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NO RELIEF FOR KEJRIWAL

RAJESH KUMAR ■
NEW DELHI

In a major setback to the AAP supremo, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday refused to interfere with the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam'.

Meanwhile, Kejriwal is likely to be produced before a Delhi court on Thursday on the conclusion of his ED custodial remand on March 28.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma issued notice on the AAP leader's petition challenging his arrest and the subsequent remand to the ED's custody, and asked the agency to file its response to it as well as his plea for interim relief of release before April 2.

The judge, in the order, clarified the matter would be taken up for final disposal on April 3 and no adjournment shall be granted.

"This court deems it appropriate to issue notice of the main writ petition as well as application for grant of interim relief, returnable on 03.04.2024," the court said.

"Further, any release order from custody will amount to enlarging the accused/petitioner on bail or interim bail, as an interim measure. The writ



File Photo: PTI

India summons US diplomat over Washington remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Taking strong objection to remarks by a US official regarding Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, India on Wednesday summoned a senior US diplomat and lodged a strong protest against Washington's remarks. On March 23, German diplomat was summoned by New Delhi over German Foreign Ministry's remark on Kejriwal.

Ministry of External Affairs



(MEA) officials summoned Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berben of US at its office in South

Block here. The meeting lasted for more than 30 minutes.

Reports had said a US State Department official had said Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal process for Kejriwal".

The MEA later in a statement said, "We take strong objection to the remarks of the Spokesperson of the US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India."

"In diplomacy, States are expected to be respectful of

the sovereignty and internal affairs of others. This responsibility is even more so in case of fellow democracies.

"It could otherwise end up setting unhealthy precedents," the statement said.

India's legal processes are based on "an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes," the MEA said in the statement while underlining that "casting aspersions on that is unwarranted".

jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India is not a ready substitute for recourse to the remedy of bail under Section 439 of the CrPC ordinarily.

"...the relief sought in prayer (C) in the main petition is dependent on the outcome of prayer (A) and (B).

"Therefore, any order passed in the application for interim release of petitioner, pending disposal of the main petition without calling for reply of the respondent, at this stage, would rather amount to deciding the main petition itself.

"This court remains conscious of the fact that to reach a conclusion as to whether the petitioner herein is entitled to immediate release or not, this court will necessarily have to decide the issues raised in the main petition, as those issues are the edifice of arguments of the learned Senior Counsel for the petitioner seeking immediate release of the petitioner," ordered the court.

"The ED will ensure that replies are filed to the main petition as well as the application for interim release of the petitioner by 02.04.2024 and copies of the same are provided in digitised form as well as hard copy to the learned counsel for the petitioner," the order said.

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Delhi Government will not be run from jail, says LG

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Wednesday categorically said the Delhi Government will not be run from jail. His reply comes in the backdrop of statements by AAP leaders that Arvind Kejriwal will continue as Chief Minister even if he is behind bars.

Replying to a query at the media conclave, the Lieutenant Governor said, "I can assure the people of Delhi that the Government will not be run from jail."

In an apparent attack on the AAP dispensation, Saxena said, "As kids, we all have heard the proverb 'lohe ke chane chabana' (to face great difficulty). After coming to Delhi I actually realised the meaning of this proverb. In this city to get any work done it feels like 'lohe ke chane chabana'. Whatever you try to do, there are some forces that put their entire strength into stopping that work. And if you are able to successfully complete that work, then these forces try to take credit."

Clearing the clutter around the noises made by the BJP regarding the President's rule, senior AAP leader and Minister in the Kejriwal



Cabinet, Atishi unequivocally stated that no Constitutional provision bars 'governance from jail', citing the law of the land ie Representation of the People Act, 1951 and GNCTD Act. Atishi said the law of the land is very clear. "The President's rule can only be imposed when there is no other choice. Issue of Article 356 has gone to the Supreme Court multiple times and it has repeatedly ruled that President's rule can only be implemented when there is no other choice left for the governance of that state. So if today the President's rule is imposed, then it is very clear that it is a political vendetta.

"So as you can see that it is used by institutions after institutions to finish off the Opposition," she said.

Continued on Page 2

Political turmoil rattles Congress



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI

As the Lok Sabha polls draw near, the Congress finds itself struggling to secure seat sharing with key alliances. Internal discord brews as party leaders depart, and tensions escalate in Karnataka as some MLAs threaten to quit over ticket allocation issues, casting shadows over the party's prospects.

The grand old party on Wednesday took offence to its partners Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and Lalu Prasad-led RJD in Bihar where the INDIA Bloc members have announced their respective Lok Sabha contestants.



Aurangabad, Begusarai, Katihar, Purnia, and Siwan in Bihar are the seats where disagreements have kept the Mahagathbandhan allies from reaching a seat-sharing arrangement. Sources said the RJD has distributed tickets to its candidates, leaving the Congress red-faced.

In Maharashtra, the Congress has objected to the Shiv Sena (UBT) announcing its candidates for the Bhiwandi, Mumbai South Central and Sangli Lok Sabha seats, saying MVA partners must stick to "coalition dharma". While Congress Legislature Party leader Balasaheb Thorat

urged Sena (UBT) to reconsider its decision, his party colleague Sanjay Nirupam adopted a more belligerent stand, attacking Congress leadership for letting the Uddhav Thackeray-led outfit grab most of the seats in Mumbai. Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) constituents Congress, Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) have been holding seat-sharing discussions for the 48 constituencies in Maharashtra, where the Lok Sabha polls will be held in five phases starting April 19.

Amid the talks, Sena (UBT) earlier in the day released its first list of 17 candidates for the upcoming elections and said it will contest a total of 22 seats in the State. Thorat said his party's State unit has apprised the central leadership of the developments. The Congress also lamented that Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) leader Prakash Ambedkar had announced a separate list of candidates.

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Planes graze past each other at Kolkata airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
KOLKATA

An IndiGo aircraft grazed the wings of an Air India Express plane at the Kolkata airport on Wednesday, leaving wings of both aircraft damaged, officials said.

The IndiGo flight was headed to Darbhanga, while the Air India Express plane was scheduled to leave for Chennai.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation promptly destroyed the two pilots and ordered an enquiry into the freak accident, DGCA sources said adding both the plane had returned to the bay.

"The wingtip of a taxiing aircraft of another airline grazed one of our aircraft, which was stationary and

awaiting clearance to enter the runway at Kolkata for a scheduled operation to Chennai," an Air India Express spokesperson said in a statement adding an investigation is on. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) said in a statement that the wingtip vortices of both planes were badly damaged. The incident happened at about 11 am, sources said, adding both the flights were delayed.

IndiGo authorities said it was a "minor graze between a taxiing IndiGo aircraft and that of another carrier," adding "the aircraft returned to bay for inspection and necessary action, as per protocol." An "incident report will be submitted to DGCA in due course," the IndiGo authorities said.

83 per cent of unemployed Indians are youth: Report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A staggering 83 per cent of unemployed individuals are youth, while only 17.5 per cent of rural youth in India are engaged in regular work, according to a joint report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute for Human Development (IHD).

This revelation has provided Opposition parties with ample ammunition to criticise the performance of the BJP-led Central Government amid the ongoing electoral battle.

The study 'India Employment Report 2024', released by Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, paints grim job scenario, stating that youth employment and underemployment increased between 2000 and 2019 but declined during the pandemic years with educated youths experiencing much higher levels of unemployment in the country during the period. Thus, indicating lack of quality employment opportunities, especially among those who have achieved higher education. Opposition parties, particularly the Congress, have seized upon the report's observations to attack the Government over the issue of



File Photo: PTI

joblessness, accusing it of neglecting the youth's future. While India's large young workforce is a demographic dividend, the report noted that they don't appear to have the skills to deliver — with 75 per cent of youth unable to send emails with attachments, 60 per cent unable to copy and paste files, and 90 per cent unable to put a mathematical formula into a spreadsheet, it said.

Further, the share of people employed in industry and manufacturing has remained the same since 2012 at 26 per cent of the total workforce. The percentage of youth involved in economic activities decreased from 42 per cent in 2012 to 37 per cent by 2022.

Also, "the number of the

educated, possessing at least secondary education, among the unemployed doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 66 per cent in 2022," said the report reflecting poorly on the Government's economic policies, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by India's labour market.

The report's revelation of stagnation in industry and manufacturing employment since 2012 points to the dismal growth in key sectors of the economy, as per the report which has come as an embarrassment for the Modi Government which is positioning itself as a job provider to the youth, particularly during the election season.

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Comic book sets stage to amplify support for Modi vision

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Election campaigning in India, hitherto confined to pages in periodicals, billboards, larger than life size posters and TV advertisements has taken a new turn with the publication of a comic book/graphic novel.

While his opponents have gone overboard ridiculing him for the slogan "Modi ki guarantee", a person who has studied the progress made by the Narendra Modi Government has come out with a graphic novel "101 Reasons Why I Will Vote for Modi". This is the first attempt of its kind of making use of a comic book for spreading a

political message. "Graphic novels can be very powerful means to communicate political ideas to the masses. This book is written from a voters' point of view, whether s/he will vote for Modi back to power in 2024," Shantanu Gupta told *The Pioneer*.

The comic book that has hit the shelves across the country is not something to be laughed at. It is reminiscences, reflections and the change the country has seen in the last ten years. The seriousness of the book lies in the studies undertaken by author Gupta, seasoned journalist and author of two path-breaking books "The Monk Who Became Chief Minister" and



"The Monk who Transformed Uttar Pradesh". The books were based on the life of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and how he changed "UP Waala Bhaiya" abuse to a badge of honour.

Those who read the two books had no doubt about the outcome of the UP Legislative Assembly Election held in 2022 because of Gupta's eyewitness account. He found out that UP has been liberated from the shackles of "BIMARU" States as entrepreneurs and investors were queuing up to make big time investments in the State.

The first five years of Yogi rule saw major infrastructure projects get going and UP emerging as a developed State under the watchful eyes of the Monk.

Gupta is experimenting with an innovation on the decade long Modi Government's performance. What makes the graphic novel unique and distinct is that the protagonist remains off the pages most of the time. It is the beneficiaries who are villagers, residents of small and medium sized towns, students, youth and the aged who explain why they would

vote for Modi in the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

Our leaders are guided by the dictum 'all is fair in war and love'. Gupta's book is different in all respects as it is focused on the major achievements of the Modi Government that provided more than four crore houses to the homeless under the PM Awas Yojana, more than 11 crore toilets which have come as a boon to the villagers.

Women who had to depend on open fields to attend to nature's call and who were always under the threat of snakes, scorpions and goons are a relieved lot because of the national mission of building toilets.

Continued on Page 2

Sena (UBT) LS pick from Mumbai North West gets ED summons

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday issued summons to Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Amol G Kirtikar to appear before it in connection with the investigations into “khichdi scam”, hours after his party named its candidate for the Mumbai North West Lok Sabha seat.

Confirming the summons issued to Kirtikar, Shiv Sena chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut came down heavily on the ruling BJP over the development dubbing it as a “pressure tactic” applied on his party candidate from Mumbai north-west constituency.

The “khichdi scam” - in which Kirtikar is being probed for money laundering



allegations, had earlier been investigated by the Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW).

“Immediately after Amol Kirtikar's nomination as party's candidate, the ED issued summons to him. It's nothing but the BJP's attempts to silence its political opponents through central

investigating agencies,” Raut said.

The alleged ‘khichdi scam’ relates to the contracts awarded by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for the supply of nutritious fare to thousands of migrants stranded during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis during the

previous Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government.

After the MVA Government was unseated by the Opposition BJP-Shinde Sena, the EOW registered an FIR in September 2023 against several SS (UBT) leaders including Raut's close aide Sujit Patkar, Sunil Kadam, Rajeev Salunkhe of a catering company and other outfits, some BMC servants and others over the alleged scam of Rs 6.37 crore.

During the investigations, Kirtikar's name also cropped up. He was questioned by the EOW for over six hours in September 2023. After the money-laundering angle also emerged in the case, the ED stepped into the investigations in October 2023.

Having filed its own

complaint and arrested Suraj Chavan - a close associate of SS (UBT)'s ex-minister Aditya Thackeray, the ED attached his properties worth Rs 88 lakh. BJP's former MP and “whistle-blower” Kirit Somaia has claimed that “Amol Kirtikar had received Rs. 1.65 crore in the ‘khichdi scam’.

Amol Kirtikar (52) is the son of a veteran Shiv Sena leader Gajanan Kirtikar, the sitting MP from Mumbai North West, who walked out of the Sena with rebel leader Chief Minister Eknath Shinde after the Shiv Sena party split in June 2022.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) has announced Amol Kirtikar as its candidate for the Mumbai north-west seat, ignoring its ally Congress' claims over the seat.

Pathan misusing ICC World Cup pictures, Adhir informs EC



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Behrampur Congress candidate Adhir Chowdhury has approached the Election Commission of India against his Trinamool Congress adversary and former India cricketer Yusuf Pathan for “misusing” during his election campaign the images of the 2011 ICC cricket World Cup featuring a host of Indian players.

Chowdhury who is also the Pradesh Congress president in his complaint alleged that

Pathan was using the pictures of the winning moments of the World Cup in the banners and posters where he is featured alongside the greats like Sachin Tendulkar.

“Using the photographs of World Cup winning event and that too with other cricketers is a gross violation of the model code of conduct,” Chowdhury said adding “winning a cricket match at the international level is something you do for your country and that has nothing to do with your political affiliations and your election campaigns which you do for yourself and for your own party ... besides the other players that feature in the posters and banners may not be the supporters of the TMC but you are using them for your campaign ... this must stop at once ...and so I have requested the ECI to look into the matter.”

When asked to comment on the issue TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said he was not aware of the things at Behrampur and that his party would do whatever the EC would say.

222 Bills passed in 17th Lok Sabha, 45 on day introduced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 222 Bills were passed in the 17th Lok Sabha and 45 of these were cleared the same day they were introduced in the House, according to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). A total of 240 bills were introduced.

Some of these bills that were passed were The Appropriation (Vote on Account) Bill, The Appropriation Bill, The Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation (No.2) Bill, The Central Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021. A report of the analysis, which was conducted by ADR and National Election Watch (NEW), was released on Tuesday. It sheds light on the performance of the 17th Lok Sabha and its members.

On average, an MP asked 165 questions and attended 189 of the 273 sittings. MPs from Chhattisgarh had the highest average attendance, with 11 representatives from the state attending 216 of the 273 sittings. Conversely, Arunachal Pradesh had the lowest average attendance, with two of its MPs attending only 127 sittings.

Thakur joins roadshow in support of MoS Singh in Udhampur

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Star campaigners of the Bharatiya Janta Party and Union Minister of Sports, Youth Affairs & Information and Broadcasting, Anurag Thakur, on Wednesday joined the road show in support of MoS PMO Dr Jitendra Singh in Udhampur.

Enthusiastic BJP supporters took out a motorbike rally from Ambedkar Chowk in Udhampur. After passing through different markets in Udhampur the rally culminated in the local BJP office. The motorbikers were led by Anurag Thakur along with senior party leaders in the absence of Dr Jitendra Singh.

During the roadshow, Union Minister Anurag Thakur also took a brief ride.

He also listed out the achievements of the Narendra Modi-led Union government before seeking votes in

support of Dr Singh. Without naming the congress candidate, Lal Singh, who recently rejoined the Congress, Anurag Thakur said on the one hand you have a candidate like Dr Jitendra Singh and on the other side you have a candidate who is out on bail and facing charges of corruption. Anurag Thakur said Dr Singh is aiming for a hatrick while his opponent is a turncoat and frequently shifting loyalties.

In Kathua, Congress candidate Lal Singh demonstrated his strength when filing the nomination papers.

Lal Singh took a vow in the presence of his supporters to expose all those leaders and political parties who took the people of Jammu and Kashmir for a ride and compounded the miseries of unemployed youth, businessmen, industrialists, farmers, and residents.

Shah AFSPA remarks trigger reactions from JK parties

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on considering the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in the wake of improvement in the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday invited sharp reactions from mainstream political parties in the valley.

Two former chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti both expressed fears that it might be just a poll promise of Union Home Minister Amit Shah ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Former chief minister and National Conference (NC) vice president Omar Abdullah said the promise of revoking the AFSPA has been made given the upcoming Lok Sabha polls as he feared that the people here would be cheated just like those in Ladakh were on the promise of the Sixth Schedule.

Another former chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti welcomed the Shah's

statement but hoped it would not be a “Jumlebaazi” like the BJP promise of providing two crore jobs in the country every year.

In an interview given to a local news channel Amit Shah made a categorical statement that the removal of AFSPA can be considered as the situation is turning normal.

“I have been waiting for this day since 2011. We made a lot of efforts to remove the AFSPA (when he was the chief minister) as well, but I fear that the people of Jammu and Kashmir will be misled and cheated like the people of Ladakh were misled and cheated on the promise of the Sixth Schedule as elections are here,” Abdullah told reporters in Budgam district.

The NC leader said the law, which gives widespread powers and immunity against prosecution to security forces in disturbed areas, should be revoked right away given the statements made by central leaders about the restoration of normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir.

“As far as revoking the AFSPA is concerned, start from today. When they say the situation is normal and militancy has ended and there is no separatist thought left, then what are they waiting for?” he asked.

Meanwhile, in a post on X, PDP chief Mufti said, “As a first step, the Central government can release journalists and Kashmiris languishing in jail ‘without any charges.’” “PDP has consistently demanded the revocation of draconian AFSPA along with a gradual removal of troops. It also formulated an important part of our Agenda of Alliance wholeheartedly agreed upon by BJP. Der aaye durust aaye.

“Better late than never but only if it isn't jumlebaazi like generating two crore jobs every year or empty promises of depositing 15 lacs into bank accounts,” Mufti said.

The former J-K chief minister hoped that the government would fulfill its commitment in case of AFSPA revocation as it would bring relief to the people of the Union territory.

India, US exercise Tiger Triumph 24 underway

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further enhance their bilateral Defence ties, a battalion group of the Indian Army, comprising more than 700 personnel, is taking part in the ongoing bilateral tri-service exercise — ‘Tiger Triumph-24’ — between India and the US, being held on the Eastern Seaboard, sources said on Wednesday.

The exercise from March 18-31 aims at developing interoperability for conducting Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations and refining SOPs to enable rapid and smooth coordination between the forces of the two countries. The Indian Army's contingent, comprising one battalion group is taking part in the second edition of the tri-service exercise, along with the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force, sources in the defence establishment said.

The 14-day exercise is being conducted in two phases with a harbour phase at Visakhapatnam followed by a sea phase at

Kakinada. The primary focus of the exercise is to enhance interoperability, strengthen bilateral relations, and refine capabilities in HADR and sub-conventional operations.

“The exercise has witnessed the amphibious capabilities of the Indian Army in conventional and sub-conventional scenarios. The Indian Army is represented by an integrated battalion group in the exercise, with strength of over 700 army personnel, showcasing newly procured or inducted weapons and state-of-the-art technological infusions,” a defence source said.

The Indian Army contingent is represented by components from infantry, mechanised infantry, Para (Special Forces), artillery, engineers and other supporting arms apart from assorted systems of multiple drones, anti-drone equipment, and ICVs (infantry combat vehicles), the sources said. The harbour phase included communication checks to ensure seamless coordination between the participating forces.

Comic book sets stage to amplify support for Modi vision

From Page 1

Kalavati of Jaipura, a village in UP and Rama didi whose harrowing experience of walking miles to fetch woods from the forest to cook the

meals literally make readers cry. “Cooking three meals a day by burning wood was equivalent to smoking more than 300 cigarettes,” says Kalavati who is one of the 10 crore beneficiaries of Ujjwala

Yojana which helped them to own LPG stoves and cylinders. This is just two or three schemes that saw bearing fruits in the last decade. There is a lot more. Each section of the Indian society, rural, urban,

metro residents, youngsters, women of all ages and students have benefited thanks to the foolproof programmes that took wings.

India has changed and changed for the better.

Interestingly, the challengers are tied up with just one agenda - to defeat the Government. For that they resort to all kinds of games. The other day saw a national spokesperson of the grand old party abusing and

humiliating a venerated film personality who is contesting the polls. The only option before the challengers is to provide the electorate with 102 reasons why one should vote for them.

83 per cent of unemployed Indians...

From Page 1

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge urged people to remember before voting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to provide 20 crore jobs in 10 years but “snatched more than 12 crore jobs from the youth”. Kharge listed the guarantees of the Congress under ‘Yuva Nyay’, such as filling up nearly 30 lakh vacant Central Government posts. He also highlighted the right to apprenticeship law for degree/diploma holders, which will guarantee them apprenticeship with an assistance of Rs 1 lakh per year.

Notably, labour from agriculture primarily found opportunities in the construction and services sectors. Despite the growth in these sectors, the overall employment scenario remained complex, indicating a mismatch between job creation and the skill sets of the workforce.

There are widespread livelihood insecurities too, the report added, with only a small percentage being covered with social protection

measures, precisely in the non-agriculture, organised sector.

“Worse, there has been a rise in contractualisation, with only a small percentage of regular workers covered by long-term contracts,” the report said.

The country is also grappling with the substantial gender gap in the labour market, with low rates of female labour force participation. “The unemployment challenge among young women, especially those who are highly educated, is enormous,” the report said.

Talking about the growing social inequalities, the report said despite affirmative action and targeted policies, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes still lag in terms of access to better jobs. “Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have greater participation in work due to economic necessity but engaged more in low-paid temporary casual wage work and informal employment,” it said. “Despite improvement in educational attainment among all groups, the hierarchy within social groups persists,” the report added.

Delhi Government will not be run from jail, says LG

From Page 1

Responding to Saxena's statement, Atishi said if President's Rule is imposed in Delhi in the aftermath of Kejriwal's arrest, it would be a clear case of “political vendetta”. She cited The Representation of the People Act that disqualifies a lawmaker if s/he is convicted. “What is the constitutional provision he is drawing on? The law of the country is very clear. You have the GNCTD Act which is very clear that you cannot be the Chief Minister if you do not enjoy the majority of the House. These conditions do not apply. So, under what conditions will the President's rule be imposed?” she said.

The Delhi Minister said it as a political conspiracy of the BJP-

led Central Government to undermine democratically elected Opposition Governments using the ED, suggesting that Opposition Chief Ministers could be coerced into resigning or face arrest under draconian sections of the PMLA.

Kejriwal was arrested by the ED on March 21 in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case and subsequently remanded in the agency's custody till March 28 by a court here.

AAP leaders on several occasions ruled out Kejriwal's resignation, insisting that he will run his Government from inside the jail.

Atishi said the arrest of Kejriwal will benefit the AAP electorally in the Lok Sabha

polls as the party is getting a lot of sympathy.

Atishi termed the arrest of Kejriwal by the ED in an excise policy-linked money laundering case as an attack on democracy that was “never seen before” in the democratic history of the country.

“The good thing is that it has benefited us electorally,” she said, adding before the arrest of Kejriwal, the result of Lok Sabha polls was a forgone conclusion as people were of the view that the BJP was going to win.

“But after Kejriwal's arrest, the level of public sympathy has gone up for us. There is just one sentiment that the BJP has gone one step too far. So, I would feel it has benefited us electorally,” Atishi said.

Political turmoil rattles Congress

From Page 1

Nirupam, who is keen to contest the Mumbai North West parliamentary constituency, said the party leadership hasn't got in touch with him in the last fortnight.

“The leadership isn't bothered that injustice is being done to its leaders and workers. Shiv Sena (UBT) is making us bend and we are doing it,” he said.

In Bihar, while RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav rushed to Delhi to stitch together the alliance after days of hiccups in the seat-sharing issue, former Lok Sabha MP Pappu Yadav, who merged his party with the Congress last week, asserted that he will not budge over his claim to the Purnea seat, which was contested by RJD. The latter had expressed uneasiness over Pappu joining the Congress.

Tejashwi and Congress leaders held talks on

Tuesday to sort out the differences that have emerged between the two allies over the seat-sharing arrangements in Bihar. The much-awaited meeting took place at senior Congress leader Mukul Wasnik's official residence after a week of tussle. Wasnik is the convener of his party's alliance committee. Bihar Congress chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh and AICC in-charge Mohan Prakash were also present.

Further, a day after the rebel and later suspended legislators joined the BJP in Himachal Pradesh and now all are candidates in the Assembly polls, in Karnataka five Congress legislators threatened to resign if senior party leader and Minister K H Muniyappa's son-in-law Chikka Peddanna was given a ticket to contest from Kolar in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, bringing into open the divisions in the party.

No relief for Kejriwal

From Page 1

The order said, “This court is further of the opinion that the present petition raises several issues of legality and the validity regarding the arrest

and remand of the petitioner. Additionally, it questions whether the arrest may be politically motivated and malafide. There are also serious concerns which have been raised by Abhishek Manu Singhvi, learned Senior Counsel on behalf of the petitioner, which relate to Article 21 of the Constitution of India and Section 19 of PMLA, as well as the validity of the statement of an approver.”

“The necessity and timing of the arrest of the petitioner and the motive behind it has also been argued at length by Singhvi. He has also raised serious and critical questions before this court that this court being a constitutional court must apply its mind to the motive behind the arrest which is patently illegal and has a direct bearing on the democratic process of impending elections in the

country.”

“In this court's opinion, such important questions and issues cannot be summarily heard and decided, by giving opportunity to only one party to file petition, documents, short note of arguments and compilation of judgments relied upon by them, especially when copy of the petition was provided to the ED yesterday itself, and the short note of arguments and compilation

of judgments relied upon by them were provided to the court as well as the learned ASG during the hearing itself. It will be unfair to not give an opportunity to the ED to rebut the same by way of filing of a detailed response,” it said.

“This court also cannot presume that the respondent will have no reply to file and will remain bound only by the contentions raised before the learned Trial

Court. Moreover, since there may be some additional material in the possession of the investigating agency, collected during the custodial interrogation of the petitioner herein, which they may wish to place before this court, which may be crucial to decide the present case. Such material may also be crucial for the petitioner himself” read the order.

Earlier, Senior Advocate

Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal in the Delhi High Court, contended the arrest of a sitting Chief Minister on the cusp of elections was against the basic structure of the Constitution.

“Object of the arrest was not to find material but to disable me and my party. My prayer is, release me now,” he argued.

Singhvi also argued that it is a delaying tactic which is reflective of malicious intent

on the part of Directorate of Enforcement to stall or delay any order being passed on the release of the petitioner herein.

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, said the “bulky” petition was served upon them only on Tuesday, and time should be given to bring their stand on record. For interim relief as well, appropriate time should be given to respond, he said.

Kejriwal health has deteriorated in ED custody: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday claimed the blood sugar level of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is diabetic, is fluctuating and his health has deteriorated in Enforcement Directorate custody. Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister's wife Sunita Kejriwal claimed that no money was found in multiple ED raids and her husband would do a “big expose” on the alleged excise policy scam in court on Thursday. According to Arvind Kejriwal's blood sugar level dropped to 46 Mg at one point of time and according to doctors, such a drop is “very dangerous”. In a video message, Sunita Kejriwal, said her husband will reveal the details of the alleged liquor scam in court on March 28 and also present evidence. ...Two days ago, Arvind Kejriwal sent a letter to water minister Atishi regarding the water and sewer problems in Delhi... The central government filed



(Left to right): Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri and others protest at the Delhi Legislative Assembly; Delhi Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj with AAP MLAs protest at Delhi Legislative Assembly



Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

a case against him. Do they want to destroy Delhi? Do they want the people to keep suffering? Arvind Kejriwal is very pained by this... In the so-called liquor scam, the ED has conducted more than 250 raids. They are searching for the money of this so-called scam. They have found nothing yet... Arvind Kejriwal has said he will reveal everything in the court on March 28. He will reveal

where the money of the liquor scam is... He will also provide proof...” Sunita Kejriwal said in a video message. “He will reveal where the money of the liquor scam is... He will also provide proof...” she said. She said that when she met the Delhi CM in the ED custody, Kejriwal told her that the central agency has conducted more than 250 raids in connection with the

“so-called liquor scam” in the last two years but “not a single paisa” has been found in any of the raids so far. They are searching for the money of this so-called scam. They have found nothing yet. Arvind Kejriwal has said that he will reveal everything in the court on March 28. He will reveal where the money of the liquor scam is and will also provide proof,” she stated. Despite two years of

probe, the ED has not been able to find even one paisa in evidence. They raided chief minister's residence but got just Rs 73,000,” she said. The ED arrested Kejriwal on March 21 in connection with the now-scarpped Delhi excise policy case linked to a money laundering case and remanded the next day to the ED till March 28. Former deputy chief minister Sisodia and AAP's Rajya Sabha MP

Singh were arrested last year in relation to the Excise Policy case, while former minister Jain was arrested in a case related to money laundering. She said Arvind Kejriwal was a brave, patriotic and genuine person and his resolve was strong despite him being a diabetic. “My husband issued directions to Water Minister Atishi from the ED custody. The Centre had issues with it.

Do they want to ruin Delhi?” Sunita Kejriwal asked, adding that her husband was upset over the issue. She appealed to the people to pray for the Delhi CM's health and success. The case arose out of a report submitted by Delhi chief secretary Naresh Kumar to Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena in July 2022, pointing to alleged procedural lapses in the formulation of the policy.

She said even though Shri Arvind Kejriwal is in jail and not keeping good health, yet he is with the people of Delhi. “He has diabetes, sugar levels are not well. But the determination is strong... Arvind ji is a very true, patriotic, fearless, and courageous person. Pray for his long life, health, and success. He has said that my body is in jail, but my soul is with you all...,” Sunita said.

AAP MLAs create ruckus in Assembly, BJP holds counter protest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Assembly witnessed a pandemonium on Wednesday as ruling AAP MLAs resorted to protests and trooped into the Well of the House, raising slogans against the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, while the Opposition BJP MLAs launched a counter-protest, demanding Kejriwal's resignation. As the Assembly proceedings began on Wednesday, AAP leaders stormed into the Well of the House raising “murdaabad” slogans against the BJP-led Centre and demanding Kejriwal's release from the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) custody. The House was adjourned till April 1 amid the sloganeering. The House was adjourned twice and is scheduled to resume at 11am on April 1. The session, the first one to be held after Kejriwal's arrest in the Delhi excise policy case, was called to take up a discussion on the shortage of medicines in hospitals and mohalla clinics in the city. The Assembly sitting was scheduled to begin at 11am but began at 11.30 due to protests by the AAP legislators, and it was adjourned for 15 minutes as soon as it convened. The House resumed at 11.50am but soon the AAP MLAs trooped into the well of the House. Speaker Ram Niwas Goel made repeated appeals to the MLAs to let the House function. However, it went unheard. Later, the Speaker



AAP MLAs wear masks of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during their protest against CM's arrest at Delhi Legislative Assembly

Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

adjourned the sitting of the House till April 1. “The assembly session has been called for the first time after the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, so definitely they will raise a voice against his arrest,” said AAP Minister Gopal Rai. Earlier, the BJP MLAs held a demonstration demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has been arrested by the ED in an excise policy-linked money-laundering case, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) legislators and their supporters raised slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Before the commencement of the Assembly proceedings, the BJP MLAs congregated at the Mahatma Gandhi statue on the premises where they protested. Interestingly, both parties -AAP and BJP staged their protests simultaneously. As the BJP legislators took out a march carrying placards, clad in yellow

T-shirts and sporting “Kejriwal” masks, AAP MLAs arrived at the Delhi Assembly premises to mark their protest against the party supremo's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an excise policy-linked money-laundering case. According to Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Kejriwal should resign as the chief minister. Bidhuri said while Kejriwal currently faces charges in one case, investigations are ongoing in numerous others, necessitating his accountability for multiple alleged scams. He asserted that resignation remains the only viable recourse in such circumstances. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj, symbolically took their social media campaign to the Assembly as they came dressed in yellow T-shirts with

slogans, such as “Mai bhi Kejriwal” and “Modi ka sabse bada dar Kejriwal”, printed on those. “All AAP MLAs are protesting against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's illegal arrest. Efforts are being made to do away with democracy in the country. For the first time in India's history, a sitting chief minister has been arrested and that too just before the national (Lok Sabha) election,” Atishi told reporters during the protest. The AAP launched a social media campaign on Monday, with its leaders changing their display pictures to one depicting Kejriwal behind bars, along with the caption — “Modi ka sabse bada dar Kejriwal (Kejriwal is Modi's biggest fear)”. On the other hand, the BJP MLAs held a demonstration demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has been arrested by the ED in an excise policy-linked money-laundering case, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) legislators and their supporters raised slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said Kejriwal should resign as chief minister. “The chief minister should resign from his post. There are almost a dozen allegations of corruption against him. If the excise policy was world class, why did he take it back? We are demanding Kejriwal's resignation,” Bidhuri said.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A high voltage political drama continued on Wednesday as Delhi BJP workers and supporters protested outside the Delhi Assembly. The BJP workers and supporters protested, demanding the resignation of Kejriwal while the AAP leaders held a protest outside the Delhi Assembly, seeking immediate release of their leader. AAP's legal cell also held a protest in the court's premises against the arrest of Kejriwal by the ED. Earlier, a BJP delegation, led by their Delhi unit president Virendra Sachdeva, met Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora on Wednesday to demand a probe into the “letters” being sent by Kejriwal to his ministers from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody. Delhi BJP Media Head Praveen Shankar Kapoor, Spokesperson and Advocate Amit Tiwari, Media Relations Head Vikram Mittal, Office Secretary Brijesh Rai and Advocate Shoumendu Mukherjee were also present during the meeting. After the Assembly proceedings were adjourned, BJP leaders, led by the party's Delhi unit president Virendra Sachdeva, staged a counter-protest outside the House, calling for Kejriwal's resignation. Delhi BJP workers and supporters held a demonstration outside the entrance of the Assembly premises around 12 noon with a group of about 100 party workers from Mayur Vihar, along with the party's Mahila Morcha and Yuva Morcha office-bearers, demanding the resignation of Kejriwal. Dressed in black, the BJP workers gathered at the Vidhan Sabha entrance gate and started raising slogans. Sachdeva himself scaled over the gate shouting slogans. Police did not allow them to



BJP youth morcha protest outside Delhi Legislative Assembly

Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

enter the Assembly premises. The security personnel locked the main gate and subsequently, detained the protesters. “Our demand is that because Arvind Kejriwal is corrupt and has looted Delhi, he should resign. AAP is shielding the thieves. A person in custody is maintaining his position as a CM. How is this ethical? AAP should think this through, and Kejriwal should resign.” “They would not have needed to release letters from jail if they had served the people in the past 9 years. Arvind Kejriwal is missing his palace and the facilities in jail,” he said. Sachdeva said the people of Delhi are frustrated watching the illegal political melodrama of the Kejriwal government and claimed that they will teach a lesson

to the AAP-Congress alliance in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls by totally rejecting them. He said two ministers of the Delhi government are already in jail and claimed that Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj might also land in prison soon for allegedly issuing fake letters. Before the commencement of the Assembly proceedings, the AAP MLAs also staged a protest outside the House and raised slogans demanding Kejriwal's immediate release from the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) custody. Party leaders, including Atishi and Bharadwaj, were part of the protest. They were dressed in yellow T-shirts with slogans like “Main Bhi Kejriwal” and “Modi ka Sabse Bada Dar Kejriwal” written on those.

Kavitha spends her first night in Tihar, served prison food



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha, arrested in connection with the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case on March 15, spent her first night in Tihar jail and was served prison food on Tuesday. According to the sources from Tihar jail, the daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao spent her first night in a cell shared by two other female inmates in jail number six, which is a dedicated women's prison. “She ate dal and rice, which was also served to other inmates on Tuesday night, and Wednesday morning, she had tea with snacks,” a jail source said. Kavitha was taken to Tihar jail on Tuesday evening after a Delhi court sent her to judicial custody for 14 more days till April 9 on the Enforcement

Directorate's plea. The central agency pleaded that if released, the “highly influential” arrestee was likely to influence witnesses and tamper with evidence. “Following her medical examinations, she was directly sent to her cell. Her blood pressure was slightly low during the medical checkup but later it went back to normal,” the source said. Kavitha was given a mattress, slippers, clothes, a bedsheet, and a blanket as per the jail rules and will also be provided with her medicines. An official said she did not demand anything “specific”, and will be provided with things as per the court order and the jail rules. According to the court order, she is permitted to have home-cooked food, a mattress, slippers, clothes, a bedsheet, a blanket, books, pen and paper, and medicines. The BRS leader is also allowed to wear jewellery.

However, she was not wearing any jewellery when she came to the jail, the official said. Adding that the leader can access the books in the Tihar jail library, which is open for all inmates, an officer said, “The timings for tea, food and watching television will be the same for her as other inmates.” Meanwhile, the MLC's counsel Nitesh Rana has sought interim bail on grounds of Kavitha's minor son's school exams. As per the directions by the Supreme Court, the bail plea will be heard by a lower court on April 1. The 46-year-old BRS leader was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case on March 15. She was in the custody of the federal probe agency for 10 days. The officials said around 500 women inmates are lodged in jail number six in the Tihar prison complex. Kavitha is the third political leader after Aam Aadmi Party's Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh who have been lodged in Tihar jail after being arrested in the excise policy case. While Sisodia is lodged in jail number one, Singh is in jail number two. Another AAP leader Satyendar Jain, who was arrested in another money laundering case, is lodged in jail number seven.

BJP intensifies efforts to seek people suggestions on manifesto

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP has intensified its efforts to gather suggestions from the people for drafting its manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls and all the seven candidates on Wednesday visited major markets in their respective constituencies to seek suggestions from the people. South Delhi Lok Sabha candidate Ramveer Singh Bidhuri visited Central Market Madangir, North-East Lok Sabha constituency candidate Manoj Tiwari visited Bhajanpura Market, East Delhi Lok Sabha candidate Harsh Malhotra visited Lal Quarter Krishna Nagar Market, Chandni Chowk candidate Praveen Khandelwal visited Gauri Shankar Temple, North-West Lok Sabha candidate Yogendra Chandoliya visited Naharpur Village



File Photo: Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

Big Market, West Delhi Lok Sabha candidate Kamaljeet Sahrawat and New Delhi Lok Sabha candidate Bansuri Swaraj visited Moti Nagar Main Market to gather suggestions from the people. Various market associations welcomed the BJP candidates and the candidates

gathered positive suggestions from the people who came for shopping in local markets for the BJP manifesto. The BJP candidates said the people of Delhi trust Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee, and they have decided to reelect him as the Prime Minister for the third time by gifting

all seven seats. The BJP candidates said through the suggestion box and the Jan Sampark program, they informed people and traders about the welfare policies of the Modi government and its vision for development. South Delhi candidate Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the way the Aam Aadmi Party has been indulging in drama within Delhi lately, the people of Delhi have seen it and the result is that Delhiites now feel deceived. He said the policies of the Modi government have benefited the people of Delhi, whether it is free ration or providing pucca houses where slums existed and they will also win the upcoming Lok Sabha elections so that all the policies of the Central Government can benefit the people of Delhi.

Three fined ₹47,500 after act on scooter goes viral in Noida

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

The Noida Traffic Police slapped another penalty of ₹47,500 against three people, including two women, whose video of scooter-riding surfaced on social media this week, officials said on Wednesday. The local police have lodged an FIR in this regard. The traffic police had earlier imposed a fine of Rs 33,000 on the scooter-owner after their first video, which was called out for vulgarity in public places by internet users, surfaced on social media on March 25. The traffic police then took cognizance of another video, in which one girl and a boy were seen riding the scooter on a city street without helmets, and

booked the scooter-owner on seven counts of negligence related to road safety including provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, according to the e-challan. “The total penalty imposed on the scooter owner over the two episodes in the two days has reached Rs 80,500,” Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Anil Kumar Yadav said. Yadav also appealed to the public to obey traffic rules and follow road safety guidelines like wearing helmets and seat belts while riding two-wheelers or four wheelers, respectively. Meanwhile, an FIR was also lodged on Tuesday at Noida's Sector 113 police station against the three “unidentified” persons on the basis of a complaint lodged by a local sub-inspector.

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Working to return money looted from poor in West Bengal: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that he is working to ensure that nearly ₹3,000 crore "looted" from poor people in West Bengal and attached by the Enforcement Directorate is returned to them. Modi made this assertion in a telephonic conversation with Amrita Roy, a member of erstwhile royalty and BJP candidate against TMC's Mahua Moitra in Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency, and claimed that power and not country is the priority of Opposition parties. "PM Modi told 'Rajmata' Amrita Roy that he is exploring legal options to ensure that the money looted from the poor goes back to them through whatever assets and money the ED has attached from the corrupt," a BJP leader said. According to the details of the conversation shared by the party,

the Prime Minister put the amount of money, which was paid by people in the state as bribe for getting jobs, at Rs 3,000 crore. He told her to inform people about his stand and asserted that soon after coming back to power he will find a way, including making legal provisions if needed, to do so. Modi also took a swipe at the Congress for its support to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal following his arrest by the ED in a corruption case, saying those who made complaint against the AAP have now changed track to help it. He, though, did not name anyone. "This shows that their priority is not country but power," he said, asserting that the BJP-led alliance is fighting for a corruption-free country for the bright future of the youth while all the corrupt have come together on the other side to save each other. With Roy tracing her lineage to 18th century local king Krishnachandra Roy, Modi hit

back at those who have targeted the erstwhile royalty for its alleged support to the British after the BJP named her its candidate. She told Modi that her family is being called traitors and noted that Krishnachandra Roy worked for people and joined hands with other kings to save "Sanatan Dharma". He asked her to not take any pressure, saying that they (TMC) practice vote bank politics and will make all kinds of wild allegations. They do so to hide their sins, he said. On the one hand, they seek evidence of Lord Ram's existence while on the other they cite incidents dating back to two and three centuries to defame others, he said. "This is their double standards," Modi said, praising the king's legacy of social reforms and development and asking her to carry forward his legacy. Expressing confidence of her win, he asked Roy to be ready with the



agenda for the first 100 days for her constituency. He also expressed confidence that

state's ruling Trinamool Congress leaders is one of the main planks of the BJP in the state, as it has highlighted the arrest of some of them, including former minister Partha Chatterjee, and recovery of large amounts of money and other assets from them to target its rivals. "You have the challenge to save Bengal's heritage," he told her. She said people have expressed their confidence in the Modi government's work and told her that Moitra, the incumbent TMC MP from the constituency, will go to jail, drawing laughter from the prime minister. Moitra is facing probe in a corruption case for allegedly allowing a businessman to use her parliamentary log-in in return of bribe and other favours. She has termed the businessman her friend and refuted the corruption charges, blaming the BJP for it. Roy told Modi that people during her campaign have spoken about corruption and unkept promises

of the state government. Later while speaking to reporters, Roy thanked the Prime Minister for his "encouragement". "It seems I now have a new josh (enthusiasm). His words were really very encouraging and inspiring. I will do my best to ensure the victory of the BJP from this seat," she said. The TMC dubbed the phone calls by the Prime Minister to BJP's women's candidates as a "well-scripted drama" ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. "It is nothing but drama on the part of the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. We would also like to hear similar telephonic conversations with the women in Manipur, and family members of the victims of Hathras in Uttar Pradesh," TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said. The BJP had won 18 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state in 2019 in what was seen as a surge in its fortunes and it is looking to boost its tally this time round.

Modi, Shah, Nadda, Gadkari among BJP star campaigners

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief Jagat Prakash Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and former BJP Chief Nitin Gadkari among the star campaigners list which was released by the party for Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhnad, for the Lok Sabha polls.

In Madhya Pradesh, former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Uma Bharti is missing from the BJP's list of star campaigners. However, the party has picked Suresh Pachauri, who recently switched over from Congress, for the job. Uma Bharti, who had led the BJP to victory in the 2003 assembly polls, had also failed to make it to the BJP's list of star campaigners during the 2023 state polls. Earlier this month, the senior BJP leader had said that she would not contest elections for the next two years and instead work for the rejuvenation of the Ganga river, but also made it clear that she won't retire from politics. Besides MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, his counterparts Yogi Adityanath (Uttar Pradesh) Bhajanlal Sharmap (Rajasthan), Bhupendra Patel (Gujarat) Himanta Biswa Sarma (Assam), Vishnu Deo Sai (Chhattisgarh) will promote



BJP candidates as star campaigners in MP. Former Union minister Pachouri, who joined the BJP from Congress earlier this month, has been included in the list. BJP chief JP Nadda, party's state unit president VD Sharma, Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari, Faggan Singh Kulaste, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Smriti Irani and Virendra Kumar Khatik are among the 40 key figures chosen to campaign for its candidates. Polling on 29 seats of Madhya Pradesh will be held in four phases - April 19, April 26, May 7 and May 13. MP's deputy CMs Jagdish Devda and Rajendra Shukla and their peers Devendra Fadnavis (Maharashtra) and Keshav Prasad Maurya (Uttar Pradesh) are a part of the list, which also includes ex-CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan and MP cabinet ministers like Prahlad Patel, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Aidal Singh Kansana and Tulsi Silawat.

Former state ministers Gopal Bhargava and Narottam Mishra, and Union ex-minister Satyanarayan Jatia have also been picked for the task. Of the 29 seats in the state, the BJP had won 28 in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, with the remaining seat - Chhindwara - going to Congress' Nakul Nath. In the first phase on April 19, Sidhi, Shahdol (ST), Jabalpur, Mandla (ST), Balaghat and Chhindwara will go to the poll. In the list of Bihar star campaigners list, BJP has also named its chief JP Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and Union ministers Nitin Gadkari, Smriti Irani, Giriraj Singh and Nityanand Rai, besides Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav. Among the state leaders who found a place on the list are Deputy CMs Samrat Chaudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, Renu Devi, Mangal Pandey, Prem Kumar, Neeraj Kumar Singh, Syed

Shahnawaz Hussain and Sushil Kumar Modi. For the 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar, the BJP has come into alliance under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and will contest with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha, ex-Union minister Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Morcha and Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) as its ally. The BJP and JD(U) have declared candidates for 17 and 16 candidates for the seats they are respectively fighting. Manjhi's party has announced his candidature from Gaya. Upendra Kushwaha is likely to enter the fray from Karakat. In Uttarakhnad, the star campaigners list includes the names of BJP president JP Nadda, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union Minister Smriti Irani and Mathura MP Hema Malini. Uttarakhnad Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, state BJP president Mahendra Bhatt and former chief ministers Trivendra Singh Rawat and Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank are also among the party's star campaigners. Polling for the five Lok Sabha seats in Uttarakhnad is scheduled to be held in the first of the seven-phase election on April 19.

Lone AAP MP joins BJP in Punjab

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In a major setback to the Arvind Kejriwal, the Aam Aadmi Party's MP and lone Lok Sabha member Sushil Kumar Rinku joined the BJP on Wednesday along with party MLA Sheetal Angural, dealing a blow to the party already facing a crisis following the arrest of its leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Rinku, the MP from Jalandhar in Punjab, and Angural, who was elected to the State Assembly from Jalandhar West, joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and its national general secretary Vinod Tawde. The MP said he was joining the BJP for the development of Punjab, especially Jalandhar, and accused the state's AAP government of not helping him in development works. Last year, Rinku won in a by-poll in Jalandhar becoming the Lok Sabha MP with a significant



margin. He said he was impressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah and lauded the Union government for its development initiatives. The parliamentarian had quit the Congress to join AAP last year to fight the bypoll to the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat. He had been vocal in criticising the BJP in the Lok Sabha. Rinku was even suspended from the House for his unruly protests. The BJP is likely to field him in

the Lok Sabha polls as the party inducts a number of influential leaders of different parties in Punjab to emerge as a strong force in the state with 13 constituencies. AAP Jalandhar West MLA Sheetal Angural on Wednesday announced he is quitting the party. "I am resigning from all responsibilities of the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party)," Angural said in a post on Facebook. Angural had won the Jalandhar West assembly seat in Punjab by defeating Sushil Kumar Rinku of the Congress during the 2022 assembly elections. Three-term Congress MP Ravneet Singh Bittu from Punjab joined the BJP on Tuesday and asserted that people have made up their minds to elect Prime Minister Modi to power again. Bittu is the grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh, a hero of the anti-terrorism campaign in the state who was assassinated in a terror attack while still in office.

AYUSH sector sees extraordinary growth: Kotecha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The AYUSH sector in the country has witnessed an extraordinary growth trajectory, surging from USD 3 billion to USD 24 billion in just eight years, positioning the sector as a sunrise industry, said Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Union Ayush Secretary here at the seventh CII AYUSH Conclave, organised recently by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), a prominent business chamber. Kotecha further emphasised that post Covid global acceptance and domestic demand for AYUSH products and services

has increased. He stated that the Ministry is working with different organizations and ministries to strengthen the research and evidence building in the sector. He said that the Ayush Ministry and ICMR has set up an Advanced Centre for Integrative Health Research across selected AIIMS in the country. "The Ministry is also collaborating with AIIMS to set up a Department of Integrative Medicine," he said at the conclave themed "Emerging trends in AYUSH: Unleashing the market potential." He also talked about the Ayush Grid platform for digitization of



service delivery across the six functional areas- health services, education, research, drug administration, medicinal plants, and capacity building and media outreach. Dr Rabinarayan Acharya, Director General, Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) mentioned that the Ministry will help develop three key botanicals while ensuring quality, safety, and efficacy by 2030.

Shashwat Goenka, Chairman, CII National Taskforce on AYUSH, and Director, PCBL Limited highlighted the concept of holistic well being by AYUSH, a view endorsed by Dr Sanchit Sharma from AIMIL Pharma as he pointed out that the increasing demand for ayurveda products based on herbal formulations indicates the evolving preferences of consumers towards natural and traditional remedies. He also stressed on evidence-based scientific research on herbal formulations to compete in the global market and ensure holistic health to mankind.

Balakot showed aerospace power can be effectively used: IAF Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Underlining the immense potential of air power, IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari on Wednesday here said "Balakot-like operations have shown that given political will, aerospace power can be effectively used beyond enemy lines. In his address at a seminar on "Aerospace Power in Future Conflicts" here, he also said as nations increasingly rely on space-based assets for building strategic advantage, "militarisation and weaponisation of space has become an inevitable reality." "Through the annals of human history, the skies have

often been regarded as realms of wonder and exploration, where dreams take flight and boundaries dissolve into the vast blue expanse," he said. Yet, beneath this calmness lies a domain "fraught with competition where contest for aerial superiority" has shaped the destiny of many nations and decided the outcome of many wars, the chief of the Indian Air Force (IAF) said. "As we navigate these uncharted skies, air power being a key component of national power, would undoubtedly play a pivotal role and also serve as a symbol of national strength, a tool for peace and cooperation," he said. The IAF chief said, "We all need



to acknowledge that wars of the future will be fought differently." Future conflicts will be characterised by a blend of simultaneous application of kinetic and non-kinetic forces, high-levels of battle space transparency, multi-domain operations, a high-degree of precision, enhanced lethality, a com-

pressed sensor-to-shooter cycle, and of course, all under intense media scrutiny, he said. The air chief marshal also said, "Balakot-like operations have shown that given the political will, aerospace power can be effectively carried out beyond enemy lines, in a no-war, no-peace scenario, under a nuclear

overhang without escalating into a full-blown conflict." The IAF struck a Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist training camp in Pakistan's Balakot area on February 26, 2019, in response to the February 14 Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed. The Pakistan Air Force had retaliated the next day by unsuccessfully targeting various military installations in Jammu and Kashmir. Chaudhari said space has also emerged as a "critical domain for conduct of military operations", wherein seamless communication, navigation and surveillance capabilities would enhance survivability of modern military forces.

LAC, preparedness on agenda in Army Commanders meet



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Situation at the border in Ladakh in the backdrop of persisting tension for the last four years and operational readiness to meet any challenge is likely to figure prominently during the five-day Army Commanders' Conference beginning Thursday. The Army top brass is also likely to take stock of its preparedness to fight a modern-day war in the context of ongoing Ukraine conflict besides review the situation in the Indian sub-continent. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will address the conference here on April 2 during which the senior military leadership will also assess the overall security situation, the defence ministry said in a statement on Wednesday. The Army Commanders' Conference, the first for the year 2024, will be organised in a hybrid mode. The conference will be held in virtual mode on

March 28 and thereafter in physical mode from April 1-2. The conference, with its wide scope, ensures the Indian Army remains progressive, forward-looking, adaptive and future-ready, it said. It serves as a "pivotal forum for apex leadership of the Indian Army to brainstorm conceptual issues, review and assess the overall security situation". It will lay down key priorities facilitating important policy decisions, to chart the course for future direction, officials said. On March 28, the conference will be chaired by Army Chief General Manoj Pandey with army commanders participating in a virtual mode from their respective Command Headquarters, it said. The deliberation will be on a critical agenda impacting the field army and veterans' welfare. The conference will also feature talks by distinguished subject matter experts on the evolving geopolitical landscape and ramifications for national security, the officials said.

On April 1, the Army's top leadership will engage in intensive brainstorming sessions. The sessions will be aimed at enhancing operational effectiveness, the importance of fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability and investing in training and development programmes to ensure readiness for future challenges. The brainstorming session will also encompass issues concerning the welfare of service personnel aimed at enhancing the quality of life for soldiers and their families, they said. This will be followed by a meeting of the Investment Advisory Committee of the Army Group Insurance, chaired by the Army chief, and attended by several experts in the field of financial management. The committee will deliberate on various welfare measures and schemes for the financial security of serving soldiers, veterans and their families, they added. The senior hierarchy of the Army will also be addressed by Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari. On April 2, the defence minister will deliver a keynote address at the conference. He will also interact with senior military leadership during the conference. The event will also be attended by the defence secretary and other senior officials from the Ministry of Defence.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A day after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal issued directions from ED custody on ensuring that medicines and tests are available to people at all Government hospitals and mohalla clinics, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya questioned the AAP Chief's concerns, stating that had he really been worried he would have implemented the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme. He highlighted the potential benefits of these schemes, including substantial financial support and enhanced healthcare infrastructure, which could significantly improve healthcare access for the people of Delhi. Under the PM-ABHIM scheme alone, Delhi was allocated a substantial amount of Rs 2406.77 crore for the

Mandaviya questions non implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme in Delhi

establishment of Urban Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, integrated public health labs, and critical care blocks. Mandaviya emphasised that despite repeated urgings, the Delhi Government had failed to sign the necessary Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to avail of this financial support, suggesting a lack of commitment to addressing healthcare challenges. Furthermore, Mandaviya pointed out that the non-implementation of the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) had deprived around 30 lakh people in Delhi of health coverage benefits.



"Delhi hosts a migrant population from across the country. They are generally the beneficiaries of AB PMJAY. To cater to the healthcare requirement of this migrant population, the Centre has empanelled 92

hospitals. However, the Delhi government run hospitals are not empanelled under the scheme. "Thus, these beneficiaries are facing challenges in availing healthcare services under the scheme. Further, the Delhi government hospitals would have also benefited from the claim amount reimbursed for providing services to the beneficiaries from other states," Mandaviya said. The NHA has written to non-implementing states for at least on-boarding their public hospitals for the benefit of beneficiaries from other states, he said. Mandaviya further alleged that in the last 10 years there has been no increase in the

number of hospital beds in Delhi. More than half of the beds are in the four Central Government hospitals-AIIMS, RML, Safadrujung and Lady Hardinge. Also, medical colleges and seats are not being increased. TB cases are increasing in the national capital and effective steps are not being taken to combat the disease. The city is also lagging behind in immunization as compared to other UTs, he alleged. Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj had said on Tuesday that the latest directions from Kejriwal show that despite being in custody, he always thinks about the wellbeing of the people of Delhi.

Karnataka BJP lodges complaint with EC over fake WhatsApp message

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka BJP unit has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission urging them to take action against those circulating a fake WhatsApp message on social media to bring “disrepute” to the party. In its complaint submitted to the State Chief Electoral Officer on March 24, it said that a fake WhatsApp message is being circulated in the social media by miscreants. It claims to be circulated by the BJP party in the following link <https://bjp.Org@offersnow.Wi>



ki? in=91711287069939. The party said it is not the author of this link or site and the said link or site is fake and the message is fabricated and

is intended to be circulated on the social media to bring a bad name to the BJP. According to the complaint, the caption of the said message

reads as “BJP-Election Bonus” and it claims that the party is officially offering Rs 5,000 and more bonus to each who answers the four questions asked in the questionnaire. Further, the same shows photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and each photo claims that it is of the year 2014, 2019 and 2024. “It appears clearly from the question and the options given, that the content sought to be derived it is aimed at identifying the gender, age group, and the liking or disliking of the person giving the response with a fake lure of

money and further this message is aimed to create doubts in the minds of the electorate that the BJP is offering money to vote for them and thereby brings a bad reputation to the party through the circulation of this misleading message,” it stated. The BJP has requested the Election Commission to look into the matter seriously and instruct the concerned authorities, including the police, to find out the miscreants who had created such fake message and punish them in accordance with law.



Nitish knew allies would be humiliated by Lalu, so he dumped RJD: JD(U) leader

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar pre-empted attempts of RJD president Lalu Prasad to “humiliate” allies ahead of Lok Sabha polls by calling off the alliance, a senior JD(U) leader claimed on Wednesday. Neeraj Kumar, MLC and chief spokesperson of the JD(U) made the claim referring to the RJD riding roughshod over the Congress. “The Congress has been a dependable ally of the RJD, though the alliance has caused it to lose its own vote share over the years. The only time the Congress saw a rise in its vote share in recent times was in the 2015 Bihar Assembly polls when we too were part of that alliance,” said the leader of the JD(U) headed by Nitish Kumar. RJD president Lalu Prasad has unilaterally given party tickets to candidates for about a dozen seats in Bihar, leaving the Congress virtually blindsided and hoping against hope that the domineering ally will address its concerns. Neeraj Kumar asked, “What type of alliance do the RJD and the Congress have that the former is giving away party tickets to people at will, paying scant regard to the interests of the latter?” Among the seats

for which Prasad has given tickets is Aurangabad, where Congress wanted to field former MP Nikhil Kumar. Besides, the RJD is understood to have promised party ticket to JD(U) turncoat Bima Bharti from Purnea, a seat from which former MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav is said to have got assurance of Congress ticket when he merged his Jan Adhikar Party last week. Neeraj Kumar said, “It was not for nothing that our leader Nitish Kumar had been seeking early seat-sharing in the INDIA bloc. He had sensed the RJD’s plans to humiliate allies. So he taught them a lesson”. The allusion was to Kumar’s exit from the opposition alliance that robbed RJD of power and stripped Tejashwi Yadav, son and heir apparent of Lalu Prasad, of the deputy chief minister’s post. Fishing in troubled waters, the JD(U) leader added: “It is now for the Congress to show that it has spine. Rahul Gandhi has undertaken a country-wide padayatra, becoming the first leader to have done so since the 1990s”. He pointed out that in the last Lok Sabha polls, it was the Congress that managed to win a seat in Bihar while the RJD, despite seeming formidable, drew a blank.

BJP South Goa nominee Dempo starts campaign

PTI ■ PANAJI

BJP’s South Goa candidate Pallavi Dempo on Wednesday hit the campaign trail from Vasco town after taking darshan of the local deity. Dempo was accompanied by Goa BJP unit president Sadanand Shet Tanavade and other leaders when she offered prayers at Lord Damodar temple. Speaking to media persons, Dempo said she was confident of victory in the elections. “Voters are positive about BJP. There is also positivity among BJP workers,” she said. Pallavi Dempo, executive director of Dempo Industries, is the first woman candidate in the BJP’s poll history from Goa to contest Lok Sabha elections on the party ticket. The BJP declared Dempo’s candidature on Sunday. The South Goa parliamentary seat is currently held by Congress MP Francisco Sardinha. The opposition party is yet to declare nominees for Lok Sabha polls in Goa, which sends two members to Lok Sabha. “The BJP is one hundred per cent sure of winning the South Goa seat. People want Narendra Modi to become the prime minister once again,” Tanavade said. He claimed that Dempo would win with a whopping margin of 60,000 votes. The BJP had won the South Goa constituency only twice since 1962.

Yogi launches LS poll campaign from Mathura

PTI ■ MATHURA/MEERUT (UP)

Launching the Lok Sabha Election campaign from the holy city of Mathura, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday that the upcoming polls are a contest between the opposition whose motto is “Family First” and the ruling BJP which is focused on “Nation First”. Adityanath, who addressed an election meeting here after offering prayers at the Shri Krishna Janmasthan temple, also said that after 500 years, Lord Ram played holi in his “dham” (abode) in Ayodhya and now the “lanes of Mathura and Vrindavan must also be waiting”. Adityanath has in the past too hinted at the demand to build a temple at the Sri Krishnajanmabhoomi complex in Mathura, claimed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna and where a mosque stands now.

The BJP leader attacked the opposition parties, alleging that they encourage corruption and mafia rule and want to divide the society on the basis of caste and religion through politics of appeasement. “Two sides are clearly visible in this election season. For one side (opposition), family comes first, while for the party led by Modi, the nation comes first. “The party that believes in ‘family first’ supports mafia rule with its actions, but Modi ji’s party works to implement the rule of law effectively,” the chief minister said. “One side is in favour of corruption while Modi’s side has zero tolerance,” he said. “One side wants to divide the society on the basis of caste, opinion and religion through appeasement, but the party led by Modi is providing the benefits of welfare schemes to every section of society through ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishvas.’”

CPM slams ED for filing case against Kerala CM daughter

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala on Wednesday slammed the Enforcement Directorate’s decision to file a money-laundering case against state Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan’s daughter and her IT firm, alleging the Central agency was acting like a “daily labourer” for the BJP. Strongly criticising the ED, CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan asked whether the agency had any credibility. The ED was one of the prominent agencies in the country, which the Supreme Court had said had lost its credibility, he said while addressing a press conference here. “It (the case) will be dealt with in an appropriate way,” he said, reacting to a query about the Enforcement Directorate filing a money-laundering case against Vijayan’s daughter Veena Vijayan, her IT company and others to



probe alleged illegal payments made by a private mineral firm to her and the company. Replying to a question as to whether the CM was being targeted through the Central probe, the Left veteran asked whom they could not target. “You can target anyone politically. But the question is, who is targeting. It (ED) is the daily labourer for the BJP,” Govindan said. Dragging opposition leader V D Sathesnan into the matter, he further said the present

probe was also to calm down the Congress leader, who had lamented why the Central agency was not initiating any investigation against the government and leaders of Kerala. Further, he alleged earlier Central agencies were used for political gains only, but now they are also used by the Union government and the BJP for amassing money from black money holders and offenders by threatening them. “The party (the CPI-M) and its people are not the ones who surrender to such tactics and cases,” Govindan added. Official sources said on Wednesday the agency has registered a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against Veena and others and is expected to summon those involved.

PUBLIC NOTICE

M/S Mirkana Engineering Pvt Ltd has been granted Environmental Clearance for Commercial Complex (IT Enabled Services) at Plot No. 34, Rama Road Najafgarh Industrial Area, New Delhi vide File No DPCC/SEIAA-IV/C-448/DL/2023/1752-1765 Dated 31.01.2024. The copy of Environmental clearance is available at office of the SEIAA Delhi and on the website of the Parivesh at parivesh.nic.in and at registered office of the company at M/S Mirkana Engineering Pvt Ltd, A-2, Udyog Nagar, Industrial Area, Peeragarhi, Rohak Road, 110041.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is public notice that the residential UG Flat 222D Block-B-10, UDAIGIRI-II, Sector-34, Noida U.P., has been allotted in the name of/ original allottee SMT. BHODMIKA KATYAL W/O AJAY KATYAL R/O 235, RPS COLONY KHANPUR, NEW DELHI-110062 and the above said Flat was sold on the basis of G.P.A. To the following person:- 1.A GPA was executed on 09-06-2000 in favour of Mr. ANIL THAPA, S/O SH. K.C. THAPA, R/O FLAT NO. 222D BLOCK-B-10, UDAIGIRI-II, SECTOR-34, NOIDA, U.P. which is registered in the office of SUB-REGISTRAR-3, NOIDA, IN Book No. 4, Volume No. 148, Page 479 to 484, as DOCUMENT NO. 963, dated 09-06-2000 and the Agreement to Sell also Executed in favour of SMT. ANITA THAPA which is not registered. 2.Because an agreement to sell is not registered or no agreement to sell executed so it is informed to all concern that the said LIG Flat 222D Block-B-10, UDAIGIRI-II, Sector 34, Noida U.P., is going to be transfer in favour of Mrs. ANITA THAPA wife of ANIL THAPA R/O LIG Flat 222D Block-B-10, UDAIGIRI-II, Sector-34, Noida U.P. If same one has/have any objection, kindly inform to (Housing Division) Noida authority with all evidence within 15 days of publication of this notice.

SIGNATURE

Mr. ANIL THAPA S/O SH. K.C. THAPA
R/O FLAT NO. 222D BLOCK-B-10,
UDAIGIRI-II, SECTOR-34, NOIDA, U.P.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Anshul Jain is in process to avail the credit facility from KMBL against his Property No. 825 in Block-D area measuring 482 Sq. Yards, situated in the layout plan of New Friends Colony, New Delhi-110065 having acquired the same vide five gift deeds bearing documents no.s 3245-3249 dated 20/3/2009 executed by Jit Paul, whereas he has lost an Conveyance Deed dated 27.08.2007 pertain to the said property, an FIR has already been lodged for that on dated 26/3/2024. All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/ registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Maheshwari Metro Tower
Sec-4, Vaishali, Gzb., U.P., Mob. 9810063351

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE (Through e-tendering)	
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-Tele-OT-993	Dated: 27.03.2024
Name of work with its location	Provision of Telecom facilities in Karnail Singh Stadium, New Delhi
App. Cost of the work (₹)	₹ 17,97,393.74/- only
Earnest Money Deposit(₹)	₹ 36,000/- only
Address of the office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annexe-1, DRM office, New Delhi-110055.
Date & Time for upload the tender / closing of notice	Tender uploading / closing date & time- 23.04.2024 up to 15.00 hrs.
Website particular & tender board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.ireps.gov.in & Notice board at S&T Branch, 3rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	
925/24	

VACATION NOTICE	
	Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005
NOTICE	
Notice is hereby given to the Applicants/ Guarantors/ Mortgageors BODY DRENCH INDIA PVT LTD, PANKAJ ARORA, to vacate the movable articles in the property situated at- 1103 AND 1104, 11TH FLOOR, SAS TOWER-B SECTOR-38 GURGAON- 122001. HARYANA The possession of which is taken by ICICI Bank Ltd, on FEBRUARY 23, 2024 under section 13 (4) of the Securitisation and Re-Construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. within the period of 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. Please take note that if you fail to vacate the movable articles, ICICI Bank Limited will be constrained to auction the property along with the movable articles lying in the property at your own cost and consequences and ICICI Bank Limited, will not be responsible for the same.	
Date : March 28, 2024 Place: Gurgaon	SD/- Authorised Officer ICICI Bank Limited

Mob thrashes cop, man trying to end fight between groups

PTI ■ THANE

Police have registered a case against several persons after a cop and another individual were injured while trying to stop a fight between two groups in Navi Mumbai, an official said on Wednesday. The incident took place on Monday near a powerhouse



in the Panvel area, he said. A police sub-inspector deployed at the powerhouse tried to pacify two groups that had got into a confrontation but he was pushed by the mob. When a second person accompanying the cop started filming it, the mob thrashed him. Members of the groups also

attacked the policeman when he tried to save the second person, the official said. Four persons were detained before being allowed to go. Efforts are ongoing to apprehend an additional 14 identified suspects and 10 others whose identities remain unknown, he added.

Gadkari files nomination for Nagpur Lok Sabha seat Says NDA will retain power

PTI ■ JHABUA (MP)

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday filed his nomination as a BJP candidate for the Nagpur Lok Sabha constituency in Maharashtra, and expressed confidence that the NDA government will continue to be in power at the Centre. Before filing the nomination paper, Gadkari took out a roadshow in the city, where Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, state Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Chandrashekhar Bawankule, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Praful Patel were present with him. Addressing a gathering before filing the nomination, Gadkari said, “With people’s blessings, the NDA government will retain power under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. Maharashtra will see a huge development under the leadership of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy CMs Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar.” “We have to make India ‘vishwa guru’ under PM Modi’s leadership and turn it into a happy and prosperous nation,” he said. The Minister of Road Transport and Highways said he carried out works worth Rs one lakh crore in Nagpur, and the



credit goes to the party workers. He said he gave a push to the Multi-Model International Passenger and Cargo Hub Airport at Nagpur (MIHAN), created job opportunities for the youth and built roads and flyovers to improve infrastructure in the district. Gadkari urged people to come out in large numbers to cast their vote so that Nagpur sees 75 per cent voter turnout, and also appealed the people to ensure that he wins by a margin of five lakh votes. Gadkari has been representing the Nagpur Lok Sabha seat since the last two terms. He fought his first Lok Sabha election in 2014 from the seat against seven-time

Congress MP Vilas Muttemwar and defeated him by a margin of 2,85,000 votes. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Gadkari defeated Congress candidate Nana Patole, who is now the Maharashtra unit chief of the grand old party, by a margin of 2,16,000 votes. Patole was earlier a BJP MP from Bhandara-Gondia Lok Sabha seat. But he left the BJP and joined the Congress, following which he was pitted against Gadkari. However, Gadkari registered a comfortable victory by securing 6,60,221 votes, while Patole bagged 4,44,212 votes. Addressing the gathering, Fadnavis said India achieved development thanks to the works undertaken by PM Modi and Gadkari. He also said the country will witness many more positive changes in the next 10 years. At the time of Gadkari’s filing of nomination at the Nagpur district collectorate, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde was present along with Fadnavis and Patel. CM Shinde-led Shiv Sena’s candidate from Ramtek Lok Sabha constituency in Nagpur, Raju Parwe, also filed his nomination paper at the same office.

PUBLIC NOTICE	
This is to certify that my clientless Smt. Jwala Devi W/o. Late Sh. Mahender Singh, R/o House No.-3008, Arya Pur, Delhi-110007, has severed all her relations with her son namely Heera & his wife namely Smt. Deepthi Rani. She has also disowned them from her all moveable and immovable properties. Whosoever deals with them, he/she will be doing so at his/her risk and responsibilities. RADHEY SHYAM ADVOCATE Chamber No. : X-25, Eastern Wing, Civil Side, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-110054	
My Client Sh. Sumit Kumar S/o Sh. Krishan Chakervorty, R/o C-57, Ganesh Nagar, Pandav Nagar Complex, Shakar Pur Baramand, East Delhi-110092, do hereby declare that my client’s PAN card bearing number DOGPK2240B has been misused by some unknown person and the company namely Bharat Enterprises, GSTIN 07DOGPK2240B1Z is not belongs to my client. He is not responsible for the acts of the said company.	
Piyyush Sharma (Advocate) (D/1395/2021) Chamber No.-F-611, Karkardooma Courts, Delhi-32	

ICICI Bank

Whereas

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.

Name of the Borrower/
Loan Account Number

Description
of Property/ Date of
Symbolic Possession

Date of Demand
Notice/ Amount
in Demand
Notice (Rs.)

Name of
Branch

1.

Subhash Chand Yadav/
Sunita Devi/
LBDEL00002943978

Flat No- 0208, 2nd Floor, Tower- 15 Supertech
Basera Manesar Complex Village Naurangpur,
Sector-79 And 79B Gurgaon/ March 23, 2024

November 30, 2022
Rs.
9,96,015/-

Delhi/
NCR

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.


Date: March 28, 2024

Place: Delhi/ NCR

Authorized Officer

ICICI Bank Limited

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



Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]

Notice for sale of immovable assets

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

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

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Travonation Holidays Private Limited- (Borrower), Mohd Faisal- (Co-Applcant/ Mortgageor and Guarantor), Reena- (Guarantor), Mohd Abbas. (Mortgagor/ Co-Applcant & Guarantor) Sheeba Naqvi (Guarantor)	Shop Bearing Pvt No. G-11, on Ground Floor Upto Ceiling Level Without Roof Rights, A Part of Property Bearing No. A-1/B, Situated in The Abadi of Acharya Niketan, Out of Khasara No. 63 in Mayur Vihar Phase 1 in Village Kotla Delhi-110091 Area- 166.34 Sqft	Rs. 1,14,97,417/- as on March 02, 2024	Rs. 35,56, 000/- Rs. 3,55, 600/-	March 03, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00PM	April 24, 2024 from 01:00 PM onwards
		Shop Bearing Pvt No. G-12, on Ground Floor Upto Extent of Ceiling Level Without Roof Rights, A Part of Property Bearing No. A-1/B, Situated in The Abadi of Acharya Niketan, Out of Khasara No. 63 in Mayur Vihar Phase 1 in Village Kotla, Ilaqashahdara Delhi-110091 Area -147.68 Sq Ft		Rs. 31,57, 000/- Rs. 3,15, 700/-		

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited (URL Link=https://disposalhub.com) The Mortgageors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till April 23, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. failing which, this/these secured asset/s will be sold as per schedule.

The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005 on or before April 23, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before April 23, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005 on or before April 23, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/ Scheduled Bank in favour of “ICICI Bank Limited” payable at Delhi

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the e-auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Bank Limited On 8928935040/8584874809

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

The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s

Date : March 28, 2024
Place : Delhi/ NCR

Authorised Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

FIRST COLUMN

CHALLENGES TO THE HOLISTIC IDEAL

We often overlook the crucial dimensions of social and moral well-being



Since ancient times, the medical profession has been considered a noble profession, for its members render a valuable service to mankind by preventing, alleviating, controlling or eliminating disease, pain and suffering. Through the knowledge of the physical body and the laws of health and hygiene, doctors provide patients with measures of great relief and recovery when they are passing through a great physical or mental crisis, are facing the worst of physical troubles or mental tensions or are fighting for life. So, the members of the profession truly needed to be complimented by the society. However, it has been observed lately that many members of the medical profession in this era of increasing urbanisation and the spread of industrial civilisation and technological culture also face the great pressures of materialism and are hard-pressed for time. Being always in a hurry and with the object of providing medicine to the largest possible number of patients within the set time limits, they are now more and more preoccupied with only the physical well-being of their patients, almost overlooking the changes required in the outlook or personality traits of the patients. Even though they know that most diseases are psychosomatic and that the lifestyle, personality traits and behavioural patterns of a person also play a major role in causing stress or trauma or in aggravating the disease, they, for various reasons, do not or cannot pay adequate attention to the social and moral dimensions of health and disease.



The reason for this is that their main attention is on the symptoms and on prescribing suitable medicines. But, if we think deeper, we find that, without controlling, reducing or eliminating the psychic or the behavioural causes, there cannot be any lasting cure for many diseases. Another serious thing that occurs as a result of moral or social ill-health of a person but which is not given serious attention is that not only does the person himself suffer from its evil effects on his body but, as a result of these psychic factors, he causes ill-health to many others also who live with him, work with him or deal with him. For example, a person of an irritable nature, or one who easily loses his temper or is prone to anxiety, not only suffers from avoidable worry and tension but often causes mental tension and anxiety to others also. Worse still is the social strife, family turmoil or political upheaval the moral and social ill-health of a person creates. Hitler, for example, was socially and morally ill and mentally sick. Most of our present-day problems are due to the moral and social ill-health of our citizens, most of them generating a chain reaction and contributing peacelessness to the total atmosphere. So, while doctors talk of holistic health, hypertension, psychosomatic diseases, drug addiction or AIDS, we wish that due attention is also paid to the turmoil caused by one's moral sickness or social illness in the socio-political or socio-economic atmosphere of society.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Mechanisation needed to tackle farm issues



The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food Processing underscores the importance of mechanisation



The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Food Processing insists on the urgent need to increase the mechanisation of farms for small and marginal farmers in India. Their recent report highlights that wholesome mechanisation is not only essential but crucial to overcoming the multifaceted challenges faced by the farming sector, which plays a pivotal role in the country's economy. Despite India's accounts for only 2.4 per cent of the world's geographical area and 4 per cent of its water resources, its farming sector supports 17 per cent of the global population and 15 per cent of the livestock, contributing 20 per cent to the nation's GDP and creating employability to 65 per cent population. Therefore, there is a dire need to enhance productivity and profitability through increased mechanisation among small and marginal farmers and in low mechanisation areas to revitalise Indian agriculture and boosting farmers' incomes requires moving beyond traditional practices to advanced mechanisation. **Status of Mechanisation:** Our country's agriculture mechanisation level is below 40 per cent lower than developing nations such as China 60 per cent and Brazil 75 per cent. It is worth noting that agrarian states like Punjab and Haryana had led the green revolution having mechanisation levels around 40 per cent, while in other areas such as the north-eastern states of India, it is negligible. The Committee has pointed out that 86 per cent of the total land holdings are in small and marginal size groups, which require special efforts for their mechanization. They have emphasized that small farmers face significant difficulties in purchasing machinery unless machines appropriate for small holdings are made available or farmland consolidation takes place. It is expected to take another 25 years to reach the level of 75 per cent mechanization. A Catalyst for Growth: The imperative



THE AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED SECTORS, LIKE LIVESTOCK FARMING, DEMAND CONTINUOUS MODERNISATION. THE DIVERSITY IN FARMING, WHETHER LARGE SCALE OR SMALL SCALE, AND RURAL LABOUR SCARCITY NECESSITATE A BROAD SPECTRUM OF AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT

role of farm mechanisation is instrumental in reducing cultivation costs and enhancing productivity through efficient resource utilisation. Experts and committees have highlighted that agricultural mechanisation in India contributes to making judicious and cost-effective use of inputs, leading to savings in seeds by 15-20 per cent, in fertilisers, an improvement in germination rate by 7-25 per cent, savings in time by 20-30 per cent, in weed by 20-40 per cent, an increase in cropping intensity by 5-20 per cent, and an increase in crop yield by 13-23 per cent. This also helps in the conservation of natural resources like water, soil nutrients, etc. **Farm Machinery Landscape:** The agriculture and allied sectors like livestock farming demand continuous modernization. The diversity in farming, whether large-scale or small-scale and rural labour scarcity necessitates a broad spectrum of agricultural equipment. From basic tractors to sophisticated combine harvesters, the sector requires a nuanced understanding of the equipment's specific applications and requirements, spanning feeding equipment, poultry tools, corral systems for cattle and more attributed to the Indian agricultural machinery market is estimated to be worth a whopping US\$16.73 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach an impressive US\$25.15 billion by 2029. **Steps to Propel Mechanisation:** First, Establishment of the Directorate of Agricultural Engineering: The parliamentary Committee recommends that to monitor and implement the Government's mechanisation policy effectively and efficiently, a Directorate of Agricultural

Engineering is needed in each state. Currently, it only exists in Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, but the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) is working towards establishing it in all states. Agricultural Engineers are also needed at Block and District Levels as there is no engineering manpower to demonstrate, train, help in repairs/maintenance and guide farmers at their doorstep. Second, Farm Machinery Banks: Since farm machinery is expensive, small farmers find it difficult to purchase it. To address this issue, the Government has introduced custom hiring centres and farm machinery banks in almost all states, where farmers can share machines. However, the benefits of these schemes have not reached the gram panchayat level. Third, Full-fledged Scheme: In September 2022, the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation was merged with Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, which diluted its mandate. Therefore, the Government should establish a full-fledged Agriculture mechanism scheme to speed up the process. Fourth, Funding for R&D: The budget allocation for the Research and Development (R&D) of the Farm Mechanisation Scheme has been declining steadily over the past four years, with a significant decrease of 30 per cent from 2019-20 to 2023-24. Fifth, Tax and Duty Incentives: To promote low horsepower tractors, which are mostly used by small and marginal farmers and orchard growers, the tractor and its components attract 12 per cent GST. This means a small tractor costing about Rs 5-7 lakh leads the farmer to pay Rs 60-84 thousand as GST. GST can be reduced to nil or 5 per cent to make it more

affordable for small farmers. Tax and duty incentives are also essential to support manufacturing units in low-mechanisation areas for sustainable growth. **In conclusion we can only agree with the Standing Committee.** The Parliamentary Standing Committee stresses the urgent need for enhanced farm mechanisation to support India's small and marginal farmers. Despite its significant agricultural contribution, India's mechanisation levels lag behind global counterparts, hindering productivity and profitability. With 86 per cent of land holdings in small and marginal categories, targeted efforts are crucial. Mechanisation not only reduces costs but also enhances productivity and conserves resources. To drive mechanisation, the committee recommends establishing agricultural engineering directorates, expanding access to farm machinery through banks, revitalising existing schemes, boosting funding for research and development, and offering tax incentives. These measures are essential for revitalising Indian agriculture, increasing farmers' incomes, and ensuring sustainable sectoral growth. By embracing comprehensive mechanisation, India can overcome multifaceted agricultural challenges and secure its position as a global agricultural leader while empowering its farming community. *-The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet Minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President, of Tractor and Mechanisation Association (TMA). Views expressed are personal.*

From addiction to artistry: Painting a new future

Decorative wall painting is transforming the lives of substance users in Manipur and beyond, giving them a purposeful life to the fullest extent

Manglemba Ningombam was 29 when he started experimenting with drugs like many of his friends in his village in Imphal, Manipur. When it started to impact their lives, some of them were able to give it up. Ningombam wasn't one of them. Over the next 15 years, this addiction would spin his life into a vicious cycle of highs and lows. Personal crisis and the death of his parents exacerbated his loneliness, leading him to consider ending his life. Fortunately, a local NGO was able to reach out in time and admit him to a drug addiction and rehabilitation centre. This was to change his life forever. While admission to a reha-



bilitation centre provided the medical and counselling support to wean him off drugs, it was an innovative intervention conducted here that catalysed the transformation. Implemented jointly by Makers Foundation, a Manipur-based not-for-profit working to empower the alcohol and drug user community, and CADAR, a community-based organisation of drug users, the initiative

to provide training in decorative wall painting has opened new doors. This skilling has given them a source of livelihood and income and the confidence to overcome stigma, a big barrier to recovery. Most importantly, it has brought hope and belief that a meaningful life without drugs is possible, thus also reducing the chances of drug abuse relapse. Ningombam, who was a part of the first batch of 400 trainees of this decorative wall painting programme started in 2022, is now its salaried lead trainer. Just how life-saving this journey has been can be gauged by the fact that there are more than 1.2 lakh psychoactive substance dependants in

Manipur. The state's proximity to the Golden Drug Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam) and its large-scale poppy cultivation means easy availability of drugs. It has given Manipur the dubious distinction of having one of the highest prevalence rates in opioid use and an increasing number of drug addicts in the state's rehabilitation centres. Internal conflict and lack of employment opportunities have compounded the problem, leading to a high percentage of relapse among those undergoing rehabilitation. It was this challenge that led to the focus on skill-building as a means to break the chain. Makers Foundation began exploring ways to



build the capacity of the substance-dependent community to become economically empowered once they had completed the treatment course. It hit upon the idea of decorative wall painting and partnered with AkzoNobel, a leading paints and coatings company, to

provide the training. Besides providing the monetary resources for the programme, AkzoNobel, which also runs paint academies for training in decorative painting, joined hands to provide the necessary skills. At the end of the 16-day training in decorative wall

painting, those with potential are selected for an advanced course of 30 days at AkzoNobel Training Centre in Kolkata. It is not just the self-confidence that this intervention has been able to restore among the trainees. It has also been accepted by their families. For Bhimo, 37, learning a new skill and getting a job as a trainer at Makers Foundation helped him not only to stay off his addiction to alcohol but also helped regain the trust, respect and support of his family. When positive impacts like this and the encouraging feedback from the community led to the scale-up of the intervention to Assam last year, Bhimo was sent as a trainer. This

was also in keeping with their Therapeutic Community Model based on the premise that a rehabilitated alcohol/drug user was better equipped to inspire other users to achieve their potential. Though it has been challenging, with 44 per cent of the 6.7 million substance users being adolescents, the initiative has so far trained 200 persons admitted to rehabilitation centres in Assam's Tinsukhia district. Hopefully, this initiative will now be able to empower the many invisible substance-dependent women and girls in need of a helping hand. *(The author is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views expressed are personal)*

7 Lebanese, one Israeli killed in Lebanon-Israel border clash

AP ■ HEBBARIYE (LEBANON)

An Israeli airstrike on a paramedics centre linked to a Lebanese Sunni Muslim group in south Lebanon killed seven of its members early on Wednesday and triggered a rocket attack from Lebanon that killed one person in northern Israel, officials said. The strike on the village of Hebbariye came after a day of airstrikes and rocket attacks between Israel's military and Lebanon's Hezbollah group along the Lebanon-Israel border, raising concerns of further escalation along the frontier that has been active for the past five months of the Israel-Hamas war. The airstrike after midnight on Tuesday hit an office of the Islamic Emergency and Relief Corps, according to the Lebanese Ambulance Association. It was one of the deadliest single attacks since violence erupted along the border. The paramedics association list-



Paramedic workers search for victims in the rubble of a paramedic center that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike early Wednesday in Hebbariye village, south Lebanon on Wednesday. AP/PTI

ed the names of seven volunteers who were killed in the strike. It said the strike was "a flagrant violation of humanitarian work". Hebbariye resident Ali Nouredine told The Associated

Press that the seven dead were pulled out from the rubble before sunrise Wednesday. Muheddine Qarhani, head of the Emergency and Relief Corps, told reporters at the scene that

the centre that was struck was set up late last year, after the latest round of violence broke out. He said they were surprised that a paramedic group was targeted. "They were here waiting to respond to a rescue call and ended up getting hit by missiles that brought the building over their heads," he said. The Israeli military said it struck a military building in Hebbariye and killed a member of Lebanon's Sunni Muslim al-Jamaa al-Islamiya, or the Islamic Group, and several other militants. It said the man was involved in attacks against Israel. Hours later, Hezbollah said it retaliated against the airstrike by firing dozens of rockets on Wednesday morning on the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona and a military base there. Rescue services in Israel said that a 25-year-old man was killed when a direct hit sparked a fire in an industrial park in Kiryat Shmona.

Hunter's tax case heads to courtroom as his defence seeks to have it tossed out

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Attorneys for Hunter Biden are expected in court on Wednesday in Los Angeles, where he is accused in what prosecutors call a four-year scheme to avoid paying USD 1.4 million in taxes while living an extravagant lifestyle. President Joe Biden's son has pleaded not guilty to the nine felony and misdemeanour tax offenses. He's asking the judge to toss out the case, arguing that the prosecution was politically motivated, was tainted by leaks from IRS agents who claimed publicly the case was mishandled and includes some allegations from before he moved to California. He has also been charged in Delaware with lying on a federal form to buy a gun in 2018 by saying he wasn't using or addicted to illegal drugs, even though he has acknowledged being addicted to crack cocaine at the time. He has pleaded not guilty in that case, which also accuses him of possessing the gun illegally. Both cases are overseen by special counsel David Weiss and now have tentative trials scheduled for June, though defense attorneys are also trying to get the Delaware gun charges tossed out. The two sets of charges come from a

years-long federal investigation that had been expected to wrap up over the summer with a plea deal in which Hunter Biden would have gotten two years of probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanour tax charges. He also would have avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble. Defence attorneys argue that immunity provisions in the deal were signed by a prosecutor and are still in effect, though prosecutors disagree. But the deal that could have spared Hunter Biden the spectacle of a criminal trial during the 2024 presidential campaign unraveled after a federal judge began to question it. Now, the tax and gun cases are moving ahead as part of an unprecedented confluence of political and legal drama: As the November election draws closer, the Justice Department is actively prosecuting both the Democratic president's son and the presumptive Republican nominee, Donald Trump. Hunter Biden's original proposed plea deal with prosecutors had been pilloried as a "sweetheart deal" by Republicans, including Trump. The former president is facing his own criminal problems — 91 charges across four cases, including that he plotted to overturn the results of

the 2020 election, which he lost to Joe Biden. Hunter Biden's criminal proceedings are also happening in parallel to so-far unsuccessful efforts by congressional Republicans to link his business dealings to his father. Republicans are pursuing an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, claiming he was engaged in an influence-peddling scheme with his son. No evidence has emerged to prove that Joe Biden, as president or previously as vice president, abused his role or accepted bribes, though questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the Biden family's international business dealings. In launching their Biden impeachment inquiry last year, the House Republicans relied in large part on unverified claims from an FBI informant released by Senate Republicans suggesting that payments totalling USD 10 million from Ukrainian energy company Burisma to the Bidens were discussed. The now-former FBI informant, Alexander Smirnov, was arrested last month in a case also overseen by Weiss. He has pleaded not guilty to charges that he fabricated the bribery allegations. If convicted of the tax charges, Hunter Biden, 53, could receive a maximum of 17 years in prison.

Police cleared traffic in seconds; 6 workers feared dead

BALTIMORE BRIDGE COLLAPSE

AP ■ BALTIMORE

It was the middle of the night when a dispatcher's warning crackled over the radio: A massive cargo ship had lost its steering capabilities and was heading toward the Francis Scott Key Bridge. Within about 90 seconds, police officers who happened to be nearby responded that they managed to stop vehicle traffic over the Baltimore bridge in both directions. One parked sideways across the lanes and planned to drive onto the bridge to alert a construction crew once another officer arrived. But he wouldn't get the chance. Powerless and laden with huge containers, the vessel smashed into a support pillar. "The whole bridge just fell down," a frantic officer said. "Start, start whoever, everybody... the whole bridge just collapsed." When the container ship Dali slammed into the pillar around 1:30 am Tuesday, it caused a long span of the bridge, a major link in the region's transport networks,

to crumple into the Patapsco River. The loss of the bridge is expected to snarl commuter traffic and disrupt a vital shipping port. At least eight people went into the water. Two were rescued but the other six, part of a construction crew that had been filling potholes on the bridge, were missing and presumed dead. A search for their bodies was underway Wednesday morning, according to Maryland State Police spokesperson Elena Russo. Among the missing were people from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, according to diplomats from those countries. The Honduran man was identified as Maynor Yassir Suazo Sandova. Federal and state officials have said the crash appeared to be an accident. Investigators on Wednesday plan to collect evidence on the ship, including electronics and paperwork, said National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy. The US Coast Guard already boarded the vessel and downloaded the voyage data recorder



A Coast Guard cutter passes a cargo ship that is stuck under the part of the structure of the Francis Scott Key Bridge after the ship hit the bridge Tuesday in Baltimore. AP/PTI

and sent it to the NTSB, which is putting together a timeline of what led to the crash, Homendy said. A preliminary report could be done in two to four weeks, she said. Ship traffic entering and leaving the Port of Baltimore has been

suspended indefinitely. Capt. Michael Burns Jr of the Maritime Centre for Responsible Energy said bringing a ship into or out of ports in restricted waters with limited room to maneuver is "one of the most technically challenging and

demanding things that we do." There are "few things that are scarier than a loss of power in restricted waters," he said. And when a ship loses propulsion and steering, "then it's really at the mercy of the wind and the current."

Video showed the ship moving at what Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said was about 9 mph (15 kph) toward the 1.6-mile (2.6-kilometer) bridge. Traffic was still moving across the span, and some vehicles appeared to escape with only seconds to spare. The crash caused the span to break and fall into the water within seconds, and jagged remnants were left jutting up from the water. Police said there is no evidence anyone went into the water other than the workers, though they had not discounted the possibility. A senior executive at the company that employed the crew, Brawner Builders, said they were working in the middle of the bridge when it fell. "This was so completely unforeseen," said Jeffrey Pritzker, the company's executive vice president. "We don't know what else to say. We take such great pride in safety, and we have cones and signs and lights and barriers and flaggers." Jesus Campos, who has worked on the bridge for Brawner Builders and knows members of the crew, said he was told they were on a break and some were sitting in their trucks.

Biden & Harris promote their healthcare agenda



AP ■ RALEIGH (NORTH CAROLINA)

President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris on Tuesday promoted their healthcare agenda in the battleground state of North Carolina, arguing that Democrats like themselves would preserve access to care while Republicans would reverse gains made over the past decade and a half. Fourteen years after President Barack Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, the White House still sees health care as a winning issue during a campaign in which Biden has sometimes found himself on the defensive when it comes to immigration or the economy. Republicans have opposed Biden's signature initiatives to lower medical costs, and they've seized opportunities to restrict abortion rights after the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade. "It's sick. Now they want to quote, his words, terminate the ACA, as my predecessor says," Biden said, referring to Republican former President Donald Trump. "If that were ever to happen, we'd also terminate a lot of lives as well. But we're not going to let that happen, are we? We're not going to let that happen." North Carolina was Biden's final stop on a tour of battleground states after his State of the Union address this month, which jump-started a frenzied travel schedule as the Democratic president makes his case for a second term in a likely rematch with Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee. The state is also a healthcare success story for the president. The American Rescue

Plan, a coronavirus pandemic recovery measure signed by Biden, included financial incentives for states to expand Medicaid coverage for low-income residents. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, a Democrat, used the money, which amounted to USD 1.8 billion, to persuade Republican lawmakers to support his plan. More than 600,000 residents are expected to qualify. Biden and Harris visited hours after the US Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case about access to mifepristone, a widely used abortion pill. The justices appeared inclined to preserve access to the medication. The White House has tried to make mifepristone more available as one of its few opportunities to protect women's ability to end their pregnancies. Afterward, Biden and Harris attended a campaign fundraiser in Raleigh that raised USD 2.3 million, said Cooper. Harris told supporters, "This is the most existential, consequential and important election of our lifetime." Biden asked, "Does anyone here want to go back to 2020?" and the crowd shouted, "No." Biden's approval ratings on health care are among his highest on a range of issues, but he trails there, too. According to a February poll from AP and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 42 per cent of US adults approve of Biden's handling of health care while 55 per cent disapprove. KFF, a health policy research firm, found in its own poll in November that 59 per cent of US adults trust the Democratic Party to do a better job addressing healthcare affordability issues.

Indian crew sustained minor injury: Official

New York (PTI): One of the 22 Indian crew manning a crippled cargo ship which collided against a bridge in Baltimore has suffered a "minor injury" while the rest are all safe aboard the vessel, owners of the Singapore-flagged ship said on Wednesday. The 2.6km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River in Baltimore, came crashing down after Dali, a 984-foot cargo ship, collided against it in the early hours of Tuesday. Minutes before impact, there was a "total blackout" of the engine and electrical power on the ship, authorities said. "We confirm the safety of all crew members and two pilots aboard 'Dali', with one minor injury reported. The injured crew member has been treated and discharged from hospital," a statement by owners Grace Ocean Pte Ltd and ship manager of Dali,

posted on the website of ship management company Synergy Marine Group. The name and other details of the crew have not been released. Authorities from the US Coast Guard and National Transportation Safety Board boarded the vessel to carry out investigations, it said. Synergy had said in a statement Tuesday after the accident that Dali's crew is "All Indian, 22 in total." "All crew members, including the two pilots, have been accounted for and there are no reports of any injuries. There has also been no pollution," Synergy had said. Synergy and Grace Ocean noted that "unfortunately", the incident also impacted those who were on the bridge at the time. "As per the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the search and rescue operation has been called off for the night.

Presidents of France and Brazil announce \$1.1 billion investment plan for Amazon

AP ■ SAO PAULO

The Brazilian and the French presidents have announced a plan to invest 1 billion euros (USD 1.1 billion) in the Amazon, including parts of the rainforest in neighbouring French Guiana. The two countries' governments said in a joint statement the money will be spread over the next four years to protect the rainforest. It will be a collaboration of state-run Brazilian banks and France's investment agency. Private resources will also be welcomed, Brazil and France said. French President Emmanuel Macron and his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva are meeting this week to revive the relationship between the countries after years of frictions with former President Jair

Bolsonaro, deepen cooperation to protect the rainforest and boost trade. Macron started his three-day visit to Brazil in the Amazon city of Belem, where he met his long-time ally Lula. The French president then took a boat to the Combú island to meet with Indigenous leaders. Both Macron and Lula saw a protest by Greenpeace Brazil with banners that read "No oil in the Amazon." Brazil's government has contemplated allowing the tapping of oil in a region close to the Para state, where Belem lies. Lula said during a speech that Macron's visit is part of a global effort to beef up rainforest protections. "We want to convince those who have already deforested that they need to contribute in an important way to countries that still have their forests to keep them stand-

ing," Lula said in a speech next to the French president. Macron's office prior said to the trip that a potential European trade deal with the South American bloc Mercosur won't be on the agenda. The French president is an opponent of such an agreement as long as South American producers don't respect the same environment and health standards as Europeans, after farmers raised concerns during protests across France and Europe. The French president decorated Indigenous leader Raoni Metuktire with the prestigious Legion of Honor medal for efforts at conserving the rainforest. "You were in Europe and I promised to come here to your forest and be with your people in this forest that is coveted," Macron told the

Indigenous leader, according to French radio RFI. "President Lula and I have a common cause for one of our friends in this land that belongs to you." Lula and Macron will seek to "set a common course" to fight both climate change and poverty, Macron's office said, as Brazil is to host the summit of the Group of 20 leading economies in Rio de Janeiro in November and UN climate talks in Belem next year. On Wednesday, Macron and Lula will launch a diesel-powered submarine built in Brazil with French technology at the Itaguaí shipyard outside Rio de Janeiro. The French president will then head to metropolis Sao Paulo to meet with Brazilian investors. On Thursday, the French president will head to Brasilia to again meet with Lula.

Lawmakers approve same-sex marriage bill in Thailand

AP ■ BANGKOK



Lawmakers in Thailand's lower house of Parliament overwhelmingly approved a marriage equality bill on Wednesday that would make the country the first in Southeast Asia to legalise equal rights for marriage partners of any gender. The bill passed its final reading with the approval of 400 of the 415 members of the House of Representatives in attendance, with 10 voting against it, two abstaining and three not voting. Thailand has a reputation for acceptance and inclusivity but has struggled for decades to pass a marriage equality law. Thai society largely holds conservative values, and members of the LGBTQ+ community say they face discrimination in everyday life. The government and state agencies are also historically conservative, and advocates for gender equality have had a hard

time pushing lawmakers and civil servants to accept change. The bill now goes to the Senate, which rarely rejects any legislation that passes the lower house, and then to the king for royal endorsement. This would make Thailand the first country or region in Southeast Asia to pass such a law and the third in Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal. The bill amends the Civil and Commercial Code to change the words "men and women" and

Iraqi man who burnt Quran plans to seek asylum in Norway

Stockholm (AP): An Iraqi man who carried out several Quran burnings in Sweden told a newspaper on Wednesday that he would seek asylum in neighbouring Norway in the wake of a deportation order by authorities in Stockholm. Salwan Momika, 37, has staged several burnings and desecrations of the sacred book of Islam in Sweden over the past few years. "I am on my way to Norway," Momika said in an interview published Wednesday by Swedish tabloid Expressen. "Sweden only accepts terrorists who are granted asylum and given protection, while philosophers and thinkers are expelled." Videos of Momika's provocative Quran burnings got worldwide publicity and raised anger and criticism in several Muslim nations, leading to riots and unrest in many places. He is

currently being investigated by Swedish authorities for incitement against ethnic groups in Sweden. According to Expressen, Momika is one of the reasons why Sweden's NATO membership, which was finalized earlier this month, got delayed by months. Among other countries, his actions got wide publicity in NATO member Turkey, which vetoed Stockholm's bid to join the military alliance for a lengthy period. Sweden's migration authorities revoked Momika's residence permit in October, saying he had provided incorrect information on his application and he would be deported to Iraq. But his deportation has been on hold for security reasons, because according to Momika, his life could be in danger if he were returned to his native country.

Pope appears in better health, praises Israeli and Arab fathers

AP ■ VATICAN CITY



Pope Francis appeared in better health on Wednesday, walking into the Vatican audience hall on his own with a cane for his weekly general audience and delivering his prepared text with a clear voice. The encounter was Francis' first public event since Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square, when he decided at the last minute to skip his homily, avoiding the speech at the start of a busy Holy Week that will test his increasingly fragile health. In recent weeks, the 87-year-old Pontiff has often shown increased difficulties in walking, has asked an aide to read aloud his remarks and has been heard breathing heavily during public events. The Holy Week schedule is challenging for popes even under the best of circumstances. But that is especially

true this year for Francis, who has been battling on and off all winter what he and the Vatican have described as a case of the flu, bronchitis or a cold. As Francis discussed the virtue of patience during his Wednesday audience, he renewed his appeal for peace and an immediate stop in ongoing conflicts. The pope also noted that there were two people in the Vatican's Paul VI audience hall — "two fathers" — and that one was Palestinian, the other Israeli.

He said that both of them had lost their daughters over the course of the Middle East conflict, "and they are both friends." "They do not look at the enmity of war," Francis said. "They look to the friendship of two men who care about each other and have experienced the same crucifixion." The Vatican press office said Bassam Aramin's daughter Abir was killed in 2007 by an Israeli soldier as she left school; Rami Elhanan's daughter Smadar was killed in 1997 in an attack in Jerusalem. The two men's story of friendship was told in the novel "Apeirogon" by Colum McCann, a winner of the Terzani Prize who met with Francis during an audience with artists on June 23, 2023. "Let us think of the beautiful witness of these two people who have suffered the war in the Holy Land in the loss of their daughters," the pope said.

China asks Pak to probe attack on Chinese citizens

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Wednesday asked Pakistan to “thoroughly investigate” and “hunt down” the perpetrators behind Tuesday’s suicide attack on Chinese citizens amid speculation that Beijing may push Islamabad to accept its security agencies to guard the CPEC projects following a spike in attacks on them in the last few days.

At least five Chinese nationals were among the six persons killed on Tuesday when an explosives-packed vehicle rammed into their bus in Pakistan’s troubled province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in the second suicide attack on the personnel working on the China-backed hydropower project since 2021.

“China asks Pakistan to thoroughly investigate the incident as soon as possible, hunt down the perpetrators and bring them to justice,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing here when asked about Beijing’s response to the suicide attack, the second on Chinese nationals in the area since 2021.

Notwithstanding the recurring terror attacks, China continues to back Pakistan, its iron-clad ally to protect thousands of its nationals working on the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects.

Lin said, “China firmly supports Pakistan in fighting terrorism. China and Pakistan have the resolve and capability to make the terrorists pay the price.”

“Our two countries are all-weather strategic cooperative partners. Our iron-clad friendship is deeply rooted in the two peoples. No attempt to sabotage China-Pakistan cooperation will ever succeed,” he said.

He declined to comment on reports that the new Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will visit Beijing in the coming days.

It is customary for Pakistan leaders to visit China after assuming office. Earlier reports

said Sharif may seek more Chinese investments to bail out the cash-strapped Pakistan economy. Concerns about the safety of thousands of Chinese personnel working in the USD 60 billion CPEC are mounting here as it was the third major attack on Chinese projects in Pakistan in a week.

Earlier, militants targeted a naval airbase and the strategic Gwadar port, the prime project of CPEC connecting with China’s Xinjiang.

Meanwhile, in Islamabad Prime Minister Sharif on Wednesday ordered a thorough joint investigation into the deadly terrorist attack on Chinese nationals. Chinese analysts say that attacks are being carried out by Islamic religious extremist groups besides the separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), which is opposed to China’s investments in Balochistan and accuses China and Pakistan of the exploitation of the resource-rich province.

The disquieting factor for China is the militants are resorting to suicide bomb attacks making it difficult for the security agencies to prevent them. Chinese experts believe the latest attack is a copy of the July 2021 Dasu terror attack in which nine Chinese nationals and four Pakistani people were killed.

Qian Feng, director of the Research Department of the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, called this terrorist attack a “copy” of the 2021 attack. “The project is located in remote mountainous terrain in a valley, where religious extremists and terrorist forces are very active. And their method of attack is similar,” Qian told the state-run Global Times.

Qian said the culprits of this attack are yet to be found out, and this case should serve as a wake-up call for Pakistan that improving the security situation in Pakistan is still a long and arduous task, requiring joint efforts from all parties.

‘Restricting technology access won’t stop China’s advance’

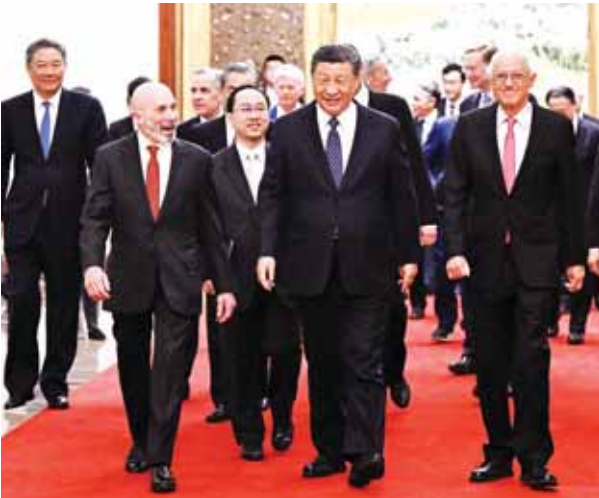
PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese leader Xi Jinping told visiting Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Wednesday that attempts to restrict China’s access to technology will not stop the country’s advance.

The Netherlands imposed export licensing requirements in 2023 on the sale of machinery that can make advanced processor chips. The move came after the United States blocked Chinese access to advanced chips and the equipment to make them, citing security concerns, and urged its allies to follow suit.

An online report from state broadcaster CCTV did not mention the chip machinery, but quoted Xi as saying that the creation of scientific and technological barriers and the fragmentation of the industrial and supply chains will lead to division and confrontation.

“The Chinese people also have the right to legitimate development, and no force can stop the pace of China’s scientific and



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, Chinese President Xi Jinping, center, walks with representatives from American business, strategic and academic communities at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

AP/PTI

technological development and progress,” Xi said, according to CCTV. Dutch company ASML is the world’s only producer of machines that use extreme ultraviolet lithography to make advanced semiconductors. In

2023, China became ASML’s second-largest market, accounting for 29 per cent of its revenue as Chinese companies bought up equipment before the licensing requirement took effect. Rutte, speaking to journalists after his meeting, declined to go

into specifics of the talks. “What I can tell you is that ... when we have to take measures, that they are never aimed at one country specifically, that we always try to make sure that the impact is limited, is not impacting the supply chain, and therefore is not impacting the overall economic relationship,” he said. The Dutch leader, who was accompanied by Trade Minister Geoffrey van Leeuwen on the trip, said the top issue for him in their meetings with Xi and Chinese Premier Li Qiang was the war in Ukraine. China has taken a neutral position on the war, providing Russia with diplomatic cover and economic support through trade.

That stance has angered and frustrated much of Europe, which sees Russia as the aggressor and Ukraine as the victim. Rutte said it’s important for China to understand that “this is a direct security threat for us, because if Russia will be successful in Ukraine, it will be a threat to the whole of Europe. It will not end with Ukraine”.

China’s rapid buildout of its green energy industry distorts global prices: Yellen

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is calling out China’s ramped-up production in solar energy, electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries, calling it unfair competition that “distorts global prices” and “hurts American firms and workers, as well as firms and workers around the world.”

Yellen, who is planning her second trip to China as Treasury secretary, says in remarks prepared for delivery on Wednesday in Georgia that she will convey her belief that Beijing’s increased production of green energy also poses risks “to productivity and growth in the Chinese economy.”

“I will press my Chinese counterparts to take necessary steps to address this issue.”

China is the dominant player in batteries for electric vehicles and has a rapidly expanding auto industry that could chal-

lenge the world’s established carmakers as it goes global. The International Energy Agency, a Paris-based intergovernmental group, notes that in 2023 China accounted for around 60 per cent of global electric car sales. Yellen’s remarks are to be delivered Wednesday afternoon at Suniva — a solar cell manufacturing facility in Norcross, Ga. The plant closed in 2017 in large part due to cheap imports flooding the market, according to Treasury. It is reopening, in part, because of incentives provided by the Democrats’ Inflation Reduction Act, which provides tax incentives for green energy manufacturing. The firm’s history is something of a warning on the impact of oversaturation of markets by Chinese products — and a marker of the state of US-China economic relations, which are strained due to investment prohibitions and espionage concerns, among other issues.

China on Tuesday filed a World

Trade Organisation complaint against the US over what it says are discriminatory requirements for electric vehicle subsidies. The Chinese Commerce Ministry didn’t say what prompted the move.

The European Union, also concerned about the potential threat to its auto industry, launched its own investigation into Chinese subsidies for electric vehicles last year. “In the past, in industries like steel and aluminum, Chinese government support led to substantial overinvestment and excess capacity that Chinese firms looked to export abroad at depressed prices,” Yellen said. “This maintained production and employment in China but forced industry in the rest of the world to contract.”

“These are concerns that I increasingly hear from government counterparts in industrialized countries and emerging markets, as well as from the business community globally,” she said.

China asks Nepal to speed up BRI implementation plan

PTI ■ BEIJING/KATHMANDU

China has urged the new dispensation in Nepal to finalise the implementation plan for its ambitious BRI projects that have struggled to make any headway due to continuous political changes in the Himalayan nation.

The strategic partnership between the two countries was discussed during the meeting of Nepal’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha, who is on his first visit to China after taking over office, with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday. China looks to speed up its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in the Himalayan nation what with Nepal witnessing the new political alignment after Prime Minister Pushpa Kumar Dahal ‘Prachanda’ formed a government with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), headed by

the pro-China leader K P Sharma Oli.

Wang said as a friendly neighbour and strategic partner, China has always placed Nepal in an important direction of its neighbourhood diplomacy.

“China is ready to work with Nepal to promote the high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, and advance the China-Nepal strategic partnership of cooperation featuring everlasting friendship for development and prosperity to a new and higher level,” Wang told Shrestha, an official press release said here.

He said China firmly supports Nepal in safeguarding its national sovereignty, independence, and national dignity and will continue to assist the best of its ability for Nepal’s economic and social development. In Nepal, the Kathmandu Post reported that during the meeting the two countries reiterated their commitment to “very soon” sign

the implementation plan of BRI, which, it said, “will pave the way for working out financing and investment modality of the projects to be executed in Nepal under the initiative.”

“Things remain stuck with China due to our delay in signing the BRI implementation plan. Once Deputy Prime Minister Shrestha returns home, we will further discuss the signing of the plan, the Post quoted a Nepali official.

In recent meetings, Chinese officials and authorities had made it clear that signing the BRI implementation plan is a prerequisite for extending economic cooperation with Nepal as well as executing the projects that China had committed to in the past, the official said. Nepal and China signed the BRI framework agreement seven years ago, on May 12, 2017, and the Chinese side forwarded the plan’s text at the end of 2019.

6 Pakistan HC judges allege intelligence agencies’ interference in judicial matters

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In an unprecedented move, six Judges of the Islamabad High Court sought intervention by the Supreme Judicial Council against the alleged interference in the working of the judiciary by Pakistan’s powerful intelligence agencies. A letter signed by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges demanded the SJC headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa initiate a judicial convention against such interference in judicial affairs.

The six judges who signed the March 25 dated letter include Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz. The letter also advocated adopting a stance to ensure the judiciary’s independence through the convention.

The SJC is the highest body authorised to take action against judges of high and supreme courts.

“We are writing to seek guidance from the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) with regard to the duty of a judge to report and respond to actions on part of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, that seek to interfere with discharge of his/her official functions and qualify as intimidation, as well as the duty to report any such actions that come to his/her attention in relation to colleagues and/or members of the courts that the High Court supervises,” the letter stated.

It goes on to highlight the interference of the executive and agencies in judicial matters, including the kidnapping and torture of the brother-in-law of a high court judge to put pressure on the judge regarding a case.

“We will also note that the code of conduct for judges prescribed by SJC provides no guidance on how judges must react to and or report incidents that are tantamount to intimidation and interfere with judi-

cial independence,” it said. The judges further said they “believe it is imperative to inquire into and determine whether there exists a continuing policy on the part of the executive branch of the state, implemented by intelligence operatives who report to the executive branch, to intimidate judges, under threat of coercion or blackmail, to engineer judicial outcomes in politically consequential matters.”

The development came days after the top court declared the removal of former IHC Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui illegal, directing that he may now be considered a retired judge. The verdict noted that the SJC proceeded against Justice Siddiqui on the “assumption that the truth or falseness of the allegations levelled” by the former judge was “irrelevant”.

Siddiqui was sacked on October 11, 2018, by the SJC based on a speech he had delivered weeks ago at the Rawalpindi Bar Association in which he accused the Inter-Services Intelligence

(ISI) — the powerful intelligence agency of the country— of influencing the court proceedings and forming benches of choice.

In their letter, the IHC judges supported Justice Siddiqui’s request to investigate the allegations made by him.

The letter is believed to be unprecedented as it officially highlights the alleged involvement of executive and intelligence agencies in the matters of the judiciary and seeks the support of the SJC, the highest body, to take action against judges and provide guidance on such matters. Meanwhile, legal community and politicians demanded an independent probe into the allegations following to stunning letter by IHC judges. The IHC Bar Association (IHCBA) “strongly condemned the interference of one institution into the matters of another institution” and demanded the chief justice for a “transparent inquiry” into the matter and that action be taken against those involved.

Imran Khan demands judicial probe in May 9 violence, Feb 8 elections

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan once again on Wednesday demanded a judicial probe into the May 9 violence and the February 8 elections, urging Supreme Court Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to hear the petitions filed by his party on the two issues. Khan, 71, while speaking to journalists after attending a court hearing in the 190 million pound corruption case, said the establishment was using the May 9 violence following his arrest in a corruption case as a pretext to dismantle his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party.

Khan claimed that the plot to dismantle his party was hatched in London by the now-ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party and urged Chief Justice Isa to set up a judicial commission to probe the matter. Dawn News reported. Khan’s supporters resorted to violence, burning civil and military installations following his arrest by the National Corruption Bureau (NCB) outside the Islamabad High Court premises in a corruption case. The May 9 violence, also dubbed as the “Black Day” violence was used as a pretext to arrest thousands of Khan’s supporters and his party leaders across the country. “The culprits could have been identified through CCTV footage, but these have been stolen. Those behind the footage theft were

responsible for the May 9 episode,” the PTI chief said.

Khan alleged that the closure of cases related to the Sharif family and President Asif Ali Zardari was a “part of the London plan”. He said the PTI would not consider the Senate elections legitimate because the National Assembly was “a product of rigged exercise” in the first place.

In reply to a question about the hearing in US Congress on the cipher controversy last week, the PTI chief said it would have been a disaster for the Biden administration had Donald Lu, the US diplomat, stated that Washington supported the ouster of his government. “Lu did not disclose facts before the Congress hearing since it would have been damaging for the Biden administration,” the cricketer-turned-politician claimed.

Khan said Asad Majeed, Pakistan’s former ambassador in Washington, had informed the National Security Committee about the “threatening tone” of Lu.

The jailed former prime minister said he was not responsible for the security of the cipher (secret diplomatic communication) as a protocol was in place for the safe keeping of secret documents.

He rejected the Election Commission of Pakistan’s investigation into allegations of rigging and said the ECP could not carry out an “impartial probe” since it had con-

ducted the exercise.

Separately, Khan’s wife Bushra Bibi told the media that Khan was in “good physical and mental health” in jail.

She, however, also said the Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) head Nadeem Anjum, and the chief of the Counter Terrorism Department would be responsible if “anything happened” to her husband.

“The nation will not tolerate such an incident,” she said. Meanwhile, A high court in Pakistan on Wednesday accepted a petition by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf to hold a rally in Islamabad and ordered authorities to let the party organise its activity under the law.

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) heard the case by the PTI to hold a rally which it initially wanted to hold on March 23 or 30 but it rescheduled it for April 6. The party had approached the court after the capital district administration refused to allow the rally due to security reasons.

IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq presided over the hearing of the plea and after hearing arguments provided the relief to the PTI. “One’s right of assembly cannot be taken away,” said the judge as he directed the federal capital’s administration to specify their conditions for the rally.

Death toll in Moscow concert hall attack rises to 140

AP ■ MOSCOW

The death toll from last week’s Moscow concert hall attack rose to 140 on Wednesday after another victim died in a hospital, Russian officials said. That person was one of five still hospitalized in “extremely grave condition,” and the doctors “did everything they could” to save them, Russia’s Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said.

A total of 80 people injured in the attack remain hospitalized, the official added, and 205 others have sought outpatient medical assistance. The Friday night massacre in Crocus City Hall, a sprawling shopping and entertainment venue on the north-western outskirts of Moscow, was the deadliest terrorist attack on the Russian soil in nearly 20 years. At least four gunmen toting automatic rifles shot at thousands of concertgoers and set the venue on fire. An affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility

for the violence, while US intelligence said it had information confirming the group was responsible. French President Emmanuel Macron said France also has intelligence pointing to “an IS entity” as responsible for the attack. Russia’s Federal Security Service, or the FSB, said it had arrested 11 people the day after the attack, including four suspected gunmen. The four men, identified as Tajik nationals, appeared in a Moscow court on Sunday on terrorism charges and showed signs of severe beatings. One appeared to be barely conscious during the hearing. Russian officials, however, have insisted Ukraine and the West had a role, claims Kyiv vehemently denies. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, of trying to drum up fervor as his forces fight in Ukraine. FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov also alleged that Western spy agencies could have

been involved. “We believe that radical Islamists prepared the action, while Western special services assisted it and Ukrainian special services had a direct part in it,” Bortnikov said, without giving details. He repeated Putin’s claim that the four gunmen were trying to escape to Ukraine when they were arrested, casting it as proof of Kyiv’s alleged involvement. But that assertion was undercut slightly by Belarus’ authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, who said Tuesday the suspects were headed for Ukraine because they feared tight controls on the Belarus border. The Islamic State group, which lost much of its territory following Russia’s military action in Syria after 2015, has long targeted Russia. In October 2015, a bomb planted by IS downed a Russian jetliner over the Sinai desert, killing all 224 people aboard, most of them Russian vacationers returning from Egypt.

Zelenskyy replaces top security official

Kyiv (Ukraine) (AP) : Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has replaced one of the country’s top security officials with the head of Ukraine’s foreign spy agency in a new reshuffle as the war with Russia drags into a third year.

Zelenskyy dismissed Oleksii Danilov, who served as secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, thanking him for his service in a video address late Tuesday. He gave no reason for the shake-up and said, without providing details, that Danilov will be “reassigned to another area.”

Zelenskyy replaced Danilov with Oleksandr Lytvynenko, who served as the head of Ukraine’s Foreign Intelligence Service.



months after Zelenskyy became president.

Danilov’s dismissal comes as exhausted Ukrainian troops struggling with a shortage of personnel and ammunition are facing a growing Russian pressure along the front line that stretches over 1,000 kilometres (620 miles).

The reshuffle follows February’s decision by Zelenskyy to fire the country’s chief military officer, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, replacing him Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi.

Rajapaksa family presses for early Sri Lanka parliamentary poll

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka’s powerful Rajapaksa family wants to see a snap parliamentary election before the constitutionally scheduled presidential election scheduled for the last quarter of this year, a family member said on Wednesday. Nimal Rajapaksa, the son of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, said his family preferred holding a parliamentary election before the presidential election.

He said current president Ranil Wickremesinghe is being accused of having no mandate to push ahead with economic reforms so the president can be mandated with the mandate received at the parliamentary election.

Wickremesinghe took over the charge following the ouster of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa after the island



nation announced its first-ever sovereign debt default since independence from British colonial rule in 1948.

He has since announced numerous reforms to get the island nation’s economy back on track.

Namal Rajapaksa was speaking after being appointed the new national organiser of the Sri Lanka People’s Party (SLPP), replacing his uncle Basil

Rajapaksa who vacated the position to make way for young blood.

The SLPP has been in disarray since the ouster of Gotabaya Rajapaksa in mid-July 2022 through public protests. The all-powerful Rajapaksa family was compelled to back Wickremesinghe, their arch-rival, as stop-gap president to complete Gotabaya’s term.

However, the SLPP remains unhappy with Wickremesinghe’s hard economic reforms necessitated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bail-out conditions.

Wickremesinghe raised taxes and utility rates while proposing to sell state-owned enterprises to stop the bleeding of the debt-ridden economy. His chances of re-election as the President hinge on the support he could muster from the SLPP.

India can push growth close to nine per cent: Panagariya

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India can realistically push its economic growth close to 9 per cent from the current 7 per cent or so, by implementing a few more reforms in the next five years, Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission Arvind Panagariya said on Wednesday. Panagariya said Prime Minister Narendra Modi worked hard over the past 10 years to make India a friendly place for businesses, so investment is coming in. "Today, the economy is open. In the next 2-3 decades, we can sustain a very rapid growth," he said, while speaking at the Times Now Summit.

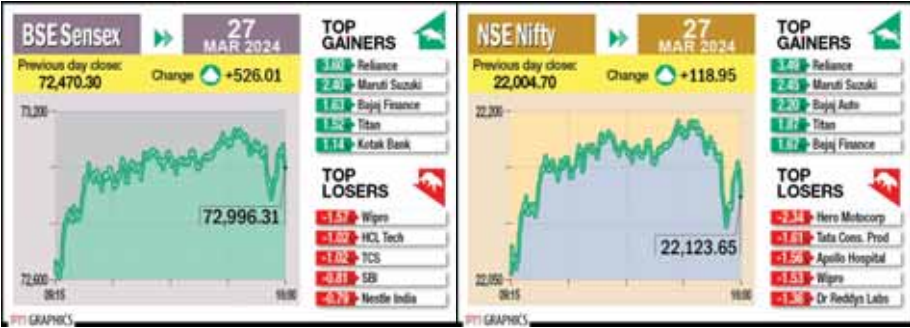


India's economy grew at better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the third quarter of FY24 — the fastest in the past one-and-a-half years. "India is currently growing in real rupees at about 7 per cent or so per year. "Certainly with a few more

reforms in the next five years, we can realistically push it to close to 9 per cent, certainly somewhere at 8-9 per cent and that can be sustained easily for a couple of decades," the economist said. Responding to a question on former chief economic adviser

Arvind Subramanian saying India's latest gross domestic product (GDP) numbers are 'absolutely mystifying' and difficult to comprehend, Panagariya said, "If you are mystified, then first you have to check, (whether) mist is on your own glasses... Or somewhere else." Panagariya said the methodological change for calculating GDP during the Modi government was recommended by bodies appointed by the previous administration (UPA government). "Nobody... Has questioned the integrity of those who actually do these (GDP) numbers. This is a new kind of phenomenon, which I don't understand," he

said. Panagariya said if critics are saying there is some fault with the methodology of calculating GDP, "they have to come in and point out the fault so that we can talk about how to make the improvements". Subramanian had recently said India's latest GDP numbers are "absolutely mystifying" and difficult to comprehend. "I want to be honest with you that the latest GDP numbers, I just simply can not understand them. "I say that with genuine respect and things. They are absolutely mystifying. They don't add up. I don't know what they mean," Subramanian had said.



Markets rebound on buying in banking, auto shares

Sensex rises 526 points, Nifty ends above 22,100 as auto, banking, energy shares support recovery

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex climbed 526 points while Nifty closed above the 22,100 level on Wednesday following buying in banking, auto and oil shares after positive macro data. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31 with 18 of its stocks advancing and 12 closing lower. During the day, it jumped 668.43 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,138.73. The broader Nifty of NSE rebounded by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to close at 22,123.65. As many as 22 Nifty shares gained while 27 declined and one closed unchanged. Auto, banking and energy shares supported the recovery while FMCG and IT shares declined due to profit taking. Among Sensex shares, Reliance Industries rose the most by 3.6 per cent, adding more than 312 points to the

upside. Maruti, Bajaj Finance, Titan, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were among the major gainers. Wipro, HCL Technologies, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services and Tata Motors were among the laggards. "Stock-specific actions and positive undercurrents due to a healthy economic growth forecast led the market towards a positive closure. However, due to the holiday-led truncated week, investors are now focusing on US GDP data tomorrow and next week's RBI policy announcement to gauge market direction. "The mid- and small-cap space are outperforming as investors got bargaining opportunities, but volumes are low," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.70 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.01 per cent.

Among the indices, services jumped 1.01 per cent, capital goods climbed 1 per cent, consumer durables (0.98 per cent), industrials (0.97 per cent) and realty (0.93 per cent). Commodities, IT, utilities, metal and tech were the laggards. In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory, while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Tuesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers on Tuesday, as they bought equities worth Rs 10.13 crore, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.96 per cent to USD 85.42 a barrel. On Tuesday, the BSE benchmark declined by 361.64 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 72,470.30. The NSE Nifty dropped 92.05 points or 0.42 per cent to 22,004.70



DPIIT plans to engage consultant to prepare logistics report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is planning to engage a research firm to prepare the Logistics Ease Across Different States and Union Territories for the next three years. Every year, the department releases a Logistics Ease Across Different State (LEADS) report, ranking states and Union Territories (UTs) on the basis of their logistics ecosystem and highlights the key logistics-related challenges faced by stakeholders and includes suggestive recommendations. The index is an indicator of the efficiency of logistical services necessary for promoting exports and economic growth. The DPIIT has floated a request for proposal for the appointment of consultant for ranking of states on the basis of their logistics efficiency (LEADS report for 2024, 2025, and 2026). "The DPIIT intends to engage a research organisation/consulting or market research firm/academic institution (Consultant) with experience in preparing national/international level reports based on robust data based analysis in the logistics/

transport/infrastructure sector for the period of 36 months to prepare, LEADS reports for 2024, 2025, and 2026," according to the request for proposal document. The objective of the current assignment for the consultant is to prepare the reports taking into account the methodology developed in the previous versions of LEADS. The consultant, it said, is expected to review the LEADS methodology, identify potential enhancements, and propose a plan for data collection; and conduct perception-based surveys across the logistics ecosystem in India, developing a sampling frame, survey instruments, and objective data sets. It is also expected to analyse collected data using robust statistical methodologies, visualise findings using data tools and derive the LEADS Index; and draft a comprehensive LEADS report for each year, including actionable recommendations tailored for states/UTs. According to the fifth LEADS 2023 report, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, and Gujarat are among the 13 states and UTs that have again been categorised as "achievers".

NBCC sells 4.8 lakh square feet commercial space in South Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned construction firm SNBCC (India) on Wednesday said it has sold 4.8 lakh square feet of commercial space in South Delhi for Rs 1,905 crore on behalf of the government. In the 25th e-auction for commercial space at World Trade Centre (WTC) in Nauroji Nagar here, NBCC achieved the highest sale realization till date with the sale of 4.8 lakh square feet of commercial space for Rs 1,905

crore. "Power Finance Corporation Ltd, Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India Ltd and Solar Energy Corporation of India Ltd are the major organisations who bought space during this e-auction," it added. Out of the total area sold, around 4.38 lakh square feet having a sale value of about Rs 1,740 crore has been sold to public sector units (PSUs). The total number of successful

bidders was five, out of which three were PSU bidders and two private entities. As on date, NBCC has sold a total commercial space of over 30 lakh square feet through 25 e-auctions having a sale value of over Rs 12,100 crore. The WTC project, a landmark development, has attracted marquee buyers across various industries. The project is rapidly progressing towards completion with more than 94 per cent of physical progress achieved.

DLF plans to raise ₹600 crore through issue of debentures

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm DLF Ltd is raising Rs 600 crore through issue of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) to investors for refinancing of its existing debts. In a regulatory filing on Wednesday, DLF informed that the company's wholly owned subsidiary DLF Home Developers Ltd has raised this amount. The Securities Allotment Committee of the Board of Directors of DHDL has approved the allotment of 60,000 NCDs, having face value of Rs 1 lakh each, for an aggregate principal amount of Rs 600 crore on a private placement basis to eligible investors. DLF, the country's largest real estate developer in terms of market capitalisation, did not mention where the amount would be utilised. Sources said the amount will be utilised for refinancing its existing debts. DLF Group has 215 million square feet of development potential across residential and



commercial segments. The group has an annuity portfolio of over 42 million square feet. The company's sales bookings jumped two times annually to Rs 13,316 crore during the first nine months of this fiscal, mainly on high demand for its luxury housing properties in Gurugram. During the April-December period of the previous fiscal, the company's sales bookings stood at Rs 6,599 crore. In the 2022-23 fiscal, DLF's sales bookings stood at a little over Rs 15,000 crore. DLF plans to launch properties worth nearly Rs 80,000 crore over the next 3-4 years to tap rising demand for housing and commercial projects.

Tata Motors, HPCL join hands to install 5,000 charging stations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Passenger Electric Mobility on Wednesday said it has tied up with Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd to set up 5,000 public charging stations across the country by the end of the year. The collaboration will leverage Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL's) fuel station network and company's insights from over 1.2 lakh Tata EVs on Indian roads, to set up chargers at locations frequently visited by Tata EV owners, Tata Passenger Electric Mobility (TPEM), a unit of Tata Motors, said in a statement. Both entities have inked an Mou in this regard, it added. The companies are also exploring the introduction of a convenient payment



system through a co-branded RFID card, which will make the charging experience hassle-free.

HPCL has a nationwide network of over 21,500 fuel stations and aims to install 5,000 electric vehicle charging stations by December 2024. "This strategic partnership with HPCL emphasises our dedication to advancing India's EV ecosystem in which the growth of charging infrastructure plays a pivotal role. This collaboration is essential for facilitating infrastructure development to support the expanding EV customer base," TPEM Chief Strategy Officer Balaje Rajan noted. HPCL Chief General Manager (Retail Strategy & BD) Debashis Chakraverty said through the alliance the PSU shall leverage Tata Motors' vehicle base to enable its strategic expansion in EV charging infrastructure at places with higher charging demand.

Magicrete completes acquisition of majority stake in Maxlite

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Magicrete, which produces building product AAC Blocks, construction chemicals, and precast construction solutions, on Wednesday said it has completed the acquisition of a majority stake in Maxlite. The company did not disclose

the actual stake that it has acquired and also the deal value. In a statement, Magicrete said this strategic acquisition would enhance its total installed capacity of AAC (Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) blocks to 1.8 million cubic metres per annum.

Maxlite is an AAC Blocks manufacturer located in South India, headquartered in Bengaluru. It operates two AAC Blocks manufacturing facilities, one in Karnataka and the other in Tamil Nadu, boasting a combined annual capacity of 5,00,000 cubic meters. AAC Blocks serve as resource-

efficient alternatives to traditional red clay bricks, offering superior thermal insulation and reducing construction time and structural load. They are about ten times larger than clay bricks and are manufactured using waste fly ash, thereby consuming 70 per cent less energy.



RPower two subsidiaries settle ₹1,023 crore debt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Power on Wednesday said its two subsidiaries have settled debt worth Rs 1,023 crore with Authum Investment's arm Reliance Commercial Finance. Reliance Power Ltd's two subsidiaries — Kalai Power Pvt Ltd and Reliance Clegan Ltd, have signed a debt settlement and discharge agreement with Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd (RCFL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Authum Investment & Infrastructure Limited, a regulatory filing said. In a stock exchange disclosure, the company informed that the value of total outstanding debt that has been settled stood at Rs 1,023 crore.

CCI conducting probe against some fintech firms: Kaur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fair trade watchdog CCI is conducting enquiries against some fintech entities to check whether their ways of leveraging technologies are impacting competition, its chief Ravneet Kaur said and asserted that the regulator is taking necessary action to ensure a competitive digital market. With a slew of amended regulations, key rulings against anti-competitive practices in the digital market and advocacy efforts, the CCI is strengthening its efforts to curb unfair business

ways. In an interview to PTI, Competition Commission of India (CCI) Chairperson Ravneet Kaur said there is an increased sensitisation among entities about the competition law and stressed the focus is on "striking the right balance between regulation and freedom". According to her, the regulator is focused on big tech companies as well as various other sectors, including fintech and online intermediary service providers. "The CCI is conducting enquiries into some entities in the fintech sector. We are look-



ing into how technology is being leveraged by fintech players and whether they are impacting competition (in the market). The enquiries are going on," Kaur said. Without divulging specific

details, she also said the regulator is looking into some cases in the film industry, especially those related to film distributors. By addressing potential market distortions and promoting healthy competition, Kaur said that the CCI anticipates a positive impact on the economy, leading to enhanced consumer choice, innovation, and overall economic growth. "It is about striking the right balance between regulation and freedom, ensuring that the market remains contestable and operates fairly for all stakeholders," she noted. Emphasising

that the watchdog is expediting cases related to the digital market, Kaur said that companies are increasingly aware of the importance of adhering to competition laws, which will ensure a more transparent and fairer digital marketplace. "While legal challenges are part of the regulatory landscape, the focus remains on creating an environment where competition thrives. It is a continuous process, and we are committed to monitoring, assessing, and taking necessary action to ensure a competitive digital market," she added.

Maruti Suzuki announces senior management rejig

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday said its board has elevated Partho Banerjee as the new head of marketing and sales function with effect from April 1, 2024. He is currently serving as Head - Service. Banerjee replaces Shashank Srivastava who is "transferred from the position of Head Marketing & Sales to Member Executive Committee", the auto major said in a regulatory filing. Similarly, Tarun Aggarwal has been named as Head of Engineering with

effect from April 1, 2024. He replaces CV Raman who also stands transferred to Member Executive Committee, it added. Aggarwal is presently working as Executive Officer and Head of Powertrain vertical, Maruti Suzuki said. The automaker also elevated Sandeep Raina as Head of Product Planning and Ram Suresh Akella as Head of service. MSI also transferred Rajesh Uppal, currently Head of HR & IT, to the Member Executive Committee. The automaker named Manoj Gautam as Head of Information Technology (IT) and Salil B Lal as Head of Human Resources (HR) with effect from April



1, 2024. Besides, the company transferred Sunil Kakkar from the position of Head — Supply Chain to Head — Corporate Planning. Deepak Thukral is designated as Head - Supply Chain while Rahul Bharti is des-

ignated as Head of Corporate Affairs, the automaker stated. The management rejig was approved by the Maruti Suzuki India board in its meeting held on Wednesday. The debt settlement with Reliance Commercial Finance came a few days after Reliance Power announced the sale of its 45 MW wind power project in Maharashtra to JSW Renewable Energy, for a consideration of Rs 132 crore. In December 2023, Kalai Power had sold the development rights of its proposed 1,200 Megawatt hydro-electric project in Arunachal Pradesh to THDC India Ltd for Rs 128 crore.



Gold rises ₹150; silver declines ₹250

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price rose Rs 150 to Rs 67,000 per 10 grams in the local market on Wednesday in line with firm trends globally, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 66,850 per 10 grams. However, silver prices declined by Rs 250 to Rs 77,250 per kg. In the previous close, it had settled at Rs 77,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 67,000 per 10 grams, up by Rs 150 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,180 per ounce, up by USD 7 from the previous close. Gold fluctuated within a range as traders

avoided fresh directional bets prior to the release of US inflation data later this week, which could potentially influence the country's trajectory towards monetary policy easing, Gandhi added. However, silver was quoted lower at USD 24.50 per ounce. In the previous trade, it had ended at USD 24.63 per ounce. "Gold traded steady, as expectations of interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve firmed, while investors awaited data due later in the week for underlying inflation trends that will help gauge the timing of these cuts. "Focus this week will also be on the US GDP data and comments from Fed Chair Jerome Powell." Navneet Damani, Senior VP of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

STIMAC OUSTER CRY GROWS AFTER SHOCK INDIA DEFEAT

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Former India footballers feel there is 'discord' in the changing room and demanded the ouster of head coach Igor Stimac following India's shocking 1-2 defeat to Afghanistan in the World Cup qualifiers. Talismanic Sunil Chhetri struck in his landmark 150th international fixture but the 117th-ranked India squandered the one-goal advantage at halftime to let in two second-half goals by the world No 158 Afghanistan in their return leg clash in Guwahati on Tuesday. Former India defender Gourmangi Singh feels something is "amiss" in the Indian dressing room, while former forward Dipendu Biswas slammed Stimac's skewed team selection for the disastrous show and demanded his immediate ouster. Echoing similar views, veteran Subrata Bhattacharya said that foreign coaches never brought laurels to the Indian team and called for an Indian coach to produce players of the calibre of "five-six" Sunil Chhetris. "Remember that these are the same players who got praise for their historic draw against Qatar (in World Cup qualifiers 2022)," Gourmangi told PTI. "Last year, they achieved greater heights, winning three tournaments including the SAFFC Championships. For one year they were performing, earning everyone's praise so suddenly what happened? It was the same team, same players, so what happened suddenly?" he asked. "Even though I have been part of



the Indian changing room there must be something missing somewhere. We're not privy to what's happening there. I'm unsure about the players' relationship with Stimac." The All India Football Federation under Kalyan Chaubey has also made headlines for wrong reasons

in the recent past since the sacking of its secretary general Shaji Prabhakaran for "breach of trust" in November last year. This has coincided with India's Asian Games fiasco and a disastrous show in the Asian Cup. India struggled to make a team for the Hangzhou showpiece and

reached just hours before the continental showpiece. And, at the Asian Cup early this year, India failed to score a single goal from three outings, and extended their goalless run to six successive matches till Chhetri ended the drought in his 150th International appearance on

Tuesday.

'Get house in order'

Gourmangi further urged the stakeholders to get the "house in order". "I don't want to take names but the AIFF's recent incidents may have had an impact on the field too. It's

like if the parents are quarrelling then the effect will be seen on the kids. You need to get the house in order. If the players don't progress and continue playing the same, then of course, we can point fingers," said the FC Goa assistant coach. Former attacking midfielder Biswas, who is now the football secretary of Mohammedan Sporting, criticised Stimac for the over-reliance on Chhetri. He is of the view that not giving opportunities to young talents from tournaments like I-League, Santosh Trophy and Calcutta Premier Division, has impeded Indian football as India continue to bank heavily on Chhetri nearly two decades after he made his debut. "It's a very depressing situation that players who have performed well in Durand Cup, Kolkata League or I-League, which has more viewership than the top-tier ISL, don't catch any attention," Biswas said. "We keep saying why we don't have another Chhetri but if we don't give chances to these performing players how will the talents emerge?" he questioned. "Flawed selection proving detrimental" Biswas cited example of Manipuri forward David Lalhlansanga, who has 30-plus goals this season for Mohammedan Sporting. "But nobody knows David, thanks to Stimac's flawed selection policies. Earlier, players were not only picked from National League but Santosh Trophy and Kolkata League also got equal significance. Now these players' dreams are

dashed." Demanding immediate ouster of Stimac, Biswas said: "The coach should not be spared after such a show. If he takes the credit for the win, he should be equally responsible for the defeat. "The likes of PK Banerjee, Nayeemuddin too were sacked after poor results then why not Stimac?" Former India defender Subrata Bhattacharya also echoed the same views. "Foreign coach never brought any laurels to Indian team. Be it Amal Dutta or PK Banerjee, it's the Indian coach who took India to greater heights." On the lack of a good striker to replace Chhetri, he said: "We must nurture, we must teach, and provide opportunities for practice. We have to develop him following this path. This is the only way. "You cannot win matches with just one Sunil Chhetri. You have to bring four or five more Sunil Chhetris. On average, you must have six good footballers on the pitch." He, however, hoped that the defeat against Afghanistan was an aberration and India bounce back soon. "Anything can happen in football. Didn't Mohun Bagan or East Bengal ever lose to Kalighat, or Rajasthan. Upset happens maybe because of miscommunication or by some mistake. "They have failed to utilise their chances and it's time to bounce back and they will surely. It's okay if they beat us once, but by beating them we cannot lift the standard of our football. We will bounce back for sure," he signed off.

Colsaerts team wins Pro Am event of Hero Indian Open

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Former Ryder Cup player Nicolas Colsaerts from Belgium led his team to victory at the Pro-Am event of the Hero Indian Open at the DLF Golf and Country Club here on Wednesday. Colsaerts, who has three DP World Tour wins against his name in a total of 10 pro wins, carried his team comprising three ladies -- Anjali Chawla, Meera Luthra and Kusum Anand -- to a fine win. They aggregated 37-under and were three better than the team lead by Romain Langasque, whose teammates were Masni Eriza, Prathmesh Moharil and Narinder Dagar, father of India's top women's pro, Diksha Dagar. Last year's runner-up Yannik Paul, also had a good look at the course, as his team finished third. His teammates were Golien Kipgen, Saurabh Uppal and Rohit Kapoor. The prizes were given away by Dr Pawan Munjal,



Executive Chairman, Hero MotoCorp. The prestigious event, which starts at the DLF Golf and Country Club on Thursday, is one of the strongest with almost a third of the players in 144-strong field having won on the DP World at some point. The tournament this year carries a record prize purse of USD 2.25 million with the winner set to receive USD 382,500.

Focus on comeback man Lahiri

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

His Olympic hopes hanging by a thread, star Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri's ambitious effort to make the Paris Games cut by ending a nine-year-long title drought will be a fascinating subplot as the prestigious Hero Indian Open tees off here on Thursday. A two-time Olympian, Lahiri, who will return to the national championships, finds himself in a tight spot as his ranking plummeted to 401 after he switched to Saudi-backed LIV golf, which is not recognised by the Official World Golf Rankings (OWGR), jeopardising his Paris chances. It will be a homecoming for the Indian, who won his last title at the same event way back in 2015 and is he hoping to regain the crown at the 57th edition of the tournament at the DLF Golf and Country Club this week. "You know the weight of, I don't know how many dozens of seconds, I've had, lays heaviest on my shoulders. So I need to get that off my back. I want to win, I am desperate to win," said Lahiri. "The driver is I have to prove to myself that I can win again. It's been a while and nobody feels that more than I do. So even though I've played 15, 16 years, I'm still as desperate to win this week as I was 10, 15 years ago, because I have to prove it to myself. I don't have to prove it to anybody else.



"I would love to go to Paris. So I need to focus on potentially eight rounds or 12 rounds that I have between now and Paris that will get me there. I will find those events on the Asian Tour, but it depends on a lot of variables. Olympics remains an unfinished business." Lahiri is currently the third Indian in the official rankings behind Shubhankar Sharma (202) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (240). The cut-off date for the men's competition of Olympic Games is June 17. Only 60 golfers each in the men's and women's categories make the field in

Olympics with the top 15 world-ranked players making the cut with a limit of four players from a given country. Countries with players, who are not ranked in the top 15, will get a maximum of two eligible players. Among Indian golfers, Sharma (48) and Bhullar (52) are inside the top-60 Games rankings created by International Golf Federation (IGF). Lahiri to make it to Paris, he will have to accumulate enough ranking points before June 17 to get inside top 60. The 36-year-old will have to compete with a total of 144 players

from over 25 countries as they vie for honours at the USD 2.25 million tournament. Almost a third of the players in the field have won on the DP World at some point, which underlines the level of competition that he will face this week. Among leading Indian players, DP World Tour Rookie of the Year Sharma and Bhullar -- who are frontrunners to make the Paris Cut, will be favourites to go deep into the tournament. It has been a while that an Indian has won the national championship with SSP Chawrasia claiming back-to-back titles at two different courses -- the challenging Delhi Golf Course in 2016 and Gary Player Course at the DLF Golf and Country Club in 2017. Since then Matt Wallace (2018), Stephen Gallacher (2019) and Marcel Siem (2023) won the trophy with the tournament being cancelled for three years from 2020 to 2022 due to COVID-19. Ryder Cup winner Rasmus Hojgaard, who will make his debut, will be one of the favourites this week, while the other top international stars include Yannik Paul, Rafa Cabrera Bello, former Ryder Cup star Nicolas Colsaerts, Matteo Manassero and Edoardo Molinari. Among Indians, Manu Gandas, Shourya Binu, Rashid Khan, Aman Raj, Yuvraj Sandhu, S Chikkarangappa, Karandeep Kochhar and Veer Ahlawat will be some exciting domestic players to watch out for during the weeks.



Bijay Chhetri signs for Latin American club Colon FC

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian defender Bijay Chhetri has joined Uruguayan football club Colon FC on loan until the year-end, his Indian Super League (ISL) club Chennaiyin FC said on Wednesday. Chhetri thus became the first Indian footballer to sign for a Latin American club. Colon is based in Montevideo, while the club competes in Segunda División Profesional (second division) of the country, where it is currently placed third on the Group B league table. "I feel so excited to get this opportunity for the new challenge in my professional career. I hope to put in good performances to enhance my game, repay the trust shown in me by Colon FC and to keep the Indian flag flying high," Bijay said in a release. "I am very well aware that if I do well, it can pave the way for future Indian players also to move abroad into these markets." The 22-year-old Bijay from Manipur began his footballing career with Shillong Lajong in 2016 and made his senior appearance with Indian Arrows in 2018. Since then, he has played for clubs like Chennai City, Real Kashmir and Sreenidi Deccan before joining CFC this season, his maiden ISL club. Wishing Bijay luck on his move to Colon, CFC co-owner Vita Dani said, "We are extremely proud to see Bijay make his way to one of the world's biggest football nations. Uruguay are forever etched in the game's history, with four stars on their chest as winners of two Olympic gold medals in 1924 and 1928, the first World Cup in 1930, and then repeating in Brazil in 1950. "And, Colon Futbol Club are part of that heritage; founded even before the first World Cup. I wish Bijay the very best, and we are all hoping for his success as he makes history as the first Indian player to secure a contract with a Latin American club."

Shubhankar counting on experience

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

An experienced AS h u b h a n k a r SharmaShubhankar Sharma is hopeful that being in a relaxed mind space with an overall improvement in his game will help him break his title jinx at the Hero Indian Open and keep him firmly on course for a ticket to Paris Olympics. The 26-year-old Indian, a two-time DP World Tour winner, will be one of favourites. When the prestigious tournament begins at the DLF Golf and Country Club on Thursday. "I've been feeling very good about my game. Since 2018, I have come close many times, including last week when I was tied for the lead at one point on the final day. I'm glad that I'm in form coming into my home event, Shubhankar told reporters. The Chandigarh-born golfer, whose last win came at the 2018 Maybank Championship, had come close to clinching the title at the Porsche Singapore Classic when he shared the lead on the back nine of the final day before finishing tied-seventh on Sunday.



"This is our fifth major. And this is my second home DLF. This is where I played so much golf from 2012 to 2016, which was my first few years as a professional. "I'm feeling very, very confident this time. Feeling better than I've ever felt coming into the Indian Open. I have more experience on my side, thankfully, since 2018. And I'm looking forward to it this week." Shubhankar is currently in 48th position in the top 60 list based on Games rankings and is likely to make the cut for Paris.

"Olympics is always very exciting and nowadays in golf, every year is exciting because every other year you are trying to qualify for the President's Cup, there are majors. Olympics, obviously, golf being an addition now in the past two Olympics, it's become a big target of everyone to qualify for the Olympics," he said. The Arjuna awardee golfer said it will be a pure test of skills at the Olympics. "I am very excited also because I know the golf course, Big Golf National I have played there many times,

it's one of my favourite golf courses on tour. I think it's a true test," he said. "It's not a golf course which is a putting competition. You have to put on your big boy pants and hit shorts. Especially in August, it will be really cold also. It can be cold. So it will be a proper test and hopefully, I will be there. "I've been playing well and my goal right now is to just play well in every event that I play. And that should take care of everything else."

'I've grown by leaps and bounds'

Shubhankar, who turned professional in 2013, believes he has grown by leaps and bounds in the last decade and is in his best possible shape coming into the tournament. "I've pretty much spent my college years on tour. This is my 12th season as a pro, so it's been a long time, it's been a great time. I've made so many friends and travelled all around the world. I've just learned more about myself... "And every year I've become a better player and a better person. I have a better understanding of the game and something that I'm proud of, the journey that I've taken

till now." Last year, Shubhankar achieved a remarkable feat, recording the best-ever finish by an Indian -- a tied 8th -- in The 2023 Open Golf Championship at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Merseyside, England. "I think everything feels really good now. I have become a lot better in pretty much every aspect from short games to putting to my ball striking and a testament of that was at the Open where I thought it was one of my best ball-striking weeks. "And I think, mentally I've just become more relaxed. I think after a while, it (remaining calm) I guess that's the difference between the top players. After a certain level, it is about how they manage their time off the course, their gym time, their meditation time or you know just time with the family. "Everything is planned properly and that is what gives them the excellence of consistency that they need. So in that aspect, I think I've grown leaps and bounds since last year and every year before that. So that has been my biggest strength."

Bopanna, Ebden reach Miami Open semifinals

PTI ■ MIAMI GARDENS (USA)

Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian teammate Matthew Ebden advanced to their third men's doubles semi-final this year, defeating Dutchman Sem Verbeek and Aussie John-Patrick Smith at the Miami Open here. The duo, who had won the Australian Open earlier this year, overcame several unforced errors in the first set to win the gruelling quarterfinal 3-6 7-6 (4) 10-7. The victory for the 44-year-old Bopanna, currently ranked No. 2 in the world, will help him stay in the top-10 in the ATP doubles ranking and ensure direct qualification for the Paris Olympics in July-August. The cut-off date for rankings to be considered for direct Paris qualification is June 10. The Bopanna-Ebden pair, seeded No.1 here, didn't enjoy a dominant first and second-serve percentage but came up with breaks at crucial junctures in the second set to take the match into the tie-breaker before winning it and drawing level. Bopanna, who won his maiden grand slam at the



Australian Open this year, had attained a career-high world No. 1 ranking following the success but has slipped to second spot after a quarterfinal loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters. The Indo-Australian pair will meet the winners of the match between Marcel Granollers (Spain)/Horacio Zeballos (Argentina) and Lloyd Glasspool (UK)/Jean-Julien Rojer (Netherlands) in the last-four. Bopanna and Ebden had also reached the semifinal of the Adelaide Open in January this year and made the title round before losing to Rajeve Ram (USA) and Joe Salisbury (UK).



PANT AIMS TO SHAKE OFF RUSTINESS

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Skipper Rishabh Pant will look to overcome his rustiness as Delhi Capitals aim for an improved batting display in their bid for a first win of the IPL season when they take on Rajasthan Royals here on Thursday.

Pant's much-anticipated return to action 453 days after he suffered grievous injuries in a horrific car accident, lasted just 13 balls (18 runs) with Punjab Kings winning by four wickets at their new home ground in Mullanpur.

Pant, though, displayed his usual lively demeanour behind the stumps and also effected the stumping of Jitesh Sharma. Having overcome the early jitters and nervousness in his first game, Pant would be eager to regain his mojo quickly as his match-up against the likes of Trent Boult, Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal would be the highlight of the contest.

"It's exciting to have your captain back in the team. He is

our leader and heartbeat of this franchise and having him back is going to make this team a lot stronger," head coach Ricky Ponting had said of Pant ahead of the IPL.

Ponting chose David Warner and Mitchell Marsh to open the innings in the hope that the duo would score enough runs to take the pressure off Pant lower down the order. But the two failed to capitalise on good starts and the pressure soon came on Pant.

Wicketkeeper-batter Abhishek Porel's unbeaten 32-run cameo was the only bright spot in DC's batting, which lifted them to a respectable 174/9 from a precarious 138/7 at one stage.

Porel was used as an impact player as Delhi were a bowler short. The problem was worsened further after Ishant Sharma twisted his ankle. The lanky pacer could miss a few matches as well.

Delhi's spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel will have a bigger role to play after what was witnessed on a dry surface at the Sawai Mansingh



Stadium the other day when Rajasthan Royals' opening duo of Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal faced some early hiccups against Lucknow Super Giants.

However, Sanju Samson struck an unbeaten 82 as the Royals won by 20 runs. By scoring a fifty in his team's first match of the season for the fifth successive time, Samson has become an early contender for the hotly-contested spot for the wicketkeeper-batter's slot in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

With Riyan Parag also among the runs, the Royals top-four will pose questions to the Delhi bowling lineup, and here's where Kuldeep and Axar's overs will be crucial in the middle.

The Royals' bowling has also hit the right notes with Trent Boult leading the charge with the new ball. Sandeep Sharma has also been superb in the death overs.

The rookie Indian dismissed KL Rahul at 58 in the 17th over and also stymied Nicholas

Pooran in the penultimate over as RR restricted Lucknow Super Giants to 173/6.

SQUADS:

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Abid Mushtaq, Avesh Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Jos Buttler, Kuldeep Sin, Kunal Singh Rathore, Nandre Burger, Navdeep Saini, Prasidh Krishna, Ravichandran Ashwin, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Rovman Powell, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Trent Boult, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal and Tanush Kotian.

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dubey, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope.

Want to remain fit to play all three formats for Windies: Shamar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

He is only 24, has endured a tough life growing up and is currently raising two toddlers with a young partner. One can't possibly blame Shamar Joseph for wanting the best of both worlds — "play all three formats for the West Indies" and also remain fit enough to ply his trade across the globe in franchise cricket.

Joseph has logged woods in the nondescript Guyanese village of Baracara, worked as a construction labourer at building sites before spending half a day as a security guard, a secure future for his family is all that he desires.

So, like a lot of West Indies players, who crisscross the globe playing IPL one day and Big Bash the next, Joseph too wants the best of both worlds.

"Look I haven't made up my mind (if preference given)," the pace sensation, who has come in as a replacement for England pacer Mark Wood in Lucknow Super Giants team, told PTI in an interview.

The hero of West Indies' recent Test win in Australia, who played through pain with a broken toe, feels that in the next few years, it his fitness will determine the workload he can take.

"I will like to play around the world to enhance my skills but if there are other opportunities (T20 Leagues), I will make myself available," Joseph said, adding, "...And I have confidence in my fitness and that won't be a problem for me."

"Definitely my fitness will be important since I have a long career ahead of mine, I would definitely like to play all three



formats for the West Indies whenever I am available. I will definitely make that time for them," said the youngster.

He has played only two T20 matches for Guyana Amazon Warriors in his short and eventful career so far but IPL will give him an opportunity to learn the tricks of the trade.

"It is a transformation from red ball to white ball cricket. There will be other (technical) changes and I get to learn from every opportunity that I get. I enjoyed playing Tests and now I will look to improve my white ball game.

"I am talking to all the experienced players, who are seniors and have played a certain amount of IPL, learning from them and enjoying being in the moment," said the soft-spoken fast bowler.

His senior Kemar Roach, who has played a few seasons of IPL

previously, did give him an idea of what to expect in January but back then, he had gone unsold.

But after the Australia series, even legends like Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose have said good things about him.

"Definitely, Kemar and I had a lot of conversations about IPL when we were in Australia. Ambrose, after the (Australia) Tests, also gave me some good advice.

"Courtney Walsh, there have been words of encouragement from all these greats which will help me going forward," he added.

Having seen extreme poverty in Baracara to enjoying the financial windfall that comes with the IPL, Joseph has indeed come a long way.

"Life has been great so far. There has been all sorts of kind comments. It is my performance that brought me here. Happy to be here."

However, he remains a country boy at heart.

"I am always aware where I came from. I still remain a country boy and nothing changes for me. Yes, I will go with the flow but being a superstar doesn't change anything for me and it has been the same life," Joseph said.

Joseph is happy to have Justin Langer around, someone who has taken keen interest in his exploits since the tour of Australia.

"It is always great to be among legends and players who inspire you like KL (Rahul), our skipper and Justin Langer our head coach, he is an amazing person. He has talked to me and advised me from the Australian series.

Dhoni advised me to play my natural game: Rizvi

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings batter Sameer Rizvi has credited Mahendra Singh Dhoni for his brief but impactful knock in his first IPL match, saying the talismanic former India skipper advised him to play his natural game when he went out to bat against Gujarat Titans.

Against GT here on Tuesday night, Rizvi played a cameo of six-ball 14-run knock, which included two sixes against Rashid Khan.

"Bhaiya (Dhoni) told me to play how I generally play since it is all about the actual gameplay. He (Dhoni) said, 'There is nothing different. Skills remain the same, and it's all just about mindset. Never take any pressure or be



nervous, and play as per the situation," he said in a video on IPLT20.Com.

Rizvi recalled the moment he was picked up by the franchise during the auction ahead of the season for a whopping Rs 8.4 crore, as he felt that his dream of meeting Dhoni will eventually come true.

"When I was picked up during

the auction by CSK, my greatest happiness was my dream to meet Bhaiya (MS Dhoni) would be fulfilled. We also had net sessions together and got to learn a lot from him and the (support) staff. I intend to learn more and perform to the fullest."

Having played cricket for Uttar Pradesh, he has decent T20 numbers, scoring 309 runs in 10 innings at a strike rate of 137.33, including two half-centuries.

Speaking about his jersey number, the 20-year-old Meerut batter said, "My jersey number is seven, which is currently worn by Bhaiya and I can't get it. So, I liked the number 1, and I took it."

Rizvi also talked about the positive atmosphere in the CSK dressing room.

Dube no longer ducks, defends against short ball

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Mike Hussey is in awe of Shivam Dube for transforming into a batter who no longer ducks or defends when faced with the short ball, an improvement that has been monitored personally by former captain and team talisman Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

The 30-year-old Dube was the top-scorer for CSK on Tuesday, striking a 23-ball 51 that included two fours and five sixes at a strike rate of 221.74. The side won by 63 runs against Gujarat Titans.

"Got to give a lot of credit to Dube for working



given it back to the bowlers, forcing them to try something new. It will benefit him in the IPL, and also if he gets a chance to play for his country, it will do him a lot of good," said Hussey.

tirelessly against the short ball, an area he needed to improve on. Hats off to him, and he is playing with confidence now. He is also dangerous against the spin.

"As the teams bowled short balls at him a few years ago, he would only duck and defend. Now, not only he can play the short ones, but he is also able to find boundaries.

"So, that's a testament to the work that he has put in and has given it back to the bowlers, forcing them to try something new. It will benefit him in the IPL, and also if he gets a chance to play for his country, it will do him a lot of good," said Hussey.



Any team is bound to miss a bowler like Shami: Mohit

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Gujarat Titans pace bowler Mohit Sharma conceded it was hard to replace a bowler of the calibre of Mohammed Shami as his team succumbed to a massive 63-run defeat at the hands of reigning IPL champions Chennai Super Kings here.

India's premier pacer Shami is sitting out of the IPL as he is recuperating from an ankle surgery. He is expected to make his comeback with the home Test series against Bangladesh later this year after missing the five-Test series against England.

Shami will also miss the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by the West Indies and the USA in June.

"Any team is bound to miss a bowler like Shami, and you can't replace him with anyone. But injuries are uncontrollable, and you must see how to move ahead with it," said Sharma, who played for CSK between 2013 and 2015 and has been with the Titans since 2022, during the post-match press conference.

"As for GT, it's the first year for Spencer (Johnson) and Azmatullah (Omzarai). They haven't played much cricket yet. Therefore, we must be patient with them and not become too result-oriented.

"We must not bother about the runs leaked or the result of the contest, but how successful we are with our plans and how we are working on it backstage. These things would come in handy in the second half (of the event)," opined Sharma.

CSK posted a huge 206 for six, with openers Ruturaj Gaikwad (36) and Rachin Ravindra (46) being the stars alongside Shivam Dube (51). GT bowlers took a lot of beating with Umesh Yadav going for 27 in two overs, while the crafty Afghanistan ace spinner Rashid Khan went for 49 in four overs although he took a couple of wickets.

Sharma added that CSK milking runs in powerplay also contributed to the big loss.

"Not much of a difference (in CSK's strategy). It used to be the same when I used to play for CSK, and we usually tried to get the maximum out of the powerplay overs," he said. CSK were 69 for 1 after powerplay overs.

"We knew it was going to be a similar scenario, especially with Rachin (Ravindra's) batting of

late. However, we failed to execute our plans properly and also failed to judge the width and length during our bowling.

"We failed in executing our plans properly. We began to bowl the slower ones too early and too wide off the off stump, leading to them scoring freely. It happens that the plans always don't get executed properly every time.

"But it's a big tournament, and we have ample time to go back to the drawing board, rectify our mistakes and start afresh.

"We had a target of 200 as the par score on this wicket, and CSK played just the way we had thought. They were on course for 225-230 before settling for 206, but since we failed to implement our plans, we believed we gave away 15-20 runs extra."

Sharma also defended the visitors' decision to bowl first, stating that dew is always a factor in night games, though, interestingly, there was hardly any dew on Tuesday night.

"Don't think the pitch has a role to play. Generally, if we win the toss and decide to bowl, it's because we know that the dew might play a factor later during the game.

"But, there was no dew (Tuesday). As usual, we decided to bowl and restrict them to a par total, while dew would have been an added positive for us.

"Had the wicket been drier, CSK would have moved in with two spinners. But, had the (GT) pacers bowled in the right areas, it would have been tough for them to hit," he considered.

'WON'T SAY WE FAILED TO SCORE RUNS, BUT CREDIT TO CSK BOWLERS': Despite the 63-run loss, Mohit refused to blame the batters for the poor show. CSK bowlers implemented their plan to perfection to restrict GT to 143/8 with Sai Sudharsan (37) being GT's top scorer.

"I won't say we failed to score runs, but credit to the CSK bowlers for bowling brilliantly. Deepak (Chahal) started well, and at the end of the day, it all boils down to the number of variations you possess and when and how to use them.

"Don't think it was a pressure scenario for us. The wicket was good, and 200 was a gettable total here.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India cricketer Manoj Tiwary expects Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya to be booed a "bit louder" when the team plays its first home IPL game here on April 1 but he feels that the flamboyant all-rounder has the temperament to deal with it.

Pandya, who replaced Rohit Sharma as MI captain before the start of the season, was booed by fans in Ahmedabad when the side played against his former franchise Gujarat Titans on Sunday.

MI lost the match by six runs and will take on Rajasthan Royals in their first home game at the Wankhede Stadium here on Monday next week.

"...You have to see how he gets welcomed here in Mumbai because I think he is going to get booed a bit louder here...Because as a fan, Mumbai fan or a Rohit Sharma fan, nobody expected that captaincy will be given to Hardik," Tiwary told PTI Videos in an interview.

"And despite Rohit giving five trophies to Mumbai Indians, he has to lose the captaincy. I don't know what are the reasons but I think it has not gone down well with the fans. And that is the reaction which you see on

Pandya will be booed louder in Mumbai but his temperament impressive: Tiwary

the field," he explained. Tiwary is, however, impressed with how Pandya has dealt with fan backlash.

"...Knowing him, whatever I have been observing of late through television, that despite getting booed, he kept his calm, he kept his nerve, which is the sign of a good temperament," he said.

The 38-year-old, who is the sports minister of West Bengal, said Pandya will have to cut out the noise and focus on his performance so that he is in good shape for the T20 World Cup starting June 1 in the Americas.

"I believe even if he was not booed, he has to perform well to get into the Indian team to play the World cup. Because it is important for all the players to perform well and be fit as well to be available for selection.

"And him being the number one all-rounder...Obviously he has to be in form and to be in form he has to perform," he said.

Tiwary competed for the Delhi



franchise in the IPL and he is keenly observing how his former team is handling Rishabh Pant's comeback from a life-threatening car accident in 2022.

He believes the big-hitter would be back to his devastating best very soon

thanks to the unflinching support of the franchise.

"First of all, he's not going to be any burden. In fact, it's going to be more positive impact which he brings along with him because as a player, he's one of the most talented cricketers in