OPINION 6

MONEY 10

Late City Vol.34 Issue 79 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable



WORLD 8

ROHIT BACKED HARDIK, BUMRAH TO HILT: PARTHIV 12 SPORTS

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Delhi World's most Polluted

NEW DELHI

mid growing concerns Aabout worsening air quality, the World Air Quality Report 2023 by Swiss organisation IQAir said India is the third-most polluted country out of 134 countries, with an average annual PM2.5 concentration micrograms per cubic metre Bangladesh (79.9)micrograms per cubic metre) Pakistan micrograms per cubic metre)

According to the report, Delhi has once again been identified as the world's most populated capital city with the poorest air quality; while Bihar's Begusarai emerged as the world's most polluted metropolitan area. The national Capital was

ranked the most polluted Capital city in the world four times on the trot starting in 2018 while Begusarai did not even figure in the 2022 rankings. Reacting to the report, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said the Delhi Government is working on various schemes to curb pollution and the results will be visible soon.

"I have not seen the details of the report and I do not know what time period it has covered. Since 2014, PM10 and PM2.5 levels have been analysed and they have shown a constant decline. In 2022, the average PM10 was 223



and it declined to 219 in 2023. The PM2.5 level increased from 103 in 2022 to 106 in 2023," Rai said.

"We are working on various schemes and the results will most polluted countries in the be seen," he said. The quality of air in 2023 has worsened in India compared to the previous year, when India was ranked eighth in the most polluted list, with an average PM2.5 level of 53.3. Annual average PM2.5 concentrations and historically polluted cities rose slightly in 2023 to 54.4 such as Delhi, India and

μg/ m3 compared to 53.3 micrograms per cubic metre in 2022 and India was ranked as the eighth most polluted country. "All four of 2023's country. world are hosted in this region, including Bangladesh, Tajikistan, and Pakistan. In addition, this region is home to the top 10 most polluted global cities. Included are highly populated

Lahore," the report said. According to a report, nine of the top 10 most polluted cities

are in India, up from six the previous year. Meanwhile, 42 cities in the top 50 are in India, up from 39; and an astounding 83 cities in the top 100 are Indian (up from 63 and 65 in the previous two

Delhi's PM2.5 levels worsened from 89.1 micrograms per cubic metre in 2022 to 92.7 micrograms per cubic metre

in 2023. It came in 6th in the overall list.

Interestingly, Begusarai stood out as the most polluted metropolitan area globally PM2.5 with an average concentration of concentration 118.9 micrograms per cubic metre. The world's most polluted city is Begusarai in the East Indian State of Bihar. Its pollution averaged 118.9 micrograms/cubic meter, 24 times the WHO's safe limit.

Continued on Page 2

Centre gets three weeks to respond to CAA stay petitions

 $\begin{array}{cccc} T^{he} & \text{Supreme Court on} \\ T^{uesday} & \text{asked} & \text{the} \\ \text{Centre to respond within} \end{array}$ three weeks to applications seeking a stay on implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024 till the apex court disposes of the pleas challenging constitutional validity of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

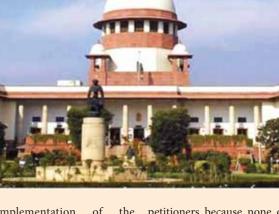
The apex court, however, refused to stay the operation of the rules that would give effect to the CAA, as sought by a battery of senior advocates representing the petitioners.

The Centre, on its part, told the bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud that the CAA does not take away the citizenship of any

person.
The bench, also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, issued notice to the Centre on the 20 applications seeking a stay on the implementation of the Rules returnable within three weeks.

"We are not expressing any prima facie view... We have to hear the petitioners, we have to hear the other side," the bench observed and posted the matter for hearing on April 9.

The Centre had on March 11 paved the way for the



implementation of Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, with the notification of the relevant rules, four years after the contentious law was passed by Parliament to fast-track Indian citizenship undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

During the hearing on Tuesday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said there are over 230 petitions in the matter, and after the rules came into force, 20 applications seeking stay have been filed. 'Just

to satisfy lordships' conscience that there is no prejudice to the

petitioners because none of the petitioners as such are affected parties, not that I am challenging the locus, it (CAA) does not take away citizenship of anyone. The law which they are seeking stay of, does not take away citizenship of any person, Mehta said, while seeking four weeks to respond to the

applications. Senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for the petitioners, said the Centre should make a statement that pending the hearing, no one will be given citizenship. They are entitled to tell us that give us a little time to file a counter. We may give them some time to file responses to the applications," the bench said.

Continued on Page 2

Paras resigns from Union Cabinet after BJP snub

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Pashupati Kumar Paras resigned on Tuesday as he accused the BJP of doing "injustice" by excluding it from the seat-sharing deal with the allies for the Lok Sabha polls in Bihar.

Paras's announcement came at a Press conference a day after the BJP-led NDA announced its seat-sharing pact



did not elaborate about his future plans. The only ally in the Union Cabinet headed by Modi, he called the Prime

Minister a

leader.

The RLIP president said he was thankful to Modi before expressing his displeasure over the treatment meted out to him. Paras said he had served the NDA with honesty and lovalty but received injustice. "Injustice has been meted out to my party and especially me," he said.

Continued on Page 2

Modi reaffirms India's commitment to combating piracy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday reaffirmed India's commitment to fight terrorism and piracy and safeguarding freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean region in response to Bulgarian President's gratitude Indian Navy for re country's ship and citizens in a 40hour long operation over the weekend.

Modi's remarks came in response to a message from Bulgarian Rumen Řadev, President expressing gratitude for the safe return of seven Bulgarian nationals.

On Monday, the Bulgarian President expressed his gratitude to the Indian Navy for successfully

carrying out a rescue operation on the hijacked Bulgarian ship, MV

Modi expressed appreciation for the President of Bulgaria and conveyed India's satisfaction that the seven Bulgarian nationals were safe and would soon be returning home.

"Appreciate vour message dent @PresidentOfl happy that 7 Bulgarian nationals are safe and will be returning home soon. India is committed to protecting freedom of navigation and combating piracy and terrorism in the Indian Ocean region," said the Prime Minister in a post on X.

The "Rouen" ship with eight Bulgarians, nine Myanmarese and one Angolan citizen on board was captured by pirates in the Arabian



Sea in December last year. In an official post on X, the Bulgarian President said, "My PM sincere gratitude to @narendramodi for the brave

action of the Navy rescuing the hijacked Bulgarian ship "Ruen" and its crew, including 7 Bulgarian citizens.

Meanwhile, Bulgaria's Foreign

Minister Mariya Gabriel in a Facebook post said on Saturday that she held a conversation with the Indian Ambassador to Bulgaria Sanjay Rana for the Indian Navy's Operation on MV Ruen and thanked him for rescuing Bulgarian nationals. In a recent post on Facebook,

Bulgaria's Foreign Minister said, Today March 16 with the help of the Indian Navy, the crew of the "Rouen" hijacked on December 14, 2023, including seven Bulgarian citizens, was released?

"Thanks to the efforts of the Indian military, the entire crew of the ship was freed. All sailors are in good health and efforts are currently being made for their timely return to Bulgaria," she

Speaking regarding the incident, she said the ship "Rouen" with eight Bulgarians, nine Myanmar and one Angolan citizen on board was captured by pirates in the Arabian Sea in December last year. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in close cooperation with all competent institutions, the overseas representations of the Republic of Bulgaria in the region and international partners is actively involved in the efforts to release the Bulgarian crew.

On March 16, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a conversation was also held with the Indian Ambassador in Sofia, Ambassador Sanjay Rana and an additional request was made to the Indian side for assistance and to take all possible actions to protect the life and health of the crew.



The Varanasi district court has fixed April 11 for hearing a plea seeking to stop Muslim devotees from walking on top of the Gyanvapi mosque's southern cellar, where the court recently allowed Hindu prayers.
According to the counsel for the Hindu side, Madan Mohan

Yadav, the Muslim side told the court of in-charge district judge Anil Kumar on Tuesday that they were fasting because it was the month of Ramzan. Therefore, they should be given time to present their side,

On this, the court fixed April 11 dismissing

Court to hear Gyanvapi mosque basement plea on April 11

as the date of hearing, he said. The plea filed by the Hindu side has stated that the cellar's roof is very old and weak. It also said the pillars of this basement, also known as 'Vyas Tehkhana', needed repair.

The fresh plea was filed days after the Allahabad High Court said Hindu prayers will continue in the 'Vyas Tehkhana' of the Gyanvapi mosque,

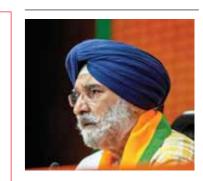


committee's plea that had challenged the district court's

order to this effect. Yadav had said Muslim devotees walking or offering namaz on top of the cellar is not good for the old structure which should be repaired.

On January 31, the district court ruled that a Hindu priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the mosque.

The prayers are now being conducted by a Hindu priest nominated by the Kashi Vishwanath temple trust and the petitioner, who has claimed that his grandfather offered puja in the cellar till December 1993.



Former Indian **Ambassador to US** joins BJP

PNS NEW DELHI

Two big shots, including former Indian Ambassador to the United States Taranjit Singh Sandhu, joined the BJP on Tuesday amid the possibility that he may be fielded in the Lok Sabha polls from Amritsar in Punjab.

Besides in a blow to the JMM and INDIA Bloc, Sita Soren, a three-term MLA and sister-in-law of former Jharkhand Chief Minister

Hemant Soren, quit the party and joined the BJP. Sita's decision to join the BJP is a

shot in the arm for the party's efforts to boost its connect with the Scheduled Tribes, a community that has been the main vote base of the

Experience the Joy of Holi at ISKCON spiritual be celebrated in a very told The Pioneer that the journey.

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Attention Holi revellers! As the festival of riots of colour is round the corner, you don't have to plan to travel to Bankey Bihari Temple in Mathura or to Barsana and Nandgaon in Uttar Pradesh to experience the joyous festivities of 'Phoolon Ki Holi' and the spirited fervour of 'Lath Mar' and 'Matka Phod' Holi, symbols of the eternal love between Radha and Krishna. Instead, get ready to immerse yourself in the vibrant spirit of festival of Dwarka Sri Gaur Prabhuji

colours at the heart of the national Capital in Dwarka at the ISKCON temple which has curated a delightful array of festivities

— from the mesmerising 'Phoolon Ki Holi' to the spirited 'Lath Maar' and 'Matka Phod' Holi, all the traditions vibrant symbolising the eternal love between Radha and Krishna coming alive under one roof

on March 25. Thus, offering a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage and traditions associated with the auspicious occasion. Vice president of ISKCON



the Holika Dahan is being celebrated with great pomp and deep devotion on March 25 in Shri Shri Rukmini Dwarkadheesh Temple.
"Not only flower Holi, lathmar Holi, matka phod

much-awaited festival of Holi on March 25, a day after

Holi have been lined up but many colourful programmes are being organised here. Thousands of devotees will come to the temple, to have darshan of the Lord and celebrate Holi together," he

At ISKCON Dwarka, Holi isn't just a festival; it's a

'Phoolon Ki Holi' will transform the traditional splashes of colour into a delicate dance of fragrant flowers, filling the air with their sweet aroma. Similarly, Lath Maar Holi will be played amidst the laughter and joy with devotees coming together to honour the eternal bond between

Radha and Krishna. Prabhuji said lakhs of dishes will be offered throughout

the day. 250 kilograms of cake will be offered to the Lord and distributed among the devotees, he said. At ISKCON Dwarka Holi will

and feel divine bliss," said Prabhuji. Anjana Cashyap, a resident of Mayur Vihar Phase 2, Delhi is already excited and has made plans to be at the

sattvik and beautiful manner in which there will be joy

and also festivities around

"We want all the residents to

come here to the temple and

play Holi with each other

Lord Shri Krishna.

festival being celebrated at the Iskon Temple.

Continued on Page 2

and Lord with flowers, take part in different festivities, have soul touching prasad

Continued on Page 2

support to Congress on LS seats

In a major setback to the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) on Tuesday distanced itself from the MVA as an entity but the MVA as an entity, but offered to support seven Congress candidates in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Two days after he shared a platform with the Opposition INDIA bloc leaders at the public rally held at the Shivaji Park in north-central Mumbai, VBA President Prakash Ambedkar shot off a letter to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and made an offer to the latter as a "gesture of good-

in the future" Maintaining that the VBA had lost its faith in both Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and Sharad Pawar-led NCP - which are two other constituents of the Opposition alliance, Ambedkar claimed that the MVA leaders "have been meet-

will and "extension of a friend-

ly hand for a possible alliance



ing continuously" without inviting VBA an discussions or

'The Shiv Sena (UBT) and Nationalist Congress Party (SP) have refused to listen to VBA's representatives in the numerous MVA meetings and we have lost faith in both of these parties due to their unequal attitude towards VBA in the MVA," Ambedkar said.

Ambedkar, who is the grandson of late B R Ambedkar, said that his party's agenda remained the same – "to unseat the fascist, divisive, undemocratic BJP-RSS government".

"With this thought, I have decided to lend VBA's full support to the Indian National Congress on 7 seats in Maharashtra," he said.

Ambedkar urged Kharge to provide him the list of 7 constituencies selected by the Congress from the quota given by the MVA. "Our party will lend our complete ground and strategic support to the candidates of your party on the seven seats of your choice," the VBA chief said.

"This proposal from VBA to the Congress is not only as a gesture of goodwill but also as an extention of a friendly hand for a possible alliance in future," Ambedkar said.

The Congress and two other MVA allies – Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) have not yet reacted to Ambedkar's latest announcement which comes a day ahead of the notification for the first phase of LS elections for five seats in Maharashtra on April 19. The five seats where the Lok Sabha polls will be held on April 19 are: Ramtek (SC), Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST), Chandrapur, Bhandara-Gondiya and Nagpur (all gen-

the Uddhav Thackeray-led party now. Given that he has never been consistent in stand towards the matters relating to the ongoing seat-sharing talks, Ambedkar's latest stand does not come as a surprise. At one a stage, a miffed VBA chief had threatened to put candidates in

all the 48 Lok Sabha con-

stituencies in the state.

eral). Ambedkar, whose party

had initially tied up with the

Shiv Sena (UBT) to contest the

Lok Sabha polls, has dumped

VBA walks out of MVA, but offers TMC calls for SC monitored Lok Sabha elections

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

 $E^{\rm ven~as~the~Trinamool}_{\rm Congress~and~the~BJP}$ crossed swords on the electoral battlefield senior TMC leader and Rajya Sabha MP Derek O' Brien on Tuesday attacked the saffron outfit for turning the Election Commission of India into its party office a reason that called for Supreme Courtmonitored general elections. The BJP promptly reacted calling upon Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to write a new Constitution as per the requirements of the Trinamool Congress.

Close on the heels of the election panel shunting out Bengal Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar --- a blue-eyed boy of the Chief Minister who was once questioned by the CBI for his alleged role in tampering of evidence in the Sharada and Rose Valley chit fund cases --- the BJP Rajva Sabha leader said that the saffron outfit was "destroying" institutions like the ECI by turning it into a BJP's "party office." Comparing the ECI with "His Master's Voice" --- the adding, "We want Supreme renowned logo of a music company of the 60s and 70s, O'Brien wrote on the X handle "BJP's filthy tricks destroy-

that they are turning ECI into a party office to target Opposition? ECI or His Master's Voice?" Demanding a Supreme Court-monitored election the TMC leader alleged how, the

ECI was "Transferring officers

of elected state governments!

For free and fair elections,"

ing institutions like Election

Commission of India. Are

BJP so nervous to face people

Court-monitored Election

Not only the change of the State DGP, much to the chagrin of the TMC the ECI has also ordered a highest sevenphase election to be manned by more than 92,000 central forces, highest till date.

The BJP was prompt to react asking O'Brien to advise his party boss to frame a new Constitution even as he said that the "Derek 'O Brien and his party want to write a new Constitution ... so why not, Mamata Banerjee writes the

new Constitution." Later reminding how 74 people had died in the last year's panchayat elections which such large-scale violence and bloodshed Majumdar said that ECI would not work at the behest of Mamata Banerjee much like the way State Election Commission did.

Meanwhile in quick succession of less than 24 hours the ECI changed the DGP twice by first shunting out Kumar to a "non-election related post," replacing him by Vivek Sahay and then replacing him by DGP Fire Brigade Sanjoy Mukherjee a 1989 batch IPS officer.Áccording to sources the ECI wrote to Bengal Chief Secretary, BP Gopalika, directing him to ensure immediate compliance and confirm the appointment of Mukherjee by 5 pm on Tuesday. Sahay was appar-ently changed because he was

due to retire on May 31. Mukherjee, a 1989-batch IPS officer, was the second person on the list of the three officers recommended by the West Bengal government for the post of DGP to the EC.

Candidate selection: BJP, TMC struggle ahead of LS battle

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

Apolitically volatile yet matured State the political parties of Bengal had never been so unprepared ahead of the "electoral exams" so to say. This because no political group -- in the tri-cornered contest that Bengal was going to witness these general elections --- seems to be in peace with itself as intra-party or intragroup differences tended delay their declaration of candidates in the coming Lok Sabha elections even three days after the Election Commission of India

announced the polls.

in the BJP on the names of 7-8 candidates in constituencies --- despite several rounds of talks --- like Bankura, Medinipur, Krishangar and even Barrackpore the TMC too looked less confident this time round in as many as 30 seats, insiders said adding how special committees to navigate the outfit through the polls in all these seats. Thanks to intra-party conflict among

While there were still difference

The stated "Third World" par- the Left parties." ties in Bengal politics Left, Congress and the ISF which would be expected to take advantage of the situation by promptly fielding candidates too seem not to be at ease even as they reportedly bickered among themselves over the

While the Congress wanted to contest from 10-12 seats --- at least four more than what it demanded from the TMC which had offered only 2 or three seats in return --- from the Left, the ISF led by Naushad Siddiqui with considerable following in the Muslim-dominated districts of South Bengal was reportedly demanding at least 8 seats most of which clashed with the Left strong-

It is another matter that both Md Salim of CPI(M) and Adhir Chowdhury of the Congress said that, "soon things would be thrashed out," while Marxist ly correcting the media saying "there is no alliance ... there is only seat adjustment among the a party office by the angry party LF, Congress and ISF," adding men and had to be rescued by "there is only an alliance with the State police."

Cut to the BJP in that regards. Though the saffron leadership remained tight-lipped sources said that there were problems at different quarters. While in Darjeeling a couple of MLAs have expressed their dissent against "outsider" and sitting MP Raju Bishta, in the Dooars another sitting MP John Barla is reportedly unhappy at not being provided ticket this time round and has been camping in Delhi for that purpose.

Back at Medinipur the flamboyant BJP MP Dilip Ghosh too is reportedly finding it difficult to find support for his candidature in the party with inside reports saying that he is not liked by the likes of Suvendu Adhikari and Sukanta Majumdar. Similarly at Bankura Dr Subhas Sarkar a Union Minister is too facing problems, insiders say. "A large number of party men who had worked hard in 2019 do said a local leader adding how last year he was locked inside

ITIs gearing up to introduce Al for All in their curriculum

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

ndustrial Training Institutes (ITIs) across India will soon gear up to introduce the curriculum "AI for All," aimed at building awareness on Artificial Intelligence (AI) which will prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

This initiative, spearheaded by the Future Right Skills Network (FRSN) in collaboration with the Directorate General of Training (DGT), marks a significant step towards equipping youth with awareness on AI to enhance their employability prospects.

In the presence of Union Minister of Education and Skill Development Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan the MOU between DGT and FRSN was exchanged.

"For new entrants in the job market skilling is critical and for reskilling and upskilling is critical," Pradhan said on the occasion.He said that he was also delighted that all the MoUs have an element of tech in it,

which was imperative in making things evolve faster and also played a critical role in communication and networking.

"Our present era is a disruptive era. Whoever is able to see it and tries to understand this, will remain relevant." The "AI for All" curriculum

aims to initiate the journey into AI by fostering awareness, with a focus on bridging the gap between industry requirements and academic offerings. This step is crucial in aligning academic programs with the evolving needs of industries. The AI curriculum by FRSN is part of the larger initiative of DGT, to integrate AI learning at ITIs.

This initiative envisions to empower up to 2.5 million learners across 15,000 ITI's nationwide, equipping them with essential future skills such as digital literacy, green mindsets, problem-solving, critical thinking and workplace readiness among others.

Alliance said that the objective behind developing the curricuof AI, its history and principles the knowledge economy.

as well as understand the types

"In addition to this, learners can also explore the use of AI and Generative AI tools in creating various digital contents and in education. We also ensure that the learners understand and discuss the ethical considerations and responsible use of AI," he

He also added that by equipping our youth with future skills, we not only empower them to thrive in an increasingly complex landscape but also foster a community of lifelong learners and innovative problem-solvers. The renewed MoU outlines a comprehensive framework for collaboration to work in four broad areas: curriculum and assessment to build employability skills, trainer development, women and work, and integration of future skills such as Green and AI.

Formed in 2019, FRSN is a collaborative effort of QUEST Morgan, and SAP Labs India. The collaborative underscores a lum was to help learners gain a collective commitment to comprehensive understanding empowering India's youth for

as BJP, PMK make alliance for LS polls the signing of the deal between

AIADMK clueless

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

As K Annamalai, the Tamil Nadu BJP chief drove down to the residence of Dr S Ramadoss, founder of the Vanniyar dominated Pattali Makkal Katchi to sign the electoral alliance for the ensuing Lok Sabha polls, the AIADMK led by Edappadi K

Palaniswamy has been left high and dry in the State politics. For the first time in recent history of Tamil Nadu, a new challenger in the role of BJP has emerged to take on the might of the DMK.

According to the agreement signed by the BJP and the PMK on Tuesday (astrologically selected because it happened to be an auspicious day), the latter has been allocated ten seats out of the 39 seats at stake in Tamil Nadu. The PMK which has been bargaining with the AIADMK and BJP much to the discomfiture of "There are no worthwhile

alliance partners for the AIADMK. The major fall out of

the BJP and the PMK is that Tamil Nadu will see a direct fight between the BJP-led NDA and the DMK led Secular Progressive Alliance. The AIADMK finds itself as a party sans alliance or partners," Gauthaman Ramakrishnan, chief editor, Sree TV told The

According to political observers in Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK, which used to boast that it is an outfit having 1.5 crore members, the party has withered since the demise of J Jayalalithaa as a result of infighting and shadow boxings.
"Edappadi Palaniswamy was left dumbfounded as the PMK walked out of his AIADMK and aligned with the BJP. Now, the fight is between the BIP and the DMK for top honors as the AIADMK has been relegated to the third position," said R Mohan, seasoned editor and journalist who has watched quarters for the last five decades. "It is going to be an interesting bout as the Congress is already on the defensive," said Mohan.

Centre gets three...

From Page 1

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, also appearing for the petitioners, said, "The problem is, if any process of citizenship starts and somebody gets citizenship, then it would be impossible to reverse it for several reasons and these petitions will become infructuous," Sibal said, adding, "Therefore, that process should not start".

He said four weeks for filing replies to applications for stay was a lot of time. When Mehta said the petitioners would not be prejudiced if someone is citizenship, Jaising said, "That is not the issue. The issue is the constitutionality One of the advocates asked

if a Hindu individual, who persecuted Balochistan, has come to

India prior to December 2014 and citizenship is granted to him here, how does it affect the right of anyone else.

"Because they will get the right to vote," Jaising shot back. After the bench said the matter would be heard on April 9, Jaising said, "In said the court can say that the meantime, let them any citizenship granted make a statement that they will not grant citizenship to anybody."
One of the counsels raised

the issue of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and said now applications for grant of citizenship to non-Muslims, hitherto excluded from it, can be processed under the CAA.

"NRC is not an issue before your lordships. Only grant of citizenship under CAA is the issue here," Mehta told the bench, adding that an attempt was made outside the court a few years back to mislead people that they were going to be ousted due to NRC

At the fag end of Tuesday's hearing, an insistent Jaising any citizenship granted pursuant to these rules will be subject to the outcome of this case.

"They don't even have the infrastructure (for granting citizenship under the new rules) in place," the bench

With the unveiling of the rules on March 11, days ahead of the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections,

effect in late 2018," it said.

the Modi Government kicked off the process of granting Indian citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim migrants -- Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians -- from Pakistan, Afghanistan

Bangladesh. The rules came into force with immediate effect, according to a gazette notification.

The contentious CAA had sparked protests in various parts of the country in late 2019 and early 2020 over alleged discriminatory

provisions. While refusing to stay the operation of the law, the apex court had on December 18, 2019 issued notices to the Centre on the pleas challenging validity of the CAA.

Experience...

From Page 1

"I love this festival of colours and had plans to visit Mathura to participate in the festival of flowers. Last year, I was at Barsana to witness Lath Maar

"But now at Dwarka's ISKON Temple I can experience the enchanting 'Phoolon Ki Holi', where fragrant flowers are expected to fill the air with their sweet aroma and simultaneously dive into the energetic rhythms of 'Lath Maar' and 'Matka Phod' Holi, re-enacting the playful antics of Radha and Krishna," she said.

Ramesh Kumar, an IT engineer, shares Anjana's excitement. His eyes sparkled with anticipation as he imagined himself participating in the spirited 'Lath Maar' Holi, where colour-drenched women armed with sticks playfully

tease men, mirroring the ageold love story of Radha and Krishna. Phoolon ki Holi is one of the most picturesque forms of Holi where instead of colours, fragrant flower petals are used to playfully drench each other in colors of nature

along with Lord Krishna. No Holi celebration is complete without delicious sweets, food and drinks. Hence, food stalls offering a variety of traditional snacks associated with the festival like gujiya, thandai, pakoras, and sweets will be on the platter during the festivities, a perfect setting to enjoy the festive spirit with family and friends.

With cultural performances, live music, and a vibrant atmosphere, the organisers shared that they expect a large crowd of devotees and visitors alike to celebrate the riots of colours with spirituality.

Paras resigns from Union...

From Page 1

Though Paras enjoyed the support of five of the six Lok Sabha MPs of the LJP until sometime back, none of them accompanied him at the Press conference. Some of them, sources said, are on a hunt for striking deals with other parties, including the one headed by his estranged nephew Chirag, to contest the upcoming polls.

Paras may explore the possibility of joining hands with the Opposition alliance led by the RLD in Bihar to fight against his nephew in the Hajipur seat. He represents Hajipur in the outgoing Lok Sabha and Paswan has also indicated that he will be contesting from the seat, considered a pocket borough of his late father Ram Vilas Paswan.

Former Indian **Ambassador to** US joins...

From Page 1 While Sandhu joined the party in the presence of its general secretaries Vinod Tawde and Tarun Chugh, Sita joined the BJP in New Delhi in the presence of Tawde and Jharkhand poll in-charge Laxmikant Bajpai.

Joining the BJP, Sandhu spoke about the growth of the India-US relationship and said development has been its focus area in a host of fields such as the semiconductor industry. This development should also reach hometown Amritsar, he said, thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and party president J P Nadda for his political innings.

Delhi World's most...

From Page 1

The most polluted country is Bangladesh which, at 79.9 micrograms, is more than 15 times higher than the safe

"Northern India and Delhi struggle with smoke from crop burning, vehicle

emissions, coal burning, waste burning, and biomass burning for heat and cooking. Annual crop burning in northern India and neighbouring Pakistan regularly results in Delhi Pakistan experiencing emergency-level Vehicle emissions are combined. older vehicles were banned in Delhi. The number of cars on the road has dropped by 35

per cent since the ban took

According to the report, Lahore, Pakistan, was the sole exception to the top 10 list, according to IQAir, which collects air-sensor data worldwide.

The report said India has an air quality days. Indian extensive air quality scientists have turned to monitoring network, hosting cloud seeding as a possible more air quality monitoring solution to help clear up Delhi's smog in November. Countries in the region Vehicle emissions are combined. The vast responsible for 40 per cent of PM2.5 emissions in the nation's Capital. In response, cities in 2023, representing 74 per cent of cities in the Central and South Asia

A nearly commensurate

proportion of Indian cities has ranked in the region's most polluted cities list, with 13 of the 15 ranked cities located in India. It is estimated that 1.36

billion people in India experience PM2.5 concentrations exceeding the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended annual guideline level of 5 micrograms per cubic metre, the report said. Also, 1.33 billion people, 96

per cent of the Indian population, experience PM2.5 levels more than seven times the WHO annual PM2.5 guideline. This trend is reflected in city-level data, with more than 66 per cent of the country's cities reporting annual averages greater than 35 micrograms per cubic

The report by IQAir summarises PM2.5 air quality data from 7,812 cities spanning 134 countries, regions, and territories. It sourced the data from

30,000 air quality monitoring stations operated by research institutions, governmental bodies, universities and educational facilities, nonprofit organizations, private companies, and citizen scientists.

"In 2023, the countries, regions, and territories in

Africa and Central and South Asia suffered from the highest annual average PM2.5 concentrations weighted by population. While the availability of air quality data in Africa continues to slowly grow, only 24 out of 54 countries in Africa had sufficient data available to be included in 2023's report, leaving countries

unaccounted for.

"Afghanistan has consistently ranked in the top 15 most polluted countries since 2019. however it, along with the country of Oman (ranked as the 6th most polluted country in 2022), is notably absent due to a lack of data availability,"

the report said. Interestingly, the data,

however, cuts two ways. While it shows how dire the crisis is in India, it also exposes major gaps in monitoring. Take South Asia for starters. The world's top three most polluted nations are all here: Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India in that order.

But in Bangladesh, only two places monitor air quality, while Pakistan has 10 sites. India monitors 256 cities. The report only has data from 79 places in Africa and 219 in all of Latin America and the Caribbean. In sharp contrast, the United Kingdom alone

has 219 monitoring sites, Europe 2,004, and the US has

According to the WHO, air pollution is responsible for an estimated seven million premature deaths worldwide every year. Exposure to PM2.5 air pollution leads to and exacerbates numerous health conditions, including but not limited to asthma, cancer, stroke and lung disease.

Exposure to elevated levels of fine particles can impair cognitive development in children, lead to mental health issues, and complicate existing illnesses, including

NEW DELHI | WEDNESDAY | MARCH 20, 2024

Campaigning for JNU students body polls reaches crescendo

STAFF REPORTER **NEW DELHI**

The walls of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) are plastered with colourful posters while the beats of traditional "daflis" and catchy slogans rent the air as campaigning for the students' body polls reaches a crescen-

The JNU students' union polls will be held after a gap of more than four years on March 22 and the results will be declared on March 24. With just three days left for the polling day, students, especially those casting their vote for the first time, were an excited lot.

"This is my first time participating in the JNUSU elections and I am very excited. My seniors have told me that the polls are akin to the festivities surrounding a wedding," Shorya Sood, a PhD scholar with cerebral palsy, said "I will vote for the outfit that talks about the welfare of all students irrespective of ideological differences and

particularly persons with disability in their manifesto," he added. The students' outfits are also holding door-to-door campaigns to woo the voters. With the election fever gripping the university, several dhabas on the campus are doing roaring business with students, including the candidates and their supporters, thronging the eateries every evening after a hard day of campaigning.

Animated conversations over a cup of tea are the norm at the renowned Sabarmati Dhaba in particular, which was witness to the 2020 JNU violence. Dhruv Kumar, owner of the Sabarmati Dhaba said, "This election is nothing like before. There's more energy and enthusiasm among the people as the polls are happening after four years. The business is booming as students gather here daily after campaigning."
The United Left alliance

comprising the All India Students' Association (AISA),



Federation of India (SFI) and the All India Students' Federation (AISF) is eyeing a clean sweep like the 2019 polls.
"Left has had a legacy in JNU.

We have been fighting for the rights of students from the very beginning. Be it the issue of women's security on campus, fee hikes, scholarship cuts, or infrastructural issues, the Left has always stood for the concerns of students," Dhananjay, the United Left's presidential candidate from AISA said. Meanwhile, the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh-affiliated Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad is preparing to give a tough competition to the United Left alliance and hopes to form a students' union led by the right-wing students group in the Left bastion.

The dictatorship of the Left has long prevailed on the JNU campus. They have not done any developmental work and only indulged in politics ruining the reputation of the

dictatorial rule and work for the students," ABVP's presidential candidate, Umesh Chandra Ajmeera, said. ABVP last won the JNUSU presidential election in 2000. Ever since the party has not been able to gain a foothold in the central panel of the JNUSU. Other student outfits such INUSUas the Congress-affiliated National Students' Union of India (NSUI), Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association (BAPSA), and Samajwadi Chatra Sangathan (SCS) are also campaigning extensively to position them-selves as a viable alternative to the traditional left-right students' bodies. SCS is the only outfit which has fielded a female candidate, Aradhna Yadav, for the post of president this year. Yadav said, "For us women's

security and their representation on the campus is the main focus. JNU has many women coming from economically backward and marginalised communities. If I am elected

their voice." BAPSA's presidential candidate, Biswajit Minji is the first scholar from his village in West Bengal. Minji belongs to an Adivasi community and his parents work as contractual labourers. 'For long, other parties such as the ABVP or the Left have used us as vote bank politics. It is high time that issues of marginally backward groups be represented by members of the same community who actually know their struggle," Minji said. The Congress' students' outfit has fielded only two candidates for the central panel — president and joint secretary — and is hoping to make a mark.

Junaid Raza, NSUI's presidential candidate said, "Our focus is to end the politics of both the ABVP and the Left and provide a peaceful environment to students. We want to build an inclusive campus." The JNUSU elections were stalled amid the COVID-19 pandemic and could not be conducted thereafter.

ED claim that APP got ₹100 crore from Kavitha dismissed by SC: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Delhi Minister Atishi on Tuesday accused the ED of becoming a "political weapon" of the BJP-led Centre and claimed the agency's assertion that BRS leader K Kavitha was involved in paying Rs 100 crore to AAP leaders for favours in the now-scrapped excise policy has been dismissed by the Supreme Court.

Addressing a press conference, she alleged the federal probe agency's action was aimed at stopping Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal from campaigning in thé Lok Sabha polls.

Kavitha, the MLC daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) last week from her Hyderabad home and she is in the federal probe agency's custody till March 23. In a statement on Monday, the ED claimed Kavitha along with others "conspired with the top leaders of AAP, including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia, for getting favours in the Delhi excise policy formulation and

"In exchange for these favours, 2023, Bharadwaj said in this recently died in jail. "Similarly,



regard

she was involved in paying Rs 100 crore to the leaders of AAP," the agency said.

Dismissing the allegation, Atishi said, "ED is acting like a political party instead of a Central probe agency. It is also a big question as to why the ED is doing this under pressure. The ED has now become a political weapon of the BJP," she alleged. Atishi said the BJP fears only one opposition leader --Keiriwal.

In another press conference, her cabinet colleague Saurabh Bharadwaj echoed similar views and said Kejriwal posing questions to the BJP makes them uncomfortable. Referring to an order issued by Justice Sanjeev Khanna of the

order, the judge clearly stated that the allegation of Rs 100 crore transaction by the ED is somewhat a matter of debate, and no evidence or facts have been presented by the federal agency in the court in this

Drawing an example from Putin's recent victory in Russia, Bharadwaj mentioned that the Russian president received 87 per cent of the votes, and he portrayed his aggression against Ukraine as acceptable to the public based on this voting percentage. He said, "However, the truth

is that Putin has also eliminated all opposition leaders in his country

Putin has imprisoned his main

in North Korea, which is known worldwide as a totalitarian country, their president Kim Jong Un holds elections in his country and declares himself the winner after the elections. A similar situation is emerging in our country as

well," he charged. The opposition leaders who pose a threat to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre are being arrested and imprisoned, Bharadwaj alleged He mentioned that every opposition leader who poses a threat to the BJP is being systematically targeted for imprisonment. He noted that there is a relentless effort to put Kejriwal in jail by the

He also reiterated that no money trail has been found and no recovery has been made by the ED in its probe in the excise policy case.

AAP Delhi state convener Gopal Rai alleged that there is "so much restlessness" in the BJP that it is already presenting its verdict before the court's decision on ED summons. "The proceedings are going on. The court is yet to decide if the summons is illegal or legal, but the BJP is so restless that they

Kejriwal cannot escape law: BJP on CM skipping summons

The BJP on Tuesday hit out at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for skipping multiple summonses of the Enforcement Directorate and said he cannot escape the "long hand" of the law for so long as there is evidence of his involvement in the alleged excise policy scam. Addressing a Press conference at the BJP headquarters, party national spokesperson Sambit Patra also slammed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for defending BRS leader K Kavitha, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the case, and said probe agencies' actions are based on evidence. "Political parties do not set up probe agencies," Patra added. The BJP's reaction came a day after the AAP called the ED a political wing of the BJP and dismissed the probe agency's charges against the party and its national convener Kejriwal calling them blatant and frivolous

Kejriwal on Monday skipped the Enforcement Directorate's summons in a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board.



agency to target Kejriwal and stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls. Reacting to the AAP's charge, Patra said, Nine-odd summonses have been issued to Kejriwal in the last six months and he has skipped all of them making some excuses or other. But these excuses are not going to

"How far you will run away from the long hand of the law. It will eventually catch you when there is evidence. The storm is coming and it will certainly come when you have committed corruption," the BJP spokesperson said. "Kejriwal has committed murder of crores of people's faith, truth and said people will give him a befitting reply.

A Delhi court on Saturday granted bail to Kejriwal in two complaints filed by the ED against him for skipping summonses in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. Patra alleged that Kejriwal is projecting the grant of bail as if he has got relief from the court while he continues to be an accused in the case.

"Kejriwal is out on bail. Grant of bail is not a relief by the court. There must be something wrong that he had to seek bail, the BJP leader contended, adding, "Being out on bail is not a merit but a demerit. Don't court granting bail to him, Kejriwal now stands "in the league" of Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, who are also out on bail in the National Herald case, he charged.

"People can understand who has the guarantee of corruption," the BJP leader said, asserting that people will vote for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees and make the BJP victorious in the Lok Sabha polls. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva claimed that the atmosphere being created by AAP is reminiscent of an old hindi adage "chori ki daddi mein tinka." (A speck in the beard of a thief). Sachdeva while calling Kejriwal 'corrupt', said, "The way the entire Aam Aadmi Party is creating a political atmosphere over Chief Minister Kejriwal's possible arrest based on an anonymous statement from yesterday, it is becoming evident that Kejriwal is corrupt and his imprisonment is certain.

Seeing the noose of the law tighten around Chief Minister Kejriwal, the frustrated AAP leaders have forgotten that investigative agencies release press statements on the crucial

Pandora box of corruption going to be out with arrest of Kavitha: Sukesh

SAUMYA SHUKLA NEW DELHI

onman Chandrashekhar, who is lodged in Delhi's Mandoli prison, released another explosive letter welcoming 'Akkaiah' K Kavitha to the 'Tihar Club' and suggested that he has more information to reveal about Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Sukesh wrote to the daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, K Kavitha, saying 'the truth has prevailed' and 'now a Pandora box of corruption is going to be out and open'. He referred to the BRS leaders as 'akka' (sister), who was arrested on March 11 by the Enforcement Directorate for alleged money laundering in the Delhi excise policy.

Sukesh, who is accused in a Rs 200 crore cheating case involving the wife of a former Fortis Healthcare promoter, wrote, "Dear K. Kavitha Akkiah, the truth has prevailed, the dramas of saying fake cases, fake allegations, political witch hunts have fallen flat, all your karmas are coming back to you, Kavitha Akkaiah. Now you have to face the power of truth..."
The jailed scammer said that while she thought she was 'invincible' and 'untouchable', she forgot this is 'new Bharat, where law is stronger and more powerful than ever.'

"However now a Pandora's box of corruption is going to be out and open, by this arrest of yours. Kavita Akka you and all your corrupt associates including the king of corruption my dearest Arvind



exposed to another level," he said, while attacking the Delhi Cm Kejriwal.

He alleged that the Telangana MLC and her party has looted thousands of crores and stacked it in countries like Singapore, Hong Kong and Germany. He claimed that all of that will be revealed. "Akka all your ghee tin stories, range rover collection stories, goa stories, contract stories as per the WhatsApp screen-shots I had shared last year is going to be investigated and proven right in the open now," he said while threatening her

that there is no way out now. He also said that she will

always be his elder sister irre-

He said, "One sincere advice

spective of exposing her and her involvement in corrup-Sukesh, who recently also wrote to Kejriwal, advised her to not 'guard' AAP chief.

trying to still hide everything and try to save the kingpin and the godfather of this scam, Arvind Kejriwal. Because now the people of this country, the Hon'ble Courts, all know the truth, there is enough evidence to prove all your corruption." He welcomed the leader into

Tihar jail and said that he will see her soon during a face to face confrontation in accordance with law at ED and CBI. Chandrashekhar further stated, "I am sure your other brother and kingpin of corruption, Kejriwal ji has arranged all luxury for your long stay in Tihar club. One more last thing before conclude this press statement Film abhi baki hai (movie is not over yet)" At last, he warned Kejriwal saying that he is next and no matter how much he tries, he will be

71,043 hoardings removed



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has removed a total of 71,043 posters, banners, hoardings and small boards from across its 12 zones in view of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in force for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The civic body has taken down the highest number of posters 12,232 from its Shahdara North zone, followed by 8,724 from City-SP zone and 6,340 from South zone.

The Election Commission on Saturday announced the dates for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The Model Code of Conduct came into force immediately and will be in place till the results of the elections are announced. According to the zone wise consolidated report, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) removed a total of 52,823 posters, 8,187 hoardings, 6,147 banners and 3,886 small boards from across its 12 zones till Tuesday.

"All unauthorized political advertisement displayed at Private property and subject to local law and court's directions, if any, have been removed," the report dated March 19 read. As per the

election office rules, any kind of poster, hoarding or banner in public place which promotes any political party or leader has to be removed within 24 hours of the election schedule announcement. In terms of the total numbers of posters, banners, hoardings and small boards removed by the civic body, Shahadara North zone saw the biggest chunk of removal with a total of 15,972 followed by 10,366 from City-SP zone and 7,817 from South zone. Apart from this, 6,859 from Shahadara South Zone and 5,006 from Najafgarh were removed. In the different forms of polit-

ical advertisement, the number of posters were the highest with a total of 52,823 followed by 8,1867 hoardings, 6,147 banners and 3,886 small boards in the 12 zones that come under that MCD. The dates for the 2024 Lok

Sabha elections were announced on March 16. The MCD has 12 zones under its jurisdiction which includes Rohini Zone, City SP Zone, Civil Lines Zone, Karol Bagh Zone, Narela Zone, Keshavpurm Zone, South Zone, West Zone, Najafgarh Central Zone Shahadara North Zone and Shahadara South Zone.

Sexual harassment case: BJP MLA urges LG to intervene

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a letter to Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, BJP MLA Vijender Gupta brought to light the grave issue of sexual harassment at Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Medical College. Gupta urged Saxena to intervene in the matter and ensure justice.

Highlighting the matter Gupta called the sexual harassment by Assistant Professor Salim Sheikh a matter of grave concern. "This incident not only constitutes a severe violation of the students' rights and safety but also represents a significant failure on the part of the institution and the Delhi government to take adequate action against the perpetrator. The silence and inaction by the AAP Government surrounding this incident have resulted in increased distress for the victims and their families,



highlighting an urgent need for intervention", said Gupta. Gupta has laid out a series of demands to the LG office, including removal of Professor Sheikh from his position pending the outcome of the investigation to prevent any further intimidation or harassment of the students.

Gupta also demanded that the Medical College Committee responsible for the welfare of female students has failed in its duties and should be disbanded. Members of the Medical College Committee should be held accountable for their negligence in handling the com-

Mediapersons with authorisation can use postal ballots for casting vote in LS, 4 State Assembly polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Mediapersons covering "polling day activities" carrying authorisation letters of the Election Commission and those part of essential services such as metros, Railways and health care can vote using postal ballots in the Lok Sabha and four state assembly polls. The Election Commission (EC) has shared its notification with all state chief electoral officers regarding the categories of "absentee voters on essential service", identified for voting through postal ballots.

While journalists on poll-day coverage and those involved in essential services have been using postal ballots during assembly elections, the facility has been extended for Lok Sabha polls. "Mediapersons to whom authorisation letters have been issued with the approval of the commission to cover polling day activities" are among the various categories identified for the use of

GST officer dismissed for gross misconduct

STAFF REPORTER **NEW DELHI**

The Vigilance Department I of Delhi Government on Tuesday has dismissed Goods and Services Tax Officer Manoj Kaushik, of Ward No. 41 of Trade and Taxes Department, 'for his gross misconduct' and causing 'loss to the Government Exchequer to the tune of Rs. 14 crores'. The order to dismiss the Trade

& Taxes Official stated, "The Competent Authority (Chief Secretary) has dismissed Manoj Kaushik, GSTO of Ward No. 41 of Trade and Taxes Department for his gross misconduct for the period ranging from 26.07.2021 to 13.10.2021."

It further mentioned that Kaushik, GSTO has issued various illegal refund orders to the beneficiaries and caused loss to the Government Exchequer to the tune of Rs. 14 crores. "The Officer is responsible for illegally issuing 122 refund orders worth Rs. 9.68 Crores (approx.) in a short span of two months without verifying the credentials of the Dealers. The Officer illegally approved refund orders worth Rs. 2.24 Crores (approx.) on the same date of applying the refunds and remaining Rs. 7.44 Crores (approx.) were approved within a short span of five days to non-existing firms," the letter stated.

It also said that huge illegal refunds were made amounting to approximately Rs. 4.11 Crores to the dealers who were found 'non-existing' and 'non-

NEW DELHI | WEDNESDAY | MARCH 20, 2024

BJP targets Rahul for shakti remark

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi intensified his attack over Rahul Gandhi's "fight against a shakti" remarks, the BJP said on Tuesday that the entire country is "angry" with the Congress leader's com-ments against the Hindu faith and it will be a major issue in this Lok Sabha election. The ruling party also asked if Rahul can speak in the same "derogatory" terms against any other religion and said the people of the country would give their reply to his remarks in the upcoming elections.

"Congress is no more a party imbued with the doctrine and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. Under Rahul's leadership, the Congress is now pursuing Maoist ideology, divisive, separatist... And anti-Hindu thoughts," senior BJP leader and former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad told a Press conference at the party headquarters here. Rahul is completely under the sway of "these elements", he added. At a rally in Mumbai on

Sunday, Rahul Gandhi had said, "We are not fighting against a political party...We are not fighting against Narendra Modi, nor are we fighting against one person. But, one face has been projected in the forefront." "In Hindu dharma,



fighting against a 'shakti' (power). The question arises as to what is that 'shakti'...," he had said in the presence of several opposition leaders of the

Reacting sharply, Prasad on Tuesday vehemently condemned Rahul's remarks. "This country is angry (over Rahul's remarks). The country will not accept such kind of repeated insult to its faith," the BJP leader said. "We vehemently condemn this (Rahul's

"The country will give a reply to this. We will make it a major issue in this election," he told reporters.

Prime Minister Modi also launched yet another blistering attack over Rahul's remarks, alleging those out to destroy "shakti" will be destroyed themselves. Addressing a rally in Salem, Tamil Nadu, on Tuesday, he alleged constituents of the INDIA bloc would never

speak ill about any other faith, but would not lose a second in abusing the Hindu religion. Rahul had on Monday clarified that he was not talking about any religious power but the 'shakti' of unrighteousness, corruption and falsehood.

The Congress leader had accused Prime Minister Modi of twisting his words and said he was speaking about the power of which Modi was wearing the mask.

Reacting to it, Prasad said it was not clear as to what Rahul Gandhi wanted to say in his clarification.

"Denigrating and castigating Hindu gods, Hindu practices and Hindu ideals has become the biggest theme of the political campaign of the Congress these days", the BJP leader charged.

He said Rahul has resorted to levelling baseless allegations against the Modi Government as he does not get votes.

EC removes Bengal DGP in less than 24 hours after appointment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The Election Commission on Tuesday removed Vivek Sahay as West Bengal DGP, less than 24 hours after naming him for the post, and directed the State Government to appoint Sanjoy Mukherjee, a year junior to Sahay in the IPS cadre, in his place. The move, unprecedented in recent memory, rendered Sahay the shortest-serving DGP of West Bengal.

Sahay, an IPS officer of the 1988 batch, was initially offered the appointment since he was the senior-most officer in the force. But owing to his scheduled superannuation on May 31, well ahead of the formal conclusion of the Lok Sabha elections on June 4, the poll panel considered naming Mukherjee, a 1989 batch officer, as the DGP, a senior offi-

Mukherjee, the Director General of the state Fire & Emergency Services was the second on the list of the three officers recommended by the Bengal government for the post of DGP to the ECI after the poll panel directed the removal of Rajeev Kumar from that position in the run-up to the elections.

On Monday, following an instruction of the ECI to post Rajeev Kumar to a "non-election related assignment", and, as an interim arrangement, post an officer immediately

निर्वाचन सदन NIRVACHAN SADAN भारत निर्वाचन आयोग LECTION COMMISSION 0F

junior to him as DGP, the Bengal government had named Sahay as replacement. Curiously, while Sahay's appointment notification was made by the state home department in which it referred to the ECI order, the corresponding notification for Mukherjee a day later was made directly by the Commission. Explaining the sudden change of mind about the appointment of the state's top cop, a senior EC official told PTI that Sahay's was only an "interim appointment".

He did not justify, though, why an appointment was notified by the state government would be toppled in less than 24 hours. Another official of the poll panel, however, said that Sahay was named the DGP based solely on his seniority and experience.

"But since he is supposed to retire in May even before the final round of polls on June 1, the ECI decided to make this change. If Sahay remained in the post of DGP, he would have to be changed again in the middle of the election process. That's why Mukherjee was given the charge instead,"

A former IPS officer in West Bengal cadre who served the state in senior positions, how-ever, stated that the Commission retains the power to extend the tenure of an official if he/she was marked for any special assignment, such as the conduct of elections, by the poll body itself.

"I am not convinced that the retirement clause is the only grounds for removing Sahay, the former officer, requesting anonymity, said.

"Sahay could have been easily retained as the DGP of the state till the elections got over. I believe we never had a DGP for such a small duration ever before in this country," he said. In March 2021, the ECI had suspended Sahay, then serving as director of security, following an incident in which Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee suffered a leg injury in Nandigram while campaigning for the assembly election in the state.

The decision to suspend Sahay was based on reports submitted by the then chief secretary of West Bengal. Banerjee received injuries on her left foot in Nandigram on March 11, 2021, while greeting her supporters standing on the footboard of her vehicle when her foot got caught between the front door and the seat of the car because of pressure

Request to parties for details of electoral bonds yields response

he Election Commission's The Election Commissional request to parties for details of electoral bonds received by them elicited myriad, and often unsolicited, responses — one party seeking its de-registration and another noting that its chief personally donates Rs 500 once every three months to the party fund

the party fund. In their responses to the Election Commission, some parties gave explanations for not receiving any donation through electoral bonds while others cited their inability to provide the requested information. The Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party cited its status as a new party and claimed it had not garnered any votes in elections and hence had no details to provide. Similarly, the Sarvjan Lok Shakti party submitted a handwritten note stating that it had not received any donation as yet.

The Bharat Ka Kisan Mazdoor Party expressed frustration, lamenting their lack of recognition and claiming no support from industrialists or capitalists, resulting in the party does not receiving any electoral bond.

The Tamil Nadu-based Tamilar Desiya Munnani cited health issues of its leadership for its inability to respond to the Election Commission notice within the given time frame. It also mentioned that it had not received any donation through electoral bonds until September 30, 2023.

The Makkal Nala Kazhagam noted that its president personally deposits money into the party account every three months. "Party president S Sathiyamoorthy is depositing his own money Rs 500 once in three months in party account in the concerned bank," it said. The Kannada Naadu Party,

which has since passed a resolution for dissolution, submitted a letter to the Election Commission requesting its derecognition. "...Resolutions passed at the respective meetings had been forwarded to your good offices and we are awaiting your confirmation of de-recognition as a political party," it said in the response. Parties such as the Jan Shakti Dal, Neethi Nijayathi Party and the Gunj Satya Ni Janta Party claimed to have received no donations. Many parties, including the Aasra Lokmanch Party, Bharatiya Sarthak Party and the National Bhrashtachar Mukti Party, stated that they had not received any donations and mentioned that they did not fall in the category eligible to receive electoral bonds. The Bahujan Rajyam Party clarified that it had not received any electoral bonds, highlighting the eligibility criteria that limit bond issuance to parties securing at least one per cent of the votes polled in previous elec-

Unhappy over conduct of Centre counsel, CAT to decide case ex parte

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unhappy over the conduct of the Centre's counsel while hearing a bureaucrat's plea seeking documents related to his empanelment, the Administrative Tribunal (CAT) has said the case will be decided on Friday ex-parte in case the respondents advocates fail to appear before it, according to an official order.

The directive came on Monday on a plea filed by Sanjiv Chaturvedi, a 2002 batch Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer of the Uttarakhand cadre, in December 2022.

Hearing the matter through video-conferencing, the CAT "nobody is present on behalf of the respondent-UOI (Union of India) although Hanu Bhaskar, counsel for the respondents put his appearance through video conferencing, but he refused to argue the matter on merits", the tribunal said in its order.

T C Aggarwal, learned counsel representing the respondents



(Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change) is also not connected and "private secretary to one of us, repeatedly called from his mobile to T C Aggarwal... But he has not respondents (Bhaskar and responded the same or conencing in the matter", said the order issued by the bench of Justice Rajiv Joshi (judicial member) and Anand S Khati (administrative member).

The conduct of the counsel for the respondents is not appreciated by the court, it said, adding that the court has no option, but to adjourn the

be put up on March 22, 2024, and inform about this order to both the counsels for the Aggarwal) in writing, accordgovernment employees.

The CAT directed the case to

made clear that on the next date fixed in the matter, if the counsels for the respondents failed to appear, the matter shall be decided ex-parte on merit," said the tribunal, which adjudicates matters related to the Hearing this matter, the bench

had last month directed to put

up this matter "for final hearing peremptorily". "Since, the pleadings between the parties have already been exchanged, put up this matter on 18.03.2024 for final hearing peremptorily," it had said in an order dated February 20. Chaturvedi had sought direc-

tions to the Central government to produce all documents, appraisals, reports of expert committees, civil services board (CSB) and findings of the competent authorities of the competent authorities related to the rejection of his application for empanelment at the level of joint secretary or equivalent in the Central gov-

The officer was conveyed his non-empanelment for holdtary or equivalent by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) through an order dated November 15, 2022, by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. The tribunal had issued notices to the Central government on December 20, 2022.

CWC authorises Kharge to give final approval to Congress manifesto

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The Congress on Tuesday asserted that the country is seeking a change and the 'guarantees' touted by the incumbent NDA Government would meet the same fate as the 'India Shining' slogan of 2004. Congress president Mallikarjun

Kharge said the country is fervently demanding a change. "The guarantees currently being touted by the present government would have the same fate as that of the 'India Shining' slogan of 2004. All of us have a responsibility to ensure that our manifesto gets the widest publicity in different States and our commitments are taken to Kharge said addressing a Press conference after the meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC).

Party leaders K C Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh said the CWC has authorised Kharge to give final approval to the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls and decide a date for its



release. The CWC has prepared a roadmap for taking the party's guarantees to grassroots, Venugopal. said after the over three-hour long meeting. Ramesh said the Congress will release not just a ghoshna patra' (manifesto) but 'nyay patra' so that people see a bright future.

Earlier addressing the meeting every household across the of the CWC, the party's top urged all party leaders and workers to take every issue raised in the party manifesto to every village and town and to every household across the country. Kharge also said that Congress workers in villages, towns will have to rise to take the party manifesto to every household. The Congress pres-

promised in the manifesto, will be strictly implemented. Before making promises in the manifesto, an in-depth deliberation has been made to ensure that these promises are

implementable, he said. "It is

ident said whatever has been

because of this very fact that, right from 1926, the Congress party's manifesto has been regarded as a 'document of trust and commitment," he said. Kharge also lauded the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, saying through it the Congress was able to draw the country's attention to the real issue of people. "These were not just political

yatras but will be noted for the largest mass contact movement in our political history. One nobody in our times has undertaken such a massive exercise. Both these yatras managed to take the issue of the people to national centre stage," he said referred to the Bharat Jodo Yatra and the just concluded

Kharge and former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul

Gandhi attended the meeting. Other senior leaders, including Ambika Soni, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, P Chidambaram, Digvijaya Singh, Ajay Maken and Kumari Selja, were also present at the crucial meeting, where Chidambaram read out the key elements of the party manifesto. Chidambaram chairs the manifesto committee of the party, which has already presented a copy of the draft document to the CWC for its The CWC would grant its

approval and give a final shape to the draft manifesto which carries the five 'guarantees' for justice. The party is fighting the elections on the issue of 'five nyay' (justices) — 'Bhagidari Nyay', 'Kisan Nyay', 'Nari Nyay', giving 25 guarantees, five for each nyay, which have been announced by the Congress president and Rahul Gandhi. Sources said the party's Central Election Committee (CEC), chaired by Kharge, would discuss and finalise its candidates for remaining seats in the

Experts bat for Ayurveda for holistic management of kidney disorders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

A midst the surge in kidney-related diseases attributed to indiscriminate medication use as per various studies, health experts have advocated for Ayurvedic formulas derived from herbs as promising remedy for effective and holistic management of urology disorders, including those concerning the kidney.

During a recent online brainstorming session titled 'Kidney Manthan, organized by AIMIL Pharma, leading experts from allopathy, ayurveda, and Unani streams delved into the efficacy of natural remedies in light of the escalating challenges posed by the overuse and misuse of antibiotics. They emphasized that indiscriminate antibiotic usage contributes to the emergence of resistant bacterial strains, thereby exacerbating kidney health issues.

Professor Avanish Pathak from SGT University elaborated extensively on over a dozen herbal formulations that have shown remarkable effectiveness in preventing urinary disorders, kidney infections, and maintaining overall kidney health.

These time-tested formulations, including Chandrakala Mutrakricharantak



Kwath, Trinpanchmool Kwath, Shatavaryadi Kwath, Kakolyadi Kwath, Utpaladi Kwath, Mustadi Kwath, Gokshur, Punarnava, Guduchi, among others, were discussed with Professor Pathak suggesting that these herbal formulations could serve as effective alter-

Not only do they prevent infections, but they also contribute to the overall enhancement of kidney health. In this connection, a section of experts also drew attention to NEERI KFT, a product from AIMIL Pharma, which has been formulated from over 19 herbs, including Punarnava, Gokshur, Varun, Kasni, Makoy, Palash,

and Guduchi. Dr. Sanchit Sharma, Executive Director of AIMIL Pharma, noted a growing trend of people turning towards traditional medical systems for kidney

modern treatments for more accurate results. Nephrologist Tejas Patel from Ahmedabad referred to NEERI KFT as a remedy for CKD patients, emphasizing its role in maintaining electrolyte balance and reducing urea levels. During the program, Dr. Vaibhav Shrivastav from Mai Hospital in Indore discussed kidney care and treatment, while Assistant Professor Preeti Chopra shed light on treatment management intricacies.

The experts noted that as life expectancy has risen with advancement in healthcare and improvement in living standards, there has been a parallel increase in lifestyle-related diseases, including diabetes, hypertension and obesity too. All these ailments impact kidney health, causing rise in kidney-related disorders and com-

CAG: \$10 trillion per year needed by 2050 to address climate change

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

substantial financial invest-Ament of more than USD 10 trillion will be required annually by 2050 to address climate change effectively, Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), Girish Chandra Murmu said on Tuesday, warning exacerbated global warming and socio-economic consequences from climate-related disasters if these needs are

"Despite evident cost-benefit analysis, current climate finance remains inadequate, making it imperative to bridge this gap for a sustainable future," the CAG said in his address at a seminar on 'Climate Financing' here.

He further elaborated that climate financing is key to our collective efforts to move towards a more resilient and sustainable future. It is a catalyst for change, empowering nations, communities, and businesses to adopt green technologies, invest in renewable energy, and foster sustainable practices.

The CAG pointed out that "Climate change is no longer a problem we are leaving for our future generations; but a phenomenon we are increasingly experiencing and have to con-



intensifies, so does the urgency for robust climate finance mechanisms to fund adaptation, mitigation, and resiliencebuilding efforts world-wide." Murmu stressed that the need for immediate action was emphasized by the stark difference between the costs asso-

ciated with inaction and the potential advantages of making timely investments in low-carbon, climate-resilient pathways. He emphasised that the seminar was a combined effort to unravel the complexities of climate finance, and assess its current state through an audit

perspective. This conference served as a platform for a dialogue on climate financing with sharing of knowledge and experience on various aspects of the theme by

experts and enriching discussions contributing to the success of the conference.

Chandini Raina, Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Saurav Sinha, Executive Director, RBI, Divyank Singh, CEO, Smart City Indore and Additional Nagar Nigam Commissioner Indore, Dr. Satya Priya Rath, Director (Budget), Finance Department, Odisha Government and S Alok, Director General of Audit, Defence Service shared their experiences on varied topics like Overview of climate finance and audit perspective on climate finance'; Key components of India's climate finance strategy; Addressing financial risks from climate change; Unlocking climate finance- transitioning to a sustainable future.

2023 warmest year on record: WMO report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Highlighting alarming trends in global climate, a new report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) released on Tuesday said that year 2023 recorded unprecedented highs in greenhouse gas levels, surface temperatures, ocean heat, acidification, and sea level rise.

Key findings include 2023 being the warmest year on record, with temperatures 1.45 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. Glacier retreat and Antarctic sea ice loss reached record levels. Extreme weather events had widespread socio-economic impacts, as per the report, titled "State of the Global Climate 2023".

Additionally, global food inse-curity doubled, attributed to conflicts, economic downturns, and climate-related challenges. The report underscores the urgent need for enhanced climate action to limit warming and mitigate its effects on vulnerable populations. "Sirens are blaring across all major indicators... Some records are not just charttopping, they are chart-busting. And changes are speeding up," said United Nations Secretary-General Antonio

Guterres. "Never have we been so close

— albeit on a temporary basis at the moment — to the 1.5 degrees Celsius lower limit of the Paris Agreement on climate change. The WMO community is sounding the red alert to the world... The climate change is the deficient of the climate change in the deficient of the climate change in the climate change is the climate change in the climate change in the climate change is the climate change in mate crisis is the defining challenge that humanity faces," WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said.

"Climate change is about much more than temperatures. What we witnessed in 2023, especially with the unprecedented ocean warmth, glacier retreat, and Antarctic Sea ice loss, is cause for particular concern," she added.COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber said the world has no time to spare. To limit warming to 1.5

degrees Celsius, countries must deliver enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), economy-wide emissions reductions, and investments in nature and adaptation, he stressed.

The WMO report also cited figures showing that the number of people who are acutely food insecure worldwide has more than doubled, from 149 million people before the COVID-19 pandemic to 333 million people in 2023 (in 78 monitored countries by the World Food Programme). WFP Global hunger levels remained unchanged from 2021 to 2022.

Seat sharing with JD(S) will be resolved amicably: BJP

rith JD(S) indicating its unhappiness over the seat sharing issue for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Karnataka BJP President B Y Vijayendra on Tuesday said he has spoken to its leadership after consulting his party's high command, and expressed confidence that the matter would be resolved amicably.

He said BJP and JD(S) leadership are discussing "everything and there will be a happy ending." "Last night I had a telephonic

discussion with our national leaders, after that I spoke to former Prime Minister (H D Deve Gowda over phone, and have also shared information with H D Kumaraswamy this morning," Vijayendra said. Speaking to reporters here, he

said he is confident that everything will be fine, and the national leadership will make a decision that is satisfactory to the

JD(S). Indicating that JD(S) is unhappy over the seat sharing issue, its Kumaraswamy on Monday said he has faith that the regional party will get three to four seats, amid reports that the saffron party may cede it only two.

The former Chief Minister also said his party leaders have asked him to communicate to the BJP leadership about the need to treat



the JD(S) "respectfully" and make them understand its strength in at least 18 Lok Sabha segments.

On whether JD(S) will contest in three seats, Vijayendra said the issue is still under discussion. "How can I say anything?"

"If there are any minor issues, for everything there will be a happy ending, and BJP-JD(S)' NDA alliance will successfully," he said. continue

JD(S) joined the NDA last September and has forged an electoral alliance with the BJP. The regional party is expected to

contest in three seats -- Mandya, Hassan and Kolar -- and as per agreement between both parties, noted cardiac surgeon, and Deve Gowda's son-in-law Dr C N Manjunath has been fielded from Bangalore Rural on a BIP ticket. However, according to recent reports, BJP is not ready to cede

irked the regional outfit. On Congress sending feelers to BJP leader and former Chief Minister D V Sadananda Gowda, Vijayendra said, he is confident that everything will be fine and there is no question of him

Kolar seat to JD(S), which has

in BJP.

Gowda is upset over being denied ticket to recontest from Bangalore North Lok Sabha seat. Asked about senior party leader K S Eshwarappa who has raised a banner of rebellion and is contesting as an independent from Shimoga Lok Sabha seat, Vijayendra said, "he is a senior certain information has gone to him and he is reacting to it, and I'm confident that everything will be fine, once he understands the

No point in voting for Congress picks, they will join BJP: Himanta

ssam Chief Minister Himanta that there is no point in voting for Congress candidates as they will ultimately go on to join the BJP. Several Congress leaders of the Congress have defected to the BJP

"Whether they win or lose is a different matter but the question is whether the candidate will remain in the Congress", Sarma told reporters after campaigning for the BJP in the two constituencies of Barak Valley-Silchar and Karimganj.

He said now nobody wants to remain the Congress but they are eager to join the BJP.

This is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's credit that they want to join

"The PM is the Sun and we are all moons around him", the chief minister said.

Therefore, there is no point in voting for the Congress. Besides, barring one candidate, I can bring all others contesting from the

party to BJP", Sarma claimed. Several Congress leaders, including its former working president Rana Goswami, left the party to join the BJP while Congress MLAs , Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Basanta Das last month said they decided to "support the govern-ment" for its developmental works. Asked about the minority voters who are traditionally Congress supporters, the chief minister said, There is nothing called minority or majority. People will vote for the



PM and his policy of Sabka Saath, Sabka

Sarma said, "The minority factor is not an issue. We are working for the minorities and now for the first time, youth from the community are getting jobs without giving money as a bribe. Did they ever get jobs during Congress rule?"
He claimed the BJP will win the minori-

ty-dominated constituencies of Karimganj and Nagaon comfortably.

Asked about Lok Sabha Deputy Leader of the Opposition Gaurav Gogoi, contesting from Jorhat, the chief minister said that he would lose by a huge margin.

Assam has 14 constituencies with BIP holding nine, and Congress three. The

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the General Public tha Mrs. Ashu W/o. Mr. Tilak Raj is the owner or FREEHOLD BUILT UP PROPERTY BEARING NO 196, OLD NO. 28/2E/5, LAND AREA MEASURIMNG. 17 do SO. METER I.E. 85 SO. YARDS. SITUATEC IN THE AREA OF VILLAGE: CHANDRAWALI IN THE AREAD OF JAWALA NAGAR, GALI NO. LALGAQ SHAHDDARA, DELHI-170032, vide GPA ATS and Will dated 07.08.2009, Registration No 3702, In Book No. 4, Registrade on dated 07.08.2009 and same sold to be of Intending Borrower /Mr. SATVEER and same modification the said property.

ATVEER and same mortgaging the said prope ith SMFG India Home Finance Co. Ltd, if anybo

as any charge/interest/tille in the said property of my kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in virting on the below mentioned address with 17 days of the present. Mrs. Prasoon Lata, Advoca SG Associates (Law Firm F 18 Lous Pend Plaza Valshbay Kland Indiranura Phazishad III.

AIUDF and an independent has one seat each in the outgoing Lok Sabha.

The NDA alliance in the state is contesting in all the 14 seats with the BJP announcing candidates in 11 seats while its alliance partners-the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) will contest in two seats and the United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL) in one.

The Congress, a constituent of the 16-party United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA), will contest in 12 seats and has left the Dibrugarh seat for AJP while there has been no decision yet for the Lakhimpur seat.

Assam polls will be held in three phases on April 19, 26 and May 7.

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

The STC of India Ltd; invites e-bids from interested agencies/firm/sole proprietor for engagement as Property Tax Consultant at STC's Corporate Office, New Delhi through etender mode only. For detailed information may visit STC website: www.stclimited.co.in or www.eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app



Woman pretending to be RPF SI held in Telangana

PTI HYDERABAD

A²⁵-year-old woman was arrested on Tuesday in Nalgonda District for allegedly engaging in fraudulent activities by "impersonating" a sub-inspector of the Railway Protection Force (RPF), Telangana State Railway Police The woman, identified as

Jadala Malavika, exploited her unwarranted recognition, including participating in events such as International Women's Day celebration in Nalgonda, where purportedly represented herself as a sub-inspector and was felicitated by the organisers, they said.

Using her fake position, the established woman connections with individuals of prominence, such as a Telugu film actor, Additional Director General of Police (Railways & Road Safety-Telangana State) Mahesh M Bhagwat said in a release. Another sub-inspector of the RPF lodged a complaint with RPS Nalgonda, stating that the woman has been observed wearing an RPF sub-inspector uniform and accoutrements while frequently travelling on various trains between the Nalgonda and Secunderabad section.

She presented herself to passengers as a bona fide subinspector of the RPF, showing them a counterfeit identity card to support her false claims, the release said. She has also deceived her relatives and villagers by falsely asserting that she has been employed as a sub-inspector in the Railway Protection Force, stationed at Secunderabad for the past year, it said.

The complainant sought appropriate measures apprehend the woman for pretending to be an official of the RPF, and to prevent any further misuse of authority or potential harm unsuspecting members of the public.

Basing on the complaint, a case has been registered under sections 170 (Personating a public servant), (punishment for cheating by personation) and 420 (cheating) of IPC, and the accused was arrested at Nalgonda Railway Station. She voluntarily confessed to have committed these offences in order to please her parents and relatives, the release said.

Four Naxalites killed in police encounter

TN RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

In an intelligence-based operation carried out in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls, the police and security forces gunned down four Maoists during an encounter in the naxalite-infested Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, on Tuesday morning.

Acting on an intelligence input that the outlawed naxalites were planning subversive activities in eastern Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Telangana ahead of the LS, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the C-60 commandos of the Anti-Operations eliminated four Maoists in the Kolamarka mountain ranges near Repanpall in Aheri taluka of Gadchiroli district. While one of the C-60 unit teams was conducting a search on Tuesday morning in the Kolamarka mountains near Repanpalli, Naxalites fired at them indiscriminately which the security personnel retaliated, the official said.

The police identified the four

PUBLIC NOTICE

tice is hereby given that the share certificate No 91021 with Distinctive Numbers 4412124 To 4412148, Certificate No. 246645 Distinctive Numbers 142926991 To 142927015. Certificate No. 364785 Distinctive Numbers 578465718 To 578465767 Certificate No. 458209 Distinctive Numbers 619800444 To 619800493 and Certificate No. 1323622 Distinctive Numbers 1391114324 To 1391114398 With respect to Folio No. 09653295 for Larsen & Toubro Limited, Registered in the name of Mohd Suleman Siddiqui and Late. Mohd Yaqoob Siddiqui is reported to be lost and the company has received an application for the issue of duplicate share certificates. If no objection from any interested person is received by the company registrar KFin Technologies Limited Selenium Building, Tower-B. Plot no. 31 & 32, Financial District, Nanakramguda, Serlingampally, Hyderabad - 500032 within 15 days from the publication hereof the company will proceed to issue duplicate share certificates to the applicant.

PUBLIC NOTICE Deop Goel is the Title Holder in possession of Entire Ground Floor of Built Up Residentia Property Bearing Plot No. 17, Block (Commonly Known as Z-17), Village Kharer (Revenue Estate, Hauz Khas, New Delta dardensuring 250.00 sq. yards, hereinafte referred to as Schedule Property vide Sale Dedaded 18.01.2005, duly registered as Regn. No 833, Book No. 1 on 18.01.2005 in the Office of the Sub Registrary V. Mehrauli, New Delhi. That origina documents i.e. (i) Sale Deed dated 19.01.1958, (ii) Death Certificate of Sh. Ram Dhan Das, (iii) Mulation Letter issued by M.C.D. date 18.07.2003, (iv) Board Resolution dates 05.11.2003, (iv) Sand Reso chedule Property by the filte Holder, may com-ward with supporting documents, to be delivere the undersigned within 10 days from the date is is Publication, post expiration of which, ar aim(s) or objection(s), if raised or received, sha breated as null & void and as waived, and the Till loder shall proceed to sell the Schedule Propert as is presently intended. Parvesh Kumar (Advocat Office Address: 27, Basement, Shreshtha Vihar, Delhi-Chamber Address: 363, Saket Cantt, New Del



killed Maoists as Varghese, Secretary of Mangi Indravelli Area, D V C M Magtu, Secretary of Sirpur Chennur Area Committee and two Platoon members Kursang Raju and Kudimetta Venkatesh. The four Maoists collectively carried a reward of Rs 36 lakh.

An AK-47 gun, a carbine, two country-made pistols, Naxal literature and other items were also recovered, the

The four deceased Maoists were members of the Telangana State Committee. who had crossed the Pranhita river and sneaked into Gadchiroli from the Telangana side.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is notified for the information of general public that my client/s Mr. Kapil Mohan Sharma S/o Mr. R.S. Sharma & Mrs. Neelima Sharma W/o Kapil Mohan Sharma a Kin Kapil Mohan Sharma a Wio Kapil Mohan Sharma a Waza Kapil K oo so at his/ner own risk and our client shall not be responsible in any manner whatsoever, however any claim on the basis of title documents will be entertained within 15 days of publication, failing which any such right, title, interest, or claim, if any, will be deemed to have been waived and not binding on our Client.

Rakesh Kumar (Advocate)

Chamber No. 119, First Floor, Tehsil mpound, Ghaziabad. (M) - 9911958676

PUBLIC NOTICE

Dated:20.03.2024 Notice is given on behalf of my client Mrs. Uma Parkash, wife of Late Shri Ved Parkash is the absolute / lawful owner and in exclusive possession of entire First Floor of property bearing no. E-32, consisting of two store rooms under stairways of 1st floor and 2nd floor, situated at Lajpat Nagar-III, New Delhi-110024 which is free from all encumbrances. charges, lien, mortgages etc.

It is also to inform that the Original Conveyance Deed executed by the President of India, through Land & Development Office in favour of Mr. Vijav Kumar Mehra & Krishan kumar sons of Late Shri Ram Swaroop Mehra in respect Document No. 8107, on 26,05,2005, in the office of the Sub-Registrar-V, New Delhi, is report in this regard had also been lodged with the Police Station, Crime Branch, Delhi, bearing SO No. 430/2014 Delhi Police and LR No. 1134872/2023, dated 14,11,2023,

Any person(s), Association, Company, Firm. Bank, Financial Institution and any Legal Entity finding the same is requested to return the same to the undersigned or if any person(s) having any sort of right, claim, title or interest in the subject property under or on the basis of the said lost/misplaced original document or otherwise, may put forth his/her/its claim to the undersigned within 15 (fifteen) days from the publication of this notice and thereafter no claim shall be entertained, in future

(ARVIND KUMAR GUPTA) Advocate Y-1, L.G.F., Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110016 (M) 9811088800

(M) 9899061365

APPENDIX IV-A

Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN: L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.04.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 52,24,698/- (Rupees Fifty Two Lakh Twenty Four Thousand Six Hundred Ninety Eight Only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLJKS00417551, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 04.03.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 05.03.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from BALBIR SINGH GIRI, SAROJNI GIRI, KULDEEP GIRI and ANUP KUMAR G.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 26,10,000/- (Rupees Twenty Six Lakh Ten Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 2,61,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Sixty One Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

PLOT NO. D - 1, 2ND FLOOR (FRONT SIDE - NORTHERN PORTION), KHASRA 206, D - BLOCK, ANOOP NAGAR, VILLAGE BINDAPUR, UTTAM NAGAR

on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date: 13.03.2024 Place: NEW DELHI

Authorized office

APPENDIX IV-A

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he Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 25,00,000/- (Rupe Twenty Five Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 2,50,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Fifty Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price. DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

FLAT NO. UG - 1 (LEFT SIDE), UPPER GROUND FLOOR, PLOT NO. 271,

SHALIMAR GARDEN EXTN -1, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH - 201005

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log

Authorized office Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR M/s HN REACON PRIVATE LIMITED

EARLIER OPERATING IN SERVICE SECTORAT H.N-106, I-FLOOR (NEAR GIRI RAJ HOTEL) SARAI KALE KHAN, NEW DELHI-110013 lation 36A (1) of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy ion Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2016

RELEVANT PARTICULARS HN Reacon Private Limited CIN:U70101DL2004PTC124645 along with PAN/CIN/LLP (Hereinafter referred to as 'CD') H.N-106, I-Floor (Near Giri Raj Hotel) Sarai Kale Address of the registered office Khan, New Delhi-110013 As per information available to RP, there is no such URL Details of place where majority o As per audited balance sheet for financial yea 2022-2023, Company does not have any asset fixed assets are located Installed capacity of main products, As per audited balance sheet for financial year services 2022-2023. Company does not have any services sold in last financial year 2022-2023, Company does not have any As per information available to RP, there is no such employees/ workmen. Further details including last available Details can be obtained by sending email to financial statements(withschedules) of hnreaconcirp@gmail.com csprassan@gmail.com dates for subsequent events of the process are available at: Eligibility for resolution applicants under section 25(2)(h) of the Code is Details can be obtained by sending email to

available at URL: csprassan@gmail.com Last date for receipt of expression prospective resolution applicants 12. Last date for submission of objections 19th April, 2024 to provisional list

3. Date of issue of final list of 29th April, 2024 prospective resolution applicants Date of issue of information 19th April, 2024 and request for resolution plans 19th May, 2024

hnreaconcirp@gmail.com

csprassan@gmail.com

Note - The abovementioned timelines are subject to the approval of an application of extensio of CIRP Process by 90 days filed by the resolution professional with the Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal. 124 Prassan Navin Kumar Sin
Prassan Navin Kumar Sin
Resolution Professional HN Reacon Private Limit
Communication Address of Resolution Profession
F-242B, 3rd Floor, Near Mangal Bazar, Laxmi Nagar, New Delhi - 1100:
Email: hnreaconcirp@gmail.com, csprassan@gmail.com

16. Process email id to submit Expression hnreaconcirp@gmail.com

of Interest

PUBLIC NOTICE

Taugeer S/o Mohd Sveed Kazmi ema uqeerkazmi970@gmail.com, R/o 12 D, LIG, DDA, New Jafrabad, Shahdara possession letter, site possession slip NOC for water and electricity and other related documents of DDA Flat No. 12 E LIG. 3rd Floor, Pocket-B, New Jafrabac Shahadara, Delhi has been lost. An FIF to this effect has been logged online vide regard No. LR No.-1528513/2024 dated 09 March 2024. Any person(s) claiming any right, any having objection or found in possession of the original documents may wright/contact the above named erson at the above address within 15 days of date of publication of this notice Contact Deputy Director (LAB) Housing LIG, D-Block, III Floor, DDA Vikas Sadan INA, New Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE Property No. HP 35, Maurya Enclave. Pitampura, Delhi

That our client **Inderjeet Kaur**, proposes to purchase the above said property from Anita Aggarwal and Bela Aggarwal, who has assured our client that they are absolute owner(s) in possession of the above said property by virtue of Two Relinquishment Deed No.8247, 8201 dated 22.05.23, consequent upon death of Raghubir Prasad who was owner of said property vide Conveyance deed No.6161 dated 29 06 93 who died intestate on 05 09 16 leaving behind **Anita Aggarwal, Bela Aggarwal, Deepika** Aggarwal, Neha Aggarwal, Parag Aggarwal and Pushkal Aggarwal as the only class I legal hein of Late Ranhuhir Prasad

Under the circumstances, notice is hereby given to the General Public, Bank/Financial institutions or other person/s, organization/s, company/jes, governmen uthority/ies, having any claim, rights, title, or any interest of any nature whatsoever into or upon the said property, is hereby called upon to make the same known, in writing with documentary evidence by registered AD Post to the undersigned at the address mentioned hereinbelow within 07 days of the publication of this notice and in the event no respons Aggarwal and Bela Aggarwal to the said property encumbrance of any nature whatsoever and any ubsequent claim shall not bind our client in any nanner whatsoever. Kumar Abhishek

9811377525, • mail:-lanoida2@gmail.com 132A. Anarkali Complex. Jhandewalan Ext. New Delhi

Phone: 011-40591567 Fax: 011-40591567 Regional Office: Delhi Rajendra Park Pusa Road CIN: L85110KA1924PLC001128 **AUCTION NOTICE**

🕸 Karnataka Bank Ltd. 📖

The following persons who have availed loans against pledge of gold ornaments have not repaid the amount in spite of our demand notices. Therefore, please take notice that if the incipal / interest and other charges are not paid on or before 27-03-24 the pledged naments will be publicly auctioned on .27-03-2024 at Shalimar Bagh 11:00 am in the Bank's premises subject to rules and regulations of the Bank. The Bank reserves the righ to cancel / postpone the auction to any other convenient date without further notice and

Gold Loan A/c No. & date Borrower 5487002000054601 5.28.944/-Place : Delhi

Deputy General Manage Date: 20-03-2024 APPENDIX IV-A

read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Commercial Credit Ltd. [CIN: U65923DL2006PLC150632] ("Secured Creditor") he physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 23.04.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery o Rs. 36,62,899/- (Rupees Thirty Six Lakh Sixty Two Thousand Eight Hundred Ninety Nine only) pending towards Loan Account No. HLLADPR00491818 by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest til 04.03.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 05.03.2024 along with legal expenses and othe charges due to the Secured Creditor from PRINCE HANDA (PROPRIETOR SATGURU JEWELLERS), POONAM HANDA and USHA RANI. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 27,50,000/- (Rupees Twenty Seven Lakh Fifty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD")

will be Rs. 2,75,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Seventy Five Thousand only) i.e equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

ENTIRE SECOND FLOOR WITH ROOF / TERRACE RIGHTS OF BUILT UP PROPERTY BEARING PLOT NO. A - 17, AREA MEASURING 100 SQ. YDS., I. E 83.61 SQ. MTRS., (30' X30') OUT OF KHASRA NO. 319, SITUATED IN THE REVENUE ESTATE OF VILLAGE BINDAPUR. DELHI AREA ABADI KNOWN AS COLONY SANJAY ENCLAVE, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI - 110059, WITH PROPORTIONATE RIGHTS OF THE LAND UNDERNEATH, COMMON STAIR CASE WITH ONE CAR PARKING SPACE AT GROUND FLOOR, WESTERN SIDE HAVING ALL RIGHTS OF EASEMENT PATENT OR LATENT, TOGETHER WITH ALL RIGTS IN ELECTRICITY WATER SANITARY FITTING

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullscommercialcredit.com For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

INDIABULLS COMMERCIAL CREDIT LTD.



Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak

[See proviso to rule 8(6)] Notice for sale of immovable assets

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial

Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the **physical possession** of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

What is , and Whatever there is basic as per the bher particulars given herealiast,							
	Sr. No.	Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Earnest Money	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
	(A)	Loan Account No. (B)	(C)	(D)	Deposit (E)	(F)	(G)
	1.	GD traders (Borrower), Amit Kumar (Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/Mortgagor), Asha kumar (Guarantor), Sumit Kumar (Mortgagor) Lan No. 125755000015, & 12570500933	A- 43, Khasra No. 805/5, Village Bisikhar Maruf Mohalla, om Saisantpura, Modi Nagar Uttar Pradesh- 201204 Area- 75.25 Sq Mt. Property	Rs. 58,46,070/-	Rs. 29,70,000/- Rs. 2,97,000/-	April	May 01, 2024 From 11:00 AM 12:00 Noon

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited (URL Link-https://disposalhub.com) The Mortgagors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till April 30, 2024 before 05:00 PM failing which, this/these secured asset/s will be sold as

. The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh. Delhi-110005 on or before April 30, 2024 before 05:00 PM and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before April 30, 2024 before 05:00 PM along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer hrough the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh. Delhi- 110005 on or before April 30, 2024 before 05:00 PM Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at Delhi. For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the e-auction or submission of

Please note that Marketing agencies 1.M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited 2. Augeo Asset Management Pvt Ltd 3. Hecta Proptech Pvt. Ltd. have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property.

tenders, kindly contact ICICI Bank Limited On 8928935040/8584874809.

The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s

Date: March 20, 2024 Authorized Officer

ICICI Bank Limited

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

The spar over 'shakti'

The clash over 'shakti' underscores the complex interplay between cultural identity and politics

s the world's largest democracy, India's political landscape is shaped by a diverse array of cultural symbols and narratives, each carrying its socio-political significance. Politicians, cognizant of these dynamics, strategically deploy cultural symbolism to appeal to different segments of the electorate, often blurring the lines between tradition and modernity, symbolism and substance. Recently, Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi engaged in a verbal skirmish over the interpretation of the term 'Shakti' and its implications on their respective political narratives. Rahul emphasised his reverence towards women, equating them with divine power. Modi underscored the significance of 'Shakti', citing the Chandrayaan mission's landing point named 'Shiv Shakti', and proclaimed readiness to safeguard this force against adversaries. The term 'Shakti' holds deep cultural and spiritual significance in India, representing feminine energy, power, and strength. Rooted in Hindu mythology, it is associated with goddesses such as Durga, Kali, and



Lakshmi, embodying various aspects of power and vitality. Rahul Gandhi, leader of the Indian National Congress, has been actively employing the symbolism of Shakti in his political messaging. Gandhi's invocation of Shakti aims to project a narrative of empowerment, particularly focusing on women's rights and social justice. By aligning himself with the symbolism of Shakti, Gandhi seeks to appeal to the electorate's aspirations for a more inclusive society.

On the other hand, PM Modi, has also incorporated the concept of 'Shakti' into his political rhetoric. Modi, known for his oratory skills and ability to resonate with the masses, has utilised the symbolism of Shakti to

portray himself as a strong and decisive leader capable of safeguarding the nation's interests. For Modi, invoking Shakti is not just about cultural symbolism but also about projecting himself as the embodiment of strength and resolve, crucial attributes in the realm of governance and national security. However, the recent spat between Rahul Gandhi and Modi over the interpretation of 'Shakti' reveals deeper political motives at play. Gandhi, in his attempts to reclaim the narrative of Shakti, accused Modi of distorting its true essence for political gain. He argued that Modi's version of Shakti is divisive and exclusionary, emphasising brute force over empowerment and inclusivity. Gandhi's critique of Modi's appropriation of 'shakti' reflects his broader strategy of challenging the BJP's narrative and offering an alternative vision for India's future. In response, Modi dismissed Gandhi's allegations, asserting that his government's policies are indeed rooted in the principles of Shakti, emphasising progress, development, and national pride. Modi accused Gandhi of attempting to hijack the cultural symbolism of 'shakti' for his political agenda, labelling it as opportunistic and insincere. Whether it's Rahul's quest for a inclusive 'shakti' or Modi's assertion of a resolute 'Shakti,' the debate transcends mere semantics, offering a broader ideological contestation that defines Indian politics today.



Women beat men during the celebration of Latthamaar Holi, in Barasana

Resurgence of military coups across Africa

There is a precarious balance between military power and democratic governance, with implications resonating across continents

Edward Luttwak in his Practical Handbook Coup ⊾d'Etat, can be immediately rewarding but the penalty of failure "is far greater than having to eat out of mess tin" he warns. After an avalanche of coups in Latin America, South East Asia and South Asia, it is resurgent in the African continent with a focus on the French Sahel. On 22nd February Guinea's military leader dissolved the government while retaining charge. In South Asia, the Pakistan Army has endured calling the shots in a new hybrid rule which was being played out clumsily recent-

ly. In South East Asia, the Thai military has donned Bond Street suits, created political parties and made a pact with the monarchy as joint de facto rulers. Monarchy and the Army were bonded in Nepal but the alliance was broken by the Maoist civil war two decades ago. In Myanmar, Generals have fumbled badly and made a mess of the country fighting a losing civil war. Lessons emerging from Pakistan, Myanmar and Thailand on diminishing longevity of coups and military rule are still a challenge to democratic institutions and traditions as we witness in the post-colonial Sahel.

In less than three years (2020 to 2023) six countries have suffered eight coups predominantly in former French colonies in Africa
– Gabon (2023) Niger (2023)
Burkina Faso (2022) Chad (2021), Mali (2021) Guinea (2021) and Sudan (2021). French neo-colonial influence in Africa has finally dissipated. The French military (Foreign Legion) combined with their corporate interests anchored on local elites ensured France became the primary security provider in what is called Francofrique. Three of these countries - Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso – after military coups ordered the French to quit their military stations issuing a deadline. In the case of Niger, it vas i December 2022 when the last French military aircraft evac- invoke a clause of collective uated its garrison. Paris defence. The pullout of French announced it would close its troops from these countries diplomatic mission in Niger for was replaced by Russia and its



an indefinite period though France would continue to be involved in the Sahel - the vast expanse south of the Sahara desert.

The French exodus was triggered by corruption, election fraud, dynasticism and a lack of development and economic progress. 1500 French troops were stationed in Niger to train its troops to meet the growing challenge of terrorism posed by Jihadists, Al Qaeda and Islamic State. Similarly, the Junta in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso have also forced French troops out of the country creating a void in military capacity in counter terrorism. In Burkina Faso and Mali, UN Peace Keepers were also deployed. On the withdrawal of French troops, military leaders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger signed a mutual defence pact. It aims to "establish architecture of collective defence and mutual assistance for our people", the first of its kind in Africa.

The Jihadi insurgency in North Mali in 2012, spread to Niger and Burkina Faso in 2015. The three Junta-led countries are the first to establish a defence arrangement which is military and economic wherein an attack on any one country will

Wagner group. In these countries, anti-West sentiment is strong with local people praising Russia. US Central Command has more than over-the-horizon capability in these states. It has located military drones in West Africa in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Benin. Along with Togo, these countries are also racked by the Jihadi insurgency that has a stronghold in the Sahel. US and France have carried out discreet(deniable) operations but that capability will now diminish following French troops leaving Sahel.

The Sahel group that expelled French troops will lose out on US, EU and French aid that Russia will be unable to provide and sustain. Gabon was the last country to

face a coup in 2023. It is an oilproducing country that also had French troops. It was the eighth coup in Gabon since 2020. President Ali Bongo took over from his father in 2009 who had ruled the country since 1967. Bongo's exit from power was another blow for France. In Gabon, election fraud had become a regular feature. A US report in January 2024 said that President Bongo had secretly provided Chinese President Al Jinping with a military base on the Atlantic Ocean coast. That's the reason China expressed concern in President Bongo. US Deputy NSA, Jon Finer is working the wheel to see if the military base agreement with China can be rescinded.

After the latest election in Pakistan, military wizards in that country are saying that the Army has lost its magic, given that its 'fixed match' over former Prime Minister Imran Khan in jail has gone awry. Its leader was in jail and the party was deprived of the election symbol, still, PTI independent candidates became the single largest group in Parliament overtaking PMLN. PTI candidates have proved to be the most popular party though the Pakistan Army remains the most trusted institution among high-octane corruption-infected political leaders. Precisely the same is the story in Sahel's West African countries under military rule. French troop's expulsion from the Sahel was resisted by Paris like India is stubbornly defending its military presence in Maldives or earlier in Sri Lanka- in both cases, Presidents Muizze and Premadasa had issued dead-

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, ana a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence *Staff. Views are personal)*

the UN about the safety of **LETTERS** TO THE EDITOR

GABON WAS THE

FACE A COUP IN

PRODUCING

HAD FRENCH

EIGHTH COUP IN

GABON SINCE 2020

LAST COUNTRY TO

2023. IT IS AN OIL-

COUNTRY THAT ALSO

TROOPS. IT WAS THE

Microcredit courses revolutionise learning



These courses are democratising access to knowledge and empowering individuals from diverse backgrounds

n a country as diverse and populous as India, with its myriad socio-economic challenges, the need for innovative approaches to education and skill development has never been more pressing. Microcredit courses emerge as a beacon of hope, offering a transformative pathway towards enhancing both learning and employability among the

Microcredit courses, often provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), microfinance institutions, or government agencies, offer short-term, skill-based training programmes that are accessible even to those with limited financial means. These courses cover a wide array of subjects ranging from vocational skills such as carpentry, and plumbing to digital literacy and entrepreneurship. In a unique initiative, Masai School, in collab-

oration with the National Development Corporation (NSDC) and IIT Guwahati, has launched the Micro-Credit Programme in Computer Science and

Engineering (CSE), aiming to

bridge the gap between aca-

demic learning and professional success in the technology sector. This initiative introduces a credit-based curriculum covering crucial

such as Programming, Mathematics for Computer Science, Data Structures and Algorithms, Databases, System Design, and OS Networking. The partnership emphasises outcome-driven education, guaranteeing internships and job assurance for students who meet specific academic and engagement criteria.

The programme stands out for its rigorous admission process, comprehensive learning methodologies, and emphasis on preparing students for employment through innovative delivery methods and assessment sys-

Micro-Credit Programme represents a transformative approach to technical education, blending rural populations. By break-

academic rigour with industry exposure. By directly linking academic achievements with professional success, it sets a new standard in higher education. NSDC, as the principal architect of the skill ecosystem in India, plays a pivotal role in catalysing vocational training initiatives and supporting private sector par-ticipation in skill develop-

IIT Guwahati's involvement underscores the programme's commitment to academic excellence and innovation, leveraging its reputation as one of India's premier engineering institutions. Masai School bridges the gap between academic learning and industry demands further strengthens the initiative's potential to revolutionise technical education.

One of the most significant advantages of microcredit courses lies in their accessibility. Unlike traditional educational institutions, which may require hefty tuition fees and possess stringent admission criteria, microcredit courses are designed to be inclusive, reaching out to marginalised communities, women, and

ing down financial barriers and geographical constraints, these courses democratise education, empowering individuals from all walks of life to acquire new skills and

knowledge. Moreover, microcredit courses are tailored to meet the specific needs and demands of local communities. They are often developed in consultation with industry experts and employers, ensuring that the skills imparted are relevant and market-oriented. This close alignment with industry requirements enhances the employability of participants. Furthermore, microcredit courses foster a culture of lifelong learning and selfreliance. By providing individuals with the tools and resources to upgrade their skills and adapt to changing market dynamics, these courses instil a sense of empowerment and agency. In the context of India, where sizable population lacks access to quality education and training, microcredit courses hold immense potential to

transformation. (The writer is an educator, views are personal)

drive social and economic

CONGRESS NEEDS TO INTROSPECT

Sir — It is time for introspection for Sonia Gandhi and the Congress party after the election reverses in the state. As everybody expected that the mother-son combination would come out of the rut and perform creditably well within the party status, one more debacle and failure is anticipated for the Congress party at the National level. Just role reversal is going to help out the cause. A postmortem needs to be conducted for successive defeats in the assembly before the parliamentary elections and Kharge as the party's leader could not stop the slide so far.

The effective ways of functioning are not found out, instead only blame games are played out. Kharge is not a taskmaster and Rahul is in the doldrums. It is more than two terms after the 2014 debacle in the parliamentary election and no remedial measures have been looked into. Just blaming the ruling dispensation is not going to help in any way. Now the party cadres are questioning the high command to be more proactive and counterproductive to repair the damages rather than remaining as sorry spectators. It is now or never situation and it is time to re-emerge as a striking force rather than remaining sober all the time. Congress needs a fresh mind and not the old warhorses just to stick around and do nothing

Anadambal Subramaniam | Mumbai

WATER CRISIS IN IT HUB Sir — A learning lesson for everyone, amidst the dire water crisis that has evolved in the "IT capital of India" is a harsh reality. Moreover, the technological hub and fastest-growing city of the service sector is itself starving for water. The current situation emerges of the need for nationwide adoption of rainwater harvesting. The need to sustain natural resources cannot be emphasised. It's rather a recitation for all of us to understand the dire water crisis that will

emerge across the nations in the com-

China's cartographic warfare



rime Minister Modi's recent visit and the inauguration of the Sela Tunnel demonstrate India's commitment to asserting sovereignty over the region and enhancing its military readiness, which China opposed. China's use of cartographic warfare in regions like Arunachal Pradesh, which it refers to as southern Tibet, represents a broader strategy to challenge existing borders without overt military aggression, blur-

ing months. We need to stand for the conservation, protection and recycling of water and segregate the water depending upon its usage like potable water, Fresh water, salt water, hard water, brackish water, distilled water, black water, raw water grey water. Considering the sustainable development goals to achieve by 2030 also set out the categorization for SDG-6 Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG-13 Climate Action and SDG-14 Life Below Water could prove the ongoing desperation. Not one, but all state solutions are the need of the

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

RCB CLINCHES MAIDEN WPL TITLE

- Royal Challengers Bangalore clinched their maiden WPL title with a resounding victory over Delhi Capitals, triumphing by 8 wickets in a spectacular finale. The match showcased RCB's unwavering determination, epitomised by their bowlers who restricted DC to a mere 113 runs. Notable performances by

Sophie Molineux and Shreyanka Patil in

ring the lines between peace and conflict. By designating Arunachal Pradesh as "Zangnan" and objecting to Indian leaders' visits to the region, China seeks to undermine India's control and pave the way for future claims. This tactic, part of a grey zone warfare approach, poses a significant challenge to India's sovereignty and territorial integrity, especially given the sensitive nature of the India-China border.

India, however, has consistently rejected China's assertions, reaffirming Arunachal Pradesh as an integral part of the country. To counter China's tactics, India must maintain a robust defence posture and engage diplomatically to uphold its territorial integrity. By strengthening infrastructure and military presence in border regions like Arunachal Pradesh, India can signal its resolve to protect its sovereignty and deter Chinese

Jacob J | Thiruvananthapuram

the final exemplified their bowling prowess. In the chase, Smriti Mandhana and Ellyse Perry's stellar partnership ensured a smooth sail to victory for the Bengaluru squad. And finally, Royal Challengers Bangalore have done it. They have won their first-ever title in the 16 years of the franchise's existence.

This historic win marks a monumental achievement for the Smriti Mandhanaled team, captivating fans worldwide with their exceptional display of talent and teamwork. As celebrations reverberate through the Bangalore family, anticipation mounts for the upcoming IPL season commencing on March 22nd. With newfound confidence and momentum, RCB enthusiasts fervently hope for a continuation of this triumphant journey. Congratulations to the entire Bangalore family on this remarkable triumph, igniting hopes for an illustrious future on cricket's grand stage

Imdadullah | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN THE DIVINE

JUSTICE SYSTEM

There is a foolproof divine justice system; we should stick to dharma at all times



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

houldn't we wonder how this Creation goes on eternally? How is order maintained with so much diversity? We are all human beings alright, but there are so many races, cultures, religions, etc. How are eight billion persons coexisting? Then, there are other species, notably cows, dogs, birds, etc. There is some kind of equilibrium and the world goes on. There is so much connectivity between different areas of the world. Things grown, produced, manufactured, etc. are made available in different parts of the world. So much exchange of goods and services is there. How does order prevail in such a big world?

The answer is the Divine Justice System. It is what keeps us all going year after year for billions of years. What is this System? Who implements it? It is God mainly. He is assisted by gods and goddesses, material nature, who work under God's superintendence. They follow rules made by God. Lord Krishna states, "Under My superintendence, the material nature gives birth to the world along with moving and stationary things. And on account of this, the world goes on." God keeps us all going. He is, "Having limbs on all sides; having eyes, head and mouth on all sides; having ears on all sides, He is situated in this world pervading all." (13.13) Those may be His manifestations, but, "This world is spread by Me by My unmanifest form." (9.4) God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. As stated earlier, gods and goddesses assist God in this mammoth task. Of all, Shani devata requires special mention in the subject connection, because he is the god of justice, which is a crucial position. It is said that Shanideva is the god of karma, justice and retribution. He delivers results depending upon one's thoughts, speech and deeds. He is very strict because he has to ensure that only deserving persons get rewarded and shirkers of duties get punished. This is exactly what is the 'Karmaphala Principle' is



All our acts done by mind, words and bodies are duly recorded for future rewards and punishments. This is where the divine system differs from the human legal system. In the latter system, we look for instant justice; we have no patience. In our hurry, we ignore so many relevant factors. For example, a poor child steals some food. In our legal system, he is guilty of theft and fit for punishment. But in the divine system, the child may be forgiven, especially because society is not shouldering its responsibility of looking after its weaker section of children.

But no guilt goes unpunished, which is not true in the case of the human legal system. That is the reason criminals are not as afraid as they should be because they hope to escape punishment. It takes time in the case of the divine justice system because the totality of the crime has to be considered. A crime affects many. Consequences have to be taken into consideration. But, ultimately justice is delivered. Then, there is no reward to anyone at the expense of another. For example, a person applying for a prime job but not so deserving will not be favoured depriving someone deserving. For God, "I am similarly inclined towards all beings, no one is hateful for Me; and no one is dear, that is I have no preconceived and prejudiced notion towards anyone." (9.29) Justice must prevail in all cases. Otherwise, how would confidence be there in the divine justice system, which is crucial for the Creation to exist?

God does favour His devotees but not at the cost of others. This is also important, otherwise, why would anyone approach God? For example, I turn to God for peace of mind. God has no difficulty in obliging me, if I become deserving in His estimation. Rather God bails out His devotees, who have developed God's consciousness every time all time. (18.58) God finds a way not to go against 'dharma'. There is nothing God cannot do; He is unlimited. So what did we learn? That there is a foolproof divine justice system, and we should stick to dharma at all times; we will be well served.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

Rationalise and simplify GST



UTTAM GUPTA

The GST Council has to make crucial decisions regarding inclusion of petroleum products and streamlining tax slabs to fortify the robustness of the GST system

Group of Ministers (GoM) set up by the GST (Goods and Services Tax) Council is currently reviewing the new tax regime with a focus on 'simplification' and 'rationalisation' as key objectives. GST is a single nationwide tax that subsumes within it more than a dozen taxes of the pre-GST era. Applied all over India, it has a provision of setoff for tax paid on inputs also known in common parlance as input tax credit (ITC). This makes the system free from the cascading effect of tax on tax besides encouraging businesses to report all their purchase or sales transactions.
Gross GST or GGST collection includes

Central GST (CGST): it is levied by the central government on the intrastate movement of goods and services, i.e., transactions within one state; State GST (SGST): it is a tax levied on intrastate supplies of both goods and services by the particular state government where the product sold is consumed; Integrated GST or IGST collection: it is a tax levied on all interstate supplies of goods and/or services or across two or more states/UTs (it also includes collections from import of goods).

GGST also includes Compensation Cess or CC: it is levied on the supply of select goods and or services or both to compensate the states for loss of revenue arising due to the implementation of the GST regime. Initially levied for five years till July 1, 2022, it has been extended till March 2026 with the specific purpose of using the proceeds for repaying the loans that were taken during 2020-21 and 2021-22 to make up for the shortfall in collections from the cess vis-à-vis the compensation requirements of the states

During 2018-19 and 2019-20, monthly GGST collections generally remained below Rs 100,000 crore. During 2020-21, after plunging during the first half (courtesy of, the Covid-19 pandemic), collections bounced back to Rs 100,000 crore during the second half. During 2021-22, these picked up posting an average of Rs 124,000 crore. During 2022-23, the monthly average rose further to Rs 150,000 crore.

During the current FY, monthly average GGST collections have zoomed to Rs 166,000 crore during April-November 2023. It works out to a growth of 12 per cent year-on-year. Looking at the breakup, CGST and SGST collections have increased by 16.7 per cent and 15.4 per cent respectively. The CC collections are also up by 12.9 per cent. However, IGST collections have registered a smaller increase of only 8.6 per cent. This is due to a meagre growth of 2.6 per cent in IGST collections from the import of goods in turn, caused by an 8.7 per cent decline in merchandise imports during this period.

Tax collections depend majorly on three factors viz. tax rates, nominal GDP (NGDP) which is GDP at current prices and compliance. According to a study by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in 2022, the weighted average GST rate fell from 14.4 per cent at the time of inception of the GST to 11.6 per cent in 2019; courtesy, of a series of tax cuts brought about during this period. The 14.4 per cent itself was lower than the revenue neutral rate (RNR) of 15-15.5 per cent estimated by the Arvind Subramanian





UNDER GST, THE **ACTIVITY OF A** FIRM ABOUT A TRANSACTION IS UNDER GAZE AT

EVERY STAGE. AT THE TIME OF GOODS LEAVING ITS PREMISES, IT IS REQUIRED TO GENERATE AN ELECTRONIC OR E-INVOICE: A DOCUMENT IN A

DIGITAL FILE FORMAT THAT IS AUTHENTICATED **ELECTRONICALLY** BY GST NETWORK

Committee. RNR is the tax rate charge of the conveyance carrythat seeks to collect similar revenue under the new regime as collected from taxes under the erstwhile regime.

The increase in GST collections despite the rate cut, shows that the other two factors played a positive role. The surge in NGDP by 18.4 per cent during 2021-22 and 16.1 per cent during 2022-23 contributed to impressive growth in GGST collections in those years. During April – November 2023, growth in NGDP slowed to around 9 per cent. Yet, if GGST collections are up 12 per cent during this period, this is due to compliance and prevention of ITC claims.

Under the pre-GST dispensation, it was possible to remove goods from the factories without raising an invoice, move to the sale points and sell to the consumers without getting noticed hence, no payment of tax. The situation was aggravated by most of the transactions happening in cash which meant there wouldn't

be any trail. Under GST, the activity of a firm about a transaction is under gaze at every stage. At the time of goods leaving its premises, it is required to generate an electronic or e-invoice - a document in a digital file format, just like a PDF file that is authenticated electronically by GST Network or GSTN. The firm is also required to generate an electronic Way or e-Way bill on the eWay Bill Portal. This document is required

ing any consignment of goods of value exceeding Rs 50,000/.

The government is also strengthening the GST infrastructure through measures such as the deployment of AI and ML-based analytics - it is the process of using ML (Machine learning) algorithms to aid the process of analytic evaluation of the data, aadhaar authentication for registration, calibrated action on nonfilers, and so on. All these measures are geared to drive all businesses to be a part of the GST network, truthfully report all transactions and prevent fraudulent

As a result, between April 2018 and April 2023, the total number of GST returns filings increased by 56 per cent to 11.28 million while the number of active GST taxpayers rose 33 per cent to 13.96 million. As for detected evasion, on top of about Rs 100,000 crore detected during 2022-23, for the current FY, the government is expected to detect Rs 300,000 crore. Of this, it hopes to recover around Rs 50,000 crore during the current year itself. The trend in GST collections since FY 2021-22 instills confidence that the new regime is robust and healthy capable of generating high revenue on a sustainable basis. The GST Council should leverage this to address some pending issues. First, it should consider taxing

petroleum products under GST. Currently, these are taxed under to be carried by a person in the pre-GST regime entailing a

much higher level of levy. For instance, in Delhi, the taxes (central excise duty or CED plus VAT) account for about 80 per cent of the ex-refinery price of petrol. Taxing it under GST will result in lowering this to 28 per cent (even if it is put in the highest slab). This means that the Centre and states will end up collecting over one-third of what they have been collecting till now. A resilient GST regime should be able to

make up for this loss. Second, it should transition from the current five tax slabs (namely nil, 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent) to a simple tax regime that GST was intended to be. While, the Dr Kelkar committee had recommended a single GST @12 per cent, even Arvind Subramanian had gone for the three rates regimes. For now, the GST Council may consider opting for

Dr Subramanian's approach. Third, several sectors face an 'inverted duty' structure i.e., the tax on finished products is lower than that on raw materials (RMs) used in its production. For instance, GST on complex fertilisers is 5 per cent, against 18 per cent on ammonia and 12 per cent on phosphoric acid. This leads to output tax liability not adequate to offset ITC resulting in an 'unabsorbed' tax credit. The anomaly needs to be corrected by lowering the tax on RMs at least to the level of tax on finished products.

(The writer is a policy analyst;

The transformative power of education in fostering global unity

Education serves as a bridge that transcends cultural divides, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration among diverse populations

n today's intricate global tapestry, education emerges ▲as a pivotal force, transcending cultural boundaries and fostering mutual understanding among diverse populations. Delving into the realm of academic achievement, this study explores the profound impact of education, particularly focusing on the experiences of Indian stu-

Within the contemporary global educational milieu, institutions offering rigorous research-oriented programmes attract a kaleidoscope of students from various backgrounds. This commitment is exemplified by programs spanning disciplines such as petroleum engineering and the energy sector. Such insti-



for students from around the globe, facilitating a dynamic international community. This dynamic illustrates how educational settings can serve as conduits for intercultural exchange, fostering innovation and academic excellence. Indian students are renowned for their academic prowess, particularly in STEM disciplines. Beyond their intellectual contributions, they enrich tutions serve as melting pots their academic environments Placement

by sharing their cultural heritage through various events and celebrations. This exchange cultivates mutual respect and understanding among peers, broadening perspectives and equipping students for an increasingly inter-connected global workforce. Initiatives promoting crosscultural exchanges and collaboration underscore the mutual benefits of cultural integration in fostering educational and economic growth.

Transitioning from academia to the professional realm marks a pivotal stage for students. Certain institutions distinguish themselves by seamlessly integrating career preparation into the educational journey. For instance, programmes like the Job Guarantee

career planning from the outset, offering support in enhancing interview skills, gaining practical experience through internships, and facilitating on-campus employment opportunities. For Indian students aspiring to pursue careers abroad, such initiatives offer a pathway to success amid the challenges of securing work visas, underscoring the institution's commitment to their holistic development. On-campus job opportunities serve as stepping stones for stu-dents to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, irrespective of their nationality. Indian students benefit from roles in data processing and IT help desks, gaining invaluable real-world insights and honing essential

Programme guide students in soft skills such as problemsolving and time manage-

Education catalyses excellence and cross-cultural understanding. Educational institutions worldwide are laying the groundwork for a more interconnected and empathetic global community through a multifaceted approach that integrates rigorous academic programmes, opportunities for cultural exchange, and practical professional development. The transformative educational journey experienced by Indian students abroad epitomizes this ethos, emphasizing the importance of diversity and readiness for a globalised workforce.

These institutions not only nurture future leaders but also pave the way for a future scale. When students from international education—

where cultural diversity is celebrated as a strength rather than a barrier. By fostering environments where students from diverse backgrounds can share experiences, learn from one another, and prepare for the challenges of \bar{a} globalised economy, education emerges as a unifying force, transcending cultural differences in the pursuit of collective achievement.

In conclusion, the exchange of students among countries is not merely a matter of academic enrichment; it is a cornerstone for fostering a more united and harmonious world. By facilitating cross-cultural understanding and empathy, student exchanges lay the foundation for mutual respect and cooperation on a global

diverse backgrounds come together in educational settings, they bring with them unique perspectives, traditions, and experiences, creating a rich tapestry of diversity that enriches the learning environment for all.

Moreover, these exchanges cultivate lifelong friendships and professional networks that transcend borders, fostering a sense of global citizenship and interconnectedness. As students return to their home countries with newfound knowledge and cultural insights, they become ambassadors for understanding and collaboration, breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions that often divide societies. Furthermore, the skills and attitudes cultivated through

such as adaptability, tolerance, and intercultural communication—are essential for addressing the complex challenges of our interconnected world, from climate change to global health crises. By investing in student exchanges and promoting educational opportunities across borders, we not only invest in the future of individuals but also the collective well-being of humanity. Ultimately, the exchange of students among countries serves as a powerful catalyst for building a better, more united world based on shared values of respect, cooperation, and mutual understanding. (The writer is Vice provost for

global engagement at the University of Tulsa, USA.; views are personal)

'Jews who vote for Democrats Incoming Palestinian PM lays out hate Israel & their religion'

Former President Donald Trump on Monday charged that Jews who vote for Democrats "hate Israel" and hate "their religion," igniting a firestorm of criticism from the White House and Jewish leaders. Trump, in an interview, had been asked about Democrats' growing criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his handling of the war in Gaza as the civilian death toll continues to mount

"I actually think they hate Israel," Trump responded to his former aide, Sebastian Gorka. "I think they hate Israel. And the Democrat party hates

Trump, who last week became the Republican Party's presumptive nominee, went on to charge: "Any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion. They hate every-thing about Israel and they should be ashamed of them-selves because Israel will be destroyed."

The comments sparked immediate backlash from the White House, President Joe Biden's campaign and Jewish leaders. The vast majority of Jewish Americans identify as Democrats, but Trump has often accused them of disloyalty, perpetuating what critics say is an antisemitic trope.

At the White House, spokesperson Andrew Bates cast the comments as "vile and unhinged Antisemitic rhetoric' without mentioning Trump

"Ás Antisemitic crimes and acts of hate have increased across the world - among them the deadliest attack committed against the Jewish people since the Holocaust – leaders have an obligation to call hate what it is and bring Americans together against it," he said. "There is no justification for spreading toxic, false stereotypes that threaten fellow citizens. None?

Biden's campaign said, "The only person who should be ashamed here is Donald Trump.'

"Trump is going to lose again this November because Americans are sick of his hateful resentment, personal attacks, and extreme agenda," said spokesman James Singer.

Biden concerned about prospective major Israeli operation in Rafah

Washington (PTI): US itation, he added. President Joe Biden has told Sullivan said Rafa Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he is deeply concerned about the prospect of Israel conducting major military operations in Rafah on the lines of those in Gaza City and Khan Younis, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said. During his telephonic conversation with Biden on Monday, Netanyahu agreed to send an inter-agency team of Israeli officials to Washington to hold discussions on an alternative approach to target key Hamas elements in the southern Gaza city of Rafah and secure the Egypt-Gaza border without a major ground invasion, Sullivan said at his daily press conference on Monday.

This was the first time in a month that the two leaders spoke on phone

Sullivan said Biden and Netanyahu spoke at length about Rafah. "The President explained why he is so deeply concerned about the prospect of Israel conducting major military operations in Rafah of the kind it conducted in Gaza City and Khan Younis," the NSA said.More than a million people have taken refuge in Rafah. They went from Gaza City to Khan Younis and then to Rafah. They have nowhere else to go. Gaza's other major cities have largely been destroyed, he said. And Israel has not presented the US or the world with a plan on how or where it would safely move those civilians, let alone feed and house them and ensure access to basic things like san-

Jonathan Greenblatt, who heads the Anti-Defamation League, said, "Accusing Jews of hating their religion because they might vote for a particular party is defamatory & amp; patently false."

"Serious leaders who care about the historic US-Israel alliance should focus on strengthening, rather than unraveling, bipartisan support for the State of Israel," he wrote on X, formerly known as

Sullivan said Rafah is a primary entry point for humanitarian assistance into Gaza from Egypt and a military operation in the city would shut it down. "Rafah is on the border with Egypt, which has voiced its deep alarm over a major military operation there and has even raised questions about its future relationship with Israel as a result of any impending military operation," he said. "Now, the President has reject-

ed, and did again today, the strawman that raising questions about Rafah is the same as raising questions about defeating Hamas. That's just nonsense. Our position is that Hamas should not be allowed a safe haven in Rafah or anywhere else. But a major ground operation there would be a mistake. It would lead to more innocent civilian deaths, worsen the already dire humanitarian crisis, deepen the anarchy in Gaza, and further isolate Israel inter-

nationally," he said. Most importantly, the key goals Israel wants to achieve in Rafah can be achieved by other means," he said. During the call, Biden asked Netanyahu to send a senior inter-agency team comprising military, intelligence and humanitarian officials to Washington in the coming days to hear the US' concerns about Israel's plans for Rafah and to lay out an alternative approach that would target key Hamas elements in the city and secure the Egypt-Gaza border without a major ground invasion, according to Sullivan.

Trump's comments come as Biden has been facing mounting pressure from the progressive wing of his party over his administration's support for Israel in its retaliatory offensive in Gaza. More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed Oct. 7, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled While Biden continues to back

since Hamas attacked Israel on

plans for reform, faces obstacles

AP ■ RAMALLAH (WEST BANK)

Israel's right to defend itself, he has increasingly criticized Netanyahu. After his State of

the Union speech, he said he needed to have a "come to Jesus" conversation with the

Israeli leader. He has also accused Netanyahu of "hurting Israel more than helping

Israel," saying, "he must pay

more attention to the innocent

lives being lost as a conse-

quence of the actions taken."

Trump took particular issue

with recent comments from

Senate Majority Leader Chuck

Schumer, the country's high-est-ranking Jewish official. In

a speech last week, Schumer sharply criticized Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza, warning that the civilian toll was damaging Israel's standing around the world. He also called for Israel to hold new

called for Israel to hold new

While the White House for-mally distanced itself from

Schumer's comments, the Democratic leader and key

ally was voicing an opinion increasingly held across Biden's

Schumer — whom Trump accused of being "very anti-

Israel now" — responded by accusing Trump of "making highly partisan and hateful

"To make Israel a partisan issue only hurts Israel and the US-Israeli relationship," he

The Pew Research Center reported in 2021 that Jews are

among the most consistently

liberal and Democratic groups

in the U.S.," with 7 in 10 Jewish adults identifying with

or leaning toward the Democratic Party. In 2020, it

found that nearly three-quar-

ters of American Jews disap-

proved of Trump's perfor-

mance as president, with just

Americans have also increas-

ingly soured on Israel's military

operation in Gaza, according

to surveys from The Associated Press and the

NORC Center for Public

In January, 50% of US adults

said the military response from Israel in the Gaza Strip had gone too far, up from 40% in

That number was higher

among Democrats, 6 in 10 of whom said the same thing in

Affairs Research.

November.

27% rating him positively.

elections.

administration.

wrote on X.

The incoming Palestinian prime minister said on Tuesday that he will appoint a technocratic government and establish an independent trust fund to oversee Gaza's reconstruction. In a mission statement acquired by The Associated Press, Mohammad Mustafa laid out wide-ranging plans for the kind of revitalised Palestinian Authority called for by the United States as part of its postwar vision for resolving the conflict.

But the PA has no power in Gaza, from which Hamas drove its forces in 2007, and only limited authority in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ruled out any return of the PA to Gaza and his government is staunchly opposed to Palestinian state-

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas designated Mustafa as prime minister last week. The US-educated economist and longtime adviser to Abbas is an independent with no political

a "non-partisan, technocratic

Palestinians line up to receive free meals at Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip

government that can gain both the trust of our people and the support of the international community". He promised wideranging reforms of PA institutions and a "zero tolerance" policy toward corruption. He said he would seek to reuni-

fy the territories and create an independent, competent and transparent agency for Gaza's In the mission statement, recovery and reconstruction Mustafa said he would appoint and an internationally managed trust fund to raise, manage and disburse the required funds".The vision statement made no mention of Hamas which won a landslide victory the last time Palestinians held national elections, in 2006, and which polls indicate still has significant support. The 88-yearold Abbas, who is in overall control of the PA, has remained in power since his own mandate expired in 2009 and has refused to hold elections, citing Israeli H-1B initial registration period to close on March 22

Washington (PTI): The initial registration period for the H-1B visas, the most sought-after by Indian IT professionals, for fiscal 2025 closes on March 22, a federal agency has said. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The initial registration period for the most sought-after H-1B visas for foreign guest workers for fis-cal 2025 closes at 12 noon Eastern Time (9:30 pm IST) on March 22, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said on Monday.

During this period, prospective petitioners and legal representatives must use an online account of US Citizenship and Immigration Services to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process and pay the associated registration fee for each beneficiary.

Al among topics covered in Obama-Sunak informal talks

Artificial intelligence (AI), one of British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's pet subjects, was among the topics on the agenda of the "informal" meeting he had with former US president Barack Obama, Downing Street has said Downing Street has said. Obama was seen unexpectedly walking up to 10 Downing Street on Monday, with surprised reporters and photographers shouting questions about the purpose of his visit, believed to be the first for the two leaders.

While he just smiled and waved, Sunak's spokesperson later described the visit as a "courtesy drop-in" as the 62-year-old Democrat was in London for work associated



with his Foundation. The Prime Minister welcomed Barack Obama to No. 10 this afternoon for an informal meeting, as part of the former president's visit to London with the Obama Foundation," a Downing Street spokesperson said later on Monday.

"They discussed a range of issues, including international

Obama was seen cheerily wav-

ing at photographers as he entered the famous black door for the discussions that took place in the Downing Street

"He was making an informal courtesy drop-in as part of his trip to London, where he is conducting work of the Obama Foundation. I think President Obama's team made contact and obviously the Prime Minister was very happy to meet with him and discuss the work of the Obama Foundation," Sunak's spokesperson told reporters. The meeting is believed to be the first time the British Indian leader has met Obama, who

was on his first visit to

White House after his two terms as US President, between 2009 and 2017. His last visit to 10 Downing Street was to meet David Cameron, then prime minister and now UK Foreign Secretary, in April 2016. Obama, the first African

American president, founded the Chicago-based Obama Foundation with a mission to "inspire, empower, and connect people to change their world." Obama was seen leaving Downing Street around an hour later with the US ambassador to the UK, Jane Hartley, and smiled at reporters as he quipped that he was "tempted" when asked to speak about democracy about the re-elec-tion of Vladimir Putin as

Kate spotted shopping near home after surgery

Avideo of a beaming Kate Middleton shows her out and about shopping at a farm shop with her husband Prince William near the family home in Windsor, her first public appearance since the so-called "photogate" fiasco of an "edited" royal photograph after her abdominal surgery triggered rumours over her health.

The video, which shows the 42vear-old Princess of Wales carry ing her own shopping bag as the royal couple walk together, was released late on Monday by 'The Sun' newspaper which said the footage is from Saturday.

The newspaper said it has chosen to both report her appearance in its Sunday's edition and show the footage on Monday in a bid to bring an end to what palace sources have called the "madness



of social media."

The couple's Kensington Palace office hopes this informal film will help dismiss the wild conspiracy theories and speculation doing the rounds over Princess Kate's health. The scrutiny around the future queen of Britain has been on overdrive after she was admitted to the London Clinic for a planned surgery on January 16, with social media speculation swirling around her recuperation.

the surgery that the Princess of Wales was "making good progress" and that it would not be offering any regular commentary on a private medical matter. Kate is not expected to return to official royal duties until next month, after the Easter school holidays

She was last officially pictured on Christmas Day last year as she attended the Royal Family's annual church service in Sandringham, Norfolk Meanwhile, after Kate was forced to apologise for the "confusion" she caused with her amateur edit of a picture of her with her three kids - Princes George, 10, and Louis, 5, and Princess Charlotte. 8 – the Getty Images picture agency revealed that another picture taken by the Princess of Wales had been "digitally enhanced at source'

Brazil's Bolsonaro indicted for first time

19 vaccination data, marking the first indictment for the embattled far-right leader with others potentially in store. The Supreme Court released the police's indictment on Tuesday that alleges Bolsonaro and 16 others inserted false information into the public health database to make it appear as though the then-president, his 12-yearold daughter and several others in his circle had received the COVID-19 vaccine

During the pandemic, Bolsonaro was one of the few world leaders railing against the vaccine, openly flouting health restrictions and encouraging society to follow his example. His administration ignored several emails from pharmaceutical company Pfizer offering to sell Brazil tens of millions of shots in 2020 and openly criticized a move by Sao Paulo state's then-Gov. João Doria to buy vaccines from Chinese company Sinovac when no jabs were otherwise available.

Brazil's prosecutor-general's office will have the final say on whether to use the police indictment to file charges against Bolsonaro at the Supreme Court. It stems from one of several investigations targeting Bolsonaro, who governed between 2019 and 2022. Bolsonaro's lawyer did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

The former president denied any wrongdoing during questioning in May 2023. Police accuse Bolsonaro and his aides of tampering with the health ministry's database shortly before he travelled to the US in December 2022, two months after he lost his reelection bid to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

WH to host first trilateral summit with Philippines, Japan in April

Washington (PTI): Leaders of the US, Japan and the Philippines will meet here on April 11 for their first-ever trilateral summit, during which they will discuss cooperation to promote inclusive economic growth and emerging technologies and further peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region amidst China's aggressive actions.

US President Joe Biden will host his Filipino counterpart Ferdinand R Marcos Jr and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of Japan at the White House for the maiden trilateral summit, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

During their meeting, the three leaders will advance a partnership built on deep historical ties of friendship, robust and growing economic relations, a proud and resolute commitment to shared democratic values, and a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

'The leaders will also reaffirm the ironclad alliances between the United States and the Philippines, and the United

States and Japan. At the summit, the three leaders will discuss trilateral cooperation to promote inclusive economic growth and emerging technologies, advance clean energy supply chains and climate cooperation, and further peace and security in the Indo-Pacific and around the world," she said.

In addition, Biden will host Marcos for a meeting at the White House on April 11 to review the historic momentum in US-Philippines relations and discuss efforts to expand cooperation on economic security, clean energy, people-to-people ties and human rights and

The President will emphasise the US commitment to uphold ing international law and promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific," Jean-Pierre said.

Blinken underscores 'ironclad' support for Philippines



Protesters hold slogans against the visit of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a rally near the Malacanang presidential palace in Manila, Philippines on

AP ■ MANILA (PHILIPPINES)

Secretary of State Antony underscored Washington's "ironclad commitment" Tuesday to help defend the Philippines in case of an armed attack against its forces after clashes between Chinese and Filipino coast guards in the disputed South China Sea recently turned more hostile. Blinken, the latest highlevel official to visit the United States treaty ally, met his Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo on Tuesday before planned meetings with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and other top officials in Manila. President Joe Biden will host Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in a White House summit in April The three are likely to discuss growing concerns over increasingly aggressive Chinese actions in the South China Sea and North Korea's nuclear programme. "We stand with the Philippines and stand by our ironclad defense commitments, including under the Mutual Defense Treaty," Blinken said in

a news conference with Manalo.

"We have a shared concern about the PRC's actions that threaten our common vision for a free, open Indo-Pacific including in the South China Sea and in the Philippines exclusive economic zone," Blinken said, using the abbreviation for the People's Republic of China.

He cited "repeated violations of international law and the rights of the Philippines: water cannons, blocking maneuvers, close shadowing other dangerous operations

The Chinese coast guard blocked and used water cannons against Philippine vessels in a confrontation two weeks ago that slightly injured a Filipino admiral and four of his sailors near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal.

The March 5 faceoff in the high seas also caused two minor collisions between Chinese and Philippine vessels and prompted Manila's Department of Foreign Affairs to summon China's deputy ambassador to convey a protest against the Chinese coast guard's actions, which the Philippines said were unacceptable.

Gangs unleash new attacks in Haiti's capital, dozen killed

Port-Au-Prince (Haiti) (AP) Gangs attacked two upscale neighbourhoods in Haiti's capital in a rampage that left at least a dozen people dead in surrounding areas.Gunmen looted homes in the communities of Laboule and Thomassin before sunrise on Monday, forcing residents to flee as some called radio stations pleading for police. The neighbourhoods had remained largely peaceful despite a surge in violent gang attacks across Port-au-Prince that began on February 29. An Associated Press photographer saw the bodies of at least 12 men strewn on the streets of Pétionville, located just below the mountainous communities of Laboule and Thomassin. Crowds began gathering around the victims.

A woman at one of the scenes collapsed and had to be held by others after learning that a rela tive of hers was killed.

UN agency: Criminals reap \$236 bn yearly profits from forced labour forms of coercion, the deliber-

Illegal profits from forced labour worldwide have risen to the "obscene" amount of USD 236 billion per year, the UN labour agency reported Tuesday, with sexual exploitation to blame for three-fourths of the take from a business that deprives migrants of money they can send home, swipes jobs from legal workers, and allows the criminals behind it to dodge taxes.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) said the tally for 2021, the most recent year covered in the painstaking international study, marked an increase of 37 per cent, or USD 64 billion, compared with its last estimate published a decade ago. That's a result of both more people being exploited and more cash generated from each victim, ILO said. "USD 236 billion.

This is the obscene level of annual profit generated from forced labour in the world today," the first line of the report's introduction said. That figure represents earnings "effectively stolen from the pockets of workers" by those who coerce them to work, as well as money taken from remittances of migrants and lost tax revenue for govern-ILO officials noted that such

a sum equaled the economic output of EU member Croatia and eclipsed the annual revenues of tech giants like Microsoft and Samsung.

Forced labour can encourage corruption, strengthen criminal networks and incentivize further exploitation, ILO said. Its director-general, Gilbert Houngbo, wants international cooperation to fight the racket. "People in forced labour are subject to multiple

ate and systematic withholding of wages being amongst the most common," he said in a statement. "Forced labour perpetuates cycles of poverty and exploitation and strikes at the heart of human dignity." We now know that the situation has only got worse," Houngbo added.

ILO defines forced labour as work that's imposed against the will of the employee and exacted under penalty — or the threat of one. It can happen at any phase of employment: during recruitment, in living conditions associated with work or by forcing people to stay in a job when they

want to leave it. On any given day in 2021, an estimated 27.6 million people were in forced labour — a 10 per cent rise from five years earlier, ILO said. The Asia-Pacific region was home to

more than half of those, while Africa, the Americas, and Europe-Central Asia each represented about 13 per cent to 14 per cent. Some $\bar{8}5$ per cent of the people affected were working in "privately imposed forced labour," which can include slavery, serfdom, bonded labour, and activities like forms of begging where cash taken in goes to the benefit of someone else, ILO said. The rest were in forced labour imposed by government authorities — a practice not covered in the study. Some critics have railed against "modern day slavery" in places like the prison system in the US state of Alabama.ILO experts said that governmentimposed forced labour was excluded from the report because of a shortage of data about it — even if estimates show nearly 4 million people were affected by it.

democracy, she said.

Pak airstrikes in Af: US urges | Pak court acquits Imran Islamabad to exercise restrain

The United States urged Pakistan to exercise restraint in its counter-terrorist offensive in Afghanistan, hours after Islamabad said it carried out airstrikes on Tehriki-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) affiliated militants in the neighbouring country.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the US also urges the which rules Taliban, Afghanistan, to ensure that Afghan soil is not used for launching terror attacks. Earlier on Monday, Pakistan

said it carried out airstrikes on TTP militants in Afghanistan, amidst a war of words between the two neighbours over a spate of recent terror attacks in restive Pakistani cities

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) said that rebels belonging to TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group were hit after the outfit

claimed responsibility for the soil. We urge Pakistan to exerattack on Saturday at an army outpost that resulted in the killing of seven soldiers, including two officers. At least eight civilians, including three children, were killed in the airstrikes carried out by Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban said while summoning the charge d'affaires of Pakistan's embassy in Kabul to lodge a strong protest.

Jean-Pierre said Pakistan and Afghanistan should resolve their differences through dia logue. "We are aware of the reports, obviously, that Pakistan carried out airstrikes in Afghanistan in response to the attack in Pakistan on Saturday at a military post. We deeply regret the loss of life and injuries sustained during the attack in Pakistan and the loss of civilian lives during the strikes in Afghanistan," she said. "We urge the Taliban to ensure that terrorist attacks are not launched from Afghan

cise restraint and ensure civilians are not harmed in their counter-terrorism efforts.

We urge both sides to address any differences through dialogue. We remain committed to ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists who wish to harm the United States or our other partners or allies," she

At a separate news conference, State Department Spokesperson Vedant Patel spoke in the same vein.

'We deeply regret the loss of life and injustices sustained during the attack in Pakistan, and the loss of civilian lives during the strike in Afghanistan. We urge the Taliban to ensure that terrorist attacks are not launched from Afghan soil, and we urge Pakistan to exercise restraint and ensure civilians are not harmed in their counterterrorism efforts.

And we urge both sides to

address any differences," he said. "We remain committed to ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists who wish to harm the United States or our partners and allies," Patel

The US has been in regular communication with Pakistani leaders to discuss Afghanistan in detail, including through counter-terrorism dialogue and other bilateral consultations, he

US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on March 15 to discuss a broad range of bilateral issues, part-nering with the Pakistani government on regional security, the US support for continued economic reforms with and through the International Monetary Fund, trade and investment, education, climate change, and other private sector-led economic growth issues

2 Af nationals serving in Pak Army

Islamabad(PTI): Pakistan on Tuesday revealed that two offi-cer-rank Afghan nationals serving in the army were among those expelled from the country under its drive against ille-

gal immigrants.
The revelation comes a day after tension flared between Islamabad and Kabul following overnight raids by the Pakistan Air Force targeted at armed groups hiding out in border regions that saw eight women

Pakistan has witnessed a series

Khan in two cases

 $\mathbf{I}^{ ext{n}}$ some relief to Imran Khan, a court in Pakistan on Tuesday acquitted the jailed former prime minister in two different cases related to the incidents of vandalism during his anti-government long march in March 2022. District and Sessions Court Judicial Magistrate Shaista Kundi accepted Khan's peti-tions and acquitted him in cases registered at Islamabad's Lohi Bhair and Sahala police stations, Geo News reported. "Several cases were registered in a single day, PTI's founder was [framed] in the same role," Khan's lawyer, Advocate Naeem Panjotha, argued.

He added that neither a notification was issued nor the party was informed regarding the enforcement of a prohibitory order under Section 144. The lawyer maintained that the plaintiff is the Station House Officer (SHO), who has no jurisdiction to register the case.

'There are no witness statements in the cases filed against the PTI founder," he further argued.

The judicial magistrate asked the counsel if Khan had been acquitted in cases before, responding to which he said: "Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder had been acquitted in several cases even earlier."

Following the arguments by the former premier's counsel, the court reserved the verdict, which was announced later. Khan is currently imprisoned in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail as he serves several sentences in the Toshakana, un-Islamic marriage, and the cipher

Khan took out a long march demanding snap polls after his ouster from power in 2022. The march was suspended after a failed assassination attempt on Khan's life.

PAK COURT ACQUITS TWO SONS OF NAWAZ SHARIF A Pakistan anti-corruption

court on Tuesday acquitted the two sons of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif in three cases of alleged corruption, nearly ending the legal woes faced by the former were implicated in the Avenfield, Flagship, and Al-Azizia corruption cases in 2018 related to the Panama Papers.

In 2018, the two brothers were declared proclaimed offenders after they failed to join the investigation in Avenfield Apartment, Al-Azizia and Flagship Investment cases filed by the National Account-ability Bureau (NAB).

However, their trials were not held as they were abroad while their father Sharif, the main accused, was convicted in the Avenfiled and Al Azizia corruption cases but acquitted in the Flagship case. The three-time former prime minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief Sharif returned from London to Pakistan in October last year after ending his self-exile for nearly four years.

He challenged his conviction in the two cases and the Islamabad High Court acquitted him.

This emboldened his sons to return from London to face the charges.

They returned on March 12 after the court had suspended their absconder status until March 14 when they finally appeared before the court and were given bail. They had also asked the court to acquit them after the main accused was exonerat-

On Tuesday, the acquittal plea was heard by the accountability court. Judge Nasir Javed Rana after hearing the case, acquitted the two in all three cases.

Earlier the same court grant ed Sharif's sons major relief by revoking its earlier order declaring them proclaimed offenders and cancelling their permanent arrest warrants. With the cases against his two sons wrapped up with Tuesday's acquittal, the entire family of Nawaz Sharif has been exonerated in cases which were launched against him and his family members in 2017 when he was disqualified by the Supreme Court.

prime minister's family. Hassan and Hussain Nawaz Aseefa Bhutto enters politics



Islamabad (PTI): Aseefa Bhutto, the youngest daughter of Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari and slain premier Benazir Bhutto, has taken a plunge into the country's tumultuous politics by filing her candidacy for the byepoll at a National Assembly seat in Sindh Province vacated by her father.

Aseefa, 31, has been active in politics for some time but was kept away from parlia-mentary politics by her father Zardari, also the co-chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples son of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), until an oppor-tune time. Following her father's inauguration as the 14th president of Pakistan, Aseefa is poised to become the First Lady, a position traditionally held by the spouse of the president. Aseefa submitted nomina-tion papers on Sunday in the

tion papers on Sunday in the bye-election for the NA-207 constituency of Shaheed Benzirabad district in the Sindh province. Her father and president,

Asif Ali Zardari, won the seat but vacated it after becoming president.

Aseefa has a resemblance to her mother, who was killed in a bombing and suicide attack in 2007 in Rawalpindi. Aseefa was then a teenager and suffered more emotionally as compared to her two elder siblings, Bakhtawar and Bilawal.

Bilawal, a former foreign minister, is the chairperson of the PPP.

It may be the reason that she was driven closer to her father, who, after becoming president, designated her the First Lady.

Nawaz sparks controversy as he chairs Punjab govt meetings

Lahore (PTI): Nawaz Sharif, the supreme leader of the PML-N, who has stayed away from public view since last month's general elections, has made a conspicuous appearance by chairing three administrative meetings of the ristrative meetings of the Punjab government, raising many eyebrows as he does not hold any official position in either the provincial or federal government.

The three-time former premier on Monday chaired administrative meetings of the Punjab government led by his daughter Maryam Nawaz, the Dawn newspaper reported. An official handout issued

after the meeting said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party supremo issued directions to ministers and officials regarding different infrastructure projects, includ-ing the underground train and metro bus, farmers' plight, electric bikes for students and Parman ralief package. Ramzan relief package. But the 74-year-old veteran

leader chairing the meetings raised many questions since he holds no official position in either the provincial or federal government and is officially only a National Assembly member.

Sharif was set to become Pakistan's premier for a record fourth time in last month's gen-eral elections, but his party failed to get enough seats in the National Assembly to form a government on its own.

Independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won the maximum number of

However, his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif, who is considered a favourite of the military establishment, managed to establishment, managed to form a coalition federal gov-ernment with the help of five other parties, including the Pakistan Peoples Party led by ex-foreign minister Bilawal Zardari-Rhutto Since then he Zardari-Bhutto. Since then, he has been away from the public eye. Maryam Nawaz, 50, is the first woman chief minister in Pakistan's history. She is considered to be the political heir of Nawaz Sharif.

Lanka moves for electoral reforms in election year

AP ■ COLOMBO Sri Lanka's cabinet has approved a proposal to reform the parliamentary election system in the island nation ahead of the presidential election likely to be held later this year. A note from the cabinet meeting held Monday released here on Tuesday said that a cabinet sub-committee has been appointed to formulate a hybrid system for parliament representation - 160 members to be appointed by first past the post SLPP wants a parliamentary election to precede the presiden-Wickremesinghe has the power to dissolve parliament for a snap election or the 225-member house can pass a resolution by simple majority to call for a fresh parliamentary election.

system while 65 members would be elected under the proportional representation system while retaining the total number of MPs at 225. Presently, 196 members are elected under districts based proportional representa-tion while 29 members are appointed on the cumulative votes polled from the nationwide vote. The cabinet note added that the Justice Minister Dr. Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe was advised to work out a draft election law accordingly. The move on the electoral reforms assumes significance as the country is set to hold the next presidential election in the last quarter of this year. The next parliamentary election is not due before August 2025. However, speculation is rife that a section of the ruling

But analysts say either party was unlikely to make the move for a snap parliamentary election. Political sources said that Wickremesinghe on Monday asked his cabinet members to get ready for the presidential election which should take place between September 15 and November 15

Nepal's new five-party coalition govt unveils common minimum policy

Nepal's new five-party coalition government Tuesday said it will adhere to an independent foreign policy to safe-guard its interests while adopt-ing efficient policies on land management, forestry, climate adaptation and disaster man-agement. The coalition's common minimum programme was unveiled at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers in Singha Durbar, in the presence of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and the top leaders of the parties in the ruling alliance.

The document underscores the government's focus on prioritising sovereignty and terri-torial integrity and fostering robust and balanced international relations.

It has also underscored the need for "maintaining balanced, trustworthy and friendly relations with all the friendly countries, including the two neighbours (India and China), keeping sovereign equality, mutual interest and respect at the centre point."

Emphasis on women's participation, women's empowerment, social inclusion, transitional justice, sustainable peace tourism, culture and social harmony are also part of the Minimum Common Policy Priorities and Resolve, which is considered a guideline for the functioning of the coalition government.

The preamble of the document states that the coalition government is committed to instilling hope and confidence among the people by tackling prevalent issues such as economic downturn and impunity. It was read out by the CPN-

UML vice chair and coordina-

tor of the government's Programme Draft Committee, Bishnu Prasad Paudel. Prachanda, of the CPN (Maoist Centre), dumped the Nepali Congress and forged a new alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist - CPN-UML) – the second-biggest party – led by former premier KP Sharma Oli on March 4. On March 6, Prachanda

appointed four ministers from his party, seven from the CPN-UML, three from the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and two from the CPN (Unified Socialist), prompting the five-party coalition to work out new guidelines for governance. The fifth party in the coalition is the Janata Samajwadi Party

The top five leaders including Prime Minister Prachanda, UML chair K P Sharma Oli, chair of CPN-Unified Socialist Madhav Kumar Nepal, RSP president Rabi Lamichhane and chair of JSP Upendra Yadav put their signatures on the document.

Nepal has struggled to maintain political stability in recent

Prime Minister Prachanda has sought a vote of confidence in to power in December 2022. Nepal has witnessed 13 governments in the last 16 years. The common minimum poli cy and priorities document includes a commitment to ensuring the integrity of financial institutions, enhancing public infrastructure, fostering good governance alongside efficient service delivery, promoting employment, entrepreneurship and domestic production and coordinating the development of physical infra-

expelled

and children dead.

of terror attacks and has openly said it suspects the involvement of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a splinter group of Afghan Taliban. The country has repeatedly urged the Afghan government to take action against the TTP and its

Russia to evacuate 9k children from border region

Moscow (AP): A Russian border region plans to evacuate some 9,000 children from the area as it is continuously shelled from the Ukrainian side, an official said Tuesday. Kyiv's forces have increasingly been extensive front line that has changed little after more than

two years of war. The children are to be moved further east, away from the Ukraine border, the governor of Russia's Belgorod border region, Vyacheslev Gladkov,

The announcement came a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin said the Kremlin wants to create a buffer zone to help protect border regions from long-range Ukrainian strikes and cross-

Ukraine has increasingly used its long-range firepower to hit oil refineries and depots deep inside Russia and has sought to unsettle the Russian border regions, putting politi-

Three people were wounded in an attack Tuesday from Ukraine on the Belgorod region, Gladkov said, including a 14-year-old who had part of a limb amputated. His mother was also seriously hurt in the attack, he said.

The previous day, four members of the same family died in an attack on the Belgorod village of Nikolskoe, according to Gladkov. A grandmother, mother, her partner and 17-year-old son were killed after a missile struck their



This photo released by Belgorod region governor Vvacheslay Gladkov's telegram channel on Monday, shows emergency ministry employees working at the destroyed building after shelling from the Ukrainian side in Nikolskove village Belgorod region, Russia, Belgorod region governor Vyacheslay Gladkov says four people were killed in the shelling, not far from the border with Ukraine

It has not been possible to independently verify either side's battlefield claims. Two Ukrainian drones were shot down over Belgorod and another over the neighbouring the Russian defence ministry said. It gave no details of any

damage or injuries. Meanwhile, Russia used S 300 missiles to attack the city of Selydove in the eastern Donetsk region of Ukraine overnight. Four people were wounded and houses and cars were damaged, the regional

prosecutor's office said. On Monday, Russian attacks in Donetsk killed one person and wounded another. according to Vadym Filashkin, the regional governor.

'Kim Jong Un supervised tests of rocket launchers targeting Seoul'

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a live-fire drill of nuclear-capable "super-large" multiple rocket launchers designed to target South Korea's capital as he vowed to boost his war deterrent in the face of deepening confrontations with rivals, state media said Tuesday. The report came a day after South Korea and Japan said they detected North Korea firing multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward waters off its eastern coast, adding to a streak of weapons displays that have raised regional tensions.

Experts say North Korea's large-sized artillery rockets blur the boundaries between artillery systems and ballistic missiles because they can create their own thrust and are guided during delivery. The North has described some of these systems, including the 600mm multiple rocket launchers that were tested Monday, as capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads. Photos published by the North's official Korean Central News Agency showed at least six rockets being fired simultaneously from launch vehicles and flames



appeared to be a small island tar-

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Tuesday that it assesses North Korea conducted more launches than what was shown on the photos. Lt. Col. Lee Chang-hyun, a deputy JCS spokesperson, said that South Korea categorizes the North Korean weapons system tested Monday as a ballistic missile in view of its characteristics and capacities.

KČNA also said North Korean troops in a separate test simulated exploding an artillery shell at a preset altitude. The report didn't specify whether that test was to rehearse how a nuclear weapon would be detonated Kim called the 600mm multiple

rocket launchers key parts of his arsenal of weapons that are supposedly capable of destroying Seoul if another war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula. (Kim) said that it is necessary

to further impress upon the enemies that if an armed conflict and a war break out, they can never avoid disastrous consequences," the KCNA said. He called for his army to "more thoroughly fulfill their missions to block and suppress the possibility of war with the constant perfect preparedness to collapse the capital of the enemy and the structure of its military

forces."Lee, the South Korean deputy spokesperson, said South Korea and the United States have been bolstering their response capabilities against North Korea's increasing nuclear threats. North Korea's launches came days after the end of the latest South Korean-U.S. combined military drills that the North portrays as an invasion rehearsal It was unclear whether the

North timed the launches with a visit to Seoul by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who on Monday attended a democracy summit and held talks with South Korean officials over the North Korean threat. Tensions on the Korean

Peninsula have risen since 2022, after Kim used Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a distraction to accelerate his testing of missiles and other weapons. The United States and South

Korea have responded by expanding their combined training and trilateral drills involving Japan and updating their deterrence strategies built around strategic US assets. There are concerns that North Korea could further dial up

pressure in an election year in

the United States and South

HK lawmakers approve new security law

Hong Kong (AP): Hong Kong lawmakers unanimously passed a new national security law on Tuesday that grants the government more power to quash dissent, widely seen as the latest step in a sweeping political crackdown that was triggered by pro-democracy protests in

The legislature passed the Safeguarding National Security Bill during a special Legislative Council President session that lasted Tuesday. It comes on top of a similar law imposed by Beijing four years ago, which has already largely silenced opposition voices in the financial hub.Hong Kong's Legislative Council, which is packed with Beijing loyalists following an electoral overhaul, expedited the process. Since the bill was unveiled on March 8, a committee held daily meetings for a week, following an appeal by Hong Kong leader John Lee to Chinese rule in 1997 push the law through "at full

Hong Kong's political scene speed". The law threatens stringent penalties for a wide range of actions authorities call threats to national security, with the most severe including treason and insurrection — punishable by life National Security Law.

imprisonment. offences, including the possession of seditious publications, could also lead to sev-

eral years in jail. Some provisions allow criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world. After the voting, Hong Kong leader John Lee announced at the council's chamber that the law will take effect on Saturday.

Andrew Leung said he believed all lawmakers were honored to have taken part in this "historic mission".

"I fully agree with what the Chief Executive said: the sooner the legislation is completed, the sooner national security will be safeguarded," he said. Critics worry the new law will further erode civil liberties that Beijing promised to preserve for 50 years when the former British colony returned to

has changed dramatically since the massive 2019 street protests that challenged China's rule over the semiautonomous territory, and the imposition of Beijing's

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJI NAGAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

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The last date of Tender ID No. 2024_AMCA_1025204_1 "Reques or Proposals - Legacy Waste Remediation by Biomining" has beer xtended till 16 April 2024 for administrative reaso

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icense Fees: Rs.2,93,21,820/-, Wharfage Fees: Rs.18,98,620/-, Last date & time of submission of bid: 04.04.2024 upto 15:00 hrs., Date and time of opening (technica bid): 04.04.2024 upto 15:00 hrs. Refer our website for details http://paradipport.gov.in/.

Sd/- Trafic Manager, Paradip Port Authority PPA/PR/96/2023-2024 dtd.19.03.2024

चुनाव सूचना

गुरु नानक खालसा कॉलेज, करनाल की कॉलेज प्रबन्धन समिति का चुनाव 2024-2027 दिनांक 05.05.2024 दिन रविवार को प्रातः 11:00 बजे कॉलेज की लाइब्रेरी हाल में होगा। चुनाव अनुसूची नामांकन पत्र दाखिल करना दिनांक 15.04.2024 से 19.04.2024 (साँय 4 बजे तक), प्राप्त नामांकन पत्री की पड़ताल दिनांक 22.04.2024, नाम वापसी की अंतिम तिथि दिनांक 26.04.2024 (सांय 4 बजे), चुनाव तिथि 05.05.2024 रिटर्निंग अधिकारी का नाम: श्री सतपाल चोपडा सीनियर एडवोकेट जिला सत्र

न्यायालय, करनाल । पदाधिकारियों के नामः प्रधान, उप-प्रधान, महासचिव, वित्तसचिव।

हस्ताक्षर-महासचिव

India can sustain eight per cent growth: RBI

ndia can sustain 8 per cent annual GDP growth and conducive

macroeconomic configuration may become a launching pad for a step-up in the country's growth trajectory, said an article on the State of Economy' in the central bank's March Bulletin published on Tuesday. Over the period 2021-24, gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged above 8 per cent.

The global economy is losing steam, with growth slowing in some of the most resilient economies and high frequency indicators, pointing to further levelling in the period ahead, said the article authored by a team led by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata

In India, real GDP growth was at a six-quarter high in the October-December period of 2023-24, powered by strong momentum, robust indirect



taxes, and lower subsidies. The high visibility of structural

and healthier corporate and bank balance sheets will likely be the galvanising forces for growth going forward. The world is confronted with

large shifts in structure and

sentiments, which are either underway or impending," it

The article noted that the outlook is shrouded with layers of uncertainty, exacerbated by geopolitical and extreme weather risks as well as fragmenting forces.

By contrast, it said the Indian economy is experiencing a conducive macroeconomic configuration that can be its launching pad for a step-up in its growth trajectory.

"Over the period 2021-24. growth has averaged above 8 per cent; and the underlying fundamentals indicate that this can be sustained and even built upon," the authors said.

The current account deficit is modest, external buffers are resilient and fiscal consolidation is into its third consecutive year even as corporations are deleveraging and improving their debt

servicing capacity.
According to the article, balance sheets in the financial sector are sound and healthy, providing the wherewithal for intermediating the productive credit needs of a resurgent economy.

markets are "Financial reflecting these favourable formations. Capital inflows have resumed strongly as investor interest floods back into India," it said.

The authors further said technology is offering new growth opportunities to seize by becoming more competitive and efficient.

"The time has come to build world class infrastructure,

strong manufacturing bases, a high-quality labour force and global leadership in services to convert these favourable factors into opportunities and strengths over the next few decades," they added.

The article further said the aggregate demand in the third quarter of 2023-24 was investment-driven, with some indications of a revival of the private capex cycle. Capacity utilisation in several sectors has reached a point where there has to be new investments.

The current financial year will likely see the highest ever length of four-lane roads being constructed, along with the highest ever length of speed or access-controlled highways on course to create a worldclass road network by 2037," it said. It also noted that the demand outlook for premium consumer businesses is robust and the growth rhythm is expected to persist into the medium-term.

21,846.30. The stock was the

biggest laggard on the BSE

On Monday, TCS's shares settled nearly 2 per cent lower

amid reports that its

promoter Tata Sons is likely to

sell a minority stake in the IT

Tata Group's stocks have been

in the spotlight after a report

from Spark Capital in March

mentioned that Tata Sons

might go public by September

2025 to meet the Reserve

Bank of India's (RBI) scale-



Sensex, Nifty tank over one per cent

PTI MUMBAI

 $B^{\text{enchmark}}_{\text{tanked 736 points while}} \\$ Sensex Nifty fell below the 22,000 level on Tuesday following a sell-off in index majors TCS, Infosys and RIL and weak Asian trends as Japan's central bank hiked rates for the first time in 17 years.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 736.37 points or 1.01 per cent to settle at more than a month's low of 72,012.05. As many as 23 Sensex shares declined while seven advanced. The index declined by 815.07 points or 1.12 per cent to slide below 72,000 at 71,933.35 in day trade.

The broader NSE Nifty slumped 238.25 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at a month's low of 21,817.45. As many as 41 Nifty shares closed in the red while nine ended with gains.

The key indices opened on a weak note amid losses in Asian markets as the Bank of Japan hiked interest rates for the first time in 17 years. Investors were also cautious ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision this week, analysts said.

Sharp losses in TCS also dragged the indices to month's lows. Tata Consultancy tanked over 4 per cent as its promoter Tata Sons sold around 2.3 crore shares, or 0.65 per cent of equity stake, in the IT services major through block deals.

Other IT stocks Infosys, Wipro, Tech Mahindra and HCL Technologies also closed lower. IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, Nestle, Power Grid, ITC, Tata Motors and UltraTech Cement were the other major laggards. Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Titan and Bharti Airtel were the gainers. Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said, "Following the BoJ's decision to hike interest rates for the first time in 17 years, the Asian peers' mood turned sour, which pulled the Indian market to continue its recent pessimism."

The correction in the domestic market has also been triggered by concerns over premium valuations and the delay of rate cuts by the US Fed due to higherthan-expected inflation, which is evident from the upward trend in the dollar index, he added.

"Nifty fell to its lowest level in over a month on March 19," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. Analysts said investors are

exercising caution as they await the upcoming US Fed meeting, seeking indications on the potential timing of a reversal in the rate cycle. Additionally, the gradual increase in crude oil prices is further dampening

market sentiment. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 1.36 per cent and the smallcap index fell by 1.04

per cent. All indices ended lower. IT index dived 2.66 per cent, teck fell by 2.36 per cent, telecommunication (1.74 per cent), services (1.60 per cent) and utilities (1.57 per cent). A total of 2,583 stocks declined while 1,234 advanced and 111 remained unchanged on the BSE. Also, 364 stocks hit their lower circuit limit, while

> upper circuit level. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled lower, while Tokyo ended in the green. European markets were

235 firms reached their

trading with marginal gains. Wall Street ended in positive territory on

Bank of India cuts home loan rates to 8.3 per cent

 $P_{\text{India}}^{\text{ublic sector lender Bank of }}_{\text{India}} \text{ on } \text{Tuesday}$ announced a reduction in new home loan rates to 8.3 per cent from 8.45 per cent and fully waived off processing fees as a limited period offer till the end of this

The bank claimed that at 8.3 per cent, it has the lowest rate among its peers.

For SBI and HDFC Bank, which are the industry leaders, the lowest rate begins at 8.4 per cent. The offer is valid up to March 31, it added.

The bank also said it is offering special financing for rooftop solar panels at 7 per cent interest rate and with no processing fee.

At 8.3 per cent, a 30-year tenor home loan will have a starting EMI of Rs 755 per

month per lakh. The loan package is further enhanced with an overdraft facility, providing a flexible months.



system homebuyers, it said.

construction, renovation and furniture, its home loan offering broadens its scope beyond traditional financing promote clean and renewable energy solutions by offering financial assistance for installation of rooftop solar panels up to Rs 10 lakh at the same interest rate applicable for home loans. Rooftop solar panel loans are

cost,

and comprehensive financial

Besides covering

priced at 7 per cent with no processing charges. Under this scheme, individuals aiming to set up a solar rooftop can avail finance up to 95 per cent of the project with a maximum repayment period of 120 share value, the market

TCS shares slip three per cent after Tata Sons divests stake

Shares of Tata Consultancy (TCS) plunged more than 3 per cent in the morning trade on Tuesday as its promoter Tata Sons sold around 2.3 crore shares, or 0.65 per cent of equity stake, in the IT services major through block deals. TCS shares tumbled 3.30 per

cent to a low of Rs 4,015.65 apiece on the NSE. On the BSE, the stock plunged 3.15 per cent to Rs 4,014 per piece, emerging a major drag on the benchmark Sensex. According to exchange data, more than 2.53 crore shares

traded on the BSE in morning deals against the two-week average of around 1 lakh. Market experts said the decline in TCS share price is mainly due to the Tata Sons

stake sale. Following the fall in TCS valuation of India's leading confirmation, however, will



software company eroded Rs be made public later in the 14,54,109.37 crore on the

The block deal initiated by Tata Sons was aimed to offload up to 2.34 crore shares of TCS at a floor price of Rs 4,001 per share. This floor price represented a 3.65 per cent discount from the previous day's closing price. The deal is estimated to be valued around Rs 9,000 crore. The buyer and seller's official

45,497.45 crore to Rs evening when the stock exchanges release the data. As of December 2023,

promoters and promoter group entities hold a 72.41 per cent stake in TCS, of which 72.38 per cent shareholding is owned by Tata Sons.

The 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark nosedived 622.03 points, or 0.86 per cent, to 72,126.39, while the broader Nifty slumped 209.40, or 0.95 per cent, to

based regulations. The RBI mandates that upper-layer Non Banking Companies Financial

(NBFCs) are required to list on the stock exchanges within three years. Tata Sons has been named

among 15 upper-layer NBFCs, with a total market valuation of Rs 31.6 lakh crore, Tata Sons is the owner of 29 publicly-listed Tata Group entities.



LIC shares fall nearly

three per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $S_{\text{Life}}^{\text{hares of insurance major}}$ Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) fell by nearly 3 per cent on Tuesday, extending their downtrend for the third day. The stock declined 2.77 per cent to settle at Rs 879.50 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it lost 3.15 per cent to Rs

On the NSE, it dropped 2.71 per cent to Rs 879.85 În three days, the stock has

declined by 8.27 per cent on From its 52-week high of Rs

1,175, the stock is down 25.14 per cent. The country's largest insurer

was listed in May 2022. The government had sold over 22.13 crore shares, or a 3.5 per cent stake, in LIC, through an Initial Public Offering (IPO). The government holds 96.5 per cent stake in the company. Shares of the insurer is down over 7 per cent from its issue price of Rs 949.

LIC is the eighth most valued domestic firm by market Its valuation. market capitalisation stood at Rs 5,56,283.55 crore.

Meanwhile, the government has approved a 17 per cent overall hike in wages for more than 1.10 lakh employees of the insurance giant.

Food price pressures threat to four per cent inflation target: RBI

 F^{ood} price pressures is an obstacle in swifter fall in retail inflation to the Reserve Bank's target of 4 per cent, said an article on the State of Economy' in the central bank's March Bulletin published on Tuesday. Retail inflation based on

Consumer Price Index (CPI) is on a decline since December and was at 5.09 per cent in February.
"Even as inflation is on the

with broad-based softening of core inflation, the repetitive incidence of short amplitude food pressures deters a swifter fall



in headline inflation towards the target of 4 per cent," said the article authored by a team lead by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra.

It further said the global economy is losing steam, with growth slowing in some of the most resilient economies and high frequency indicators pointing to further levelling

was at a six-quarter high in the third quarter of financial year 2023-24, powered by strong momentum, robust indirect taxes, and lower subsidies.

The high visibility of structural demand and healthier corporate and bank balance sheets will likely be the galvanising forces for growth going forward, the article said.

The central bank said the views expressed in the Bulletin article are of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank

Audi to drive in over twenty new models by 2025: CEO

PTI ■ INGOLSTADT

erman automaker Audi Gplans to roll out over 20 new models by the end of 2025 across markets, Audi AG CEO Gernot Dollner said on Tuesday.

The company also plans to He further said: "We are electrify all core segments by planning more than 20 new

The automaker has also lined up a capex of EUR 41 billion for the period between 2024-

Audi AG will invest EUR 11.5 billion in the development of ICE (internal combustion engine), PHEV (plug-in hybrid electric vehicle) and other segments and EUR 29.5 billion for BEV (battery

electric vehicles) and digitisation.

"The Audi Q6 e-tron is the start of an extensive product initiative that we will use to rejuvenate our portfolio over the coming years," Dollner

planning more than 20 new models in 2024 and 2025, including the presentation of the A6 e-tron in the summer 2024 and the new generation of the A5 and Q5 as the first models on the new Premium Platform Combustion (PPC) in the second half of the year." The group is positioning itself

for the future economically, technologically

Pharma major launches cancer

treatment drug Versavo in UK

strategically, and planning to put new products on the street one by one, he stated. Dollner said that despite the recent public debate, there is no doubt about the future of electric cars.

"At Audi, we will electrify all core segments by 2027 and have defined a fully electric target portfolio," he stated. In addition, the transitional period will require starting off with highly efficient combustion-engine models and plug-in hybrids, Dollner "The 50 per cent increase in

electric vehicles delivered in 2023 confirms our path toward electric mobility," he



Tata Motors opens fifth vehicle scrapping facility

PTI NEW DELHI

Tata Motors on Tuesday said it has commissioned its registered vehicle scrapping facility near the capital. Developed in partnership with Johar Motors, registered vehicle scrapping facility (RVSF) has a capacity to safely disassemble 18,000 end-of-life vehicles annually, Tata Motors said in a statement. It is adept at scrapping passenger and commercial vehicles of all brands, the company added. 'The launch of our fifth scrapping facility marks a significant step forward in making sustainable practices and responsible vehicle disposal more accessible. Creating value from scrap aligns with our vision of a

oncology."

Dr Reddy's launched

Versavo in India in 2019.

was launched under the brand name Persivia.

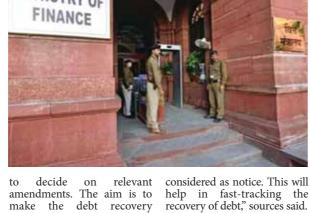
Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Surat, and Chandigarh. It runs the

Government mulls changes in SARFAESI, DRT laws MINISTRY OF

 T^{o} speed up the debt recovery process, the Finance Ministry has set up a panel to suggest amendments to the SARFAESI and DRT Acts, including a provision for granting legal sanctity to enotices to debtors, sources

The committee headed by an Additional Secretary held several meetings, and discussions are in the advanced stage in this regard, sources told PTI. Last month, the Finance Ministry held extensive deliberations with the top brass of banks and Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) to enhance the efficacy of DRTs for expeditious

recovery of debts. "We have formed a committee led by the Additional Secretary



amendments. The aim is to make the debt recovery process less tedious and more effective. We are also planning to introduce a provision to provide legal sanctity to e-

The Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) Act was enacted in 1993 to provide a legal framework for the expeditious adjudication and recovery of "So that an SMS and e-mails debts due to banks and financial institutions. sent by banks can be

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $P_{\text{Laboratories}}^{\text{harma major Dr Reddy's}}_{\text{Ltd}}$ Tuesday announced the treatment drug Versavo in the United Kingdom. Versavo is a biosimilar of

Avastin, a registered trademark of Roche, and is indicated for the treatment of several types of cancers, including colorectal metastatic cancer, lung cancer, recurrent glioblastoma, metastatic renal cell carcinoma, advanced cervical cancer, ovarian cancer and metastatic breast cancer, Dr ovarian Reddy's Laboratories said in

the UK. It is available in strengths of 100 mg and 400 mg single use vials, it added. a regulatory filing. "The launch of Versavo in a It is the first biosimilar highly regulated market product of the company to underscores our capability be approved and launched in global

option for patients with different types of cancers," Dr Reddy's Global Head of Biologics Jayanth Sridhar Further, he said, "This reinforces our launch commitment to bring more biosimilar and other critical

development of high-quality

biosimilar products. Versavo

is a potential treatment

biological products to meet the unmet needs of patients, and strengthens our focus on

Subsequently, it was introduced in other markets such as Thailand, Ukraine, Nepal, and Jamaica under the same brand name. In Colombia, the product

RVSFs under the name 'Re.Wi.Re Recycle with Respect', which are built for dismantling end-of-life passenger and commercial vehicles across all brands, with a focus on employing eco friendly practices.

building a circular economy," Tata Motors Executive

Tata Motors has four RVSFs in

Director Girish Wagh said.

SHREYASI, MAIRAJ, GANEMAT IN TWELVE MEMBERS TEAM



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ommonwealth Games gold medallist Shreyasi Singh, seasoned Mairaj Ahmad Khan and World Cup winner Ganemat Sekhon on Tuesday figured in a 12member shotgun squad picked for the final Paris Games qualifying competition, to be held in Doha from April 19-29. The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) announced the squads for various international important competitions in the run-up to the Olympics, which will be

Four quotas, one each in men's and women's trap and skeet, will be up for grabs in the

held in July-August.

National

Pool qualifying for the knock-

outs, the stage is set for some high-octane action. All the

quarterfinals are scheduled to take place on March 20. The first quarterfinal will be

played between defending champions Madhya Pradesh

existing quota holders have been kept out of the tournament.

Prithviraj Tondaiman and Vivaan Kapoor in men's trap, Shreyasi and Manisha Keer in women's trap, Mairaj and Sheeraz Sheikh in men's skeet and Ganemat and Maheshwari Chauhan in women's skeet are the common shooters in each of the three squads announced. While Zoravar Sandhu gets a crack in men's trap in Doha, Neeru in women's trap, Angad Bajwa in men's skeet and Areeba Khan in women's skeet also get a shot at a Paris quota. For the final three events leading up to Paris — namely leading up to rais - the Green Cup Shotgun in Umbria Italy, the ISSF combined World Cup in Baku,

Azerbaijan (both in May) and the Shotgun World Cup in Lonato, Italy (June) — quota **B**howneesh holders Mendiratta (men's trap), Rajeshwari Kumari (women's trap), Anant Jeet Singh Naruka (men's skeet) and Raiza Dhillon (women's skeet) make a comeback along with the top rankers. The Olympic shogtun

probables are currently

training camp in New Delhi which will be followed by

technical

undergoing a

preparatory camps for both the trap and skeet teams before they depart for Doha. India have so far won 19 quotas for the Paris Games. The shotgun squad has so far won the highest number (4) of

Hockey Manipur qualifies for quarterfinals

Olympic quotas ever.



Germany to play Ukraine, Greece in final warm up games for Euro 2024

ermany will play Ukraine Gand Greece in its final warmup games before hosting the European Championship. The team will face Ukraine in Nuremberg on June 3, and four days later Greece, the 2004 European champion, in Mönchengladbach, the German soccer federation said

on Tuesday. Both opponents need to get through playoffs to qualify for this summer's tournament. Bosnia-Ukraine faces Herzegovina and Greece plays

semifinals on Thursday. "We have to prepare for different playing styles and Germany coach

Kazakhstan in the playoff

Julian Nagelsmann said. "Ukraine and Greece are two strong, passionate teams. We've had our difficulties with opponents of this type

Germany first plays France in Lyon on Saturday, then the Netherlands in Frankfurt on Tuesday.

team will The preparations for Euro 2024 at a training camp in the state of Thuringia from May 26-31 before moving to its base camp at Herzogenaurach in Bavaria for the tournament.

Germany opens Euro 2024 against Scotland in Munich on June 14, followed by Hungary in Stuttgart on June 19 and Switzerland in Frankfurt on

(FLORIDA)

Scottie Scheffler is next in Sline for comparisons with Tiger Woods because golf, like other sports, is always looking for the heir to the throne. Scheffler is playing great golf, measured as much by his elite

ball-striking and alarming consistency as the results. He now has nine victories against the strongest fields — one of them a small field in the Bahamas — in the 25 months since he won his first PGA Tour title

Equally impressive is his 65% rate of finishing in the top 10. The next Woods?
"I think that's a funny question," Scheffler said

Sunday evening after his record-tying final round made him the first back-to-back winner of The Players Championship.

He found out the answer a month earlier at Riviera during the Genesis Invitational.

"I'm not going to remember the exact numbers, but we're playing at Riv this year and I hit my tee ball, and this guy yells out, Congrats on being No. 1, Scottie - 11 more years to go!" he said. And then Scheffler repeated

the number to let it sink in for anyone listen.

"Eleven more years to go." Scheffler reached No. 1 in the world for the fourth time after his runner-up finish in the PGA Championship last May, and he has been there ever since, challenged a few times by either Jon Rahm or Rory

And now with his second withdraw. straight win — a five-shot Before him was McIlroy, who

victory at Bay Hill, a five-shot comeback at the TPC Sawgrass

his lead at the top of the ranking is the largest since Dustin Johnson in May 2017. Johnson stayed No. 1 for 64 consecutive weeks, the longest in the post-Woods era. Scheffler is currently at 43 weeks. His total time has been

Scottie reaching a dominance

not seen since Woods

Woods holds the record at 281 consecutive weeks, breaking his previous mark of 264 consecutive weeks. His total time at No. 1 was slightly more than 13 years.

78 weeks.

Scheffler was off by two years. No need to quibble.

"Anytime you can be compared to Tiger I think is really special," Scheffler said. "But I mean, the guy stands alone I think in our game. He really does? Scheffler has tied Woods with

the most Players Championship titles — two.
"Outside of that, I've got 14 more majors and 70-some PGA Tour events to catch up," he said. "So I think I'm going to tick to my routine and just stick to my routine and just continue to plod along, try and stay as even-keeled as I can."

It's easy to overlook Johnson, partly because he is with LIV Golf and is seen against a full

Golf and is seen against a full roster of great players only at the four majors, and partly because it has been seven years since he was at his most dominant. He won three straight tournaments - Riviera and two World Golf Championships — and was the overwhelming favorite at the Masters until slipping down the stairs the day before the the stairs the day before the first round and having to

won seven times from May 2014 through May 2015, including consecutive majors. And then he injured his knee playing soccer, missing the British Open at St. Andrews, and lost the No. 1 ranking to

and lost the No. 1 ranking to Jordan Spieth.
Scheffler offered a small reminder about looking too far into the future. He felt something in his neck on the second hole of his second round and the pain was such round, and the pain was such that it hurt to take the club too far back. He needed treatment after the 13th, 14th and 15th holes. He had reason to withdraw except that he was playing well — he was tied when he felt the pain — and his competitiveness kept him from

stopping. So he got through Friday with a 69, and then relied more on his hands for a game he described as "kind of slapping it around." He birdied the last three holes Saturday for a 68 to stay in the game, five shots behind.

And then he felt better on Sunday and delivered a masterpiece — a hole-out from 92 yards for eagle on No. 4, four birdies in a five-hole stretch around the turn and a 64 to match the Players Championship record for lowest Sunday score by a winner.

And no one was terribly surprised, the ultimate compliment.

Statistically, he led the field from tee-to-green, just like he seems to do whenever and wherever he plays. It wasn't his best week with the irons — remember the "slapping it around" from Saturday — and he a little better than middle of

the pack in putting. It's been that way for some time. His consistently great play first came into focus at the start of 2023 when it took until July at the British Open for his first result worse than a tie for 12th. And it hasn't really

stopped. The best since Woods in his prime? Scheffler gets closer the larger his sample size gets. The larger his sample size gets. The real measure is when expectations get too high for anyone but Woods to match. It's getting close. Still to be determined is whether it gets to him, which sounds unlikely. "I try not to place too much emphasis on results, good or bad," Scheffler said. "I show up to try and perform my best and to try and perform my best and hopefully win tournaments. But when I stand on the tee on Thursday, I'm not thinking

about the trophy ceremony at

the end of the week.



and Bengal, while hosts Maharashtra will face off against Manipur in the second quarterfinal.
The third quarterfinal will see Odisha in the fourth they topped Pool G. quarterfinal. Jharkhand play Mizoram, For Manipur, it was their Bramhacharimayum

while Haryana will play third win in three matches as

racism

Fans will be encouraged to take part on social media, and the launch of a

new pilot project taking anti-racist measures to amateur clubs in the

Association. The pilot project will run through 2025 before being extended

"Everyone can do something against

racism, not only the players, but we

want to reach spectators, and parents

when it comes to youth teams, to raise

awareness of this topic," federation

president Bernd Neuendorf said

during a visit to kids from the

German Football

⊥ targeting

Championship.

Northeast

to other areas

24th), Prabhleen Kaur (14th, 45th) and Chingshubam Sanggai Ibemhal (53rd, 60th)

scored a brace each, while

Karnataka, Kruthika SP (15th, 26th, 56th, 56th) led from the front with four goals, while MG Yashika (20th, 38th, 58th) scored hat-trick, Chandana J (33rd, 27th) scored a brace and 37th) scored a brace and Adira S (43rd), Prashu Singh Parihar (48th), Anjali H R (55th) and Gedela Gayatri (60rg) scored a goal each.

Hockey 13-0.

Captain

German soccer targets racism before hosting Euro 2024 **AP** ■ BERLIN amateur club SFC Stern 1900 in so, so much (racism) happening in



Spotlight on promising long jumper Shaili

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The spotlight will be on promising Shaili Singh at the Indian Open Jumps Competition beginning here on Wednesday.
With the Paris Olympics lined up in July-August, the world U-20 silver medallist in

women's long jump has specific goals set this year.
"It is too early to expect outstanding performance but we are hoping for a good result, otherwise it will be a

challenging task to earn a ticket to Diamond League competitions," Shaili's personal coach, Robert Bobby George, said on the eve of the one-day competition.

According to the national long jump coach, the first domestic competition in Bengaluru will be all about evaluation of performance and how to move forward in the right direction to win a ticket to the Paris Olympics. "We have set specific goals for each competition for Shaili

Singh," the long jump coach

Shaili has a personal best of 6.76m recorded last year in April in Bengaluru. She finished fifth at the Hangzhou Asian Games with a jump of 6.48m. The women's long jump event

in Bengaluru has attracted nine competitors including Nayana James of Kerala. The focus will also be on triple

Birmingham Commonwealth Games champion Eldhose Paul, Karthik U and Abdulla Aboobacker, all from Kerala, will begin their season with the competition.

Praveen Chithravel, who holds the national record of 17.37m recorded last year, will skip the event. Promising Tamil Nadu triple jumper Selva Prabhu will compete in the U20 age group. His personal best and national record record of 16.78m was recorded last year.

High jumper Jesse Sandesh of Karnataka and long jumper Muhammed Anees will be other prominent athletes in

Berlin

The German soccer federation is "That's why it's so important that we take a broader view and not only notice what's happening on the discrimination among fans and amateur players with a new campaign ahead of this summer's European professional fields at the weekend," Neuendorf said. "We also have to clearly address the fact that it's a The federation presented its twogeneral problem in society, but also in pronged strategy on Monday with a video message under the motto "Soccer time is the best time against football. And that includes amateur

football."

The federation has had to deal with hateful abuse directed online at the Germany team that won the Under-17 World Cup last year. It announced in December that it was working with the public prosecutor's office in Frankfurt to identify the perpetrators. Gerard Asamoah, who made 46 appearances for Germany, was the target of racist abuse from Hansa Rostock supporters shortly after being feted as a hero at the 2006 World Cup. "It was disappointing to be marginalized like that just a few months later," said Asamoah, who sees Euro 2024 as "a huge chance to make amends, and I really believe we



can do it.

Asamoah said it takes civil courage for people to speak up about racism, and said he was more confident now than he was in 2006 that people had the courage to speak up and confront

He also took encouragement from the level of political action against racism, and the fact that it's an important issue for the federation.

"When I compare it to my time, when I was marginalized in the youth teams, it didn't interest anyone. I had to deal with it by myself. When I was 18, I played in Cottbus and had bananas thrown at me. But the game was so important for us, that my issue interested nobody," Asamoah said. "That's why I find it super that we've made a start, that the federation is taking matters in its hands. There is

amateur football, also at youth level." Reem Alabali-Radovan, who is Germany's federal commissioner for migration, refugees and integration, outlined how local soccer clubs are often the first points of contact for migrants who have just arrived in Germany. She said they are often subjected to racist abuse that doesn't get the same attention on a national level because the incidents are so localized.

"Far too many people are affected by racism every day in Germany," Alabali-Radovan said. experience racism in all sorts of situations, not just everyday racism, but also in the housing market, when looking for a job, in schools, and also in sports."

Asamoah, who graciously signed autographs and posed for photos with the young players of Stern despite the biting cold, concluded the launch by wishing such campaigns were not necessary, "that there is no racism, we're all the same.

AP MANCHESTER

N on-Black former soccer players in England were 50% more likely than their Black counterparts to progress into management, said a report published on Tuesday.

In a latest study into coaching diversity, U.K.-based advocacy group Black Footballers Partnership (BFP) highlighted the ongoing disparity in the sport and concluded Black managers or assistants were also 41%

more likely to be fired.
"Football should be a game for everyone on and off the pitch. If you are good enough on the pitch your dreams and hopes can and should be realized," wrote a group of Black former players including Sol Campbell and Les Ferdinand in the report's foreword. "The significant drop off in off-field opportunities lets down Black players and an industry that relies on their tal-

Obstacles faced by Black coaches in English soccer highlighted in new report

The group, which also includes Chris Ramsey, Paul Davis and Ricky Hill, described the lack of opportunities for Black coaches as a "systemic issue." Burnley's Vincent Kompany began the season as the Premier League's only Black manager. Then Nuno Espirito Santo, who was born on the African island of São Tomé, was hired by Nottingham Forest in December. In its 2022 report, the BFP found 43% of Premier League players were Black, but only 4.4% of managerial positions for former players were taken up by Black applicants. In the latest report, academics Sam Hoey from the University



of Liverpool, Thomas Peeters from Erasmus University, Rotterdam, and Stefan Szymanski from the University of Michigan studied a sample of about 3,500 players from England's top two divisions from 1990 to 2010 and who stopped playing in 2013 or ear-lier. The report said Black managerial staff were also less likely to be promoted. "In sum, Black former players

get fewer chances at management, get promoted more slowly (if at all), their progress stalls sooner, and they get fired quicker than their non-Black counterparts — and none of that is related to their performance," the BFP said. "A career in football management often looks like a game of snakes and ladders; but for Black former players it's pretty much all snakes and no ladders, and we have the data to prove it," BFL executive director Delroy Corinaldi said.

WOMEN PREMIER LEAGUE LOOKING TO PUSH BOUNDARIES, LITERALLY

hafali Verma shimmied down the track and deposited off-spinner Ashleigh Gardner's slot-ball on the off-stump 91 metres over wide long-on for a six, the longest of this year's Women's Premier League.

That nearly 20 seconds of explosive moment 'underlined the fast-evolving landscape of women's cricket — the increasing infiltration of power and fitness.

But it has also accentuated the talk about the possibility of stretching the boundary perimeter similar to that in men's cricket.

"Yeah, we have seen some big sixes getting hit this year in the WPL, and a lot of chat is going on about pushing back the boundary lines (in the tournament). The increasing power limit of players is obvious,

thanks to their focus on fitness.
"But for that (increasing the length of boundary), detailed discussion with players, coaches etc is needed as ultimately, they have the biggest say in matters related to playing conditions," a BCCI official told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Irrespective of the future course of action, there is a lot of merit in the argument to standardise the boundary size in women's and men's cricket, considering the players' increasing ability to clear the ropes. The WPL 2023 saw a total of 159 sixes, whereas there were 168 maximums a year later and Indian batters biffed 98 of them.

Former India player Mamtha Maben gave an explanation.

"What I have seen is the step-up by domestic (Indian) players in terms of fitness and power. It reflected in their batting and fielding. I saw a few of them hammering big sixes. "There is some more road to travel but there is a marked improvement from last year to this year in their performance, regardless, of the

performance, regardless of the boundary size," Maben, now a consultant with Namibia women's cricket team, told PTI.

A deep dive into the dimensions of the M Chinnaswamy Stadium and Arun Jaitley Stadium, venues where WPL 2024 was played, is necessary to see the finer points.

The normal boundary lengths at the Chinnaswamy, where the first part of this iteration of WPL was held,



wicket, 76-68m in the 'V' towards the media box while 56m on either boundary mark was shrunk to 47

are 64-63m on the square of the flank behind the wicketkeeper.

metres, and it had made the task of captains harder as batte comfortably cleared that distance.

contain left-handers when they batted from that end as even a small dab or tuck could make the ball race to the fence on the quick Bengaluru

Delhi Capitals captain Meg Lanning stressed on that point.

"It is a nightmare having a 40-metre boundary on one side. That is one thing I haven't necessarily enjoyed as a captain.

We could look at potentially having slightly bigger boundaries. If it is even all the way around, that makes sense," Lanning had said ahead of the WPL final against

Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Lanning admitted that the left-handers would have a natural edge with a shorter boundary on one side of the ground.

"There's so much more power and strength in the game now that people are clearing the ropes easily. I have lost a lot of sleep when there's only a 40-metre boundary on one side, especially when there's lefthanders like Smriti," said the Australian.

But the scenario saw a slight improvement during the title clash use of pitch No. 5 ensured a rather equal allocation of distance. The square boundaries measured

55 metres, while the 'V' in front of the wicket had a length of 65

The 'V' behind the square was the shortest at 49 metres, and RCB captain Smriti Mandhana admitted that planning became easier on grounds with uniform boundary

size.
"There's a lot of planning that goes on when the boundary length is 40 metres on one side. I feel it is a lot of headache than having a similar size

of boundary.
"When left-right batters were playing, it was a nightmare to understand which end to bowl your spinners or pacers from," said Mandhana.

Maben echoed those sentiments.

"More power-hitters will be present in women's cricket in future with the kind of work players and the BCCI are putting in. "It's imperative that a sit-down will

happen sooner than later to discuss about keeping this sport future ready," she said



Gutted to miss IPL, says injured Behrendorff

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Australia and Mumbai Indians fast bowler Jason Behrendorff on Tuesday said he was gutted to miss this year's IPL after fracturing his leg in a "freak training leg in a incident".

Behrendorff, a left-arm pacer, was on Monday replaced by England's Luke Wood in MI

squad. "Unfortunately, there was a freak accident at training last week which resulted in my leg being broken. It wasn't anyone's fault, just a very unlucky incident," Behrendorff wrote in a social media post. "I have loved being a part of

the MI Family and I am absolutely gutted to be missing this year's IPL."

Though the 33-year-old didn't elaborate on the incident, a report in Espncricinfo said that he suffered the injury while batting in the nets at the

batting in the nets at the WACA Ground last week. "Behrendorff was batting in the nets at the WACA ground last Thursday ahead of departing to India to play in the IPL with Mumbai Indians when he suffered a fractured left fibula after a ball missed his pad and struck him flush just above the left ankle," the report said.

He had snapped 14 wickets in 12 matches for MI last year.

Rohit backed Hardik, Bumrah to hilt: Parthiv

Patel said on Tuesday that Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah had got the full backing of Rohit Sharma when they were struggling in the early part of their IPL stints at Mumbai Indians.

Parthiv compared Rohit's leadership with CSK talisman MS Dhoni, saying the Mumbai cricketer never "made a blunder", while the Chennai captain had erred on a few occasions during his long IPL

stint.
"I think the most important thing is that he (Rohit) supports his players. The best examples of this are Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah. Bumrah came into the MI set up in 2014 and by 2015, his performance wasn't great," Parthiv told Jio Cinema on Tuesday.

They even pondered sending him back after half the season. But Rohit Sharma believed in his ability and from 2016 onwards, his performance has been excellent," added the former India wicketkeeper, who played 25 Tests.

Bumrah, who came into the MI setup in 2014, has gone on to become the country's go-to pacer in all three formats and played a pivotal role in Mumbai's success in IPL.

of the five-time champions in



2015, went on to lead Gujarat Titans to the IPL title in 2022 and is now back as MI skipper, replacing Rohit. "Same with Hardik Pandya. He came in 2015 and became popular. His 2016 season wasn't great but MI stuck with him and Pandya became the player he is today." He added that Rohit brings a sense of calm to the side, which is unmatched.

The best example is the two IPLs MI won by just one run each. That would not have been possible if you don't have Pandya, after becoming a part a captain who can stay calm on the ground.

'When there's a tense match, sometimes wrong decisions or blunders are made. But the hallmark of Rohit Sharma's captaincy is that in the last 10 years, you don't remember that he made a blunder.

"Even Dhoni has made blunders like giving Pawan Negi an over, but if you see Rohit, you'll never see a blunder. Keeping the process simple is something that Dhoni advises but we see Rohit practice that in games," added

decisions circumstances, which is one of the most difficult tasks for a captain in IPL.

"You can plan for a game in advance but nobody knows how proceedings will unfold in the middle. He (Rohit) acts according to situations and takes decisions, and many times they are different from what may have been planned in the run-up to the game.

"I think that's his strength. In the IPL, taking on-the-spot decisions is one of the biggest Former India pacer Zaheer challenges for captains and he Khan said Rohit takes did that well for MI," he added. The first Test will be played in



first three IPL fixtures

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Wanindu All-rounger
Hasaranga is set to miss at ll-rounder least the first three IPL matches for Sunrisers Hyderabad after he was named in the Sri Lanka squad for a two-Test series against Bangladesh starting March 22

Hasaranga has played four Tests for Sri Lanka. He had announced his retirement from the longest format in August last year to focus on white-ball cricket.

However, the 26-year-old was named in Sri Lanka's 17-man squad on Tuesday along with uncapped spinner Nishan Peiris.

Sylhet from March 22-26, while the second tie is slated from March 30 to April 3 at Chattogram.

Hasaranga was roped in by SRH at his base price of Rs 1.5 crore. As per the IPL schedule announced for the first two weeks, SRH will take on Kolkata Knight Riders on March 23 in Kolkata. They will travel to Hyderabad for the tie against Mumbai Indians on March 27 and then proceed to Ahmedabad for the game against Gujarat Titans on March 31.

It remains to be seen if the right-arm spinner will be available for SRH's home fixture against Chennai Super Kings on April 5.

Sidhu returns to first love

Back in commentary box after decade this IPL

Set to be back in the commentary box after a decade with the upcoming IPL, flamboyant former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu says the glitzy league would help decide the T20 World Cup squad of not just India but also other countries. After a decade-long stint in the unforgiving world of politics, Sidhu and his 'Sidhuisms' will be back on air starting with the IPL, which precedes the T20 World

Cup in June. "The IPL will set the tone for the World Cup. There is no other cricket happening. The eyes of the world are on IPL. This is where you can snatch a berth for the T20 World Cup, not only Indians, even the foreign players," Sidhu told PTI in an interview facilitated by the IPL's official TV broadcaster 'Star Sports'. Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, who have not played a lot of T20 cricket since the 2022 edition, are expected to be on the flight to USA and Caribbean for the ICC showpiece.

Do the veteran batters still add value to the T20 squad?

"They will be needed there. These are giants of cricketing world. Form is like the morning dew, it can elude you but class of these people has stamp of

authority.
"I would rate Kohli as the greatest Indian batsmen for the simple reason, his fitness, he is getting fitter with age like old wine does. Technically very sound and he has the uncanny knack of adapting to all three formats, same goes for Rohit," Sidhu explained in his inimitable style. "Both are quality players. I am not sure about Rohit's fitness levwell.

els. With age you tend to slow down, your reflexes tend to go. Sehwag with those glasses, his reflexes were not the same, I saw it in the IPL."

Sidhu closely tracked India's campaign in the ODI World Cup last year where the hosts ended as runners-up after being the sole unbeaten side in the group stages. The final loss extended their long wait for a world title but Sidhu isn't too concerned.

"In the recent World Cup they were playing very well, they just had one bad game, one bad game cannot asses the fortunes of a team. I see the Indian team ruling the roost for a long time because the system that breeds cricketers is very congenial and

conducive. "In my time, people would carry on despite bad form because there were no replacements. Now, Hardik Pandya is replacing the Indian captain as captain at Mumbai Indians because he has performed so

"Not that it is derogatory to Rohit but it is just a thought process. The old order must change yielding place to the new," said Sidhu

There are multiple options for wicket-keeper batter's slot in the World Cup squad with likes of Ishan Kishan, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, and K L Rahul in the race. Sidhu said he would go with

someone who has superior keeping skills with his batting prowess being "secondary". WILL TAKE TO COMMEN-TARY LIKE FISH TO WATER:

It has been a while since the 60year-old held the mic but three days from his "first" commentary comeback, the former India opener was as gung-ho as ever. "Boss, cricket is my first love. If your hobby becomes your profession there is nothing better than that. A duckling would never forget how to swim, I will

take to commentary like a fish

takes to water,".

Asked if the sense of humour kept him going during the turbulent phases of his life, Sidhu said, "Secret of my life is that is I switch on and switch off. It was difficult for me to switch off from politics but then the age of miracles has not passed. The difficult is done at once, the impossible takes a little while longer. "The mental fortitude will sail me through any situation now. In cricket, I have made 20 odd comebacks, this is my first comeback to commentary. 1 was in the swing of things from 1999 to 2014-15 (commentary). "A gem cannot be polished without friction nor a man perfected without trials," Sidhu went on, the way only he can. In the early years of the IPL, Sidhu provided the X factor to the commentary box and the stupendous success behind the mic made him a prominent face in the entertainment world where he was paid handsomely to appear on a comedy shows. The money was a lot more than what he could make as an established India cricketer but Sidhu said he was never in it for

the big bucks. "I left cricket and joined com-mentary and I did not know if this is something I could do. I was not very confident (initially) but 10-15 days into the World Cup, the word Sidhuism came up. I was walking in a lane no one was walking. It was the lane of Sidhuism.

"From Rs 60-70 lakh for the the whole tournament, I was taking Rs 25 lakh per day in IPL. The satisfaction was not with money, the satisfaction was that time would fly. It was beautiful."

Australia postpones T20 series against Afghanistan

ricket Australia on Tuesday postponed a three-match T20 International home series against Afghanistan's men's team in August this year, citing the "worsening" conditions for women and girls in that

The Taliban, following its return to power in Afghanistan, has imposed restrictions on girls attending high schools, barred women from universities and stopped female Afghan aid staff from working. CA's decision to postpone the upcoming series is the conitnuation of its tough stand on the south asian country. CA had

Afghanistan in Hobart in November 2021,

against

cancelled a one-off Test



following which they also postponed a three-match ODI series in the UAE "Over the past twelve months, CA has continued to consult with the Australian Government on the situation in Afghanistan. The government's advice is that conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan are getting worse," read a statement from CA

"For this reason, we have maintained our previous position and will postpone the bilateral series against Afghanistan," it

Afghanistan were the only Full Member to not be represented at the Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa, because the females in the country have been barred from playing cricket.

This is the third time CA has declined to play Afghanistan since the Taliban took control of the strife-torn country in September 2021 and placed restrictions on women's participation in sport.

Jaydev to return to county side Sussex this year

PTI SUSSEX

Division 2.

run win.

Left-arm pacer Jaydev Unadkat will return to the English club side Sussex for the final five games of the County Championship campaign. Last season, the 32-year-old,

who has played four Tests for India, had played three of the four County Championship matches for Sussex, taking 11 wickets at 24.18, which helped the side register a third-place finish in

Unadkat, who last represented India in the two-Test away series against the West Indies in 2023, came up with his best performance Leicestershire on Sussex's home ground, taking six second-innings wickets to guide the country side to a 15-



Unadkat, who captained Saurashtra to their maiden Ranji Trophy title in the 2019-20 season, said he cannot wait to get back to Hove.

'It was at Hove last season when we won a last-day thriller against Leicestershire, that me a sense of belongingness to county cricket, and to Sussex as my home," said Unadkat in a statement.

"When (head coach) Farby (Paul Farbrace) offered me a contract this season for the last leg of the championship, I was sure I wanted to come back and hopefully win games with the guys. "While my first county season was good, I can't wait to be back and push for that promotion this summer which everyone at Hove is rooting for!" he added. Sussex head coach Farbrace

said Unadkat had shown his class during the last season and hoped the Indian would continue in the same vein this season.

"We are all delighted that Jaydev is returning to The 1st Central County Ground for the final five championship matches of the coming season. "Jaydev lived up to the expectation that not only would he show his class on the field, but he would also be a fantastic person and be part of what we are all trying to achieve. Jaydev is a lovely guy who did everything he could to help our players and share his fantastic knowledge," said

Farbrace. Unadkat will don the Sunrisers Hyderabad jersey in the upcoming edition of the IPL following which he will be available for county stint.

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Phone: 011-69342500 and printed at Jagran Prakashan Ltd, D-210, 211 Sector-63, Noida (U.P.). Editor-in-Chief Shobori Ganguli AIR SURCHARGE of ₹ 2.00 East: Calcutta, North: Leh West: Mumbai & Ahmedabad South: Bangalore & Chennai. Central: Khajuraho. Lucknow Office: 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226 016. Telephones: 0522-2346443, 2346444, 2346445.