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Delhi World's most Polluted

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid growing concerns about 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 of 54.4 micrograms per cubic metre after Bangladesh (79.9 micrograms per cubic metre) and Pakistan (73.7 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



File Photo/PTI

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 be seen," he said. The quality of air in 2023 has worsened in 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 rose slightly in 2023 to 54.4

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 most polluted countries in the world are hosted in this region, including Bangladesh, India, Tajikistan, and Pakistan. In addition, this region is home to the top 10 most polluted global cities. Included are highly populated and historically polluted cities such as Delhi, India and

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 years). 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 with an average PM2.5 concentration of 118.9 micrograms per cubic metre. The world's most polluted city is Begusarai in the East Indian State of Bihar. Its pollution level 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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Centre to respond within three weeks to applications seeking a stay on implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024 till the apex court disposes of the pleas challenging the 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 the 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 for 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 your 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 Indra 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" with his Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party 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 and gave five seats to the Chirag Paswan-led LJP (Ram Vilas), ignoring his faction's claims. Paras made brief remarks at the Press conference about his resignation and did not elaborate about his future plans. The only ally in the Union Cabinet headed by Modi, he called the Prime Minister a big leader. The RLJP 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 loyalty 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 ■ NEW DELHI

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 to the Indian Navy for rescuing his country's ship and citizens in a 40-hour long operation over the weekend. Modi's remarks came in response to a message from Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, 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 Ruen. 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 your message President @PresidentOfBg. We are 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 Myanmar 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 sincere gratitude to PM @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 ship "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 said.

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.

Court to hear Gyanvapi mosque basement plea on April 11

PTI ■ VARANASI (UP)

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, he said. On this, the court fixed 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, while dismissing the 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 JMM. Continued on Page 2

Experience the Joy of Holi at ISKCON

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 Bhari 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, all the vibrant traditions 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 Dwarka Sri Gaur Prabhuj

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 vibrant traditions 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 Dwarka Sri Gaur Prabhuj



FILE PHOTO/PTI

told The Pioneer that the much-awaited festival of Holi on March 25, a day after 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 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 said. At ISKCON Dwarka, Holi isn't just a festival; it's a

spiritual journey. The '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. Prabhuj 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

be celebrated in a very sattvik and beautiful manner in which there will be joy and also festivities around Lord Shri Krishna. "We want all the residents to come here to the temple and play Holi with each other and Lord with flowers, take part in different festivities, have soul touching prasad and feel divine bliss," said Prabhuj. Anjana Cashyap, a resident of Mayur Vihar Phase 2, Delhi is already excited and has made plans to be at the festival being celebrated at the Iskon Temple. Continued on Page 2

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 "dafli" and catchy slogans rent the air as campaigning for the students' body polls reaches a crescendo. 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 dhabs 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), Democratic Students'



Federation (DSF), Students' 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

institute. We want to end this 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 as JNUSU's 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 themselves 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

as the president, I will become 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 AAP 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 the 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 implementation'. "In exchange for these favours,



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 -- Kejriwal. 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 Supreme Court on October 30, 2023, Bharadwaj said in this

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 regard. 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 opposition rival in Russia, who recently died in jail. "Similarly,

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 BJP. 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 are continuously announcing their own verdicts," Rai said.

Kejriwal cannot escape law: BJP on CM skipping summons

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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 lies. Kejriwal on Monday skipped the Enforcement Directorate's summons in a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board. The AAP termed the ED summons "illegal" and accused the



BJP-led government at the Centre of "using" the probe 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 work." "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 development. There is evidence of it available all over

That's why ED is issuing summons (to him)," Patra alleged 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 project the grant of bail as relief by the court." With the

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 developments of every high-profile case."

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

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Conman Sukesh Chandrashekar, 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 Chandrashekar 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 Akkaiah, 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



Kejriwal is going to be 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 screenshots 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 irrespective of exposing her and her involvement in corruption. Sukesh, who recently also wrote to Kejriwal, advised her to not 'guard' AAP chief. He said, "One sincere advice

to you, there's no use of you 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. Chandrashekar 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 exposed too.

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 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, Shahdara 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 Shahdara South Zone and 5,006 from Najafgarh were removed. In the different forms of political advertisement, the number of posters were the highest with a total of 52,823 followed by 8,187 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, Keshavpuram Zone, South Zone, West Zone, Najafgarh Zone, Central Zone, Shahdara North Zone and Shahdara 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 complaints of sexual harassment.

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 postal ballots.

The Vigilance Department 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-traceable'.

BJP targets Rahul for shakti remark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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 comments 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.



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

speaking 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 ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Tuesday removed Vivek Sahay as West Bengal DGP, less than 24 hours after naming him for the post, and extended 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 from the crowd.



process. That's why Mukherjee was given the charge instead," he said. A former IPS officer in West Bengal cadre who served the state in senior positions, however, 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 from the crowd.

Request to parties for details of electoral bonds yields response

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission's 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. 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 Maharashtra-based 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 Sarjany 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 de-recognition. "...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 Bhrastrachar 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 elections.

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 Central 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 principal bench said that "nobody is present on behalf of the respondent-UIO (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 responded the same or connected through video-conferencing in the matter", said the order issued by the bench of Justice Rajiv Joshi (judicial member) and Anand S Khatri (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

matter. The CAT directed the case to be put up on March 22, 2024, and inform about this order to both the counsels for the respondents (Bhaskar and Aggarwal) in writing, according to the order's copy. "It is 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 government employees. 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 directions to the Central government to produce all documents, appraisals, reports of expert committees, civil services board (CSB) and findings of the competent authorities related to the rejection of his application for empanelment at the level of joint secretary or equivalent in the Central government. The officer was conveyed his non-empanelment for holding the post of the joint secretary 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 ■ NEW DELHI

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 every household across the country and people at large," 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 'ghosha patra' (manifesto) but 'nyay patra' so that people see a bright future. Earlier addressing the meeting of the CWC, the party's top decision-making body, Kharge 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-

ident said whatever has been 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 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 can't undermine the fact that 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 Nyay Yatra. 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 nod. 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', 'Shramik Nyay' and 'Yuva 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 evening.

Experts bat for Ayurveda for holistic management of kidney disorders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst 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 Ras, Trinetr Ras, Mutrakricharantak Ras, Tarakeshwar Ras,



Chandraprabha Vati, Varunadi 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 alternatives. 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

treatment, complementing modern treatments for more accurate results. Nephrologist Dr. 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 complications.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A substantial financial investment 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 not met. "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-



tend with. As climate change intensifies, so does the urgency for robust climate finance mechanisms to fund adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building efforts world-wide." Murmu stressed that the need for immediate action was emphasized by the stark difference between the costs associated 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 ■ NEW DELHI

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 pre-industrial 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 insecurity 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 chort-topping, 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 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.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The spar over 'shakti'

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

As 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 an 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.

PICTALK



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

Resurgence of military coups across Africa



ASHOK K MEHTA

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

Military coups, says 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 recently.

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 Francophonie. 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 was 1 December 2022 when the last French military aircraft evacuated its garrison. Paris announced it would close its diplomatic mission in Niger for



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 Jihadist 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 invoke a clause of collective defence. The pullout of French troops from these countries was replaced by Russia and its



GABON WAS THE LAST COUNTRY TO FACE A COUP IN 2023. IT IS AN OIL-PRODUCING COUNTRY THAT ALSO HAD FRENCH TROOPS. IT WAS THE EIGHTH COUP IN GABON SINCE 2020

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 Jihadist 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 oil-producing 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 Xi Jinping with a military base on the Atlantic Ocean coast. That's the reason China expressed concern in the UN about the safety of

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 party was in jail and 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 troops' 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 deadlines.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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



Prime 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, blurring 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 aggression.

Jacob J | Thiruvananthapuram

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 hour.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

RCB CLINCHES MAIDEN WPL TITLE

Sir - 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

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 Mandhana-led 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

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Microcredit courses revolutionise learning

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

In 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 masses.



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 collaboration with the National Skill 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-

ademic 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 participation in skill development.

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 rural populations. By break-

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 self-reliance. 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 sizeable population lacks access to quality education and training, microcredit courses hold immense potential to drive social and economic transformation.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)



AARTI SHUKLA



FIRST COLUMN THE DIVINE JUSTICE SYSTEM

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Shouldn'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 shoudering 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

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



UTTAM GUPTA

A 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 set-off 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 in those years.

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 break-up, 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 that 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 evasion.

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 to be carried by a person in

charge of the conveyance carrying 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 non-filers, 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 ITC claims.

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 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; views are personal)

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

In 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 students.



VIVIAN WANG

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 their academic environments

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 interconnected global workforce. Initiatives promoting cross-cultural 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 Placement Guarantee

Programme guide students in 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 students 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

soft skills such as problem-solving and time management. 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

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 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 scale. When students from

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 international education—

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)

India can sustain eight per cent growth: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India can sustain 8 per cent annual GDP growth and the 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 Patra. 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 demand 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 said. 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. "Financial markets are 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,



Sensex, Nifty tank over one per cent

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex tanked 736 points while 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 Services 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

Bank of India cuts home loan rates to 8.3 per cent

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Public sector lender Bank of India on 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 month. 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



and comprehensive financial support system for homebuyers, it said. Besides covering home construction, renovation and furniture, its home loan offering broadens its scope beyond traditional financing to 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 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 cost, with a maximum repayment period of 120 months.

TCS shares slip three per cent after Tata Sons divests stake

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Tata Consultancy Services (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 share value, the market valuation of India's leading



software company eroded Rs 45,497.45 crore to Rs 14,54,109.37 crore on the BSE. 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 confirmation, however, will

be made public later in the 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 21,846.30. The stock was the biggest laggard on the BSE index. 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 major. Tata Group's stocks had 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-based regulations. The RBI mandates that upper-layer Non Banking Financial Companies (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

Shares of insurance major Life 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 876.05. On the NSE, it dropped 2.71 per cent to Rs 879.85. In three days, the stock has declined by 8.27 per cent on the BSE. 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 valuation. Its 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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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



in headline inflation towards the target of 4 per cent," said the article authored by a team led 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

in the period ahead. In India, real GDP growth 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 of India.

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

PTI ■ INGOLSTADT

German automaker Audi G plans 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 electrify all core segments by 2027. The automaker has also lined up a capex of EUR 41 billion for the period between 2024-2028. 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 stated. He further said: "We are planning more than 20 new models in 2024 and 2025, including the presentation of the A6 e-tron in the summer of 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 and

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 stated. "The 50 per cent increase in electric vehicles delivered in 2023 confirms our path toward electric mobility," he added.



Tata Motors opens fifth vehicle scrapping facility

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors on Tuesday said it has commissioned its fifth registered vehicle scrapping facility near the capital. Developed in partnership with Johar Motors, the 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 building a circular economy," Tata Motors Executive Director Girish Wagh said. Tata Motors has four RVSFs in Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Surat, and Chandigarh. It runs the 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.

Government mulls changes in SARFAESI, DRT laws

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To 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 e-notices to debtors, sources said. 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



to decide on relevant 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-notices. "So that an SMS and e-mails sent by banks can be considered as notice. This will help in fast-tracking the recovery of debt," sources said. The Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) Act was enacted in 1993 to provide a legal framework for the expeditious adjudication and recovery of debts due to banks and financial institutions.

Pharma major launches cancer treatment drug Versavo in UK

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Pharma major Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd on Tuesday announced the launch of its cancer 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 metastatic colorectal cancer, lung cancer, recurrent glioblastoma, metastatic renal cell carcinoma, advanced cervical cancer, ovarian cancer and metastatic breast cancer, Dr Reddy's Laboratories said in a regulatory filing. It is the first biosimilar product of the company to be approved and launched in



the UK. It is available in strengths of 100 mg and 400 mg single use vials, it added. "The launch of Versavo in a highly regulated market underscores our capability for global clinical

development of high-quality biosimilar products. Versavo is a potential treatment option for patients with different types of cancers," Dr Reddy's Global Head of Biologics Jayanth Sridhar said. Further, he said, "This launch reinforces our commitment to bring more biosimilar and other critical biological products to meet the unmet needs of patients, and strengthens our focus on oncology." Dr Reddy's launched Versavo in India in 2019. Subsequently, it was introduced in other markets such as Thailand, Ukraine, Nepal, and Jamaica under the same brand name. In Colombia, the product was launched under the brand name Persivia.

SHREYASI, MAIRAJ, GANEMAT IN TWELVE MEMBERS TEAM

FINAL PARIS OLYMPICS QUALIFICATION



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Commonwealth Games gold medalist Shreyasi Singh, seasoned Mairaj Ahmad Khan and World Cup winner Ganemat Sekhon on Tuesday figured in a 12-member 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 important international competitions in the run-up to the Olympics, which will be held in July-August. Four quotas, one each in men's and women's trap and skeet, will be up for grabs in the Doha competition. The

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 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 holders Bhowneesh 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 shotgun probables are currently undergoing a technical training camp in New Delhi which will be followed by 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 Olympic quotas ever.



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

AP ■ BERLIN
Germany will play Ukraine and Greece in its final warm up 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. Ukraine faces Bosnia-Herzegovina and Greece plays Kazakhstan in the playoff semifinals on Thursday. "We have to prepare for different playing styles and systems," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann said. "Ukraine and Greece are two strong, passionate teams. We've had our difficulties with opponents of this type recently." Germany first plays France in Lyon on Saturday, then the Netherlands in Frankfurt on Tuesday. The team will start 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 June 23.

Scottie reaching a dominance not seen since Woods



AP ■ PONTE VERDA BEACH (FLORIDA)

Scottie Scheffler is next in line 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 McIlroy. And now with his second straight win — a five-shot

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 78 weeks. 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. 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 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 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 first round and having to withdraw. Before him was McIlroy, who

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 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 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 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 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.

Hockey Manipur qualifies for quarterfinals of Senior Women National Championship

PTI ■ PUNE
Manipur progressed to the quarterfinals with an 11-2 win over Uttarakhand in a Pool G match as the league stage of the Senior Women National Championship concluded here on Tuesday. Karnataka also ended their campaign on a high, beating Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu Hockey 13-0 in another pool G game. With the top team from each 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 and Bengal, while hosts Maharashtra will face off against Manipur in the second quarterfinal. The third quarterfinal will see Jharkhand play Mizoram,



while Haryana will play Odisha in the fourth quarterfinal. For Manipur, it was their

third win in three matches as they topped Pool G. Sarita Dev Bramhacharimayum (8th,

24th), Prabhleen Kaur (14th, 45th) and Chingshubam Sanggai Ibemhal (53rd, 60th) scored a brace each, while

Vartika Rawat (5th), Sonia Devi Kshetrimayum (7th), Ranjita Sanasam (44th), captain Lily Chanu Mayengbam (57th) and Chanu Lanhenbi Khundrakpam (59th) scored a goal each for Manipur. The two goals for Uttarakhand were field goals that came from the sticks of Komal Dharmi (36th) and Monika Chand (41st). Earlier the day, Karnataka defeated Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu Hockey 13-0. Captain of Hockey Karnataka, Kruthika SP (15th, 26th, 56th, 56th) led from the front with four goals, while MG Yashika (20th, 38th, 58th) scored a hat-trick, Chandana J (33rd, 37th) scored a brace and Adira S (43rd), Prashu Singh Parihar (48th), Anjali H R (55th) and Gedela Gayatri (60rg) scored a goal each.



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 medalist 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 domestic 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

said. 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 men's triple jump. 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 action.

German soccer targets racism before hosting Euro 2024

AP ■ BERLIN
The German soccer federation is targeting racism and discrimination among fans and amateur players with a new campaign ahead of this summer's European Championship. The federation presented its two-pronged strategy on Monday with a video message under the motto "Soccer time is the best time against 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 Northeast German Football Association. The pilot project will run through 2025 before being extended to other areas. "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 Neundorff said during a visit to kids from the amateur club SFC Stern 1900 in Berlin. "That's why it's so important that we take a broader view and not only notice what's happening on the professional fields at the weekend," Neundorff said. "We also have to clearly address the fact that it's a general problem in society, but also in 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 it. 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

so, so much (racism) happening in 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. "They 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.

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

AP ■ MANCHESTER
Non-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-

ent." 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 earlier. The report said Black managerial staff were also less likely to be promoted. "In sum, Black former players get fewer chances at management, got 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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Shafali 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.

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.



are 64-63m on the square of the wicket, 76-68m in the 'V' towards the media box while 56m on either flank behind the wicketkeeper. But during the WPL, the shortest boundary mark was shrunk to 47 metres, and it had made the task of captains harder as batters comfortably cleared that distance.

It became doubly difficult to 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 outfield.

at the Arun Jaitley Stadium as the use of pitch No. 5 ensured a rather equal allocation of distance.



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 incident".

the MI Family and I am absolutely gutted to be missing this year's IPL.

Rohit backed Hardik, Bumrah to hilt: Parthiv

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former cricketer 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.



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."

"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.



Hasaranga set to miss Sunrisers Hyderabad first three IPL fixtures

PTI ■ COLOMBO

All-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga is set to miss at 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.

Sylhet from March 22-26, while the second tie is slated from March 30 to April 3 at Chattogram.

Sidhu returns to first love

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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.



not sure about Rohit's fitness levels. With age you tend to slow down, your reflexes tend to go. Sehwaag with those glasses, his reflexes were not the same, I saw it in the IPL."

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 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."

Australia postpones T20 series against Afghanistan

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Cricket 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 country.



following which they also postponed a three-match ODI series in the UAE.

Afghanistan. The government's advice is that conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan are getting worse, read a statement from CA.

Jaydev to return to county side Sussex this year

PTI ■ SUSSEX

Left-arm pacer Jaydev Unadkat will return to the English club side Sussex for the final five games of the County Championship campaign.



Unadkat, who captained Saurashtra to their maiden Ranji Trophy title in the 2019-20 season, said he cannot wait to get back to Hove.

said Unadkat had shown his class during the last season and hoped the Indian would continue in the same vein this season.