and quilt in judicial custody. According to counsel, Kejriwal through his counsel sought permission to use his own mattress, bed-sheet, two pillows, to carry essential medicines and medical devices, required for monitoring and controlling diabetes, Isabgol, Glucose, Toffees, Banana not-



pad and pen in judicial custody. Like other prisoners, Kejriwal's day in Tihar jail will usually begin at 6:30 am. Prisoners are served tea and a few slices of bread for breakfast. Following this, the AAP national convener will either leave for the Court, in case of a scheduled hearing, or hold discussions with his lawyers inside the prison premises. According to sources, lunch in Tihar is usually served between 10:30 am to 11 am, consisting of rice or around 5 chapatis, along with pulses and vegetables. Post lunch, prisoners are

kept locked up from noon till 3 pm. Around 3:30 pm, Kejriwal will be served tea and two biscuits, like other prisoners after which the Delhi CM can meet his legal team. Dinner at Tihar is also served early, around 5:30 pm, post which all prisoners are locked up for the night by 7 pm. Kejriwal will be permitted to view television, except during scheduled prison activities such as meals and lock-up periods. A selection of 18 to 20 channels covering news, entertainment, and sports are allowed to be telecast inside the premises. Medical staff is available around the clock in cases of emergency. Kejriwal, who is diabetic, will also undergo regular checkups during his time in prison. In the event of an emergency, medical professionals and staff are on stand-by around the clock. Kejriwal's

lawyer sought a special meal plan due to his health condition. Kejriwal's lawyers have urged for dietary restrictions in light of his illness. The Delhi Chief Minister can meet his family twice a week, only the members whose names are on a pre-approved list. Their names, however, must be approved by prison authorities beforehand. His legal team has also made a request to grant Kejriwal access to three books - Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, and How Prime Ministers Decide by journalist Neeraj Chowdhury. Meanwhile, a protest erupted on Monday outside Tihar Jail ahead of the arrival of Kejriwal. Scores of AAP workers, carrying party flags and wearing T-shirts with 'Main Bhi Kejriwal' printed on them, gathered outside the jail entrance. A senior police officer said that

they have stepped up the security arrangements outside Tihar Jail to maintain law and order. "No one will be allowed to breach law and order situation," the officer said. The Delhi Traffic Police said that traffic would be "affected on Jail Road in the carriage way from Delhi Cantt towards Tilak Nagar due to a demonstration" in a post on X. "Kindly avoid the stretch," police said. Kejriwal, who has been remanded in judicial custody till April 15, was taken to Tihar jail on Monday. Kejriwal will be lodged in Jail Number 2, an almost convict jail. The Rouse Avenue court heard the matter earlier in the day after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had asked for fifteen days of judicial custody of Kejriwal who was arrested in the alleged Delhi excise policy 'scam' case. The ED had cited his 'non-cooperative behaviour'.

BJP slams AAP for raising bogey of victimhood

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday slammed the AAP for trying to raise the "bogey of victimhood" in support of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, and said the order of a court here to send him to jail was based on "concrete" evidence. The BJP also lashed out at Kejriwal after the Enforcement Directorate said the Delhi Chief Minister gave "false and contradictory evidence (regarding) other members of (his) AAP" in interrogation. The BJP also pointed to Kejriwal - the "kingpin" in the liquorgate policy scam - reportedly calling AAP colleagues "confused" when asked about their statements. BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Delhi government's status in the case is becoming "progressively clearer". The sharp attacks came shortly after Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court was told Mr Kejriwal had given "evasive



replies" and concealed information relevant to the investigation into the alleged scam. Taking a dig at the INDIA bloc rally organised Sunday at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan in support of Kejriwal and jailed former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, Trivedi said the leaders of various political parties who were facing corruption cases themselves gathered there. "I would like to underline to

In 2011, Kejriwal sat on a hunger strike for 320 hours and waved papers purported to be proof of corruption, she said. Those whom he called thief were defending him at the Ramlila rally now, Ilmi added. Trivedi and Ilmi claimed that in a statement in the excise policy case, Kejriwal has said that Vijay Nair, who was associated with the AAP and has been arrested, used to report to ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj and not to him. Ilmi claimed that she and several of her former party colleagues including Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhusan were made to leave the party. The "fate" of Kejriwal's "new friends" Atishi and Bharadwaj will also be clear soon, she said. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said after the court sent Arvind Kejriwal to jail in judicial custody, the claims of Kejriwal's innocence have come to an end and we hope that now his wife who is playing the role of the party chief and other

leaders will stop making false statements about harassment of Kejriwal. In his video statement, Sachdeva also claimed that the alleged liquor excise policy scam forced the youth of Delhi into addiction. He expressed hope that the people of Delhi were watching those who looted them. Kejriwal's arrest marked the first time a sitting Chief Minister in India was put behind bars while still in office. Today, liquor scam accused Arvind Kejriwal is sent to 15 days judicial custody. Now, he cannot claim his honesty," said Sachdeva. "We believe that this scam pushed the youth of Delhi into addiction... I hope the people of Delhi will watch those who looted Delhi," said Sachdeva. Earlier in the day, the court of Special Judge Kaveri Baweja sent the AAP chief to judicial custody till April 15 after his Enforcement Directorate custody in the money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy ended.

Gupta raps Kejriwal conduct in excise policy scam

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi former Leader of Opposition and MLA Vijender Gupta raised serious concerns in the Assembly over the conduct of Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) regarding the ongoing investigation into the excise policy scam. Gupta highlighted the Enforcement Directorate's observation that Kejriwal has been evasive and non-cooperative in the investigation process. Gupta stated that the matter is currently under judicial scrutiny, rendering any discussions on the arrest of Kejriwal and speculative talks of the imposition of President's rule in Delhi as unnecessary and misleading. He emphasised that the judiciary's active engagement in the matter signifies the



importance of letting the legal process unfold without undue interference or pressure from political entities. He reminded the House of repeated allegations made by AAP members regarding offers made to AAP MLAs to break away from the party, yet no formal complaints have been lodged to date. Gupta accused the AAP of exploiting the privileges and sanctity of the House to mislead the public. Referencing the excise policy formulated in June 2021 and implemented by November of the same year, Gupta pointed out the hurried rollback of the policy once corruption was exposed.

BJP motive is to keep my husband in jail: Sunita

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal on Monday accused the BJP of having only one motive — to put her husband in jail during the Lok Sabha elections. Kejriwal, the AAP's national convener, was arrested on March 21 and subsequently remanded in Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody. He is accused of being directly involved in a conspiracy related to the formulation of the now-scrapped excise policy, favouring certain individuals. A trial court on Monday sent Kejriwal to judicial custody till April 15. "He was questioned for 11 days, the questioning is complete. The court has not declared him guilty. Why has he been put in jail?" Sunita Kejriwal told reporters while leaving the Rouse Avenue court.

BJP wants to topple city Government by poaching its MLAs, claims Jasmine

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP leaders Jasmine Shah and Dilip Pandey on Monday said the BJP's Enforcement Directorate has adopted a two-pronged strategy: Keep Arvind Kejriwal away from campaigning in elections and topple the AAP Government by poaching its MLAs. They criticised the BJP saying the names of Delhi Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj are being cited in connection with the alleged excise policy scam as the BJP thinks jailing only chief minister Arvind Kejriwal will not be enough to finish the AAP. In a press conference on Monday, AAP leader Jasmine Shah asserted that Kejriwal will remain the chief minister no matter how long he is kept in jail because he has taken a constitutional oath to serve the people of Delhi. "There is no trial yet, let alone conviction. It's his (Kejriwal's) constitutional right and duty because the chief minister is under the constitutional oath to serve the people of Delhi. Kejriwal will keep on being the Delhi chief minister no matter how long they keep

him in jail," he asserted. The Delhi chief minister, arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering case linked to now scrapped excise policy of his government, was earlier on the day sent to judicial custody till April 15 by a city court. "The names of our two senior leaders who are ministers in Delhi government -- Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj -- have figured because the BJP has realised that the AAP will not shut down by sending Kejriwal alone to jail and preparations for other leaders need to done," Jasmine Shah claimed. When Vijay Nair was arrested one-and-a-half years ago, he had said that he did not report to the chief minister and that he reported to Atishi and Bharadwaj. "After 1.5 years, why is the ED raising this thing when it already has a written statement?" he said. In its remand application before the court, the ED said during Kejriwal's custodial interrogation, he gave "evasive replies" and concealed information. "He (Kejriwal) stated that Vijay Nair did not report to him but to Atishi and

Saurabh Bharadwaj and his interaction with Nair was limited," the agency said in its plea. Jasmine Shah alleged that everyday since Kejriwal's ED custody, one or the other senior BJP leader has demanded his resignation, threatening imposition of the president's rule. The BJP is "baffled" with the support for Kejriwal among the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc leaders and which was on display during the Ramlila Maidan rally on Sunday, he said. Fearing its defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP through its political tool ED ensured that Arvind Kejriwal was sent in judicial custody to keep him away from campaigning and make 'Operation Lotus' successful, said senior AAP leader Dilip Pandey. Addressing the media, Pandey said today, the sequence of events in Delhi court exposed the ED and proved that the BJP directed ED is playing an active role in the Lok Sabha elections as political tool of the BJP. By agreeing to judicial custody and not seeking his remand in court today, the ED proved the AAP stand correct.

HC asks ED to submit its notes to special judge

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to submit its notes to the special judge, dealing with the excise policy-linked money laundering case in which Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been arrested, on the issue of the CM passing orders while in custody. A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora said the special judge is directed to pass an order, if required, in accordance with law. It clarified that it has not commented on the locus standi of the petitioner. The court disposed of a public interest litigation that sought directions to prevent Kejriwal from issuing orders in his capacity as the chief minister while in ED custody, contending that it was against the legal framework. "This court directs Respondent No. 2 (ED) to bring its contents/ notes to the notice of the said judge who is directed to pass an order in accordance with law, if required," the bench said. During the hearing, the ED's counsel said the agency was



seized of the issue raised in the petition and that it was not providing any infrastructure to Kejriwal for passing orders. "The petitioner's apprehension or understanding is that ED has provided apparatus and infrastructure to the chief minister but this is not the case. We have not provided anything to him. We have done some investigation. "If the process has been misused by way of 'mulakat', it will have to be looked into," ED's counsel submitted, adding, "Today it is not disputed that an order has been passed by him in custody." To this, the court asked the agency's counsel to bring it to

the notice of the special judge dealing with the case and suggested that the plea be treated as a representation by ED. The petition was vehemently opposed by senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing Kejriwal, who said the petition has no locus standi to be heard and the ED was capable enough to deal with the matter. The counsel said this was the third such petition filed before the high court and added that he has no instructions on the issue of whether Kejriwal was passing orders while being in custody. "What is the basis of this apprehension? The petitioner must show some material

to invoke the court's writ jurisdiction. This will open a Pandora's box. The ED is well equipped, it does not need anyone's assistance in this. How is this third party coming in and interfering?" Mehra argued. The petitioner, Surjit Singh Yadav, said in the PIL that issuance of such orders by Kejriwal in the capacity as the CM is against the legal framework as well as the principle of fair and proper investigation. The plea also seeks a direction to the ED not to provide a typist, computer and printer to Kejriwal. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener, who was arrested on March 21 and subsequently remanded to the ED custody by a Delhi court, faces allegations of direct involvement in a conspiracy related to the formulation of the excise policy favouring specific individuals. Kejriwal was on Monday sent to judicial custody by the trial court till April 15. His petition challenging his arrest is scheduled to be heard by the high court on April 3. In the PIL, the petitioner, who claims to be a social worker, has asserted that Kejriwal has

"virtually forfeited his office" and being in custody, he has disabled himself from performing the duties and responsibilities of a public servant. "The Respondent No. 4 (Kejriwal), while issuing direction/ order being in the custody of Respondent No. 2 (ED), is breaching his oath of secrecy administered to him under the Third Schedule of the Constitution of India as any directions/ orders passed by him would have to be scanned thoroughly by the Respondent No. 2 as they are in charge of the custody of Respondent No. 4," the PIL said. "The inaction by the Respondent Nos. 1-3 (Centre, ED and Delhi government) to restrain Respondent No. 4 from issuing direction/ order while in custody and communicating the said order to Respondent No. 5 (Delhi minister Atishi) is a gross example of abuse of power and position, and merits interference by this court," it has claimed. Earlier, Yadav had filed a separate PIL seeking Kejriwal's removal from the chief minister's post following his arrest and it was rejected by the high court.

SC notice to Principal Secretary for not releasing DJB funds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday issued a notice to Delhi's Principal Secretary (Finance) on a plea of the AAP Government alleging that the official was not releasing funds to the Delhi Jal Board despite approval by the Legislative Assembly. "My civil servants do not listen to me," the counsel representing the Delhi government told a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and added that Rs 1,927 crore is yet to be released for the DJB. Senior lawyer Abhishek Singhvi and advocate Shadan Farasat, appearing for the Delhi government, said the recent amendments in the services law have created a situation where the city bureaucrats do not listen to the ministers and are not complying with the orders. "We will ask the Principal



Secretary (Finance)," said the bench which also comprised Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. The bench did not issue notice to the office of Delhi Lieutenant Governor after taking note of the submissions of senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi that the LG has no role in the disbursement of funds by the finance department of the Delhi government. A day before the plea was listed for hearing in the apex court, the finance secretary released Rs 760 crore on March 31, the Delhi government counsel said and added that the funds were utilised in clearing the pending bills. The Delhi government said a total of Rs 4,578.15 crore has been received by the DJB for financial year 2023-24, inclu-

sive of Rs 760 crore received on March 31 and Rs 1,927 crores was still outstanding. Rohatgi, appearing for the LG office, opposed the hearing in the top court saying that a similar plea was pending adjudication in the Delhi High Court. The Jal Board is a statutory authority and the LG has nothing to do with it, he said. "He has no role to play. It is very strange. Petitioner is the Delhi government through the Minister of Water, who is also the Minister of Planning, also the Chairperson of the Jal Board. She holds all these posts and finance. The real respondent is her own secretary. I don't know what kind of petition this is," Rohatgi submitted. Yet an amount of Rs 1,927 crore, approved by the legislative assembly, remains to be remitted to the DJB, Singhvi replied. Rohatgi said the LG was not

holding any funds and the same had to be released by the Finance Department of the Delhi government. "My Secretaries don't listen to me," Singhvi said. "If your secretaries don't listen to you, what should I do," Rohatgi said. The bench has now posted the matter for hearing on April 5. Earlier on March 20, the Arvind Kejriwal government had moved the top court over the issue in the latest run-in involving the bureaucracy and the AAP dispensation in Delhi. The CJI had assured the AAP government that it can always order the release of funds meant for the DJB even after they lapse on March 31. Singhvi had said that the budget was duly passed and yet the funds meant for the DJB were not being released and it would result in their lapse.

LG inspects Sanjay Van

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi LG Vinai Kumar Saxena, conducted a thorough inspection of Sanjay Van and Mehrauli Archaeological Park in South Delhi on Monday, overseeing the ongoing restoration and beautification efforts spearheaded by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). The deadline for completion has been set before the impending monsoon season. This marks the seventh visit by the LG since his initial inspection of Sanjay Van on February 4, 2023, with his most recent visit occurring on March 4 this year. During his last visit, Saxena instructed DDA officials to commence work on filling the water bodies Anang Tal and Lalkot Baoli Qila Rai Pithora in Sanjay Van. He also directed efforts towards conserving and restor-



ing historical landmarks such as Balban's Tomb, Jamali Kamali Mosque, and Rajon ki Baoli in Mehrauli Archaeological Park, under the supervision of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). These endeavors aim to transform these heritage sites into new public assets for the

Capital, enhancing Delhi's stature as a heritage city. Much of the restoration work at both locations has already been completed, drawing significant foot traffic since October of last year, when Saxena inaugurated the renovated Mehrauli Archaeological Park.

EAM responds to US envoy red line remark on Pannun case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday asserted that India's national security interests are involved in its investigation into the alleged involvement of a Government official in the assassination plot aimed at Khalistani extremist Gurbaj Singh Pannun. "It is something we are investigating as we believe our own national security interests are involved in that investigation," he told reporters, replying to a question about US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti's statement that the involvement of a Government official in an assassination bid on the citizen of another country is an "unacceptable red line". Jaishankar said the US ambassador will say what he feels is the thinking or position of his gov-



about it. At this point, beyond the fact that there is an investigation going on, we have nothing more to say," the external affairs minister said. To a question about Indians getting caught up in the Ukraine conflict after being taken to Russia on job promises, he said India has taken up the matter "very very strongly" with the Russian government. "We are trying to get all these people back to India safely," he said. Last month, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaishwal said several Indians had been "duped" to work with the Russian Army and New Delhi had strongly taken up the matter with Moscow for their early release. He had appealed to Indian nationals to not get "swayed" by offers made by agents for support jobs with the Russian Army, saying it is fraught with danger and risk to life.

ment. "The position of my government is that in this particular case, there has been certain information provided to us which we are investigating," he said, adding that India's own security interest is involved in this. "So, as and when we have something to say on the investigation we would be very glad to speak

Act against Rahul for match fixing remarks: BJP to EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday urged the Election Commission (EC) to take the strictest action against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and issue directions to lodge an FIR against him for his "match-fixing" remarks at an Opposition INDIA bloc rally here a day ago. A BJP delegation comprising Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and BJP national general secretary Arun Singh lodged the complaint against Gandhi with the poll panel, urging it to direct the Congress leader to tender an "unconditional public apology" to the nation and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for levelling "false allegations" against him. Addressing the INDIA bloc's 'Loktantra Bachao' (Save Democracy) rally at the Ramliha Maidan on Sunday, Rahul accused Modi of trying to do "match-fixing" in the Lok Sabha polls and warned that if the BJP wins the election through this endeavour and "changes" the Constitution, then the whole country would be "finished".



The public meeting was aimed at highlighting the issue of "attack on democracy" including the alleged misuse of agencies against opposition leaders in the aftermath of the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and income tax notices to parties. In a memorandum to the Election Commission (EC), the ruling BJP urged the poll panel to take a comprehensive view of

the "design and patterns" of the Congress' misleading campaign and propaganda and its leaders, alleging that they are not only creating disaffection amongst the people but also "habitually and serially" committing electoral offences by violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and "healthy" democratic conventions. Addressing the media after meeting EC officials, Puri said Rahul's comments during the public meeting were "extreme-

ly objectionable" as they were not just in violation of the MCC but could also have serious implications. "Addressing the public meeting yesterday, Rahul Gandhi said this (Lok Sabha polls) is a fixed match. He also said that the central government has deployed its people in the Election Commission. He also raised questions on the credibility of EVMs and said the Constitution will be cancelled (changed) after the elections,"

the Union minister said. "We urged the Election Commission to take the strictest action against Rahul Gandhi, other Congress leaders and those of the opposition INDIA alliance," he added. BJP national general secretary Singh accused Rahul of repeatedly making such comments and said the EC should consider "completely censoring" him from speaking during the Lok Sabha elections as the Congress leader would not stop making such remarks. Sensing their defeat in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Rahul and other leaders of the INDIA bloc are using derogatory words against Prime Minister Modi, the judiciary, the EC and all other institutions out of frustration, the BJP leader charged. "We told the Election Commission that Rahul Gandhi's statement was anti-national and a gross violation of Model Code of Conduct, Indian Penal Code, Election Laws and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act," Singh said.

Opposition slams Centre over Katchatheevu island issue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hitting back at the Centre over the Katchatheevu island issue, Opposition leaders on Monday cited a 2015 RTI reply, which stated that the agreements in 1974 and 1976 did not involve either acquiring or ceding of territory belonging to India, and asked whether the "change" in Modi Government's stance was

"election politics". The Opposition's response came after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday claimed that Prime Ministers from the Congress displayed indifference about Katchatheevu island and gave away Indian fishermen's rights despite legal views to the contrary. Jaishankar's remarks at a press conference were made a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi cited a media report to assert that new facts reveal

that the Congress "callously" gave away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka. Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram hit out at the government over the issue. "Tit for tat is old. Tweet for Tweet is the new weapon. Will Foreign Minister Mr. Jaishankar please refer to the RTI reply dated 27-1-2015... The Reply justified the circumstances under which India acknowledged that a small island belonged to Sri Lanka,"

Chidambaram said. Why is the Foreign Minister and his ministry doing a somersault now, he asked. "How quickly can people change colours. From a suave liberal Foreign Service officer to a smart Foreign Secretary to a mouthpiece of the RSS-BJP, life and times of Mr Jaishankar will be recorded in the annals of acrobatic sports," Chidambaram said. "It is true that fishermen were detained in the last

50 years. Likewise, India has detained many Sri Lankan fishermen. Every government has negotiated with Sri Lanka and freed our fishermen," the former home minister said. "This has happened when Mr Jaishankar was a foreign service officer and when he was Foreign Secretary and when he is Foreign Minister. What has changed for Mr Jaishankar to launch a tirade against the Congress and DMK?" he said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

| Sr. No. | Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address | Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced | Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice | NPA Date |
|---------|--|---|--|------------|
| 1. | Ajay Sharma, Anita Sharma, C-3/206, Janakpuri, Delhi-110058 A/c:- LBDEL00002185998 | Villa No. 4, The Legend Situated At Sector- 57, Sushant Lok- III Gurgaon- 122001 | 06/02/2024 Rs.3,07,79,605.3/- | 03/11/2023 |
| 2. | Mukesh Kumar, Anju Singh, Kps Clinical Services Private Limited, C-5/10 First Floor Beta-1, Greater Noida-201306 A/c:- LBDEL00001916302 | Flat No. K-208, Tower-K, 2nd Floor, Avj Heights, Greater Noida, Noida, Uttar Pradesh | 14/02/2024 Rs.13,69,463.66/- | 14/11/2023 |
| 3. | Puran Singh Baghel, Monika Singh Baghel, 26 G, Pkt-A-3, Mayur Vihar Ph- III, Delhi-110096 A/c:- LBNOD00001361845 | Mig Flat S-2, Second Floor (With Roof Rights), Front Lhs, Plot No-B-83, Blk-B, Shalimar Garden Ext-2, Village Pasonda, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & District Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh- 201010 | 17/02/2024 Rs. 4,55,559.22/- | 09/12/2023 |
| 4. | Gautam Gondwal, Sunita Gondwal, Mig Flat No.455, Pocket A, Sector-17, Dwarka, Phase-2, New Delhi-110075 A/c:- LBDEL00003035494 | Flat No. D-1302, 13th Floor, Tower D, R of Aalayas, Sector-102, Village Dhankot, Gurgaon, Haryana, 122001 | 17/02/2024 Rs.18,95,912.81/- | 03/11/2023 |
| 5. | Praveen Pratap Singh, Sheetal, House No 529 2nd Floor, Orchard Iland, Sector 51, Gurgaon-122001 A/c:- LBDEL00005375230 | Flat/ Apartment No. Ef29-A Ground & First Floor, Primanti, Phase II, Situated At Sector 72 Gurgaon- 122001 | 19/02/2024 Rs. 2,77,92,190.89/- | 08/04/2023 |
| 6. | Rajendra Pratap Singh, Swaita, 2031, Sanskriti Apartment, Plot-35 Sec-10, Dwarka, Delhi- 110075 A/c:- LBDEL00005044535 | Property Bearing No A-20, Front Side/ Northern Side Third Floor With Entire Terrace Naraina Vihar Delhi- 110075 | 19/02/2024 Rs. 4,00,79,290.58/- | 06/12/2022 |
| 7. | Anita Shokeen, Akash Shokeen, B 1 Plot No. 9, Shaman Vihar Cghs, Sector 23 Dwarka, South West Delhi, Delhi-110075, A/c:- LBDEL00005331625/ LBDEL00005164135 | Flat No-B-1, Ground Floor Plot No 9 Sector 23 Shaman Vihar Cghs LTD, Dwarka Delhi- 110075 | 22/02/2024 Rs.12,33,854/- Rs. 97,21,205/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 8. | Anita Singh, Tarun Tilwar, Hela Bajar, Hajipur, Ithk, Near Mahaprabhuji Baitkha, Bihar, Vaishali-844101 A/c:- LBDEL00005182005 | Apartment No. A-302, 3rd Floor, Golden Sands, Block-A, Shankar Nagar, Raipur, Chhatisgarh-492001 (Along With 4 Wheeler Car Parking) | 20/02/2024 Rs. 45,95,915/- | 28/12/2023 |
| 9. | Hind Airstar Private Limited, Samar Qureshi, Kiran Qureshi, M/s Hind Airstar Private Limited, A-1, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase 1, Delhi-110020 A/c:- LBDEL00002025600/ LBDEL00002025599/ LBDEL00002025598 | Unit No. R 203 Nwst3704, 37th Floor, Type-Duplex, Nova West, Situated At SupernoVA, Plot No.03, Sector-94, Noida, UttarPradesh- 201301 | 20/02/2024 Rs. 29,22,169.39/- Rs.1,91,88,079.77/- Rs. 29,56,831.22/- | 09/12/2023 |
| 10. | Alka Singh, Chandra Shekher Singh, E-54A, 3rd Floor, Wishkarma Colony, Pahladpur M B Road, Gauram Stor, Badapur, Delhi-110044, A/c:- LBDEL00004429479 | Flat No. C-1208, 12th Floor, Tower-C, Floridaa Sector-82, Faridabad, Haryana- 121001 | 23/02/2024 Rs. 14,44,613/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 11. | Ashutosh Kumar Dubey, Ramesh Toshniwal, B-996, Second Floor, Gate No-4, Green Field Colony, Faridabad- 121003 A/c:- LBDEL00005362596 | Plot No 124, Sector-B, Part of Khasra No.68/10 & 11, First Floor (Without Roof Rights) Residential Colony, Village Sarai Khawaja, Greenfields Colony, Haryana, Faridabad- 121001 | 23/02/2024 Rs. 25,50,673/- | 09/12/2023 |
| 12. | Sumanta Banerjee, Rakhahari Banerjee, B/134-136, Ambedkar Colony, Street No. 1, Chhattarpur, New Delhi-110074, A/c:- LBGUR00004679201 | Flat No. A-146, Floor-14, Sector-63A, 63A Golf Drive, Affordable Group Housing Colony, Type D, Tower-J, Village Ullahwas, Gurgaon, Haryana- 122001 | 23/02/2024 Rs. 19,15,391.59/- | 14/12/2023 |
| 13. | Mantosh Kumar, Susipta Das, A-1 Third Floor, Kohli Vihar Sector 49 Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida-201301 A/c:- LBNOD00002372711/ LBNOD00005375768 | Flat No. T13-2001, Tower No. 13, 20th Floor, "Exotica Dreamville", Situated At Plot No. Gh-01/A, Sector-16c, Phase- 2nd, Greater Noida District Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Noida- 201307 | 23/02/2024 Rs.22,11,045/- Rs.88,289/- | 09/12/2023 |
| 14. | Tanu, Narendra Kumar, Angel Mercury Apartment, Flat No B-1603, Mall Road, Ahinsa Khand-2 Indrapuram, Ghaziabad-201014 A/c:- LBNOD00005176382 | Flat No-A-1711, 17th Floor, (without Roof Rights), Tower A, KW Srishiti, Khasra No. 1125/1, 1125/2 & 1125/3, Situated At Noor Nagar, Rajnagar Extension, NH-58, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & District Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh 201001 | 29/02/2024 Rs. 21,90,628.62/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 15. | Sushmita Bhowal, Shoumitra Kumar Bhowal, R/o B-181 Ground Floor, D.D.A Market No. 3 Park Aali, South West Delhi, New Delhi-110019 A/c:- LBGUR00004910399 | Flat No-A-31, Situated At Amaya Greens, Sector-3, Farrukh Nagar, Gurgaon, Haryana- 122001 | 29/02/2024 Rs.27,06,436/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 16. | Future U India Limited, Sweety Bansal, Vishal Kumar Bansal, Babita Bansal, Flat No. -202, Block D4, Society-Ireo Victory Valley, Sector 67, Gurgaon-122101 A/c:- TBDEL00006244315 | Plot No.634, Block No.-3, Unit No.na, Ward No. 13,14 Gur Mandi And Luharowali Dharamshala Bhadra Tehsil Bhadra, Hanumangarh, Gora Devi School, Bhadra, Hanumangarh, Bhadra, Rajasthan-335501 | 29/02/2024 Rs. 10,21,078/- | 15/11/2023 |
| 17. | Minhaj Alam, Khatija, House No. 641, Type 2 Sector 6, Postal SB Sector-5 R K Puram, South West, New Delhi-110022 A/c:- LBDEL00005488227/ LBGHZ00005871158 | Flat No. B-505, (Without Roof Rights) 5th Floor, Tower/Block-B, Star Rameshwaram, Situated At Nh-58, Raj Nagar Extension, Village Noor Nagar, Loni, Tehsil And District Ghaziabad- 201001 | 29/02/2024 Rs.26,04,054/- Rs.76,139/- | 07/12/2023 |
| 18. | Vaani Sing, House No. 641, Type 2 Sector 6, Postal SB Sector-5 R K Puram, South West, Delhi-110022 A/c:- LBDEL00005957485/ LBGHZ00005981061 | Flat No. A-1204-A, 12th Floor, Tower A, Mehak Jeevan, Nh-58, Raj Nagar Extension, Tehsil And District Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh- 201001 | 29/02/2024 Rs.15,14,095/- Rs.15,410/- | 30/12/2023 |
| 19. | Shiv Vikram Singh, Bhawna Singh, 266/2 Gali No-1 Block-B, Baba Colony, Burari Delhi Near Sawraj Mandir Delhi-110084 A/c:- LBDEL00005638007 | Flat No-4, 1st Floor, Situated At Sector -36, "Signature Global Park II", Gurgaon Haryana- 122001 | 04/03/2024 Rs. 30,17,922.79/- | 28/12/2023 |
| 20. | Harish Kumar Saini, Savita, Plot No-106/A Khasra No. 73/3, 1st Floor, Block-J, Krishna Nagar, Landmark Goyal Vatika, Delhi-110086, A/c:- LBDEL00004566695 | Flat/ Unit No. J-1203A, Project Name-Mahira Homes, 13th Floor, Tower J, Situated At Sector- 68, Village Badsnahpur, Gurgaon Haryana- 122018 | 04/03/2024 Rs. 18,83,759/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 21. | Meera Agrawal, Santosh Kumar, House No.-1081, Sector-7, Rk Puram New Delhi-110022 A/c:- LBDEL00002018500 | Flat/ Unit No. Le/d-1207 On The 12th Floor, "Luxuria Estate", Situated At Aditya World City, Sector-6, Off NH-24, Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh- 201001 | 04/03/2024 Rs. 4,56,842/- | 09/12/2023 |
| 22. | Deepak Kumar, Rajesh Kumar, Flat 2 Entrance 707, Road 3917, 0339, Namamal/ Umal Hassam Capital, Governorate, Bahrain Governorate A/c:- LBNOD00002121396/ LBNOD00002874984 | Plot No. T-3/C 708, 8th Floor, Tower T3, Situated At Plot No. Sc 01/D-1, Sector 79 "Shubh Kamna Lords", Noida Uttar Pradesh- 201301 | 04/03/2024 Rs.13,67,389/- Rs.73,965/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 23. | Saurav Kumar, Anjali Sehrawat, B 502, Heritage One, Sector 62, Gurgaon-122001, A/c:- LBGUR00003334697 | Apartment No K-1706, 16th Floor, Tower K, Godrej Summit, Sector 104 Gurgaon- 122001 (Along with 2 Car Parking Space). | 06/03/2024 Rs. 1,31,56,563.37/- | 30/04/2021 |
| 24. | Mamta Rajkumar Gupta, Raj Kumar Gupta, 91 Ff, Block -7, Subhash Nagar, Delhi-110018 A/c:- LBDEL00002336412 | Unit No 1603, 16th Floor Tower B-6, Eco Village-2 Situated at Plot No. GH-01 Sector -16 B Greater Noida- 201303 | 06/03/2024 Rs.19,44,791/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 25. | Mamta Rajkumar Gupta, Raj Kumar Gupta, 91 Ff, Block -7, Subhash Nagar, Delhi-110018 A/c:- LBDEL00002336413 | Unit No 1702 17th Floor Tower B7, Eco Village 2 Situated at Plot No GH 01, Sec 16 B, GREATER NOIDA 201303 | 06/03/2024 Rs.21,45,811/- | 04/12/2023 |
| 26. | Sachin Sharma, Flat No. 2042, Block E, 20th Floor Plot No. GC 3D, Galaxy North Avenue 2, Sector 16C, Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida-201308 A/c:- LBGHZ00006052088/ LBGHZ00006118477 | Residential Apartment No- 037, Ground Floor, Tower-9, Dream Homes Constructed on Plot No. GH-6A, Sector 05, Wave City, Ghaziabad- 201010 | 02/03/2024 Rs. 20,43,664.91/- Rs. 1,10,957/- | 06/10/2022 |
| 27. | Mukesh Kumar, Mousam Kumari, H No-92 G Shakti Khandi-I Nr. Mangal Bazar Chowk, Indrapuram, Ghaziabad-201010, A/c:- LBGHZ00002070276/ LBGUR00002040618 | Flat No. D0608, Tower-D, Springview Heights Situated at Crescent ParC Township NH 24 Ghaziabad 201010 | 02/03/2024 Rs.21,79,326.05/- Rs.84,632/- | 11/06/2021 |

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : April 02, 2024 Place : Delhi/NCR Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited



Congress leaders a call away from joining BJP: Himanta

PTI MAJULI (ASSAM) 19. Notably, Majuli is now part of the Jorhat Lok Sabha constituency post-delimitation, where BJP's incumbent MP Topon Kumar Gogoi faces Congress' Gaurav Gogoi, who is the deputy leader of opposition in the outgoing Lok Sabha.



scars as a sign of respect. "If I ask today, all of them will come. The Muslim leaders will come by 2032, and the Hindu leaders will join if I call

opposition party have joined BJP over the last few weeks. Asked about two women Congress MLAs Nandita Das and Sibamoni Bora, who are campaigning for the party candidates, Sarma suggested their willingness to switch sides but noted the limitations on calling everyone.

On the issue of opposition parties fielding candidates against each other despite initial collaboration, Sarma remained unfazed, attributing the electorate's focus solely on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Modi brought peace, development to Northeast: Tripura CM Saha

PTI AGARTALA Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought peace and development to the Northeast by signing as many as 12 accords, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Monday.

BRS is fast collapsing in Telangana, says Kishan

PTI HYDERABAD Alleging that Congress only gave political slogans like 'garibi hatao' and 'roti, kapda aur makaan' without ensuring any change in people's lives, Union Minister G Kishan Reddy on Monday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government worked as per people's aspirations.

either the ruling Congress in the state or the BJP in recent times. Reddy alleged that Telangana suffered due to the mistakes of the father-son duo — former chief minister KCR and K T Rama Rao.

Pappu Yadav says he will file nomination from Purnea

PTI PATNA Former MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav on Monday said he will file his nomination papers for Purnea in Bihar later this week, and urged RJD president Lalu Prasad to forego the Lok Sabha seat for ally Congress.

सर्वजनिक सूचना
एतद्द्वारा सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेरे व्यक्तिगत श्री शैलेन्द्र तिवारी पुत्र: श्री हरिदेव तिवारी पता: म. नं. एच-16/163, आर्य समाज रोड, बापा नगर, करोल बाग, दिल्ली-110005 ने अपने पुत्री: रुचि से उसके द्वारा मेरे व मेरे परिवार के प्रति दुर्यवहार, गलत आचरण तथा हमारी इच्छा के विरुद्ध जाकर विदेशी नामक व्यक्ति से शादी करने के कारणवश हमने रुचि से अपने समस्त पारिवारिक संबंध-विच्छेद कर अपनी समस्त वस्तु अचल संपत्ति से बेदखल कर दिया है। रुचि और उसके पति दिवंगत- से जो भी कोई व्यक्ति भविष्य में लेन-देन व व्यवहार खेगा वह स्वयं ही उसका जिम्मेवार होगा। इससे मेरे व्यक्तिगत को कोई जिम्मेदारी व जवाबदेही नहीं होगी। हस्ता/ अधिकृत मूकेश कुमार Enrol. No. D-7530/2021 Seat. No. 32, P.S. Rathi Block Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-54

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME Sandeep Kumar S/o Shri Raju Singh R/o 18-A, Shiv Vihar West, Vikas Nagar, West Delhi-110059, has changed my name from Sanjeev Kumar to Sandeep Kumar for all future purposes. PD(329)C THANKSGIVING Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine. Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine. PD(328)C

PUBLIC NOTICE It is for general information that I Shiva Kumar Yadav, S/o Malvar Yadav, R/o CB 97 and 97 A, 3rd Floor, Naraina Near Mera Medicos, Ring Road, Naraina Industrial Estate, South West Delhi-110028 declare that name of mine and my father has been wrongly written as Shiva and Sh. Malwan Yadav in my driving License No. P90952003292001. The actual name of mine and my father are Shiva Kumar Yadav and Malvar Yadav respectively which may be amended accordingly.

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mr. Sudhir Kumar Yadav who is purchasing the Property No. 123, area measuring 65 Sq. Mtrs., in Block-F, Sector-27, Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.), from Mr. Ashok Taneja, who is owner of the aforesaid property after demise of his father Mr. Gobind Ram Taneja who is not available. To complete the requirements of BANK/NFDC, we need the financial assistance from Axis Finance Limited. That, original's Surviving Member Certificate (SMC) of Office No. B-938, Second Floor, Opposite SBI Bank, Sector-2, Noida, UP-201301, Contact# 0120-4269379

PUBLIC NOTICE The Jammu & Kashmir Bank Limited IMPAIRED ASSETS PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT Zonal Office Delhi: Plot No. 132-134 Sector 44, Gurgaon (Haryana) India GSTIN: 66AAAD1616712Z E: aspm.dcl@jkbank.com W: www.jkbank.net E-Auction Notice (For Sale of Immovable Hypothecated Vehicle under the SARFAESI Act, 2002) [Refer Proviso to rule 6(2)] Notice is hereby given to the public in general and to the borrowers and guarantors in particular that the below mentioned Vehicle hypothecated to The Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd., Branch Shalimar Bagh Delhi, as security for the credit facility extended in favour of Mr. Mukesh Bansal S/o Late Sh. Vir Bhan Bansal Address: BS-103-A, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088, the possession of which has been taken by the Authorized officer of the bank under Section 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act, will be sold through E-auction on "AS IS WHERE IS" "AS IS WHAT IS" AND "WHAT EVER THERE IS" and "NO COMPLAINT" basis on 04-05-2024, for recovery of Rs. 3,94,111.22/- (Rupees Three Lakhs Ninety Four Thousand One Hundred Eleven and Paise Twenty Two Only) as on 31.03.2024 with interest, cost etc., thereon due to the bank from concerned borrower through its proprietor(s), mortgagee(s) and guarantors viz:- 1. Sh. Mukesh Bansal S/o Late Sh. Vir Bhan Bansal R/o BS-103-A, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088 (Borrower). 2. Smt. Sangeta Bansal (W/o Sh. Mukesh Bansal R/o BS-103-A, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088 (Borrower).

PUBLIC NOTICE Maruti Dzirre ZXI AMT, Registration No: DL1CX9662, Rigid(Passenger Car), Petrol. The minimum Reserve Price for the aforesaid property is Rs. 4.25 lacs (Rupees Four Lacs Twenty Five Thousand Only) and the EMD is Rs. 0.45 Lacs (Rupees Forty Five Thousand Only). The bid document/format containing full details of the property and all the terms and conditions can be had from, and submitted on, the website "http://sarfaesi.auctiontiger.net" (contact person Ram Sharma (M) 9978591888, contact No. 079-86136800/8136837 Mob.: +91 926556221/181 email: support@auctiontiger.net). The bids complete in all respects can be only submitted online by or before 03.05.2024. The time of E-Auction will be 3:00 pm on 04.05.2024. The contact details of bank officials are: Mr. Rajneesh Mahajan (Authorized Officer) Mob: 9967753294 and Ms. Esha Mahajan (Branch Head Shalimar Bagh) Mob No: 9618636369. Email:smbagh@jkbank.com. Sd/- (Mr. Rajneesh Mahajan) Authorized Officer, The J&K Bank Ltd

PUBLIC NOTICE I, Dharam Vir Sharma R/o. WZ-162, Plot No 174, 3rd Floor, Partap Nagar, Hari Nagar South West, Delhi-110064, hereby disown and disinherit my son ANKIT SHARMA (Aadhaar No. 495526591223) from my all movable and immovable properties. That if, anybody will deal with my son Ankit Sharma he will do so on his/her own risk and responsibility and I will not be responsible for any act done. Dharam Vir Sharma

DEBTS RECOVERY APPELLATE TRIBUNAL, ALLAHABAD Ministry of Finance Govt. of India 147-A-58/1, Jawahar Lal Nehru Road, Tagore Town, Allahabad Appeal Diary No. 844 of 2023 Ref. No. 18-01-2024 (Summons to the Parties Through Publication Under Section 20 of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 Read with rule 26 (8) as Amended up to date) ICICI BANK LIMITED ...Applicant VS. SUMIT SINGH NEGI & ORS. ...Respondants To, 1. Sumit Singh Negi S/o. Maheshwar Singh Negi, R/o. House No. G-403, Salik, GMS Road, Aditya Doon Shire, Kanwali, Dehradun- 248 001, Uttarakhand (PAN No. AFAPN4137L). 2. Smt. Pooja Negi W/o. Sh. Sumit Singh Negi R/o. House No. G-403, Salik, GMS Road, Aditya Doon Shire, Kanwali, Dehradun- 248 001, Uttarakhand. (PAN No. AIQPN4730Q) 3. S.A. Bultech Head, Office-A-801, Hind Apartments, Plot No. 12, Sector 5, Dwarka, New Delhi- 110075. Corporate Office:- 93, Rajpur Road, 2nd Floor, Near Mayur Auto, Dehradun- 248 001, Uttarakhand. NOTICE To take notice that appellant has filed an appeal against the order dated 30.01.2023 passed in O.A No. 488 of 2021 by the Debts Recovery Tribunal at Dehradun. The above mentioned appeal has been listed for appearance and further proceeding before Appellate Tribunal at Allahabad on 25/04/2024 at 11.00 A.M. You may appear before this Appellate Tribunal on the date either in person or through legal practitioner duly appoint by you for this purpose. Take notice that in default of your appearance on the date fixed, the appeal will be heard ex-parte. REGISTRAR DEBTS RECOVERY APPELLATE TRIBUNAL ALLAHABAD

PUBLIC NOTICE Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Building, 4th Floor, 228A, A/JC Bose Road, Kolkata- 700020. CIN No: L65190GJ1994PLC021012, www.icicibank.com

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date. Includes entries for Binayak Nayak/Bishnu Charan Nayak and Sudesh Kumar Dhir/Swarnalatha Dhir.

OK PLAY INDIA LIMITED CIN No: L28219HR1988PLC030347 Regd. Office: 17-18, Roz- Ka-Meo Industrial Estate, Tehsil Nuh, District Mewat, Haryana. - 122103 Website: www.okplay.in, Email: info@okplay.in Tel: 01146190000, Fax: 01146190090

NOTICE Pursuant to Regulation 29 read with Regulation 47 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, Notice is hereby given that a Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Company is being rescheduled on Tuesday, the 09th day of April, 2024, to audit and approve, inter - alia, the Audited Financial Results (Standalone and Consolidated) of the Company for the quarter and year ended on 31st March, 2024. For OK PLAY INDIA LIMITED. Sd/- Meenu Goswami Company Secretary Date: 01.04.2024 Place: New Delhi

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date. Includes entry for Anita Singh, Tarun Tilwar, Hela Bajaj.

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 4/10, Mythree Tower, Bommanhalli Hosur Main Road Bangalore- 560068

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date. Includes entry for Shaun Steven/ Faustina Natasha Gomez/ Flat No. 1006 Wembley Estate.

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 4/10, Mythree Tower, Bommanhalli Hosur Main Road Bangalore- 560068

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date. Includes entry for Shaun Steven/ Faustina Natasha Gomez/ Flat No. 1006 Wembley Estate.

EXTENSION OF HOLI SPECIAL TRAINS To clear post Holi rush of passengers, Northern Railway has decided to extend the services of following Holi special trains as per the details given below:-

Table with 6 columns: Train No., From, To, Days to Dep., Notified up to, Extended Date. Lists various Holi special trains like 03239, 03240, 05575, etc.

For detailed information, please call RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit enquiry website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in Visit RailMadad website : www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in & download Railmadad app. Northern Railway Visit us at: www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 4/10, Mythree Tower, Bommanhalli Hosur Main Road Bangalore- 560068

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date. Includes entry for Shaun Steven/ Faustina Natasha Gomez/ Flat No. 1006 Wembley Estate.

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. Date : April 02, 2024 Place : Delhi & Gurgaon Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

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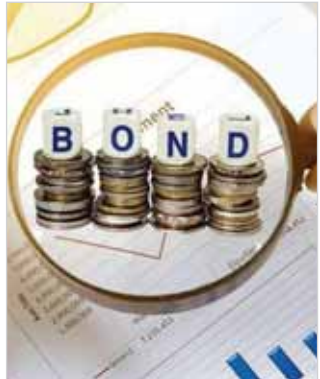
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Dead and buried

The Supreme Court has scrapped the Electoral Bonds scheme, but the controversy refuses to die

The Opposition is labelling the contentious issue of Electoral Bonds usage as "extortion of funds by the BJP" while Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserts that the scheme has facilitated transparency in political funding. Since its inception in 2018, the scheme has been the subject of intense scrutiny and criticism from various quarters. Opposition parties have taken up the cudgels against the Electoral Bonds scheme, alleging that it provides a veil of secrecy to big corporate donors who can channel funds to their preferred political parties without public disclosure. They argue that the lack of transparency undermines the very essence of democracy, as it allows for the unchecked influence of money on politics. Moreover, the Opposition accuses the ruling BJP of benefiting disproportionately from the scheme, alleging that it has turned into a tool for the ruling party to amass funds while sidelining smaller outfits. The recent revelations emanating from the State Bank of India documents fuelled these accusations, suggesting that the BJP has been the major beneficiary of the Electoral Bonds scheme. What is more disconcerting is that there are indications of a quid pro quo between the donors and the BJP. Many people ostensibly were let off the ED hook after buying hefty Electoral Bonds and donating them to the party in power.



In response, Modi has defended the scheme, asserting that it has made the process of political funding more transparent than ever before. He argues that earlier, political donations were made through cash transactions, which opened the doors for corruption and black money. The introduction of Electoral Bonds, according to the Prime Minister, has ensured that the flow of funds is traceable, thereby enhancing accountability and reducing the influence of illicit money in elections. Furthermore, supporters of the Electoral Bond scheme emphasise that it offers a legitimate channel for corporations and individuals to contribute to political parties without fear of reprisal or victimisation. Despite the divergent viewpoints, the issue of Electoral Bonds underscores the broader debate surrounding political finance reform in India. While the Government contends that the scheme promotes transparency and accountability, critics argue that it falls short of these objectives and instead perpetuates opacity and favours the ruling party. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between. Every scheme must be tweaked after it is launched to address the anomalies and loopholes to make it foolproof. Indeed, the Electoral Bonds scheme currently has too many of these and the Government would do well to relaunch it in a new avatar while addressing the lacunas. It remains to be seen whether the Government will ever address the concerns raised by the Opposition and civil society groups or persist with its defence of the controversial scheme. In a democracy, the integrity of electoral processes and the fairness of political competition are paramount, and any measures undertaken in the realm of political finance must be aimed at upholding these principles.

PICTALK



Devotees offer prayers and perform rituals on the occasion of 'Sheetala Saptami', in Bhopal

Global surge in negative campaigning



KALYANI SHANKAR

As election fervour sweeps across 64 countries, including India and the US, a familiar trend emerges: The surge in negative political advertising

It is election season in 64 countries, such as India, the US, the UK and the European Union. Political advertising is increasing worldwide. Political parties and candidates often use negative campaigns to make themselves appear better and their opponents weaker.

Parties have used negative campaigning since the 1828 US presidential race. Historians say the John Quincy Adams/Andrew Jackson contest was the nastiest. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson discredited his opponent, Barry Goldwater, using radio ads, including the "Daisy ad." Donald Trump aired an ad depicting his opponent, Hillary Clinton, collapsing in public during the 2016 US Presidential campaign. In the 2020 election, Presidential candidates Trump and Joe Biden engaged in negative campaigning. Trump criticised Biden's mental abilities, while Biden attacked Trump's handling of COVID-19 and his character. In 2024, too, the negative ads continue.

The Conservative Party portrayed Jeremy Corbyn as a significant security threat during the 2019 UK General Election. In the 2021 German Federal Election, the Social Democratic Party targeted Armin Laschet using images of him laughing while visiting a flood-affected region. Since Prime Minister Modi emerged on the national scene in 2014, the use of technology and ad spending during the election campaign have enormously increased. Leaders are now trained to present themselves, communicate effectively, and make effective speeches. BSP chief Mayawati was told what to wear. Regional leaders have also employed foreign agencies. For instance, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin was told to wear jeans and T-shirts to impress the voters. Late Congress leader Rajiv Gandhi lost the 1989 elections because of hostile campaign slogans like "Galli Galli me shore hair, Rahul Gandhi chor hai." The Bofors scam brought him down. Candidates adopting a "hit first, hit hard, and keep hitting" approach indulge in personal



attacks and fear tactics. Even after ten years of rule, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not stopped blaming Congress for all the country's problems. The Election Commission limits candidates' spending, but many political parties and candidates spend much more than the specified amount. They offer bribes such as phones, cash, and unrealistic promises to win voters' support. One Tamil Nadu independent candidate even promised a trip to the moon and a robot for every homeowner, but he did not win. Advertising for India's 2024 elections may cost between Rs 2000 crore and Rs 13000 crore. There are predictions that political parties and candidates may spend over \$14.4 billion (1.2 trillion rupees) on advertising, twice the amount spent during the 2019 elections. Where do political candidates get their campaign funding? Typically, some wealthy candidates self-finance, while the party spends for others. Parties have no spending limits. However, black money has also entered the fray over time. India's Supreme Court has banned election bonds due to a lack of transparency. BJP received 57 per cent of the sold bonds, amounting to \$1.1 billion, while Congress received only 10 per cent, valued at



IN 2014, NARENDRA MODI TRANSFORMED INTO A STRONG NATIONALIST LEADER BY PROJECTING HIMSELF AS A NATIONAL BRAND

\$188 million. While parties resort to any method to come to power, some campaigns succeed while others fail. The effectiveness of a negative campaign ad depends on its content, context, and the characteristics of the viewers. Prime Minister Vajpayee's 2004 "India Shining" multi-crore campaign is a classic example of a failed campaign. The Congress's 2019 "Chowkidar chor hai" campaign slogan failed, and Rahul Gandhi's attack on Modi on Rafale scam also did not click. However, the Congress party's "Aam Admi" campaign succeeded in the same elections. In 2014, Narendra Modi transformed into a strong nationalist leader by projecting himself as a national brand. He utilised modern technology for mass mobilisation, including 3D rallies, "Chai Pe Charcha," interviews, and campaign visits. YouTube has successfully enabled political parties to advertise using 30-second TV ads and longer online videos. In short, he succeeded in attracting voters with his Congress-bashing. The Aam Admi Party, a new political party, emerged as a strong contender during the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections. They used mohalla campaigns, social media, and a radio ad featuring AAP chief Kejriwal. Today, this party is in

power in both Punjab and Delhi. All parties used negative tactics in the 2019 political campaign. The opposition criticised the BJP's Hindutva-inspired programmes. Still, the saffron Party came back to power with an increased number of seats. Modi is aspiring for a 400-plus tally in the 2024 polls. Last year, the BJP produced an AI-generated video of Modi campaigning. The Congress party mocked the footage, using his digital likeness to counter. The video, portraying a business tycoon attempting to steal resources, has gone viral with over 1.5 million views. Despite the Election Commission's guidelines, the 2024 elections will likely feature more negative campaign tactics. Political parties and candidates should create positive advertisements instead of negative campaigns. This will help to protect democracy and prevent character assassination. One solution is to have the State fund polls, as many Electoral Commissions recommend. It is also essential to maintain decency and decorum in campaigns. This will help create a fair, respectful environment and a level playing field for all candidates. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INADEQUATE FOOD FOR PEOPLE

Madam — Apropos news article, "Quantifying happiness is perplexing" published on March 29, this is my response. Amid hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, poverty and inequality, it is hardly possible for a person to be happy. India's child wasting and child stunting rates are horrific. As per the Union Health Ministry's National Family Health Survey - 5 (2019 - 20) report, the nutrition indicators for children under 5 years show that 1 out of 3 children (35.5 per cent) is a victim of stunting and 1 out of 5 children (19.3 per cent) is a victim of wasting. A study, across 92 low-income and middle-income countries on infants aged between 6 months and 24 months who have not received any food over a 24-hour period which it called Zero-food children (ZFC), has recently been published. For its study on ZFC in India, it used the data from the Union Health Ministry's national family health survey for 2019-21. It is found that in terms of the total number of zero-food children, India is at the top of the list with over 6.7 million infants and the third highest in the world percentage-wise. Instead of finding fault with the happiness index, authorities need to take corrective measures to ensure equitable growth.

Sujit De | Kolkata

SAVING OUR TIGERS

Madam — Apropos news article "Majestic Cats Continue to Perish" published on March 27, this is my response. That Madhya Pradesh accounted for 12 of the 39 tiger deaths does not augur well for its "tiger state of India" tag. India can no longer claim to be the "safest" place for the big cat. The same old story of tiger habitat destruction due to urbanisation continues. However, some of the latest tiger casualties are attributed to territorial fights as 22 tigers succumbed inside the tiger reserves. It is important to remember that any tiger death is attributed to poaching unless proven otherwise. Tigers have lost lives when they have ventured out of their way in search of water

Tribals' tribulations



Apropos news article "Empowering India's tribal communities" published on April 01, this is my response. India's dynamic progress often overshadows the struggles of its indigenous tribal communities. Despite their rich cultural heritage, these communities grapple with deep-rooted challenges, from educational disparities to land rights violations. The Pioneer sheds light on these pressing issues, urging concerted efforts for holistic

development. Educational inequity remains a glaring concern, with tribal literacy rates languishing below the national average. The lack of infrastructure and cultural barriers perpetuate this gap, entrenching cycles of poverty. Land rights violations compound their plight, as development projects encroach upon ancestral lands. Legal safeguards like PESA often prove insufficient, leaving tribes vulnerable to exploitation. However, initiatives like the ITDA model in Andhra Pradesh offer hope, providing holistic interventions that empower communities. Efforts to bolster education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship are paramount. By investing in these sectors and fostering social inclusion, India can uplift its tribal populations, honouring their heritage while securing their future. The Pioneer's spotlight on these issues is commendable, catalysing dialogue and action for a more equitable society.

Khirabdi | Noida

or looking for habitat. The big cats traverse through what is known as "tiger spots" on the highway because tigers need serious demarcation of territories, and crowded highways are impediments to tiger movement. The need for overbridges and underpasses on highways is more pronounced now. Dedicated officers should be put in charge of tiger projects. Increased patrolling, camera traps and conviction rates to pin the poachers are important. Safeguarding ecologically sensitive areas, forests water and grasslands cannot be overlooked. Tiger relocation also has to be prioritised.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

EMBRACING IMPERFECT BEAUTY

Madam — Apropos news article "The quest for perfection: Imperfection and life's beauty" published on April 01, this is my response. Witnessing small moments of imperfection can often lead to profound reflections on the nature of perfection itself. On a recent flight, a seemingly trivial gesture—a wife offering a pillow to her husband—prompted contemplation on soci-

etal norms and personal imperfections. In a world where striving for perfection is often praised, these observations serve as gentle reminders of the beauty found in imperfection. From the intricacies of personal relationships to professional endeavours, the pursuit of perfection can sometimes lead to futile iterations and missed opportunities. As we navigate through life, embracing imperfections can reveal moments of genuine beauty. Whether it's in the spontaneity of nature or the authenticity of human connections, there's a richness to be found in the imperfect. Renowned musician Graham Nash aptly captures this sentiment, reminding us that life's tapestry is woven with both terrifying and incredibly beautiful moments. Perhaps it's in accepting this duality that we can truly make the best of what life offers, opening our hearts to the imperfect beauty that surrounds us.

Sneha Gupta | Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Need more women representation in science

Women aspiring to pursue scientific research often encounter barriers in the form of stereotypes and inadequate mentorship opportunities



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

The underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. Apart from societal bias towards women opting for careers in Science and technology, lack of support from the peer professional group in their workplace is also a severe issue. It is challenging for women to venture into scientific research without the support of the peer community dominated by their male counterparts. In such a scenario, special schemes or initiatives targeting women in scientific research can be beneficial in addressing systemic barriers and inequalities that women may face in STEM fields. These schemes can provide targeted support to increase the participation and advancement of women in these fields.



The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt of India recognises the importance of inclusivity and diversity in driving scientific innovation and progress. To address the underrepresentation of women in the field of Science and Technology (S&T), DST has initiated the 'Women in Science and Engineering-KIRAN (WISE-KIRAN)' scheme. This programme aims to empower women from various backgrounds and walks of life, providing them with opportunities to participate and excel actively in S&T domains. WISE-KIRAN is designed to be a holistic initiative addressing a wide range of challenges women encounter in their scientific journeys. These challenges may include societal stereotypes and biases, limited access to resources and opportunities, lack of mentorship and networking, and work-life balance issues. The scheme offers diverse programmes and interventions to support women at different stages of their scientific careers. These

programmes may include: 1. Educational and training initiatives to encourage girls and young women to pursue S&T subjects and careers. 2. Scholarships, fellowships, and research grants to support women in higher education and research; e.g., WISE-PhD and WISE-PDF. 3. Mentorship programmes to connect aspiring female scientists with established professionals in their field. 4. Capacity-building workshops and skill development programmes to enhance women's scientific expertise and leadership abilities; e.g., WISE Internship in Intellectual Property Rights (WISE-IPR). 5. Networking events and conferences to facilitate collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and career advancement opportunities for women in S&T, e.g., Women International Grant Support (WINGS). Women's Instinct for Developing and Ushering in Scientific Heights & Innovations (WIDUSHI) is a unique initiative from the Government of India to support women scientists on

the verge of retirement and also the women scientists who are not in permanent positions but are active researchers and continuously excelling in the research field. Through the Consolidation of University Research for Innovation and Excellence (CURIE) programme, the DST also supports infrastructure development in Women's Institutions, especially women's universities and post-graduate colleges. It assists women's institutions in setting up cutting-edge research infrastructure to enhance their research capabilities and elevate their research and development (R&D) efforts, ultimately striving for excellence in the Science & Technology (S&T) domain. The DST also supports young girls in igniting interest in STEM disciplines. The Vigyan Jyoti programme presents a crucial avenue for young girls to explore and excel in Science and technology. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

REHABILITATION OF ALCOHOLICS

Alcoholism is a complex interplay of desires, physiology and mental patterns



RAVI VALLURI

This article arose as a result of a debate on the ban of alcohol consumption in some states of the country, which I heard on a podcast recently. Without getting into the merits of the issue, a simple question arose in my mind - can we expatriate thoughts?

An alcoholic's mind is extraordinarily sharp yet deviant despite suffering from this medical malady. An alcoholic will employ all possible means at his disposal to acquire the prized possession - the bottle. Like fish is to water, an alcoholic is to liquor.

The problem can be addressed by getting an alcoholic admitted into a rehabilitation programme, joining the Alcoholics Anonymous, a self-help group; undertaking the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living (where the unique breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya is imparted) or undergoing the Vipassana breathing technique. These techniques can be of help only when the alcoholic acknowledges the problem.

Through grave indulgence of Bacchus and reckless drinking, alcoholics wreak immense damage to all organs of the human body. This is no rocket science and is known to the afflicted. To begin with, the stomach, the pancreas, the liver, the esophagus, the small and large intestine get adversely damaged. Once the gut is affected, it has a debilitating impact on the circulatory and nervous systems. Alcoholics develop heart ailments, problems pertaining to blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis, among others. One organ after the other start failing and collapsing and eventually an alcoholic becomes a vegetable. The alcoholic finally lands up in the ICU or in the grave. The cause of alcoholism is the negative and destructive pattern of thinking.

This is an advisory for all alcoholics and recovering alcoholics (those



who have turned sober through the gift of the Divine) regarding their eating and drinking patterns. Those who get admitted to a rehab or an Ayurvedic clinic fortuitously will be served a regulated diet for proper resuscitation.

There are large, unfortunate numbers who are caught in the vortex of drinking or continue to suffer from relapses. They should begin the day with several glasses of warm lime water laced with honey and not with a cup of coffee/tea. It goes without saying, say a firm 'NO' to drink. Lime water with honey assists in detoxifying the system. Eating fresh fruits for breakfast and not leftovers of the night help in digestion. It is guaranteed that most alcoholics suffer from an irritable bowel syndrome and associated disorders. The fruit should be partaken as an entire meal and should not merely be a supplement. Tamasic and Rajasic intake of food invariably trigger the desire to consume alcohol. However, consumption of Sattvic food will certainly enable to rectify the imbalances present in the body and diminish the craving for alcohol.

There is a tremendous weakening of the immune system of the body of an alcoholic as precious minerals and vitamins get drained out. The resistance levels need to be enhanced through the proper intake of nutritious food. The propensity of an alcoholic falling prey to opportunistic ailments is extortionate. This medical problem can be addressed only by a qualified medical practitioner.

Also, what about the mental problem? Louise L. Hay, in You Can Heal Your Life has identified the probable cause of alcoholism as negative thought processes such as - 'What's the use?'. Feelings of futility, guilt, and self-rejection. According to her, the renewed thought pattern should be - 'I live in the now'. 'Each moment is new'. 'I choose to see my self-worth'. 'I love and approve of myself'.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Checkmating China's chicanery

China's relentless pursuit of dominance in the Asia-Pacific region has led to unease. It is time to call China's bluff and give a befitting reply



ATUL SEHGAL



China is at it continuously. Devising devious designs to disturb and destabilise its neighbouring countries to whet its hegemonic appetite, it has created an atmosphere of unprecedented tension in the Asia Pacific region. In specific countries, picking on individuals and community persons who have Communist mindset and funding, arming and training them to further its hegemonic agenda, it has gravely vitiated the political atmosphere of the Asian subcontinent. The instruments of its nefarious actions extend from veiled cultural and economic intrusion to brazen intimidation through military exercises and gestures. Yes, it has learnt expansionism from none other than the erstwhile hegemonic global powers who have ruled the roost in the twentieth century.

Nations are built on ideologies and sustain on the ideological threads that are drawn from the universalistic divine principles called Dharma. But disbelievers in the divine have always existed in this world. Their original breed was called Naastik (atheists) whose ideological icon was an ancient Indian philosopher called Charvak and members of its modern breed are the Communists. Since they do not believe in any supernatural controlling and regulating power called God and also reject the theory of karmic retribution, they display naked self righteousness. They show no qualms of conscience. Since their numbers have steadily grown in the last few decades, they have become arrogant and supercilious. The ruling Chinese Communist Party, its cohorts and subscribers are an illustrative example of above.

China, under its communist regime, annexed Tibet in 1951 and followed it up in 1962 by usurping 38,000 square kilometres of Indian territory in Ladakh. In recent months, persons have circulated on social media channels like Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram the original map of China showing in distinctive colours the grabbed territories- China occupied Tibet, East



CHINA, UNDER ITS COMMUNIST REGIME, ANNEXED TIBET IN 1951 AND FOLLOWED IT UP IN 1962 BY USURPING 38,000 SQUARE KILOMETRES OF INDIAN TERRITORY IN LADAKH

Turkistan, South Mongolia, Manchuria and Yunnan. And China doesn't stop at it.

It is continuously provoking India either through military build-up across the LAC, intrusion and attempts for encroachment of Indian territory using salami slicing tactics, negative and malicious propaganda against India through its mouthpiece Global Times or by enticing smaller nations in the Indo-China region in its debt trap, installing Communist party regimes in some of these smaller states, establishing military bases in neighbouring smaller states through debt trap diplomacy, cultural infiltration in states as far flung as USA and developing a starkly hegemonic global land route infrastructure for trade called the Belt and Road Initiative - BRI. The recent political manipulations by China in Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka glaringly reveal this.

But Bharat, through astute political and diplomatic counter plays has been successfully checkmating all the sinister moves by China. However, Bharat needs to do much more and with greater prudence and precision, using planning and proactive approach to beat China at its game. The Chinese are following the ideological principles of Sun Tzu which are full of guile, deceit and chicanery. But Bharat's ancient strategy Chanakya Niti is ideologically far superior and powerful, based as it is on the divine principles of eternal Dharma. And, it is heartening to note that the present political dispensation in Bharat is using Chanakya Niti to a good extent to counter the predatory actions of China.

Bharat has a much bigger and broader task to do in keeping with its ancient historical role as the

spiritual torchbearer of the world. It has to first retrieve its territory occupied by China-eastern Ladakh or Aksai Chin and then go on to liberate Tibet. Its long term natural objective should be reintegration of Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and even Pakistan and Afghanistan with it. The following action plan is suggested for achieving its geo political objectives in the Asia Pacific region.

1. Creation of strong national and international media channels for propagation of the facts about pristine cultural and geopolitical glory of Bharat and exposing the propaganda of the colonial and new colonial west about Bharat's past. This and much more needs to be done to propagate the divine, universalistic Vedic culture of Bharat so that our peace and progress promoting ideology can enter the mental space of global citizens.

2. Countering China by following the axioms of Chanakya Niti and Artha Shastra-the ultimate tools of statecraft for progress, prosperity and political empowerment of nations. This means China will be dealt with in a planned, proactive, secretive and deceptive manner befitting it. The strategy will not just be paying it back in the same coin, but surprising and shocking it at every step and thoroughly outwitting it. As long as our approach is anchored to eternal principles of Dharma, we will always be victorious.

3. Bharat needs to spend much more on its defence than at present. Bharat with its current defence outlay of 75 million USD is far behind China with outlay of 222 billion USD. The outlay needs to be doubled by reducing the expenditure on socialistic schemes and doles. R&D in defence needs

to be given a further boost by reviving the critical MSME sector, though some good work has been done in the past few years by involving private sector in defence and by encouraging startups. The MSME part of the economy has not received adequate attention of the present Government so far. Boosting of MSME sector will need more drastic import curbs and bureaucratic and structural reforms which will accelerate the growth of this sector and generate jobs in a big way.

4. Military strength and geopolitical clout are based on economic might. And we need to boost economic growth through educational reforms, agricultural reforms, judicial reforms and bureaucratic reforms. We hope Modi 3.0 envisions them and will complete the half or quarter steps taken in these areas in Modi 1.0 and Modi 2.0 terms.

5. The reintegration of Bharat to form the United Bharat of the distant past will need ironing out of ideological differences between the countries of the Indian subcontinent. This, it is reiterated, is the most important measure. Our Sanatan Vedic ideology has the potential to rationalise and harmonise all other schools of thought because only the former is humanistic and universalistic.

It can reunite the ideologically divided world like nothing else can. We need to make intensive efforts to disseminate our peace promoting philosophy in the current world with raging wars and other peace disrupting processes on. This is the singular most important step that the scholars, sages and politicians of Bharat need to take in the present times.

(The author is a management consultant; views are personal)

Political turmoil in the Capital in the wake of ED arrests

The arrest of Arvind Kejriwal and tax notices issued to Opposition parties stir up both domestic and international disquiet

Political heat is also on the rise with the soaring temperature in Delhi after the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and tax notices to opposition parties. Political development in India has invited criticism from Germany, US and even United Nations, more particularly on the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal who is facing corruption charges and many of his cabinet ministers are already in jail.

Perhaps western powers are still in the colonial hangover and carrying a false sense of superiority believing that they can meddle in the internal affairs of any country. Perhaps it is high time for them to smell the coffee and adjust to the realities of the twenty-first



SHSHANK SAOURAV

century. World is not ready to accept the sermons on democracy from those who have a track record of toppling the democratically elected Governments and siding with autocratic regimes to achieve their own means. Political parties which are part of INDI alliance have received Income Tax (IT) notice and principal opposition party Congress is one of them. IT officials should

show some maturity and issuing notices on merely technical grounds is not going to help the Indian democracy. If the position taken by the IT officials is applied across all assessments, then it would be difficult to find any political party which is fully compliant.

In terms of technical requirements as per the law, section 13A of the IT Act casts a requirement to maintain the detail of every donor (viz name and address) and Section 29C of the Representation of the People's Act, 1951 requires the political party to file these details with the Election Commission of India (ECI). Contribution report filed by all major political parties with the ECI and available on



its website shows that data quality issues persist across the details provided by all the parties. IT authorities need to look beyond what has been submitted in the return filed with ECI and they must be answering the question, if in-substance they are in possession of any information which can establish the donor's credentials. Section

13A of the Income Tax Act, 1961 clearly provides that any donation more than Rs. Two thousand must be received via banking channels and if any political party is compliant with this requirement, then it is for the tax officials to explain what difficulty they are facing in corroborating the details when donations are coming via bank?

As per media reports, communist party of India (CPI) has received IT notice quoting its old income tax PAN in the filing and questions should be asked from tax officials on what was the bonafide intent in sending notice to the assessee? How this error has impacted the cause of transparency and why couldn't CPI be provided

an opportunity to correct this kind of error by updating the PAN?

This country does not need a bureaucracy which goes on unleashed and those who are defending harassment over trivial issues should think from a long-term perspective. Bureaucrats are not answerable to the public but politicians should be conscious of the message which gets disseminated from the actions of babus. Treasurer and office bearers of Congress, CPI or any other political outfit can be criticised for not following appropriate procedures so far as it relates to filing the necessary details or pursuing the income tax notices, or filing an appeal with income tax appellate tribunal but as a democracy we must not give

a free run to bureaucrats to manage the show in accordance with their whims and fancies.

Though people's memory is very short, I would like to remind you of the retrospective amendment done in Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 1976 to bailout both BJP and Congress. In 2014, Delhi high court found both BJP & Congress guilty of receiving foreign contribution in violation of FCRA and therefore the law was amended first in 2016 and applied retrospectively since the inception of FCRA, 1976 via another amendment in 2018. This issue was also technical in nature and the current income tax issue is also technical in nature.

We are the largest democracy in the world and such instances which appear to be over enthusiasm of tax officials to please their bosses is not in a good taste. There are a lot of cases pending with the agencies and they should be told to focus on those rather than bringing new topics for discussion which create unnecessary noise and have no practical value. On a lighter note, now seasoned politicians would have understood how the common man of the country feels when it gets tax notices on frivolous grounds which gets quashed but only after following a prolonged appellate procedure.

(The writer is Chartered Accountant, Author and Public Policy Analyst; views are personal)

Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza's largest hospital

AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

Israel's military withdrew from Gaza's largest hospital early Monday after a two-week raid, in which it said it killed some 200 militants and detained hundreds more. Palestinian residents said the troops left behind several bodies and a vast swath of destruction. The military has described the raid on Shifa Hospital as a major battlefield victory in the nearly six-month war. But it came at a time of mounting frustration in Israel, with tens of thousands protesting against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday and demanding he do more to bring home dozens of hostages held in Gaza. It was the largest anti-government demonstration since the start of the war. The fighting showed that Hamas can still put up resistance even in one of the hardest-hit areas. Israel said it had largely dismantled Hamas in northern Gaza and withdrew thousands of troops late last year, leaving a security vacuum that has made it difficult to deliver desperately needed humanitarian aid. A second shipment of food aid

arrived by sea on Monday in the latest test of a new maritime route from the Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus. One of the three boats could be seen off the coast, and Cyprus' Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos said they had received permission to offload. The precise mechanism of delivery was not yet clear. The military said that among those killed at Shifa were senior Hamas operatives and other militants who had regrouped there after an earlier raid in November, and that it seized weapons and valuable intelligence. The UN health agency said more than 20 patients died and dozens were put at risk during the raid, which brought even further destruction to a hospital that had already largely ceased to function. Bassel al-Hilou said the bodies of seven of his relatives had been found in the wreckage surrounding the hospital. He said they had sought shelter at a neighbour's house after their was bombed, but then another strike hit the home where they were staying. "There was a massacre in my uncle's house," he told The

Associated Press. "The situation was indescribable." It was not yet known how many Palestinian civilians were killed during the raid. The military denied that its forces harmed any civilians inside the compound. Israel has accused Hamas of using hospitals for military purposes and has raided several medical facilities. Health officials in Gaza deny those allegations. Critics accuse the army of recklessly endangering civilians and of decimating a health sector already overwhelmed with war-wounded. Palestinians say Israeli troops forced hundreds of people living near Shifa to evacuate to the south. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top military spokesman, said Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group had established their main northern headquarters inside the hospital. He described days of close-quarters fighting and blamed Hamas for the destruction, saying some fighters had barricaded themselves inside hospital wards while others launched mortar rounds at the compound. Hagari said the troops had arrested some 900 suspected militants during the raid,

including more than 500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters, and seized over USD 3 million in different currencies, as well as weapons. He said the army evacuated more than 200 of the estimated 300 to 350 patients and delivered food, water and medical supplies to the rest. Two Israeli soldiers were killed in the raid along with some 200 militants, the military said. Mohammed Mahdi, who was among hundreds of Palestinians who returned to the area, described a scene of "total destruction." He said several buildings had been burned down and that he had counted six bodies in the area, including two in the hospital courtyard. It was not immediately clear if the bodies around the hospital were the remains of people killed in the raid or those who had died earlier in the war. Another resident, Yahia Abu Auf, said army bulldozers had plowed up a makeshift cemetery in Shifa's courtyard. Video footage circulating online showed heavily damaged and charred buildings, mounds of dirt that had been churned up by bulldozers and patients on

stretchers in darkened corridors. At least 21 patients have died since the raid began, World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus posted late Sunday on X, formerly Twitter. He said over a hundred patients were still inside the compound, including four children and 28 critical patients. He also said there were no diapers, urine bags or water to clean wounds, and that many patients suffered from infected wounds and dehydration. The military had previously raided Shifa in November, after saying Hamas maintained an elaborate command and control centre inside and beneath the compound. It revealed a tunnel running beneath the hospital that led to a few rooms, as well as weapons it said it had confiscated from inside medical buildings, but nothing on the scale of what it had alleged prior to that raid. The war began on October 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage. Israel responded with an air, land and sea offensive that has

killed at least 32,845 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children have made up around two-thirds of those killed. The Israeli military says it has killed over 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence, and blames the civilian death toll on Palestinian militants because they fight in dense residential areas. The war has displaced most of the territory's population and driven a third of its residents to the brink of famine. Northern Gaza, where Shifa is located, has suffered vast destruction and has been largely isolated since October, leading to widespread hunger. The aid ships that arrived Monday are carrying some 400 tons of food and supplies in a shipment organized by the United Arab Emirates and the World Central Kitchen, the charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés. Last month a ship delivered 200 tons of aid in a pilot run. Even as Israel has turned its focus to other parts of Gaza this year, its troops have battled mil-

itants in the north on a number of occasions, and the two weeks of heavy fighting around Shifa highlighted the staying power of the armed groups. Netanyahu has vowed to keep up the offensive until Hamas is destroyed and all of the hostages are freed. He says Israel will soon expand ground operations to the southern city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza's population — have sought refuge. But he faces mounting pressure from Israelis who blame him for the security failures of October 7 and from some families of the hostages who blame him for the failure to reach a deal despite several weeks of talks mediated by the United States, Qatar and Egypt. Allied countries, including main backer the United States, have warned him against an invasion of Rafah. Hamas and other militants are still believed to be holding some 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others, after freeing most of the rest during a cease-fire last November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Shooting in Nashville restaurant kills 1, injures 5

AP ■ NASHVILLE

A man was killed and five other people were injured during a shooting inside a Nashville, Tennessee, restaurant, police said. The shooting around 3 pm on Sunday in Nashville's Salemtown neighbourhood began within minutes of the male suspect's arrival at the restaurant with a woman, police said. The suspect and the man who died got into an argument that "significantly escalated within moments," Metropolitan Nashville Police Department spokesman Don Aaron said during a news conference at the scene. Police later identified the deceased man as Allen Beachem, 33. The conditions of the other victims were not immediately released. Police identified a 46-year-old suspect and the car used to flee the scene with images from security video provided by the restaurant. As a search continued Sunday for the suspect, police posted photos of the shooting scene on social media, including an image of a man pointing a handgun. "The gunman was the only one who brandished a pistol. This was not a shootout, if you will, this was one person who decided to pull a gun based on an altercation occurring with another man and then he fired multiple shots," Aaron said. "There was a panic inside the restaurant as customers tried to escape, Police Commander Anthony McClain said. "Some people did try to resist the gunman," McClain said. "It was just mass chaos." Investigators were at local hospitals Sunday interviewing victims to determine exactly what happened, Aaron said. "It may have been something as simple as one person invading another person's space," he said.

US and Israeli officials to hold talks on Rafah military op dispute

AP ■ WASHINGTON

American and Israeli officials are holding virtual talks Monday to discuss the potential expansion of Israel's war against Hamas to the southern Gaza city of Rafah, a move the US opposes on humanitarian grounds. A US official confirmed the officials would meet by secure video conference on Monday, a week after planned in-person talks were nixed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when the US didn't veto a UN resolution that called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Sunak faces revolt over new homelessness law

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces a potential revolt from within his party ranks over new legislation that is set to criminalise homelessness and hand police powers to crack down on rough sleepers on the country's streets. According to a report in 'The Times' on Monday, several Conservative Party MPs have warned that they will vote against the measures in the Criminal Justice Bill, which is currently going through the House of Commons and set to become law before a general election expected later this year. The proposals, which had been unveiled by former Indian-origin home secretary Suella Braverman, would mean rough sleepers in



England and Wales could be fined as much as 2,500 Pounds or face prison terms. "A lot of colleagues believe that the bill as it stands is completely unacceptable because it

would have the effect of criminalising people who have no choice but to sleep on the streets. We are urging ministers to think again," said Tory MP Bob Blackman, who is also joint secretary of the powerful Conservative backbench 1922 Committee. Former Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith and former deputy prime minister Damian Green are among the other Tory MPs who have signed amendments that would remove the new police powers. Green said he supported Blackman's amendment because it represented "a practical way forward to help people off the streets" rather than criminalising them. "People are not homeless because they want to be. These plans are even worse than the vagrancy act that was first introduced after the Napoleonic wars that this is supposed to be replaced," an unnamed Tory MP was quoted by the newspaper as saying. The Criminal Justice Bill is designed to present the

Conservatives as tough on crime as it prepares for a gruelling general election campaign, with the odds stacked against the governing party due to intense anti-incumbency sentiments. The proposals within the legislation include expanding police powers to test suspects for drugs on arrest and enter premises to search for stolen goods such as mobile phones. It would also give probation officers the power to administer lie-detection tests to sex offenders and terrorists after their release from prison and also increase sentences for some offences. However, ministers are concerned the bill will be overshadowed by controversies such as the homelessness debate. "That's just part of the things we're looking to do in terms of

making sure that people don't sleep on the streets and that's not right, we want to provide the resources for people, housing, improving the number of refugees people can sleep in, and the amount of social housing and affordable housing, which we've done," said UK Business Minister Kevin Hollinrake. Polly Neate, chief executive of the homelessness charity Shelter, stressed that the legislation was unfair. "Instead of punishing people for being homeless, politicians should be trying to prevent them from ending up on the streets. Everyone at risk of sleeping rough should have a right to suitable emergency accommodation, and to end homelessness for good it must invest in genuinely affordable social homes — we need 90,000 a year," she said.

US military says it destroyed Houthi drones over Red Sea in Yemen

AP ■ CAIRO

The US military has said it destroyed one unmanned aerial vehicle in a Houthi rebel-held area of war-ravaged Yemen and another over a crucial shipping route in the Red Sea. It was the latest development in months of tension between the Iran-backed rebels and the US. The drones, which were destroyed Saturday morning, posed a threat to US and coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region, the US Central Command said on Sunday. It said that one drone was destroyed over the Red Sea, while the second was destroyed on the ground as it was prepared to launch. "These actions are necessary to protect

our forces, ensure freedom of navigation, and make international waters safer and more secure for US, coalition, and merchant vessels," CENTCOM said. There was no comment from the Houthi rebels, which control much of Yemen's north and west. The rebels launched a campaign of drone and missile attacks on shipping in the Red Sea in November. They have also fired missiles toward Israel, although those have largely fallen short or been intercepted. The rebels have described their campaign as an effort to pressure Israel to end its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The ships targeted by the Houthis, however, largely have had little or no connection to Israel, the US or other nations involved in the war.

The Houthis have kept up their campaign of attacks despite more than two months of US-led airstrikes. Earlier this month, CENTCOM said its forces also destroyed four unmanned aerial vehicles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. It also said Houthis fired four anti-ship ballistic missiles toward the Red Sea, but no injuries or damages were reported by US, coalition or commercial ships. The escalation in the Red Sea and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza impacted the UN-led efforts to relaunch political talks to end Yemen's yearslong conflict, according to the UN envoy for Yemen. Hans Grundberg told the UN Security Council in mid-March

that he had hoped to reach an agreement on a nationwide cease-fire in Yemen by the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began early in March. He warned that Yemen could be propelled back into war, saying that "the longer the escalatory environment (in the region) continues, the more challenging Yemen's mediation space will become." The war between the Houthis and pro-government forces backed by a coalition of Gulf Arab states has raged since 2014, when the Houthis swept down from the mountains, seized much of northern Yemen and the country's capital, Sanaa, and forced the internationally recognized government to flee into exile to Saudi Arabia.



An attendee flips open a fan while dancing on the street during a march to celebrate International Transgender Day of Visibility, in Lisbon, Portugal on Sunday. AP/PTI

Gmail celebrates its 20th anniversary

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin loved pulling pranks, so much so they began rolling out-landish ideas every April Fools' Day not long after starting their company more than a quarter century ago. One year, Google posted a job opening for a Copernicus research centre on the moon. Another year, the company said it planned to roll out a "scratch and sniff" feature on its search engine. The jokes were so consistently over-the-top that people learned to laugh them off as another example of Google mischief. And that's why Page and Brin decided to unveil something no one would believe was possible 20 years ago on April Fools' Day. It was Gmail, a free service boasting 1 gigabyte of storage per account, an amount that sounds almost pedestrian in an age of one-terabyte iPhones. But it sounded like a preposterous amount of email capacity back then, enough to store about 13,500 emails before running out of space compared to just 30 to 60 emails in the then-leading webmail services run by Yahoo and Microsoft. That translat-

ed into 250 to 500 times more email storage space. Besides the quantum leap in storage, Gmail also came equipped with Google's search technology so users could quickly retrieve a tidbit from an old email, photo or other personal information stored on the service. It also automatically threaded together a string of communications about the same topic so everything flowed together as if it was a single conversation. "The original pitch we put together was all about the three S's — storage, search and speed," said former Google executive Marissa Mayer, who helped design Gmail and other company products before later becoming Yahoo's CEO. It was such a mind-bending concept that shortly after The Associated Press published a story about Gmail late on the afternoon of April Fools' 2004, readers began calling and emailing to inform the news agency it had been duped by Google's pranksters. "That was part of the charm, making a product that people won't believe is real. It kind of changed people's perceptions about the kinds of applications that were possible within a web browser," former Google

engineer Paul Buchheit recalled during a recent AP interview about his efforts to build Gmail. It took three years to do as part of a project called "Caribou" — a reference to a running gag in the Dilbert comic strip. "There was something sort of absurd about the name Caribou, it just made me laugh," said Buchheit, the 23rd employee hired at a company that now employs more than 180,000 people. The AP knew Google wasn't joking about Gmail because an AP reporter had been abruptly asked to come down from San Francisco to the company's Mountain View, California, headquarters to see something that would make the trip worthwhile. After arriving at a still-developing corporate campus that would soon blossom into what became known as the "Googleplex," the AP reporter was ushered into a small office where Page was wearing an impish grin while sitting in front of his laptop computer. Page, then just 31 years old, proceeded to show off Gmail's sleekly designed inbox and demonstrated how quickly it operated within Microsoft's now-retired Explorer web

browser. And he pointed out there was no delete button featured in the main control window because it wouldn't be necessary, given Gmail had so much storage and could be so easily searched. "I think people are really going to like this," Page predicted. As with so many other things, Page was right. Gmail now has an estimated 1.8 billion active accounts — each one now offering 15 gigabytes of free storage bundled with Google Photos and Google Drive. Even though that's 15 times more storage than Gmail initially offered, it's still not enough for many users who rarely see the need to purge their accounts, just as Google hoped. The digital hoarding of email, photos and other content is why Google, Apple and other companies now make money from selling additional storage capacity in their data centres. (In Google's case, it charges anywhere from USD 30 annually for 200 gigabytes of storage to USD 250 annually for 5 terabytes of storage). Gmail's existence is also why other free email services and the internal email accounts that employees use on their jobs offer far more storage than was fathomed 20 years ago.

Baltimore bridge collapse national economic catastrophe: Governor

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Describing the collapse of Francis Scott Key bridge last week as America's "national economic catastrophe", Maryland Governor Wes Moore has said the removal of the wreckage of the bridge and the cargo ship that was mainly manned by an Indian crew is a complex and time-consuming operation. The 2.6km-long, four-lane bridge over the Patapsco River in Baltimore came crashing down after Dali, a 984-foot cargo ship bound for Sri Lanka, collided against it in the early hours of Tuesday. There were eight workers on the bridge at the time. Two survived, two bodies have been found, and four more men are presumed dead. The 22 crew members from India who have remained on the ship, named the Dali, since the disaster, the New York Times reported. "This is not a Baltimore catastrophe, not a Maryland catastrophe. This is a national economic catastrophe," Moore told CNN in an interview on Sunday. Moore said this port is one of



the busiest, most active ports in the country. "So, this is not just going to have an impact on Maryland. This is going to impact the farmers in Kentucky. This is going to impact the auto dealer in Ohio. This is going to impact the restaurant owner in Tennessee," he said. "Whether you're talking about all those various industries, the Port of Baltimore is the largest in the country for all of those things. So, the reason that we need people to move on a

bipartisan basis and move on a fast basis is not because we need you to do Maryland a favour. Maryland needs no favours. We need to make sure that we're moving quickly to get the American economy going again; because the Port of Baltimore is instrumental in our larger economic growth," he said. "This is not just about Maryland's economy. This is something that is impacting the nation's economy. AP

'Alternate channel being prepared'

Baltimore (US): The US Coast Guard is preparing a temporary, alternate channel for commercially essential vessels near the fallen Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, part of a phased approach to opening the main channel leading to the vital port, officials said. Crews have begun the complicated work of removing steel and concrete at the site of the bridge's deadly collapse into the Patapsco River after a freighter collision last week. On Sunday, dive teams surveyed parts of the bridge and checked the ship, and workers in lifts used torches to cut above-water parts of the twisted steel superstructure. The captain of the port is preparing to establish the temporary channel on the north-east side of the main channel. It will have a controlling depth of 11 feet (over 3 metres), a horizontal clearance of 264 feet (80 metres) and a vertical clearance of 96 feet (29 metres), officials said. AP

Court suspends 14-year jail term of Imran, wife

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

TOSHAKHANA CORRUPTION CASE



In a temporary relief to jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan, a high court on Monday suspended the 14-year sentence handed out to him and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana corruption case.

The beleaguered couple were sentenced to 14 years in jail each by an accountability court on January 31 for alleged corruption in state gifts they got from the state depository, days before the general elections. According to the verdict, Khan and Bushra were barred from holding any public office for 10 years and slapped with a fine of Rs 787 million each.

They challenged the conviction in the Islamabad High Court where a two-member bench headed by IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the case. On Monday, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) gave temporary relief to the couple in the case by suspending their sentences and granting them bail in the case.

However, the court announced that their appeals against the conviction would be heard after the Eid festival next month. But Khan may not be released as he is convicted in other cases and cannot be released until absolved from charges in other cases. Similarly, Bushra is also convicted in another case and may not be released after her sentence has been suspended. In the Toshakhana corruption case, the 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician is accused of retaining expensive state gifts they received during

his tenure as Pakistan's premier. Under the rules governing Toshakhana - a Persian word meaning "treasure house" - government officials can keep gifts by paying a price for them but first the gift should be deposited. Khan and his wife either failed to deposit the gift or got it for a low price by allegedly using their authority. The conviction of Khan in the Toshakhana case had come a day after he was sentenced to 10 years in jail in the cipher case on January 30.

Earlier, he was also convicted in a different Toshakhana corruption case in August 2023, leading to his arrest. The latest conviction was based on the charges of misusing his authority as prime minister to retain gifts he or his spouse got during his tenure. It was filed by the National Accountability Bureau. The previous Toshakhana graft case was filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan in the charges of hiring the sale of state gifts. Khan so far has been convicted

Pak SC to hear case about 'interference in judicial matters' by intelligence agencies

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

After backlash and criticism, Pakistan's Supreme Court on Monday decided to hear the case about a stunning letter by six high court judges about alleged interference in judicial matters by the country's powerful intelligence agencies. The decision comes after the government on Saturday appointed a one-member commission headed by former chief Supreme Court justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani to hold an inquiry into the allegations levelled by the judges and submit its report in 60 days.

Jilani had, however, declined to head the commission. The government had drawn criticism from the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, as well as senior lawyers who wanted the apex court to use its special suo motu powers to hear the case based on allegations.

After the backlash, the top court set up a seven-member bench to hear the case from Wednesday. It was not clear if the probe commission announced by the government would continue its proceedings or cease to exist.

PTI chief Gohar Khan, whose party had objected to the commission, welcomed the move by the Supreme Court but demanded that the number of judges should be increased. "We support the decision by the court but the number of judges should be increased," he said. On March 26, six

Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges, including justices Mohsin Akhtar Kiyani, Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Babar Sattar, Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Saman Fafat Imtiaz sent a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), urging it to convene a judicial convention over the alleged interference of intelligence agencies in judicial affairs. The SJC is the highest body authorised to take action against judges of high and supreme courts.

In response to the letter, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa on March 28 said that meddling by the executive in the affairs and "judicial workings of judges will not be tolerated" come what may. He said this during a meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Supreme Court in Islamabad. The chief justice and the prime minister had agreed in the meeting to form the inquiry commission. The letter by the IHC judges came days after the apex court declared the removal of former IHC Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui illegal, directing that he may now be considered a retired judge. Siddiqui was sacked on October 11, 2018, by the SJC based on a speech he had delivered weeks ago at the Rawalpindi Bar Association in which he accused the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) — the powerful intelligence agency of the country — of influencing the court proceedings and forming benches of choice.

Voters are unhappy with Erdogan's govt: Experts

AP ■ ISTANBUL



Republican People's Party, or CHP, supporters gather outside the City Hall in Ankara, Sunday.

The Turkish opposition made huge gains in local elections, outperforming President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party and adding to municipalities gained five years ago. Many wonder on Monday if it's a turning point for the country reeling from economic hardship.

The main opposition, the centre-left Republican People's Party, or CHP, kept hold of Istanbul and the capital Ankara by wide margins but also added wins in conservative provinces such as Adiyaman in the south.

The party won in 35 of Turkey's 81 provinces — including the country's five most populous cities — while Erdogan's Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party, or AKP, took 24.

Crucially, the CHP took 37.7 per cent of the nationwide vote with nearly all the ballots counted. The AKP secured 35.5 per cent.

The surprise results came just 10 months after the opposition was left divided and demoralized following a defeat in last year's presidential and parliamentary elections.

"It's a huge turning point," Seda Demiralp, a political science professor at Isik University in Istanbul, said. "The CHP is no longer the opposition party in local government now... (Erdogan) is clearly aware that throughout Turkey voters sent a clear message, even in conservative cities. It's unbelievable, it's a huge deal. It's not just about local government, it's about

voters saying they're not happy with the AK Party government." Turnout was around 78 per cent, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency, compared to 87 per cent last year. The results suggested that it was mostly AKP supporters who failed to vote, Demiralp said. Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, director of the German Marshall Fund in Ankara, described the results as unprecedented over Erdogan's two decades in power.

"We have never seen him lose like this," he said. "Now the CHP is leading the AKP in the polls for the first time... This is a landslide for the CHP because they got more votes than the AKP for the first time." In south-east Turkey, the pro-Kurdish Equality and Democracy Party took 10 provinces while the Erdogan-allied Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, won eight scattered across the country. The New Welfare Party, or YRP, which largely competed

with the AKP over the support of conservative voters, took two provinces. It was the third biggest party in terms of nationwide votes, taking 6.2 per cent. The IYI Party and the Great Unity Party won the remaining two provinces. Following last year's discouraging defeat, some had expected the opposition to perform poorly in Sunday's election. However, a change in leadership in the CHP — from the 75-year-old Kemal Kilicdaroglu to Ozgur Uzel, 49 — appeared to have revitalized the party and paved the way for incumbent CHP mayors and other candidates to secure conclusive victories. Analysts contrasted the strong candidates fielded by the opposition — such as Ekrem Imamoglu in Istanbul and Mansur Yavas in Ankara — to those standing for the AKP, largely overshadowed by Erdogan during the campaign. Imamoglu won by a margin of more than 11 points while Yavas secured a gap of nearly 29 points on his AKP rival.

2 Pak soldiers killed in indiscriminate fire

PTI ■ KARACHI

Dam area on Sunday, officials said.

Unidentified armed men opened indiscriminate fire on a Pakistan Army bomb disposal team near the port city of Gwadar in the restive Balochistan province, killing two soldiers and injuring four others.

The bomb disposal team of the Pakistan Army was busy clearing landmines in the Ankara Dam area of Gwadar district when gunmen opened fire on them on Sunday, the Dawn newspaper reported on Monday.

Two security personnel were killed and four others injured in the attack in the Ankara

investments in Balochistan and accuses China and Pakistan of exploitation of the resource-rich province, a charge rejected by the authorities. On March 24, the BLA also claimed responsibility for an attack on the Gwadar Port Authority Complex. Security forces had killed eight militants of the banned separatist group in the gunfire. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic corridor projects.

Bodies of five Chinese personnel flown to Wuhan

PTI ■ BEIJING

The bodies of five Chinese personnel who were killed in a suicide bomb attack in Pakistan have been flown to Wuhan on a special Pakistani military plane on Monday as Beijing planned to step up security measures to protect hundreds of its workers employed in CPEC projects amid increasing attacks by militants. On March 26, five Chinese nationals, including a woman and their Pakistani driver were killed in a major terrorist attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Thousands of Chinese personnel are working in Pakistan on

several projects under the aegis of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China rushed its investigators to Pakistan last Friday to probe their death as more Chinese firms have stopped work on hydropower projects in the restive north-west region. "Today, the remains of the five Chinese victims who were killed in a terrorist attack on the Dasu project in Pakistan are brought back to China on a Pakistani military plane," the spokesperson of China's Foreign Ministry Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here. Pakistan Prime Minister

Chinese personnel working at the Dasu power project. Pakistan's state-run APP reported that the special plane brought the bodies to the central Chinese city of Wuhan. Pakistan's Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Chaudhry Salik Hussain too travelled in the plane. A special ceremony was held to pay homage to the five deceased personnel, the report said. Earlier the Chinese Defence spokesman, Sr. Col Wu Qian told the media here that the PLA is willing to work with the Pakistan military to enhance its capability of tackling various security risks and challenges, especially the ability to respond to terrorist attacks and jointly safeguard regional peace and stability.

It is not clear yet whether the current joint investigations into the attack will lead to the joint security measures which may lead to the deployment of Chinese security personnel in big numbers. Chinese security experts believe the latest attack is a copy of the July 2021 Dasu terror attack in which nine Chinese nationals and four Pakistani people were killed and there was no breakthrough in the investigations into that attack.

SL oppn leader seeks details of Indian intel pre-warning of 2019 Easter bombings

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sunday bombings to win the polls in the past.

The leader of the opposition in the Sri Lankan Parliament on Monday urged the government to disclose the details of Indian intelligence pre-warning the 2019 Easter bombings.

Sajith Premadasa, the main opposition leader in Parliament, questioned the government on the sequence of the pre-intelligence warnings issued by India ahead of the 2019 coordinated suicide bombings that left 270 persons dead, including 11 Indians. The bombings, carried out by the National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ), a local jihadi group, targeted churches and Colombo star-class hotels.

"Tell us how many times Indian intelligence warned on the attacks, which were the dates when the information was provided? Who had deleted the WhatsApp messages sent by the Indian intelligence counterpart agencies to local intelligence," Premadasa asked. The Indian intelligence had given clear details to the Sri Lankan intelligence on the attacks, Premadasa said. "I asked the government how many probes were carried out and what were their recommendations," Premadasa said, accusing the local intelligence officials of having links with some of the suicide bombers. He accused ousted president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Premadasa's rival in the 2019 presidential elections, of taking advantage of the Easter

Pakistan witnessed as many as 245 incidents of terror attacks and counter-terror operations during the first quarter of 2024, resulting in 432 fatalities and 370 injuries among civilians, security personnel and rebels, according to a think tank report.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan provinces, both bordering Afghanistan, accounted for over 92 per cent of all fatalities and 86 per cent of attacks (including incidents of terrorism and security forces operations) during this period. Individually, the former suffered 51 per cent and the latter 41 per cent of all fatalities in the first quarter of 2024, according to the security report issued by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS).

The attacks led to a significant political change in Sri Lanka. It emerged that the then authorities had ignored prior intelligence on the attack by Indian intelligence agencies. However, the timing of the bombing ahead of the 2019 presidential election was the subject of conspiracy theories which suggested that the Rajapaksa brothers then in opposition had taken political advantage of the attacks. Sirisena, 72, who had denied any knowledge of the attacks, was the president at the time of the attack. Sirisena was accused and found guilty in a special presidential panel he appointed as the country's president. The findings blamed him for inaction on the prior intelligence received on the attacks. Later, he was ordered to pay Sri Lankan Rs 100 million to the relatives of the victims of the attack as compensation. He has so far paid only a part of it.

Pakistan witnessed 245 terror attacks, counter-terror ops this year: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The data indicates that the remaining regions were relatively peaceful, suffering less than 8 per cent of all fatalities. Interestingly, militant organisations claimed responsibility for less than 20 per cent of the total casualties attributed to terrorism in the first quarter of 2024. A new militant group named Jabhat Ansar al-Mahdi Khorasan (JAMK), affiliated with the Gul Bahadur group, has emerged. In addition to the casualties of terrorism and counter-terrorism, there were 64 incidents of sabotage in the country targeting properties of the government, politicians, and private and security properties. In the first quarter, Balochistan recorded a staggering 96 per cent surge in violence, with fatalities jumping to 178 from 91 in the last quarter of 2023. Sindh saw a nearly 47 per

cent rise in violence, though the number of fatalities was very low. However, the regions of KP, Punjab, and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) recorded encouraging decreases in violence by 24 per cent, 85 per cent, and 65 per cent, respectively. Despite a notable decrease in violence observed in GB during the period under review, the GB home minister issued a terror threat alert on March 31, 2024, on the possibility of attacks by the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

The alert came following a suicide attack on a convoy of Chinese engineers in the Shangla district of KP who were working on the Dasu Dam project, resulting in the deaths of five Chinese nationals and a local driver. It's worth noting that last year, GB suffered the highest number of fatalities in

a decade, with 17 lives lost, the report stated.

In the first quarter of the current year, civilians and security forces personnel suffered over 65 per cent (281) of all fatalities in nearly 200 terror attacks, compared to outlaws suffering only 35 per cent (151) in around 48 counter-terror operations. The attacks on security officials and civilians outnumbered the security operations conducted against the outlaws by almost fourfold. Civilians suffered 154 fatalities (36 per cent), which is more than any other category of victims. Compared to the last quarter of 2023, the fatalities of civilians and security officials combined surged by 17 per cent, whereas the fatalities of outlaws, militants, and insurgents combined decreased by almost 15 per cent in the first quarter of 2024.

'Suspects detained in Caucasus linked to Moscow attack'

Moscow (AP): Russia's top security agency said on Monday it has broken up what it called a "terrorist cell" in southern Russia whose members had provided weapons and cash to suspected attackers of the Moscow concert hall.

The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said that on Sunday it detained four suspected members of the cell in the Russian province of Dagestan in the North Caucasus. The agency alleged that the suspects detained in Dagestan were involved in channelling funds and providing weapons to the gunmen who attacked the concert hall on Moscow's western edge on March 22, killing 144 people in the deadliest attack on Russian soil in two decades. "The detained militants directly participated in financing the perpetrators of the March 22 terror attack on the Crocus City Hall in Moscow and providing them with terror means," the FSB said in a statement. It said one of the suspects detained in Dagestan had confessed to personally bringing weapons to the Moscow attackers. The FSB released a video showing one of the suspects saying that they also planned an attack in the city of Kaspysk in Dagestan. It wasn't clear whether the two confessions came from the same person. The agency said the suspects are foreign nationals, without specifying their nationality. The suspected attackers of the Moscow concert hall arrested hours after the March 22 raid are citizens of the Central Asian nation of Tajikistan.

'BRI implementation plan discussed with China for Nepal's dev'

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal and China have made progress in moving forward with the implementation plan of the Beijing-backed Belt and Road Initiative projects in the Himalayan nation, Deputy Prime Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha said here on Monday. Shrestha, who is also the Minister for Foreign Affairs, returned home on Monday, after concluding an eight-day official visit to China from March 25 to April 1.

He held discussions with Chinese officials on matters relating to giving final shape to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Implementation Plan for its actual implementation. "An understanding has already been reached with China regarding the BRI Implementation Plan during

the visit of our Prime Minister to China and talks have moved forward during my visit as per the understanding," he said. Under the BRI, Nepal is free to select development projects as per its choice, he added. Responding to a question, he said "We prefer grant assistance under the BRI but both options including, grant and loan are open and the matter will be discussed later after signing the implementation plan."

The BRI, also referred to as the "New Silk Road", is a 10-year-old project initiated by China for building land and sea infrastructure in multiple countries. Nepal and China signed the BRI framework agreement seven years ago, on May 12, 2017, and the Chinese side forwarded the plan's text at the end of 2019. After the Nepali side expressed serious reserva-

tions about the text, arguing that Nepal is not interested in commercial loans from China, and set several other conditions to accept support under the BRI framework, negotiations over the BRI projects and implementation plan were halted, local media had reported, quoting Nepalese Foreign Ministry officials. "My China visit has been successful in further strengthening mutual respect, goodwill and trust between the two countries," Shrestha told journalists at the Tribhuvan International Airport upon his arrival. "I believe that the visit has played an important role in taking the friendly relations existing between Nepal and China to a new height," he said. "As the Nepal government has already waived visa fees to Chinese tourists coming to the country

Lhasa, the autonomous region of China, said the foreign minister. "To facilitate effective implementation of past understandings reached between Nepal and China in the past, the two sides have agreed to convene regular meetings of existing mechanisms and to make mutual cooperation further dynamic," reads a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry. Nepal and China agreed to discuss various aspects of friendly relations at a higher level regularly and to set up a Joint Commission at the level of Foreign Minister. The Chinese government is also positive to provide necessary capital and technical assistance to Nepal for increasing agricultural productivity, Shrestha said. Both sides have shown interest

in further expanding connectivity between Nepal and China through the expansion of international road network, railway, air-route and electricity transmission lines, he added. "We had a positive discussion on matters relating to the construction of the development corridor among Nepal-Tibet-Chongqing-Sichuan," the foreign minister said. He also requested the Chinese government to make the upcoming Nepal Investment Summit 2024 being held from April 28 to 29 in Kathmandu successful, through maximum participation of Chinese investors in the summit. "I have called Chinese investors to invest in Nepal during a pre-investment summit organised by the Nepalese embassy in Beijing on March 26, 2024," he said.

PM: Growth should be RBI top priority next decade

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The Reserve Bank has to accord "top-most priority" to growth and at the same time focus on trust and stability, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday.
Addressing the inauguration of the event commemorating 90 years of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) here, Modi said the next decade is as important for attaining the goal of developed India as it is for the RBI, which will complete 100 years of existence in 2035.
Modi said as per the "mantra" of the central bank, "The RBI should make fast growth its top-most priority, along with focusing on trust and stability." Since 2016, keeping inflation under check has become the primary goal of the RBI. Often, there are voices who have pitched for additional attention to growth through measures like rate cuts.
The comments come days ahead of the first monetary



policy review of the new fiscal year. Modi said the "reflection" of double-digit inflation rate was not visible in the financial policies earlier, and claimed credit for giving the RBI the rights to take decisions to curb inflation. The six-member monetary policy committee (MPC) has also done some very good work on its mandate over the years, Modi said. The government's efforts,

including delivering on fiscal consolidation and active price monitoring, also helped in the cooling of inflation, he added. Modi said inflation is at a "moderate level", despite the Covid pandemic or the challenges posed by wars in various countries. India followed a path where it took care of both financial prudence concerns and also the requirements of the common man during the pandemic, he said. At a time when many countries of the world are still struggling to come out of the shocks suffered during the pandemic, the Indian economy is creating new records, Modi said. He said balancing inflation control and growth is a unique need for every developing country and urged everybody to study the right monetary tools to wrestle with this challenge. The PM said the RBI can create a model and play a leadership role that will help the broader Global South.

No new change in income tax regime from April 1: Ministry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry on Monday said there is no change in the new income tax regime for individuals for the current fiscal year and individual taxpayers can opt out of the regime at the time of filing their ITR. Clarifying on social media posts claiming certain changes in the new tax regime effective April 1, the ministry said, "There is no new change which is coming in from 01.04.2024." A modified new income tax regime was rolled out from the financial year beginning April 1, 2023, for individuals under which the tax rates are "significantly lower". However, the benefit of various exemptions and deductions (other than standard deduction of Rs 50,000 from salary and Rs 15,000 from family pension) is not available, as in the old regime. "New tax regime is the default tax regime. However, tax payers can choose the tax regime (old or new) that they think is beneficial to them... Option for opting out from the new tax regime is available till



filing of return for the AY 2024-25," the ministry said. Under the new 1-T regime, income of up to Rs 3 lakh is exempt from tax. A 5 per cent tax is levied on income between Rs 3-6 lakh, 10 per cent for income between Rs 6-9 lakh. Income between Rs 9-12 lakh and Rs 12-15 lakh is subject to 15 per cent and 20 per cent tax, respectively. A 30 per cent I-T would be applicable on income above Rs 15 lakh. The new tax regime was set as "a default regime" from 2023-24 and the Assessment Year corresponding to this is AY 2024-25. This can be changed by the taxpayer at the time of filing Income Tax Returns (ITR) by an individual. Eligible persons without any business income will have the option to choose the regime for each financial year. So, they can choose new tax regime in one financial year and old tax regime in another year and vice-versa, the ministry said in a statement. The old tax regime which is still in force and offers a host of deductions and exemptions, exempts income up to Rs 2.5 lakh from taxes. Income from Rs 2.5-5 lakh attracts 5 per cent tax, and 20 per cent for income between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. A 30 per cent tax is levied on income above Rs 10 lakh.



Sensex, Nifty hit record high in intra day trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Stock markets started the new fiscal on a firm note on Monday with benchmark Sensex and Nifty scaling fresh record high levels in intra-day trade before settling in the green, backed by firm trends in Asian markets and foreign fund inflows. Extending its winning momentum to the third day in a row, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 363.20 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 74,014.55. During the day, it zoomed 603.27 points or 0.81 per cent to hit its record intra-day high of 74,254.62. The NSE Nifty climbed 135.10 points or 0.61 per cent to 22,462. During the day, it jumped 203.05 points or 0.90 per cent to

hit the all-time peak of 22,529.95. From the Sensex basket, JSW Steel, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement, NTPC, Larsen & Toubro and HDFC Bank were the major gainers. Titan, Nestle, Bharti Airtel and IndusInd Bank were among the laggards. "The Indian market boarded on a strong trajectory at the onset of the new financial year, with indications pointing towards a continuation of this favourable momentum, in the near term. This confidence is supported by a global rally in expectation of a Fed rate cut in June and a healthy domestic earnings growth forecast in Q4FY24," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services said.

Metal stocks excelled, owing to the swift pace of Chinese PMI data, indicating traction in the economic recovery, Nair added. Among Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the green while Tokyo ended lower. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Thursday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 188.31 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.10 per cent to USD 86.91 a barrel. Equity markets were closed on Friday for Good Friday. In the 2023-24 financial year, the BSE benchmark jumped 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent, while the Nifty soared 4,967.15 points or 28.61 per cent.

Gold surges to all time high of ₹68,420 per 10 gram in Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices surged by Rs 1,070 to hit an all-time high of Rs 68,420 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a rally in the precious metal in global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 67,350 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver prices also jumped by Rs 1,120 to Rs 78,570 per kg. In the previous trade, it had closed at Rs 77,450 per kg. Gold prices touched record levels as the US Federal Reserve is getting closer to cutting interest rates which is adding momentum to a rise in bullion prices. "Additionally,

robust Chinese demand also feeding a rise in the prices of the precious metal," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, the June contract of gold climbed Rs 978 to Rs 68,679 per 10 grams. The May contract of silver rose by Rs 763 to Rs 75,811 per kg. In the overseas markets, spot COMEX gold prices climbed as much as USD 2,265.73 per ounce and last quoted at USD 2,257.10 per ounce. "Gold rises to yet record high above USD 2,280 per ounce in the overseas futures and Rs 69,487 per 10 gm on MCX futures, as better than expected US growth data and sticky inflation above 2.5 per cent



which raises concerns around the expected rate cut at the Fed's June meeting. "The dollar index is seen trading steady as many markets are closed today for Easter holiday," Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG - Commodity & Currency Research at JM Financial Services Ltd, said. Silver was also trading higher at USD 25.13 per ounce. In the previous session, it had closed at USD 24.55 per ounce. "Further, major US data, including manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) to be released on Monday which will provide further direction for the Federal Reserve's monetary policy outlook," Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said.

GST collections hit second highest since roll out

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GST collections in March grew 11.5 per cent to Rs 1.78 lakh crore, buoyed by domestic transactions, the finance ministry said on Monday. The gross GST collection for the last fiscal (April 2023-March 2024) stood at Rs 20.14 lakh crore, 11.7 per cent higher than the mop-up in the preceding fiscal. The average monthly gross collection for FY24 stood at Rs 1.68 lakh crore, exceeding Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the preceding fiscal. "Gross Good and Services Tax (GST) revenue for March 2024 witnessed the second highest collection ever at Rs 1.78 lakh crore, with a 11.5 per cent year-on-year growth. This surge was driven by a significant rise in GST collection from domestic transactions at 17.6 per cent," the ministry said in a statement. The highest-ever GST collection was recorded at Rs 1.87 lakh crore in April 2023. GST revenue net of refunds for March 2024 was Rs 1.65 lakh crore, 18.4 per cent higher over the same period a year ago.

BUSINESS BRIEF



THE COTTAGE SIGNS MOU WITH NCHHD
The Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India Ltd (popularly known as the Cottage) and National Council for Handloom and Handicraft Development (NCHHD) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on March 27, 2024 to facilitate each other's efforts in promotion and development of handicrafts and handloom products across the country. The MOU was signed by Managing Director, Manoj Lal, The Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India Ltd and VP Thakur, Regional Director, Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). Speaking on the occasion, Manoj Lal stated that the cottage is involved in bringing India's artisanal heritage to the world and with this MoU, each month an exclusive State focus exhibition would be held.

ARTOPIAXLA KERMESSE 2024 HELD
ARTOPIAXLA KERMESSE 2024, organised by the Management Education and Research Institute, was filled with a diverse range of engaging events. Renowned singer and songwriter Sukh's live performance on March 30th, 2024, was a significant highlight, adding excitement and vibrancy to the festival. Additionally, stand-up comedian Rajat Chauhan's performance contributed to the festive atmosphere, providing entertainment and laughter for the attendees. The day also featured the DUET DANCE competition, MR & MS LAKERMESSE contest, JUST A MIN event, ART EXHIBITION, COOKWITHOUT FIRE competition, as well as FACE PAINTING and PENCIL SKETCHING events.

SRI LANKA RECOGNISES SRMIST BDS COURSE
Sri Lanka Medical Council — the Statutory Body established for the purpose of protecting health care seekers through ensuring maintenance of academic and professional standards, discipline, and ethical practice by the medical fraternity in Sri Lanka — has Accredited and Recognises SRM Kattankulathur Dental College and Hospital to permit students from the Island Nation for the 5-year Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme. A notification from the Sri Lanka Medical Council was passed recently by Dr. H.D.B. Herath, the Council's Registrar. This would now make it possible for students of Sri Lanka to pursue Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme at SRM Kattankulathur Dental College and Hospital.

India poised to fill global demand, supply gap of skilled workers

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With a growing ageing population across most developed nations, India is poised to play an important role in filling the demand-supply gap of skilled workers globally, a senior executive of TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship said. Historically, Indian workers have migrated worldwide, but over the past decade, India has become a favoured destination for hiring skilled workers, experiencing an annual skill rate ranging from 15-20 per cent, largely due to the ageing population in developed nations, TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship Vice President and Business Head Dhriti Prasanna Mahanta told PTI. Going forward, this trend of global mobility of Indian workers is expected to witness 28-30 per cent growth in the next five years, he added. According to reports, India is a young nation with 554 million people falling in the 15-64 years age group, Mahanta said. "The Global Skill Gap Study" by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) showed a growing demand for Indian talent across diverse sectors worldwide and projections indicate significant demand in regions such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Germany, Netherlands, UK, Sweden, Switzerland, Singapore,



Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, Japan, and Malaysia, he added. To address this demand, the Indian International Skilling Centre (IISC) Network aims to foster international workforce mobility, placing 1,00,000 skilled Indian candidates overseas, training 2,50,000 candidates through pre-departure orientation, and certifying 25,000 workers through recognition of prior learning assessment and certification overseas, he added. Moreover, the ongoing labour agreements with countries like Japan and France is also helping India increase its prominence in the global labour market, Mahanta noted. According to the latest data, Saudi Arabia has hired the maximum number of Indians (13,944), followed by Qatar (3,646) and UAE with 2,941 Indian workers. As many as 12,000 people are currently

undergoing training for international mobility, with 2,008 healthcare workers learning foreign languages, including Japanese, Italian and German, he said. Further, in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, there is a high demand for professionals in the healthcare and old age care sectors, he added. "There is a rising demand for construction skills in the GCC and Eastern European countries and almost all countries have a high demand for IT professionals. We are also observing the emerging need for green jobs," he stated. Japan, he said, has introduced 'Specified Skilled Workers' to address the severe labour shortages in the country by accepting foreign human resources with specific expertise and skills. "India and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in January 2021, to implement 'Specified Skilled Worker' between India and Japan," he said. According to the Skill Ministry data, he said, 18,532 individuals are employed in the construction sector overseas, 2,531 in facility management, and 2,410 in mechanical, electrical, and plumbing skills. In addition, 1,607 individuals are working in the healthcare sector across various countries, he added.

Indian firms collect ₹9.41 lakh crore from private placement of bonds in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian companies garnered Rs 9.41 lakh crore through the issuance of bonds on a private placement basis in 2023-24, a surge of 10 per cent from the preceding fiscal amid surge in credit demand. The 2024-25 fiscal is expected to be very robust as companies will continue to raise capital for capex post-election results. "In an unprecedented era of economic development aided by pro-business reforms and macroeconomic stability, India is set to become the third largest economy globally by 2027 and will continue to see strong flows. "In this backdrop, we expect FY25 to also be a very strong year from a primary capital perspective as companies will continue to look to raise capital for capex post-election results," Neha Agarwal, Managing Director & Head of Equity Capital Markets at JM Financial Ltd, said. According to data compiled by Prime Database, the amount raised through debt private placement in 2023-24 stood at Rs 9.41 lakh crore, up 10 per cent from Rs 8.52 lakh crore in 2022-23. This was mobilised by 904 institutions and corporates. In addition, there were 17 debt private placements from real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InVITs) collecting Rs 14,155 crore. The funds were mopped up to strengthen balance sheets, retire existing debt and support working capital requirements. In private placement of bonds, firms or trusts issue securities or bonds to institutional investors to raise capital. Market experts believe private placement has become the preferred and cost-efficient route for fund mobilisation compared to other avenues such as initial public offering (IPO), qualified institutional placement (QIP) and bank loans. The higher fund collection through the route could be due to an increase in credit demand, soaring bank loan rates, and expensive overseas borrowing. The highest mobilisation through debt private placements was by NABARD (Rs 51,855 crore) followed by REC (Rs 48,976 crore) and HDFC (Rs 46,062 crore). Apart from the private placement of corporate bonds, the public bonds market also saw a huge increase with 48 issues raising Rs 20,757 crore in comparison to 32 issues raising Rs 7,444 crore last year. The largest issue was from PFC raising Rs 2,824 crore.

Prestige Estates shares jump nearly eight per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of realty firm Prestige Estates Projects Ltd on Monday jumped nearly 8 per cent as the company raised Rs 2,001 crore from Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and Kotak AIF to develop housing projects across four major cities, as part of its expansion plan. The stock climbed 7.68 per cent to settle at Rs 1,259.80 on the BSE. During the day, it zoomed 8.78 per cent to Rs 1,272.70. At the NSE, the stock jumped 7 per cent to Rs 1,253. In a regulatory filing on Monday, Prestige Group said the company, through its subsidiaries, has entered into a landmark deal with ADIA and Kotak AIF for Rs 2,001 crore (around USD 240 million) to capitalise on growth

opportunities in the residential sector. The fund will be used to develop projects with an estimated revenue potential of Rs 18,000 crore, it added. "This marquee deal not only underscores the confidence of institutional investors in Prestige Group's execution and corporate governance but also reflects our shared commitment to delivering

excellence in real estate development pan-India," Irfan Razack, Chairman & Managing Director of Prestige Group, said. When contacted, Prestige Group CEO Venkat K Narayana said the company has raised this fund in a quasi-equity form and will be used to develop four housing projects in Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Goa and Bengaluru.

Old, new faces in Hockey India 60 women assessment squad

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Veterans like goalkeeper Savita Punia and forward Vandana Katariya made the cut among a host of new faces in Hockey India's jumbo assessment squad of 60 for a seven-day camp starting Monday, at the end of which trials to pick 33 national probables would be conducted. The assessment camp will be held at the Sports Authority of India centre here and selection trials to prune down the squad to 33 for future coaching camps and international exposure tours will be conducted on the April 6 and 7. "The 60-player core group has been shortlisted following the stellar performances at the recently concluded 14th Hockey India Senior Women's National Championship in Pune," Hockey India said in a statement. Hockey India had promised a revamp of the national camp after the team's failure to make the cut for Paris Olympics despite being the hosts of the qualifying tournament earlier this year. "This selection identifies promising talent from across various states

based on their impressive performances throughout the tournament," the HI stated. "These players will now be closely monitored as they vie for a spot in the final 33-member core probables for the Indian Women's Hockey Team," it added. The players will report to women's hockey team coach Ankitha BS, who has been handed the role after Dutch-woman Janneke Schopman resigned from the job citing lack of respect and hostile work environment. HI said Ankitha will hold the position "until such time that a suitable chief coach is appointed." The assessment squad includes goalkeepers Savita, Sonal Minj, Bichu Devi Kharibam, Madhuri Kindo, Bansari Solanki, Promila Kr, and Ramya Kurmapu. Barring Savita and Bichu, all others are new entrants with Uttar Pradesh's Bansari Solanki being touted as a promising talent. The 22-year-old has done well at the junior level and was also a solid performer in the recent nationals for her state. "The 14th Hockey India Senior Women National Championship



proved to be a gold mine. We have picked out the best performers from the teams in the National Championship, irrespective of prior involvement in the national setup," Hockey India High Performance Director Herman Krus said. "Now we have a good mixture of

players who have been around the National Team and players who displayed immense potential. The objective going ahead is to pick the best 33 players for the Indian women's hockey team core probables," he added, referring to about 30 new names who have been picked. The defenders reporting to the camp here will be Udita, Nikki Pradhan, Ropni Kumari, Lalhlunmawii, Preeti, T Suman Devi, Anjana Ddungdung, Nishi Yadav. **Midfielders:** Monika, Sonika, Neha, Mahima Choudhary, Nisha, Jyoti, Salima Tete, Manashri Shedge, Akshata Abaso Dhakale, Lalruatfeli, Marina Lalramnghaki, Prabheena Kaur, Manisha Chauhan, Ishika Chaudhary, Ritanya Sahu, Jyoti Chhatra, Ajmina Kujur, Sujata Kujur, Kruthika Sp, Mahima Tete, Mamta Bhat, Edula Jyothi, Anisha Ddungdung, Bhavna Khade, Maxima Toppo. **Forwards:** Deepika, Sharmila Devi, Navneet Kaur, Deepika Soreng, Sangita Kumari, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal, Lalrindiki, Lalremsiami, Vertika Rawat, Preeti Dubey, Hritika Singh, Mariana Kujur, Mumtaz Khan, Taranpreet Kaur, Baljeet Kaur, Vandana Katariya, Dipi Monika Toppo, Kajal S Atpadkar, Manju Chorsiya.

PLAYERS SELECTED FOR ASSESSMENT CAMP: Goalkeepers: Savita, Sonal Minj, Bichu Devi Kharibam, Madhuri Kindo, Bansari Solanki, Promila Kr, Ramya Kurmapu. Defenders: Udita, Nikki Pradhan, Ropni Kumari, Lalhlunmawii, Preeti, T Suman Devi, Anjana Ddungdung, Nishi Yadav. Midfielders: Monika, Sonika, Neha, Mahima Choudhary, Nisha, Jyoti, Salima Tete, Manashri Shedge, Akshata Abaso Dhakale, Lalruatfeli, Marina Lalramnghaki, Prabheena Kaur, Manisha Chauhan, Ishika Chaudhary, Ritanya Sahu, Jyoti Chhatra, Ajmina Kujur, Sujata Kujur, Kruthika Sp, Mahima Tete, Mamta Bhat, Edula Jyothi, Anisha Ddungdung, Bhavna Khade, Maxima Toppo. Forwards: Deepika, Sharmila Devi, Navneet Kaur, Deepika Soreng, Sangita Kumari, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal, Lalrindiki, Lalremsiami, Vertika Rawat, Preeti Dubey, Hritika Singh, Mariana Kujur, Mumtaz Khan, Taranpreet Kaur, Baljeet Kaur, Vandana Katariya, Dipi Monika Toppo, Kajal S Atpadkar, Manju Chorsiya.

Indians are a long shot in Candidates: Anand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Giving prominence to experience over youthful exuberance, five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand feels the three Indian participants remain far from winning the Candidates chess title, saying they "should first settle into the tournament." The tournament, which will determine the challenger for the next World Championship, will be held in Toronto from April 3-22. The immensely talented R Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi are the three Indians competing in the meet's open category. "The Indians are a long shot. If they can keep the tournament going that's good enough. If a late opportunity presents itself, they can grab it. They should first settle into

the tournament and try to play good games. Let the big decisions come later," said Anand in a webcast published on a popular chess portal. The Indian stalwart was referring to those who have played at this level before. And it is only the first time that all the three have qualified and Anand singled out Gujrathi as someone who could fit on both sides - being experienced as well as a debutante. The opinion is not much divided among the world elite as Anand also felt, like many others, that Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura of the United States are the clear favourites while terming Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia and Alireza Firouzja of France as the unpredictable players of the tournament. According to Grandmaster N



Srinath, one of the country's top trainers, Praggnanandhaa has the best chance among Indians but picked Fabiano Caruana of United States as the clear favourite for the title. Just a few days ahead of the elite event world number one and former world champion Magnus Carlsen said both Caruana and Nakamura have "excellent chances". Carlsen thought that Nepomniachtchi could do well too. The Russian has been a World Championship challenger in the last two attempts but, apart from that, he does not have any great result to boot. Despite that, according to Carlsen, "Ian has enough

pedigree to be among the top contender." The winner of the Candidates will qualify to challenge Ding Liren of China in the next World Championship match. Among Indians, Carlsen singled out Praggnanandhaa as the player to watch out for. "Pragg has his weak moments but he is also very stable psychologically, he will do well," he said. The Norwegian also mentioned Gujrathi's capabilities to win the strongest tournament of his career. Vidit has improved quite a lot especially from a psychological point. "He did poorly at Prague, which is not a good sign, but he has the capacity to win," Carlsen noted. The eight-player double round-robin event will have 14 games in all and the player

with the maximum score will qualify for the world championship battle. It may be recalled that the race to the world championship was opened in 2022 after Carlsen refused to take part in it having won the title five times in a row. Ding Liren and Ian Nepomniachtchi had played the match then, with the Chinese player coming out on top. From the Indian perspective, Anand qualified for the first time in the early 1990s and since then he was part of every World Championship cycle till 2014, when he lost his last world title match to Carlsen. Grandmasters Koneru Humpy and R Vaishali are the two Indians participating in the tournament's ladies section.



National Esports Championships to begin from April 18

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Esports Championships (NESC) will start on April 18, the Esports Federation of India (ESFI) announced on Monday. The NESC will provide a platform for players across India to demonstrate their prowess in DOTA 2 (Open), eFootball (Open), and Counter-Strike 2 in the open and female categories. The online qualifiers, set to commence from April 18, will be played in a double-elimination format. The winners will advance to the regional qualifiers wherein they will compete against the other Asian countries to secure their berth for the global finals of the 16th World Esports Championships (WEC), starting on November 11 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Organised by the International Esports Federation (IESF), the WEC 2024 will witness a total

of 609 teams representing their countries across five game titles - Counter Strike 2 (Open and Female), Dota2, eFootball series, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (Open and Female), and PUBG MOBILE. The tournament will feature a prize pool of USD 1 million to be distributed among the top eight teams in each game title and category for the first time. "After a historic 2023, where India made its debut at the Asian Games 2022, we are excited to embark on a new year of opportunities with the NESC 2024," EFSI President Vinod Tiwari said in a media release. "Last year, we hosted the country's inaugural female CS:GO qualifiers, where the winning team made it all the way to the Asian qualifiers. This time, we anticipate even greater achievements from our country's talented female athletes," he added.



Hayes slams male aggression after clash with Arsenal coach

AP ■ WOLVERHAMPTON (UK)

Emma Hayes, the incoming coach of the U.S. Women's national team, appeared to push Arsenal coach Jonas Eidevall and later complained about "male aggression" after Chelsea's quadruple bid ended with defeat in the Women's English League Cup final. Arsenal won 1-0 in extra time after Stina Blackstenius scored in the 116th minute at Molineux. Hayes appeared to push Eidevall and say something to him as he went to shake her hand after the final whistle. When questioned later, the Chelsea coach said "I'm not down for male aggression on the touchline." Hayes was not happy with what she described as "fronting up with players." "For me that's unacceptable and, yeah, I was disappointed and I told Jonas that. I don't think it's okay to behave like that." There was an exchange between Eidevall and Chelsea player Erin Cuthbert in extra time as Arsenal closed in on victory. "I don't see me as aggressive. She is irresponsible putting that label on it," Eidevall later

said of Hayes' "male aggression" comments. Hayes will take over as U.S. Coach at the end of the season when she will lead the team at the Paris Olympics. She was aiming to complete a quadruple of trophies in her final year at Chelsea, but Blackstenius' goal ensured Arsenal secured the League Cup. Chelsea is second in the Women's Super League - three points behind first-place Manchester City, having played a game fewer. Hayes is also hoping to win the Champions League for the first time after guiding Chelsea to the semifinals, where it will face defending champion Barcelona. Her team has also advanced to the semifinals of the FA Cup and will play Manchester United. The League Cup final was paused after Arsenal's Frida Maanum collapsed off the ball and received medical treatment on the field. Arsenal said later that Maanum was conscious and in a stable condition. "The first thing after the game, we don't care about winning, we care about how it is with Frida and we are so happy that she is doing well," Eidevall said.

Mirabai finishes 3rd in group B of World Cup

PTI ■ PHUKET (THAILAND)

Tokyo Olympics silver-medallist Mirabai Chanu all but qualified for the 2024 Paris Games after she finished third in the women's 49kg Group B event of the IWF World Cup here on Monday. Returning from a six-month injury lay off, Chanu lifted a total of 184kg (81kg+103kg) at the tournament, which is the final and a mandatory qualifier for the Paris Olympics. With the completion of her event, Chanu has fulfilled the criteria for the Paris Olympics, which is participating in two compulsory events and three other qualifiers. The 2017 world champion is currently ranked second in the women's 49kg Olympic Qualification Ranking (OQR) behind China's Jian Huihua. The official announcement for the qualification will come after the conclusion of the World Cup when the OQR will be updated. The top 10 lifters from each weight class will qualify for the Paris Olympics. Chanu, who last competed at the Asian



Games in September where she suffered a hip tendonitis injury, was not at her best, but was able to make five clean lifts. Her lifts in the snatch and clean and jerk sections were nowhere close to her personal best efforts. The 29-year-old has a personal best of 88kg in snatch while she had lifted the

then world record of 119kg in clean and jerk at the Asian Championships in 2021. But given that she is coming off an injury and rehab, Chanu still has time to peak in July and her progress looks good. Chanu will be the lone Indian weightlifter at the Paris Games, which will be her third appearance at the Olympics.

Jaeger wins Houston Open for 1st PGA Tour title

AP ■ HOUSTON

Stephan Jaeger couldn't Shave dreamed up a better scenario for his first PGA Tour victory. He played the final 36 holes with the best player in the world, and he won the Houston Open to earn his first trip to the Masters. "It feels amazing," Jaeger said. Scottie Scheffler couldn't imagine a tougher way for his March winning streak to end - a clutch shot to 5 feet on the final hole, and a birdie putt he thought was good until he looked up and realized it wasn't. "I hit two or three really good shots into 18 to give myself a chance and I feel like I made the putt and I looked up and it was breaking off," Scheffler said. "So a bit disappointing, but Stephan played great this week and he's a deserving champion." Jaeger closed with nine straight pars, and that was just enough for a 3-under 67 to finally win in his 135th attempt on the PGA Tour. Jaeger was preparing for a playoff after narrowly missing a 20-foot birdie putt that would have assured the victory. But then Scheffler, who gave himself three good



looks down the stretch, saw his putt burn the left edge of the cup. "I expected him to make it, and I'm not mad at him for missing it," Jaeger said. Scheffler was trying to become the first player in seven years to win three straight starts on the PGA Tour, and he was right there with a chance. Two shots behind, he had a 20-foot eagle putt on the par-5 16th and settled for birdie. He missed from 12 feet for birdie on the 17th, and stayed alive when Jaeger missed from 7 feet on the reachable par-4 17th. His last chance was from 5 feet. "It would be one thing if I pulled it or something like that," Scheffler said. "I just misread it. I don't know why I misread it, it's part of the game. Maybe I could have hit it with some more speed, I felt like I hit a nice putt kind of how I wanted to, just didn't go." Jaeger, a 34-year-old German who came to high school in Tennessee when he was 16, earned his first trip to the Masters with the victory. He also is in the remaining four \$20 million signature events this season.

Alejandro Tosti had a chance to become the fourth PGA Tour rookie to win this early in the year. He was tied for the lead until chipping too strong on the 18th and missing the 18-foot par putt for a 68. There was a five-way tie for the lead at the start - and eight players had at least

a share of the lead at some point during the round. Jaeger was always in the mix, taking the lead with an 8-foot birdie putt on the par-3 ninth hole at Memorial Park. That was his last birdie of the day, and no one could beat him. "I was just tried to stay within myself," Jaeger said. "Birdies eluded me on the back nine. But this golf course plays

with his birdie on the downwind 16th, where Jaeger had to lay up and settle for par. Scheffler and Jaeger both missed good birdie chances on the 17th, and Scheffler had one last chance on the 18th. Jaeger finished at 12-under 268 and cracks the top 50 in the world ranking for the first time. "I couldn't have dreamed up a better week," Jaeger said. "Playing Scottie last couple days, he's been on a tear, so to kind of slay the dragon a little bit this week was amazing. He's such a good dude, such a good player, I was just happy to play with him a couple days." Defending champion Tony Finau closed with two straight birdies for a 66 and joined Scheffler, Tosti, Detry and Moore in a tie for second. This was the final week for players to move into the top 50 and earn a Masters invitation, and no one from outside the top 50 - Mackenzie Hughes and Tom Hoge had the best chances - did well enough to earn a spot. Byeong Hun An is the only player from the top 50 added to the field for the Masters, which now includes Jaeger.



DHONI WILL BAT HIGHER ONLY IF GAME IS ON THE LINE: CLARKE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Calls for Mahendra Singh Dhoni batting higher up the order have grown after his whirlwind effort against Delhi Capitals but Michael Clarke feels the former Chennai Super Kings captain will continue to bat at no.8 and will only promote himself if the game "is on the line". Dhoni's unbeaten 37 off 16 balls at number eight did not prove to be enough but his loyal fans believe the outcome would have been different had he batted higher up the order. Clarke, who like Dhoni is a World Cup-winning captain, said the Indian legend will continue to perform the finisher's role. "I don't think he will. I think he'll stay where he is. I think every MS Dhoni fan wants to see him as high up the order as possible. We've all said throughout his career, he should open the batting," Clarke told Star Sports. "But look, he's at a stage of his career where he's down from the captaincy. I don't think he'll come up the order. I think if there's a game on the line and he needs to go up the order because it's what's best for the team, I'm sure he will."



Dhoni's cameo against the Delhi Capitals included a thundering six over extra-cover before he unleashed a one handed maximum over mid-wicket in the 20th over. The 42-year-old, who last played for India in 2019, had undergone a knee surgery last year. "...Just because he's hitting the ball so well, I don't think you'll see him batting in the top five or top six. I think he's a genius at the dance. He's probably the best finisher I've ever seen. So, I think they'll continue to utilize him in that role," said Clarke. Steve Smith, who has also captained Australia, said Dhoni at higher than number eight could benefit CSK. "Let's get him up the order. I think he did not miss the middle of the bat tonight. That was just incredible to witness. I think Jadeja, throughout the other end, was actually struggling to find the middle. "They bowled really well to him but MS got there on strike. Obviously, in his first ball to the boundary and then from there, he just barely missed the middle of the bat. It was great to watch and I think the fans want to see him getting up the order and keep doing it more often," said Smith.



You are not a true human being if you are not inspired by Pant: Watson

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

If Rishabh Pant's journey from a near death car accident to hitting one handed sixes in a space of 15 months does not inspire someone then they are probably "not true human beings", feels former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson. The 26-year-old returned to competitive cricket in this IPL after recovering from a horrifying car crash in December 2022. The flamboyant batter had suffered multiple injuries, which required a major knee surgery and an extensive rehabilitation. After two scratchy innings in the opening two games, Pant gave a glimpse of his

devastating best as he hammered four boundaries and three maximums, including his trademark hand-off-the-bat six, to notch his maiden fifty of the season. "You're not a true human being if you're not inspired by Rishabh Pant, the way he was able to come out and turn it on like that. It took him a little while to find his feet but once he let those shackles off, he played some 'Rishabh Pant' shots, and they were extraordinary. His knock helped Delhi

Capitals register a 20-run win, their maiden victory of the season, over defending champions Chennai Super Kings in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. "It really was something special. I thought it might take him a few games, if not towards the backend of the IPL, to be able to play an innings like that. Watson, who worked with Pant during his stint at Delhi Capitals' assistant coach added "But knowing him, that doesn't surprise me. He's so desperate to be the best he possibly can, and that showed tonight." It was Pant's resilience and mental strength that helped him make an early recovery.

Faltering RCB eye collective improvement

PTI ■ BENGALURU

An inconsistent Royal Challengers Bengaluru would be eager to hit the turnaround button when they host Lucknow Super Giants, who will keep an eye on regular skipper KL Rahul's fitness, in the IPL here on Tuesday. The Royal Challengers are currently eighth on the table with two points from three matches, and alarmingly, their net run rate too has dipped to -0.71 after a heavy defeat against Kolkata Knight Riders here last week. This is not to undermine the side under Faf du Plessis, who himself is struggling for big runs, but its ability to dish out consistent cricket is a matter of debate at this point. Several reasons are there for that overbearing feeling. It starts with the RCB batting line-up in which Virat Kohli is the only consistent with two fifties from three matches.

But Du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Rajat Patidar and Cameron Green, who constitute the cream of RCB's top and middle-order, have so far made up for a faltering coalition. The quartet's collective returns from three matches stand at — Du Plessis (46, Avg: 15.33), Maxwell (31, Avg: 10.33), Green (54, Avg: 18) and Patidar (21, Avg: 7), and terming them underwhelming is an understatement. It meant that RCB had to often rely on their late-order batters like Dinesh Karthik, Anuj Rawat and Mahipal Lomror to add meat to the total. In that context, the RCB might give a break to Patidar for this game and bring in someone like Suyash Prabhudessai, who can also roll his arm for an over or two. The senior batters' struggles have percolated to their bowling department too. Mohammed Siraj offers the most glaring example.

The lead pacer has taken just two wickets in three matches, conceding 10 runs an over and he needs to step up immediately. Siraj's lack of bite has robbed RCB of a chance to take some early wickets in the Power Play and put the opposition under pressure, something he had done quite consistently during IPL 2023. The situation has turned even grimmer as Siraj's new-ball partner Alzarri Joseph, RCB's Rs 11.5 crore buy in the auction, has been totally rulerless, taking a solitary wicket and leaking 9.4 runs per over. So, the hosts might ponder the inclusion of either Reece Topley or Lockie Ferguson against Lucknow in place of the West Indian. The spin unit of RCB offers an even more bewildering view as none among Glenn Maxwell, Karn Sharma and Mayank Dagar, the most impressive of the lot, have bowled their full



quota of four overs in any of the three previous matches. In fact, Maxwell's off-spin was not even employed in their last match against the Knight

Riders. To make matters worse, they don't have many reliable choices in the dugout too. **RAHUL UNDER SCANNER:**

On the other hand, the Super Giants have their own set of worries as the fitness of regular captain Rahul, who came in as an Impact Sub in their 21-run

win over Punjab Kings, will be closely monitored. Will the LSG continue to use Rahul as an impact player with Nicholas Pooran wearing the captain's armband or will he return to his normal three-in-one role of skipper, batter and wicketkeeper? We will have to wait for the answer. Be that as it may, the Lucknow side, the whole of the Indian cricket ecosystem too, will be delighted to see the emergence of Mayank Yadav, a fast bowler who can effortlessly touch 150 clicks. But the 21-year-old Delhi quick will have a different kind of test at Chinnaswamy as compared to the Ekana Stadium, the venue of his IPL debut against Punjab. Here, Mayank will have to nullify a smoother pitch and shorter boundaries but the current form of RCB batters will certainly fill him with the hopes of swelling his tally of wickets.

TEAMS (FROM): Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil, Saurav Chauhan. Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yudhvir Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M. Siddharth, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry, Arshad Khan.



Pant fined ₹12 lakh for slow over rate

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant has copped a Rs 12 lakh fine for maintaining a slow over rate during the IPL game against Chennai Super Kings here. Delhi Capitals pulled off a comfortable 20-run win over defending champions CSK here on Sunday. "Rishabh Pant, the Delhi Capitals captain, has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during their IPL match against Chennai Super Kings," an IPL statement read. "As it was his team's first offence of the season under the

IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over rate offences, Pant was fined Rs 12 lakhs," it added. Openers Prithvi Shaw and David Warner provided a thunderous start to the Capitals before Pant provided the final flurry to post a challenging target with a gutsy fifty. The DC bowlers, especially pacers Khaleel Ahmed and Mukesh Kumar, then rattled the CSK batters and despite veteran Mahendra Singh Dhoni's cracking 16-ball 37 not out, the defending champions suffered their first loss of the season. The win on Sunday was Delhi Capitals' first this season.

Pandya gets booed again

PTI ■ MUMBAI

There was no letup in crowd hostility towards Hardik Pandya with fans booing the Mumbai Indians skipper as he walked out for toss in their IPL match against Rajasthan Royals on Monday, even as chants of 'Rohit... Rohit' reverberated across the Wankhede Stadium. But, with the bat in his hand, Pandya managed to get the crowd on his side, quickly turning the jeers into cheers with half a dozen boundaries during a 21-ball 34, which lifted his team from 20/4 to 76/5 in the 10th over, when his entertaining knock came to an end. In fact, the cheers from around the ground were as loud as any when Pandya smashed his first four, a far cry from the evening's hostile reception. The 29-year-old Pandya, who replaced Rohit as the captain of the Mumbai Indians in the lead-up to the tournament, has already been subjected to crowd's anger over the franchise's decision regarding leadership during the team's previous two away games at Ahmedabad and Hyderabad. Pandya was booed by a section of the crowd before the toss when he was doing rounds of the field as a warm-up exercise. The flamboyant all-rounder was then booed again when his name was announced at the time of the toss, to which Pandya only smiled as loud chants in support of the former Mumbai skipper Rohit filled the venue. The jeers continued as Pandya began speaking after losing the toss to



Rajasthan Royals' skipper Sanju Samson, forcing presenter Sanjay Manjrekar to ask the crowd to "behave". Right at that moment, Rohit, in his training kit, was meeting his former teammate Harbhajan Singh who was at the field as one of the commentators doing the pre-match show. If the relentless booing was not enough, Pandya again found himself at the receiving end of crowd's displeasure, especially from the Sachin Tendulkar stand when he walked out to bat with his team reeling at 20/4 in the fourth over. "The day Hardik wins a game for MI by contributing big, he'll walk into the Wankhede to a hero's welcome!

Wankhede will soon chant 'Navratri maa Daandiya, Wankhede maa Pandya,' said Nish Navalkar, a member of the 'North Stand Gang' at the iconic venue. Additionally, as per officials here, the fans were allowed inside the stadium only after their banners were confiscated due to an election commission directive given to the Mumbai police. However, there was an element of miscommunication as well as misinterpretation since the directive was about not allowing political banners but fans complained on social media about all banners being taken away. There were, nevertheless, a few fans who were able to carry their banners inside.

BCCI invites IPL owners for informal meet in Ahmedabad on April 16

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI has invited owners of the 10 IPL teams for an informal meeting in Ahmedabad on April 16 and there could be discussions on potential increase in auction purse for the franchises and player retention. The meeting will take place on the sidelines of the game between Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium. "The IPL owners have been invited for an informal meeting. There is no set agenda. Since IPL will be into its second month, it will be a good time for all stakeholders to get together," a BCCI official told PTI. Likely discussions could be around the mega auction due later this year, covering player retention and potential increase in the auction purse which currently stands at Rs 100 crore. BCCI secretary Jay Shah, president Roger Binny and IPL chairman Anur Dhumal will attend the meeting. Currently, teams are allowed to retain four players ahead of



every mega auction, which is conducted once in three years and was last held in 2022. The next mega auction will be held ahead of the 2025 edition of the league. The two-month IPL began on March 22 and will end with the final in Chennai on May 26. Qualifier 1 and Eliminator will be held in Ahmedabad on May 21 and May 22 while the Qualifier will be staged in Chennai on May 24. The BCCI had first announced the schedule of the first two weeks before releasing the full line-up of games last week after the dates of the general elections were revealed. The seven-phase elections will begin on April 19 and coincide with the league.