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SELLER FEE STRUCTURES

SPORT 12
PANT FAILS TO FIRE
ON COMEBACK

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AFTER KEJRIWAL, AAP SEALED

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the political turmoil in the AAP-led Delhi Government, the party is now fighting for its "survival" as its party headquarters has been allegedly sealed. With the Lok Sabha elections round the corner, its leaders have sought an appointment from the Election Commission (EC) to ensure equal opportunities for all parties in the Lok Sabha elections. The AAP has demanded that the poll watchdog should take notice of the entire incident. In another setback to Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi High Court has refused to give urgent listing of the plea filed by the Chief Minister and AAP national convener Kejriwal challenging his arrest and custody in the case. In the second day of arrest of Kejriwal, the protesting leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) raised concerns on Saturday regarding the alleged "sealing" of the party's office at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg in Delhi and claimed that Ministers are being stopped from going to the office a charge which the Delhi Police denied. The AAP also accused the Narendra Modi Government at the Centre of engaging in systematic intimidation by preventing free movement of party leaders ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.



AAP workers and supporters at Shaheed Park during a protest over the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in connection with an excise policy-linked money-laundering case in New Delhi on Saturday

Delhi PWD Minister and senior AAP leader Atishi took to social media platforms to express dismay over the apparent closure of the party's office, and questioned the "sealing" of the office, saying it goes against the concept of having a "level playing field" in elections as promised by the Constitution. Atishi also posted a video in which she can be seen arguing with a Delhi Police officer while some AAP leaders sat

on the road as a mark of protest over being stopped by the police. "How can access to a national party's office be stopped during the Lok Sabha election? This (is) against the 'level playing field' promised in the Indian Constitution. We are seeking time with the EC to complain against this," the Delhi Minister said in her post. Meanwhile, a Delhi Police officer refuted the charge that

the AAP office was sealed. Police personnel were deployed at DDU Marg to stop the gathering of people since CrPC section 144 is imposed there, the officer said. According to the police, around 500 AAP workers as well as leaders from Delhi and Punjab gathered at Shaheed Park located at Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg on Saturday. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) M Harsha

Vadhan said the office was never sealed by police. He said Atishi and her associates were not stopped from going home. Another senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said all access to the party office has been stopped by the Union Government. Bharadwaj said he and Atishi were stopped from going to the party office.

Continued on Page 7

Russia Hit by Terror

PNS/AP ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday reached out to Russia after the terror attack on Friday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemning the incident and said "India stands in solidarity with the Government and the people of the Russian Federation in this hour of grief". "We strongly condemn the heinous terrorist attack in Moscow. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims," Modi said in a post on X. "India stands in solidarity with the Government and the people of the Russian Federation in this hour of grief," he said. The death toll in the Moscow concert hall attack has risen to 133, Russia's top state investigative agency said on Saturday. The update from the Investigative Committee comes as authorities are combing the charred wreckage of the Crocus City Hall on Moscow's western edge for more victims. Officials previously put the death toll from Friday's raid at 115. The attack also left many wounded. The Islamic State group's Afghanistan branch claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on affiliated channels on social media. A US intelligence official told The Associated Press that US agencies had confirmed that the group was



Russian Rosguardia (National Guard) servicemen help a man to leave an area near the Crocus City Hall on the western edge of Moscow, Russia, on Friday. Several gunmen have burst into a big concert hall in Moscow and fired automatic weapons at the crowd, injuring an unspecified number of people and setting a massive blaze in terror attack

responsible for the attack. In an address to the nation on Saturday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said authorities had detained 11 people, including four who took part in the attack. He also suggested they had been trying to cross the border into Ukraine which, he said, tried to create a "window" to help them escape.

Ukraine has strongly denied any involvement and accused Moscow of using the attack to try to stoke fervour in its war effort. In an address to the nation, Putin called it "a bloody, barbaric terrorist act" and said all four people who were directly involved had been taken into custody.

Continued on Page 7

NIA reveals Chennai link to Bengaluru blast case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After examining more than 1,000 CCTV footage and continuous investigation, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has traced two suspects in the March 1 Rameshwaram Café blast in Bengaluru, resulting in injuries to at least 10 individuals. The NIA also established a connection between the Bengaluru blast and activities in Chennai. After meticulous scrutiny of over 1,000 CCTV footage recordings and a persistent investigation, NIA officials have identified two suspects. It has been revealed



that these individuals resided in Chennai during the months of January and February. Investigation also revealed that a suspect involved in the blast used a fake Aadhaar and driving licence to stay at a lodging facility in Chennai with an associate, ahead of the incident. A baseball cap that the suspect is seen wearing in CCTV footage during the nine-minute operation of planting an improvised explosive device (IED) at the cafe in the Whitefield region of Bengaluru has led investigators from the NIA and the Bengaluru police to Chennai where the cap was

purchased in January. One of Shazib's accomplices was also identified by the anti-terror agency, as Abdul Mateen Taha, also a native of Thiruthahalli. Taha was wanted for the murder of Tamil Nadu police inspector, K Wilson, and stayed with the main suspect in Chennai. Sources said Taha was also a part of the ISIS module in Shivamogga. The same was confirmed by members of the module, who were earlier arrested. Taha was also seen in CCTV footage where he had conducted recce of the cafe a day before the blast. According to the NIA, Taha always used to wear a cap which he had bought while he stayed in Triplicane. The suspected bomber, Shazib, was seen wearing the same cap on the day of the blast. The anti-terror agency found that these caps are a limited edition series and that only 400 pieces of the product were sold. In CCTV footage, the NIA officials found Taha purchasing the cap from a Chennai mall. Following the blast, the suspect had dropped the cap at some distance from the cafe.

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Himachal Rumble for Congress

Six party rebels, three independents join BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/SHIMLA

Another crisis looms large over the Congress-led Himachal Pradesh Government as nine former MLAs, including six disqualified Congress legislators and three Independents, joined the BJP on Saturday. After the disqualification of the six Congress MLAs following the Rajya Sabha elections goof-up in the State last month, the ruling party's strength decreased from 39 to 33 in the now 62-member Assembly, down from its original strength of 68. The BJP, on the other hand, has 25 members. Amid the continuing political crisis in the State, the Speaker, who can vote only in the case of a tie during a floor test, is affiliated with the Congress. The resignations of the three Independent MLAs have further reduced the Assembly's strength. The Congress Government plunged into crisis last month after the BJP won the Rajya Sabha poll for the State's lone seat with the support of these nine MLAs. Although Chief Minister



Union Minister Anurag Thakur, former Himachal Pradesh CM and BJP leader Jai Ram Thakur and party leader Arun Singh with Himachal Pradesh Independent MLAs KL Thakur, Hoshiyar Singh and Ashish Sharma who joined BJP, in New Delhi, on Saturday

Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has been putting up a brave face and there appears to be no immediate threat to his Government, the BJP aims to bring down his dispensation through bypoll wins, anticipating that it may attract more legislators from

the ruling party into its fold. The Election Commission has already announced bypolls for the six constituencies held by these former Congress MLAs, and bypolls are expected to be announced for the three seats held by the

Independents as well. The former MLAs, who joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Anurag Thakur, former Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, its national general secretary Arun Singh, and State unit president Rajeev Bindal, said development work has been stalled since the Congress Government came

into power in the State headed by Sukhu. Welcoming the former MLAs into the party, Thakur said their presence would further strengthen the BJP as he accused the Congress Government in the State of failing to fulfil its promises, leading to anger among people. Thakur said six of the former lawmakers, despite being Congress MLAs, supported the BJP in the recent Rajya Sabha election as they chose to reflect the "public anger" against the Sukhu Government. The former Congress MLAs who joined the BJP are Sudhir Sharma, Ravi Thakur, Rajinder Rana, Inder Dutt Lakhnpal, Chetanya Sharma and Devinder Kumar Bhutto — all disqualified on February 29 for defying a party whip to be present in the House and vote in favour of the State Government during a cut motion and Budget. Ashish Sharma, Hoshiyar Singh and KL Thakur, who were elected as Independents and resigned on Friday, also joined the BJP, with Singh saying they decided to be part of the country's development journey under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

China trains its waterguns at us on Holi

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

While the boycott of Chinese-made crackers and Diwali decorations like lighting remains resolute, the vibrant hues of Holi find themselves adorned with water guns and gulal (dry colours), with a notable presence of Chinese products in the local market. Every shop, retailer, and street corner is filled with Chinese pichkari (water guns), which are attractive and give Indian manufacturers a run for their money. The claim of making the celebration completely 'Made in India' hasn't stood the litmus test, with traders and consumers professing to boycott goods manufactured in China during

this festival of joy, yet failing to hold true to their promise as Chinese goods continue to abound in the market. Paramjeet Singh Pamma, chairman of Federation of Sadar Bazar trade Association, said while the presence of Holi items made by China in India's market on the festival is considerably low, it still has its presence. While speaking on the share of Chinese and Indian goods, Pamma said, "The presence of Chinese products in the market is significantly low this year compared to earlier. But it hasn't been completely annihilated." There is a change in the trend of consumers' preferences and choices. While the sale of Chinese and Indian products was 60 and 40 per cent respectively



last year, the share has reversed this year. "Indian manufactured products are leading the sale," he said. In fact, elections which are often referred as the biggest festival of Indian democracy also seem to seep in the Holi festivities. "This year water guns shaped like a hammer have come to the market, along with those having the face of political leaders like Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath," said Pamma, adding that customers are also liking water guns with the face of the deceased singer and rapper Sidhu Moose Wala, whose parents have just landed themselves in a controversy after giving birth to a child through IVF.

He also predicted that the sale in Holi this year will end the bane of Covid finally, with the mood of festivities being set in the country since the consecration ceremony of Ram temple in Ayodhya in January. He said, "This year we feel that Holi will break all records and end the dry patch that has occurred since Covid pandemic. One reason behind this is because people were in a celebratory mood since the consecration ceremony of Ayodhya Ram temple. "This becomes more important since Holi marks the beginning of the celebrations in the country. The upcoming festivals of Janmashtami, Eid and others will also follow the same trend then."

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Adherence to law paramount for everyone, says Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Referring to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath strongly asserted that adherence to the law was paramount for everyone, regardless of their position or influence. Speaking in a discussion with a private TV channel on Saturday, Yogi Adityanath remarked, "In our nation, democracy prevails, allowing individuals like Arvind Kejriwal to repeatedly hold the position of chief minister in Delhi. However, democracy does not allow any person, party or organisation to commit 'dacoity'." Yogi Adityanath underscored the role of a chief minister as a public servant rather than the "owner" of a state, stating, "Our work is that of a public servant and custodian." He further emphasised the importance of equal treatment under the law, stating that even he would be subject to legal consequences if found in violation of regulations. "It is wrong if any person or government starts considering itself above the law. ED (Enforcement Directorate) is an independent regulatory body and Kejriwal's case is in the court, now only the court will decide it." Reiterating Bharatiya Janata Party's commitment to development over divisive politics, Yogi Adityanath emphasised



the party's respect for the faith of people. Yogi Adityanath mentioned that he plans to conduct his election campaign from Mathura. Yogi Adityanath said, "We cannot tamper with the Hindu faith; perhaps this is why we have not secured a place in the minds of Muslims. In India, we have to respect the original soul of this place. Hindu is the basic soul of India. It cannot be insulted. If anyone assumes we will engage in politics by disrespecting this sentiment, they are mistaken. We cannot compromise on national security or the reverence for Hindu faith. We are blessed by God and supported by the people."

Regarding the paper leak issue, he said that stringent measures had been taken. Regarding Mohammad Azam Khan's case, Yogi said that due to his (Khan's) actions, he had been punished by the court. "The judiciary of India is independent," he added. On the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Yogi pointed out that the Muslim population in India has increased at a much faster rate than that of Hindus since Independence. "Conversely, the Hindu population in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan has significantly declined," he added. He said that if the Indian gov-

ernment was granting Indian citizenship through the CAA to refugees born in India who adhere to all religious customs, it should be received with open arms. However, he emphasised that strict action should be taken against those who resort to violence. Yogi emphasised that the CAA embodied the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in India. Yogi commented on the Samajwadi Party-Congress alliance, noting that such alliances have occurred previously. "The people of the state have already taught them a lesson. That is why Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra lack the courage to come to UP. False promises won't deceive the people anymore. The Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies are poised to deliver their strongest performance in UP," he remarked. Yogi also asserted that the BJP maintains a strong presence in Karnataka, Telangana and Maharashtra. He anticipated significant gains in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where the BJP had previously lagged behind. Regarding the Bahujan Samaj Party, Yogi remarked, "It possesses a distinct voter base, with its leader Mayawati having served as the state's chief minister thrice. If the BSP loses influence, the BJP stands to gain. In 2019, the SP and BSP formed a coalition to test their strength."

Yogi to kick-start BJP campaign in UP by meeting intellectuals

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Bharatiya Janata Party is gearing up to kick-start its Lok Sabha election campaign in Uttar Pradesh with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath taking the lead by meeting intellectuals in the Prabuddha Sammelan. A comprehensive programme has been proposed, scheduled to commence immediately after the festival of Holi from March 27. "This is the beginning of the chief minister's election campaign where he will hold meetings and in the next phase he will hold rallies," Manish Dixit, head of BJP's Media Cell, told this reporter on Saturday. Dixit said that Yogi Adityanath was much in demand not only in Uttar Pradesh but across the country and therefore the party would use his availability to the hilt. The plan entails the chief minister engaging in Prabuddha Sammelan where he will have discussions with intellectuals to deliberate on the party's policies and strategies. As per the proposed schedule, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is set to hold three conferences daily in various regions. The campaign is set to commence on March 27 from Mathura, followed by visits to Meerut and Ghaziabad on the same day. On March 28, conferences are slated to be held in Bijnor, Moradabad and Amroha. Furthermore, the agenda includes organising Prabuddh Sammelans in Shamli, Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur on March 29, followed by events in Baghpat, Bulandshahr and Gautam Buddha Nagar on March 30. The campaign will culminate with events in Bareilly, Rampur and Pilibhit on March 31. The BJP has intensified its preparations for this extensive campaign, aiming to connect with voters across various regions of Uttar Pradesh.

SP faces tough test as allies desert Akhilesh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a significant blow to the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, several crucial allies have announced their departure from the party led by Akhilesh Yadav, signaling a major upheaval in the state's political landscape ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This exodus of allies poses a formidable challenge to the main opposition party in Uttar Pradesh, leaving it grappling with uncertainties and complexities as it navigates the road to electoral success. The departure of key allies commenced approximately a year ago, as political parties geared up for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The trend gained momentum with the exit of the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP) and subsequently the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). The latest blow came from Apna Dal (Kameravadi), a staunch advocate of the SP's political alliance strategy, which has opted to contest the elections independently, further complicating matters for the beleaguered party. The geographical spread of these erstwhile allies, each wielding significant influence in different regions of the state, from the east to the west, adds to the challenge for the SP. This departure not only dilutes the SP's support base but also undermines its ability to secure victories in diverse constituencies across Uttar Pradesh. Presently, the SP finds itself with only the Congress as a steadfast ally for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. While an SP-Congress alliance was stitched in 2017, it failed to yield substantial results. All eyes are now on Akhilesh Yadav as he navigates the path for success in 2024 with only Congress support, a stark contrast to the broad coalition he had envisioned. The recent history of electoral experiments by the SP reveals a mixed bag of outcomes. In 2014, contesting alone, the party managed to secure five seats, all won by family mem-

LEADERS WHO DESERTED THE PARTY

Here are the key leaders who have left the Samajwadi Party and their subsequent political moves.

- **Om Prakash Rajbhar (SBSP):** After the assembly elections, Rajbhar parted ways with the SP and joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). In a strategic move to bolster support from the Rajbhar community, the Bharatiya Janata Party (not only appointed Om Prakash Rajbhar as a minister in the Yogi Adityanath cabinet but also entrusted him with a significant department, the Panchayati Raj.
- **Jayant Chaudhary (RLD):** The Rashtriya Lok Dal, once considered SP's strongest ally, has also parted ways with the party. This departure, particularly impactful in western Uttar Pradesh, is perceived as a major setback for the SP in the region. The RLD has now aligned with the NDA. Furthermore, an RLD MLA has joined the Yogi Adityanath cabinet.
- **Krishna Patel (Apna Dal-Kameravadi):** Krishna Patel's elder daughter, Pallavi Patel, has been elected as an MLA on the Samajwadi Party sym-

bol. However, Pallavi Patel has shown signs of dissent by openly challenging its selection of candidates in the Rajya Sabha elections. The Apna Dal (K) has announced its intention to contest the Lok Sabha elections from Phulpur, Mirzapur and Kaushambi reserved seats, further weakening the Samajwadi Party.

- **Dara Singh Chauhan:** Considered a leader of the Noniya community, Dara Singh Chauhan left the Samajwadi Party and returned to the Bharatiya Janata Party. He was elected as an MLC and subsequently became a minister in the Yogi Adityanath government.
- **Swami Prasad Maurya (Rashtriya Shoshit Samaj Party):** After serving as the national general secretary of the Samajwadi Party, Swami Prasad Maurya departed from the party and relinquished his membership of the UP Legislative Council. He has now founded a new political entity, the Rashtriya Shoshit Samaj Party, advocating for the interests of backwards, Dalits and minority communities.

SP'S PERFORMANCE

- 2014 Lok Sabha Elections: 5 seats
- 2019 Lok Sabha Elections: 5 seats
- 2017 assembly elections: 47 seats
- 2022 assembly elections: 111 seats

UPPCL pulls up socks for uninterrupted power supply



Lucknow (PNS): The Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited has geared up to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply to consumers during the Holi festivities. UPPCL Chairman Ashish Goel has instructed the five power distribution subsidiaries (discoms) to guarantee uninterrupted and stable electricity supply during the festival across the state. During this period, electricity supply will be provided round the clock in the state. It is worth mentioning that previously, during events such as Dussehra, Navratri, Diwali and the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, uninterrupted power supply was maintained for 24 hours in rural areas, nagar panchayat headquarters, tehsil headquarters, and district headquarters across all 75 districts. The UPPCL chairman said that considering the significance of the Holi festival, it had been decided to ensure uninterrupted power supply during the festival. This will not only benefit the common consumers but also businesses, trade and industry. He emphasised that throughout the festival, every area across the state will enjoy uninterrupted electricity supply for 24 hours.

Muslim women to oversee polling booths for BJP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Bharatiya Janata Party is embarking on a strategic manoeuvre ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, focusing particularly on the minority-dominated regions. In a bid to bolster its electoral prospects, the party has chalked out plans to deploy women functionaries from the Muslim community to oversee polling booths, primarily in the western parts of Uttar Pradesh where there is a substantial Muslim population. Basit Ali, chief of the UP BJP Minority Morcha, underscored the significance of this initiative. "Our women workers, hailing from the respective localities, will be stationed at 40,000 polling booths to assist officials in verifying the identities of voters," Ali said. He emphasised the importance of their local knowledge

in authenticating voters' identities against the provided documents. This move comes amidst the BJP's persistent calls to the Election Commission of India to scrutinise the identities of burqa-clad women voters, a demand that has sparked controversy among opposition parties. Sources familiar with the matter indicate that the BJP intends to press this demand, commencing with the first phase of elections covering regions such as Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Moradabad and Rampur, known for their significant Muslim population. The decision to engage Muslim women in the electoral process purportedly followed during a high-level meeting of state BJP leaders, including UP BJP chief Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary and state general secretary Dharampal Singh. The meeting, attended by key members

of the UP BJP Minority Morcha, aimed at fortifying the BJP's electoral foothold among Muslims and countering opposition challenges. Ali further explained the UP BJP Minority Morcha's strategy, highlighting the setting up of 11-member booth-level committees across all 40,000 booths. "We aim to engage Muslim voters, many of whom have benefited from various government schemes. Even a marginal increase in our support can significantly impact the party's electoral fortunes," Ali remarked, pointing out the potential gain of an additional 10 lakh votes. The BJP's move to involve women from the Muslim community in the electoral process underscores its concerted efforts to broaden its support base and navigate the intricate dynamics of minority-centric constituencies ahead of the crucial polls.

Police sub-inspector caught taking bribe

Lucknow (PTI): A police sub-inspector was caught taking bribe after threatening an accused of illegal liquor trade in Shahjahanpur, officials said on Saturday. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Sanjay Kumar told PTI that a case was recently registered against a person named Satyapal Singh, a resident of Banda police station area, on charges of illegal liquor business. Singh had alleged that Sub-Inspector Narendra Kumar Sharma had threat-

ened him that if he did not give him a bribe of Rs 10,000 then he would add a serious charge in the case and send him to jail. The victim had lodged a complaint in this regard with the Bareilly-based Anti-Corruption Organisation and its team which was here last night arrested the sub-inspector while accepting a bribe of Rs 10,000 inside the Banda police station, the P said. The Anti-Corruption Organisation team has lodged a case against the accused sub-

inspector at the Sadar Bazar police station, he added. Meanwhile in Etawah, a man was killed and two others were injured when a pick-up van rammed into a truck on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, police said on Saturday. The incident occurred on Friday night when the mini-truck carrying rugs was on its way to Sitapur from Agra. The driver of the pick-up van allegedly fell asleep at the wheel and crashed the vehicle into another truck, police said.



Huge rush at Charbagh railway station and Charbagh bus station as people going to their native districts for Holi

Pioneer

Apna Dal (K) to forge alliance with BSP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Apna Dal (Kameravadi), a former ally of Samajwadi Party, has announced that it will forge an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party. The alliance of Apna Dal (K) with the Samajwadi Party had collapsed last week after it unilaterally announced three candidates for Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. Apna Dal (K) on Saturday announced the withdrawal of the list of three candidates. Apna Dal (K) leader Pallavi Patel, who is an MLA, said the list announced earlier had been withdrawn. Pallavi Patel said she would meet BSP chief Mayawati on Sunday and the candidates would be announced after alliance with the BSP was finalised. Apna Dal (K) had earlier announced candidates from Mirzapur, Kaushambi and Phulpur Lok Sabha constituencies.

UP RERA: Legal title over land a must for project registration

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority (UP RERA) has issued orders directing promoters to ensure that they have legal title over the land on which they are applying for registration of the project. In case, the project land is not in the ownership of the promoter but in the ownership of some other person or persons, the promoter must have the consent of such land owner for the development of the proposed project and must have a registered joint development agreement to this effect with the land owner. UP RERA has also directed the promoters to file affidavit to the effect that the project land is free from encumbrances and to disclose the same if there is any encumbrance on the land of the

RERA HAD TO ISSUE THESE DIRECTIONS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CONSUMERS AND TO FACILITATE THE CONVEYANCE DEED IN THEIR FAVOUR WITHOUT ANY LEGAL IMPEDIMENTS

project. UP RERA Chairman Sanjay Bhoosreddy said that the provisions of RERA were very clear that the promoter shall obtain the CC/OC of the project and transfer the title of the unit to the allottee by way of a registered sale deed or sublease deed, as the case may be. He further clarified that it is established law that only a person having title over the

land or property has right to legally transfer such land or property to a buyer. So, RERA had to issue these directions in order to ensure the protection of the rights of the consumers and to facilitate the conveyance deed in their favour without any legal impediments. He said it also poses problems before UP RERA in deciding the application for registration of the project if the promoter does not have the legal title over the land or alternatively, he does not have the written consent of the land owner and a registered joint development agreement with such land owner. RERA has been continuously impressing these points upon the promoters and through its new order it has made the points too clear to be missed and has also removed all the doubts in this regard.

Railway employees push train coach after malfunction in Amethi

Amethi (PTI): A train inspection coach carrying railway officials was manually pushed to another track after it developed a technical snag, railways said on Saturday. The video of the incident surfaced online and was also shared by the Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav and the Congress. The incident occurred on Friday when a self-propelled inspection coach carrying Railway officials from Sultanpur to Nihalgarh to carry out the inspection work, malfunctioned before reaching the Nihalgarh Railway Station which is being renamed after Maharaja Bijli Pasi, a rail official said. The railway crossing ahead of Nihalgarh Railway Station was already closed because a train was about to arrive. Since the driver of the technical staff of the inspection coach was not able to fix the fault and the shunting engine was also not available, the employees started to remove the coach by pushing it, he said. About a dozen officers and employees pushed it from the main line to the loop line to avoid disruption of the rail traffic, he added. The inspection coach was sent for repairs later, he added. Sharing the video, the SP chief in a post on X slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party government and said, "Call the Railway minister immediately, get him to push as well."

सेंट्रल बैंक ऑफ इंडिया Central Bank of India			
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Regional Office: First Floor, B.K.D. Campus, Gwalior Road, Jhansi U.P. 284003, Ph: 0510-2444044			
POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property)			
Under Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security, Interest Act 2002 and in exercise of the Powers conferred under section 13(12) and read with rule 8 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 issued demand notice as detailed here in below with our Branch to repay the amount mentioned in the notices within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notices. The borrowers/guarantors having failed to pay the entire amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers/guarantors and public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described here in below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the said rules. The borrowers/guarantors in particular and public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with be subject to charge of Central Bank of India. The borrowers attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.			
DESCRIPTION OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES			
S. No.	Name & Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors	Possession Notice Date	Date of Demand Notice Amt. Outstanding (Rs.)
1.	Mr. Vakil Khan S/o Mohd. Idrish Khan, (Borrowers) R/o House No. 91, Maudaha, Sichauli, Hamirpur, U.P.-210507 & Mrs. Anisha Khatoun W/o Mohd. Idrish Khan, (Guarantor) R/o H. No. 91, Vill. Ragaul, Pargana Maudaha, Tehsil-Maudaha Distt. Hamirpur, Branch: Hamirpur	22.03.2024	Rs. 9,87,503.00 on Date 28.12.2023 + Interest thereon other expenses
Description of the Immovable Property	All that part and parcel of the Property Consisting of R/o House No. 91, Vill Ragaul, Pargana Maudaha, Tehsil-Maudaha, Distt. Hamirpur, Admeasuring: 1500 Sq Feet, within the registration District Hamirpur. Property Owner: Mrs. Anisha Khatoun W/o Mohd. Idrish Khan BOUNDED: NORTH: Plot of Seller, SOUTH: Plot of Seller, EAST: Arazi Iqbal Ahmad (Seller), WEST: Nikas/Rasta		
2.	1. Mr. Ram Bihari, (Borrowers) 2. Mrs. Sita Devi W/o Mr. Ram Bihari, (Co-Borrowers) R/o Near Upbhokta Bhandar Hardauli Ghat Kyotara Banda Branch: Banda	21.03.2024	Rs. 11,10,715.00 on Date 20.10.2023 + Interest thereon other expenses
Description of the Immovable Property	All that part and parcel of the Property Consisting of R/o Gata No. 512/1, V Hardoli, Z Area Near Mukti Dham Road Upbhokta Bhandar, Mohalla Kyotra Banda Admeasuring: 1040 Sq Feet, within the registration District Banda. Property Owner: Mrs. Sita Devi W/o Mr. Ram Bihari, BOUNDED: NORTH: Plot of Sri Kailash House of Sri Ram Lakhnan Gupta, SOUTH: Remaining Part of Gata No. 512/1, EAST: Arazi of Sri Sarju Nishad, WEST: 15 ft. wide Way		
Date: 23.03.2024		Place: Jhansi Authorised Officer, Central, Bank of India	

BHU fraternity plays Holi with Lord Shiva

PNS ■ VARANASI

At the Vishwanath temple in the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), the university fraternity played Holi with Lord Shiva. They used flowers and gulal to play the 'festival of colours' in the sprawling temple premises on the eve of closure of the university for the festival. The teachers along with staff and students danced to the tune of musical 'Fagua' songs. Honorary administrator of the temple, Prof Vinay Kumar Pandey, and co-administrator Dr Subhash Pandey greeted the people for the festival. On the occasion, abhishek of Lord Shiva was done with thandai, milk and water and then rose petals and gulal were offered to Baba Vishwanath. Later, Fagua and Holi songs were presented on the tunes of harmonium, dhols and tablas. This was followed by distribution of 'prasad' and thandai. In the programme, Finance Officer of BHU Dr Abhay Kumar Thakur, Vice-Chancellor of Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, Prof Dinesh Chand Rai, Additional Controller of Examinations of BHU Prof Gyan Prakash Singh, Joint Registrar (Finance) Dr Sanjay Kumar, Prof Sanjay Singh, Prof Ramnarayan Dwivedi, Prof Santosh Kumar Singh, Dr Shailendra Singh, Dr Dharendra Rai and other university officials, employees, students and devotees were present. Meanwhile, to maintain peace



BHU officials playing Holi with rose petals and gulal at Vishwanath Temple on university campus on Saturday

on the BHU campus during Holi festival on March 25, barring the main gate, all other gates will remain closed for traffic from 8 am to 2 pm, informed Chief Proctor Prof Shiv Prakash Singh. Meanwhile, North Eastern Railway (NER) Divisional Railway Manager of Varanasi Division, Vineet Kumar Srivastava, greeted the railway employees and railway users on

the occasion of Holi, the festival of love and harmony. He appealed to the passengers to use 21 pairs of Holi special trains operated from Banaras, Chhapra and Mau stations on Varanasi Division and not to travel with flammable substances in trains. To maintain peace, he said that the Varanasi Division of NER had set up a control room in the Varanasi Divisional Office to

provide 24-hour monitoring and service on the occasion of Holi from March 26 to 29 in view of possible increase in passenger traffic at the division's stations during this period. Based on the estimates, officers and supervisory staff have been deployed at important stations of the Varanasi division. Apart from this, a control room has also been set up at Chhapra Junction, Siwan Junction, Mau

and Ballia stations of Varanasi division to handle any situation. Besides, all the activities of the station will be closely monitored. During this period, 24-hour monitoring and guidelines will be broadcast from the control room established in the Varanasi divisional office till the end of Holi festival. In the Varanasi Control Room, Senior Divisional Commercial

Manager Sheikh Rehman, Senior Divisional Operations Manager AP Singh, Senior Divisional Signal and Telecommunication Engineer Rajat Priya, Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer (Carriage and Wagon) Anubhav Pathak, Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer (EnHM) Apoorva Swarnkar, Divisional Engineer General PP Kujur, Divisional Operations Manager Ratan Deep Gupta, Divisional Electrical Engineer Ramdayal, Assistant Commercial Manager AK Suman and Prashant Kumar and divisional and assistant divisional officers have been deputed.

Earlier, on the instructions of District Magistrate S Rajalingam, to effectively prevent the sale of adulterated food and beverages, food items and beverages on Holi festival, widespread raids were conducted. After collecting the samples, food items worth Rs 70,000 were seized. On Friday, while inspecting 30 food establishments at various places in the city, including Nadesar, Mint House, Bhadau Chungi, Mukimganj, Ramnagar, Sarnath, Pandeypur, Teliana, nine persons were arrested by the enforcement team of food safety officers constituted by the Food Safety and Drug Administration. A total of 15 samples of food items, including curd, cheese, gram flour, refined palmolein oil, papad, maida, chamcham, barfi, khova, boondi, raita, peanuts, namkeen etc were collected for quality checking.

Rly Board member Satish Kumar pays visit to BLW



Member of Railway Board Satish Kumar inspecting BLW workshop in Varanasi

PNS ■ VARANASI

Member (Traction and Rolling Stock) of Railway Board, Satish Kumar, visited the Banaras Locomotives Works (BLW). During his visit, Chief Executive Director (Electrical Engineering, Rolling Stock) Mohit Chandra was also present. On his arrival at BLW, General Manager Basudev Panda greeted Satish Kumar by presenting him with a bouquet. Then the Railway Board member visited the BLW workshop areas and inspected the loco frame shop, loco assembly shop, loco test shop, new loco project site under construction and new block shop. During his stay there, Kumar was apprised in detail of the production activities of electric locomotives, manufacturing facilities, ongoing projects in BLW as well as the production process, other technical subjects and the new loco project site under construction. During the inspection, BLW's GM and the department heads and officers were also present. After the workshop visit, Kumar reviewed the progress with BLW officials at the Hall of Fame in which important technical aspects related to railway locomotive manufacturing were discussed. Principal Chief Electrical Engineer SK Srivastava gave detailed information about the achievements of BLW since its inception till now through a powerpoint presentation. In the meeting, along with the production activities, other works of BLW and various ongoing projects, future plans

were discussed in detail. The Railway Board member expressed happiness over BLW moving towards the highest goal of its loco production. He said that due to its visionary thinking, BLW had been successful in producing locos with high targets and quality. He recommended making a complete plan for rain water harvesting for more quality loco production as well as environment optimisation, increasing the number of ditches, connecting all the soak pits with drainage, quality action plan for management and energy consumption. He said that regular monitoring should be done by visiting the loco sheds regularly for problems arising there. He instructed the marketing department to continuously take feedback from customers and solve their technical problems quickly. He asked the stores department to make continuous efforts to ensure the availability of loco materials. Later, a marathon meeting related to production activities in diesel and electric locomotives was held. He enquired about the problems being faced in loco production and issued necessary guidelines for their solution. In the end, BLW GM Basudev Panda, while welcoming the chief guest in his address, assured him that in future too, BLW will achieve the target given by the Railway Board with high quality and ensured that BLW will move towards new heights every day. The meeting was conducted by Chief Design Engineer (Electric Loco) Anil Kumar Jain.

IAF personnel found hanging

Prayagraj (PNS): The body of a 24-year-old Indian Air Force personnel was found hanging in his room on Saturday morning. He was a resident of Rasulpur Talia under Handia police station area and was posted in Jalandhar, Punjab. On being informed about the incident, police reached the spot. The deceased was identified as Deepak Kumar Yadav. He was taken to a hospital where doctors pronounced him dead. Son of Anil Kumar Yadav, Deepak was the eldest amongst three siblings. Deepak had returned from his duty on March 2 and got married on March 11. No suicide note was recovered from the spot, nor has the family suspected foul play. Police said they have recorded the statement of the family members and will take action accordingly after the autopsy report is obtained.

Dastak Abhiyan to begin from April 10

PNS ■ VARANASI

For effective control and action against communicable diseases like dengue, malaria, filariasis and other mosquito-borne diseases, a special communicable disease control campaign will be run from April 1 to 30 and Dastak Abhiyan, which will be a part of the campaign, will run from April 10 to 30. For the success of the campaign, a meeting of the district task force was held in the Collectorate auditorium here on Friday in the presence of Chief Development Officer Himanshu Nagpal. Speaking at the meeting, the CDO said that in coordination with the Health and many other departments, this campaign should be made 100 per cent successful and for it, the district administration and all allied departments, including

the Health department, would have to take concrete steps to prevent dengue. He directed the Panchayati Raj and Rural Development department to ensure cleanliness, anti-larva spraying, fogging, repair of hand pumps, cleaning of drains and ponds and roads in mutual coordination apart from the work of cutting and pruning of bushes. He also directed the officers to launch special monitoring of high risk villages and areas so that vector density could be controlled. The CDO asked the nagar swasthya adhikari and the nagar nigam officers to publish measures for the prevention and control of infectious diseases and run cleanliness campaigns, especially in urban slum areas. Chief Medical Officer D Sandeep Chaudhary said that in this campaign, the empha-



CDO Himanshu Nagpal addressing a meeting of District Health Task Force

sis would be on identifying patients with symptoms of communicable diseases like dengue, malaria, meningitis etc as well as tuberculosis, leprosy, kala-azar and filariasis and under the Dastak Abhiyan, ASHA and Anganwadi workers would go door-to-door to make people aware about the communicable diseases. ACMOs, nagar swasthya adhikari, DyCMOs, DPO (ICDS), district malaria officer, block development officers, representatives of WHO and

UNICEF and others were present in the meeting. Meanwhile, at another meeting at same venue, Additional District Magistrate (City) Alok Verma instructed the Health department to make an action plan to deal with heat wave and for prevention of heatstroke during the upcoming summer season. Reviewing the progress of National Climate Change and Human Health Programme, an ambitious programme of the Government of India, the

ADM (City) said that due to climate change, the problems of heat wave, heatstroke, cold wave, excessive rainfall and drought had increased. He stressed the need for running a comprehensive prevention programme for checking the adverse effects of environmental conditions and air pollution on human health. The CMO said that the Health department had already started preparations to prevent this and during the summer season, doctors and paramedical staff would be informed about the symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases arising due to severe heat, possible heat wave (loo), heatstroke and air pollution. Nodal Officer and ACMO Dr Rajesh Prasad talked about timely information about diseases spreading in the changing weather and preventive measures.

Tributes paid to Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru



Tributes being paid to Shaheed Bhagat Singh and others on Shaheedi Diwas in Varanasi on Saturday

PNS ■ VARANASI

Floral tributes were paid to Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru on the occasion of the Martyrs' Day at a programme organised under the banner of All India Democratic Youth Organisation (AIDYO) at Shaheed Udyan Park here on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, AIDYO district in-charge Kamlesh Maurya said that Bhagat Singh and others were the great revolutionaries of the non-compromising stream of the freedom movement and even today the slogan Inquilab Zindabad and the name of Bhagat Singh infuse enthusiasm, courage and fearlessness in our veins. He said that Bhagat Singh and all his revolutionary comrades had declared through their organisation Hindustan Socialist Republican

Association that their aim was not only to get freedom from the slavery of the British but also to end the exploitation of one person by another person and one nation by another nation. They said that as long as a handful of people continued to control the labour and hard-earned money of the common people, whether they were Englishmen or Indians, the fight would continue as they wanted an end to capitalism. According to Kamlesh Maurya, even today the dreams of these martyrs remain unfulfilled. He appealed to the youth to take the responsibility of fulfilling the dreams of the martyrs. Rahul Raj, Anand, Govind Lal Gupta, Shivam Das, Surendra and others were also present. Meanwhile, under the auspices of Asha Trust, a blood donation camp was organised on the occasion of Martyrs' Day at the training centre of

the institute located at Bandha Kala, Kaithi. Rich tributes were paid to the revolutionaries by garlanding the pictures of Sardar Bhagat Singh, Shivram Hari Rajguru and Sukhdev Thapar who were hanged together in Lahore on March 23, 1931. Sixteen volunteers donated blood in the camp, including two first-time blood donors and two women. Asha Trust coordinator Vallabhacharya Pandey donated blood for the 104th time. The girls of Asha e-Library and Study Centre learned and understood about the process of blood donation. Dr Brijendra Raj, who is leading the 10-member team of Pt Deendayal Upadhyay Government Hospital, praised the efforts of the social organisation and said that there was no greater virtue than donating blood as by doing this one donated life to others.

Health workers of SSH exhibit cultural talents

PNS ■ VARANASI

The paramedical staff, including nurses, of Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH), the biggest hospital of Purvanchal and a part of the Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS), Banaras Hindu University (BHU), showcased their cultural talents, enthralling everyone in KN Udupa auditorium here on Friday evening. The occasion was the celebration of Hospital Day. They presented many entertaining programmes like dances based on Ganesh Vandana, Purnakatha apart from group and solo dances. They also presented group songs, and programmes of flute and other musical instruments. On the occasion, the retired employees were honoured. The employees who worked hard

and dedicatedly during the last 10 years were also felicitated. Earlier, the function was inaugurated by IMS-BHU Director Prof LPSN Shankhwar, who was the chief guest, and it was presided over by SSH Medical Superintendent Prof Kailash Kumar Gupta. The welcome address was given by Deputy Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer Dr Rashmi Ranjan while the vote of thanks was proposed by Nursing Officer Major Karanambike. On this occasion, the winners of various sports competitions held at Ruiya Sports Grounds recently were also awarded. The coordinator of the cultural programme and Chief Medical Officer in-charge of Employees Health Complex Prof SP John and others were also present.



North-Central Rly awarded



Prayagraj (PNS): North-Central Railway was awarded the 'Railway Minister Rajbhasha Trophy' as the second award for the best use and dissemination of Rajbhasha (Hindi) throughout the Indian Railways. The award was given to NCR by Chairperson and CEO of Railway Board Jaya Verma Sinha. Principal chief signal and telecommunication engineer Satendra Kumar received this award on behalf of NCR. It is noteworthy that

NCR had received the 'Railway Minister Rajbhasha Shield' as the first prize last year. Thus, NCR has set a record by receiving the ministry-level award for the second consecutive year. As a result of the patronage and guidance of General Manager Ravindra Goyal and the efforts of Chief Rajbhasha Officer and Principal Chief Safety Officer Manish Kumar Gupta, NCR is achieving new milestone everyday in the field of use and dissemination of official language.

'Nazul Land Ordinance anti-people'

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Terming the Nazul Land Ordinance "anti-people", former Congress MLA from Prayagraj and senior leader Anugrah Narayan Singh has written a letter to Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, requesting that it be withdrawn. Singh criticised the decision outlined in the ordinance, which prohibits the allocation of freehold Nazul land to individuals or private institutions and mandates the return of already deposited amounts at a 25% simple interest rate, as notified on March 7, 2024. Emphasising that such measures are unjust, he urged for their reversal in the interest of the public. Highlighting the potential repercussions, Singh noted that the ordinance could adversely impact court orders obtained by lessees or heirs under the previous policy, thereby infringing upon the principles of equality before the law and equal protection of laws enshrined in the Indian Constitution. In addition to the letter, Singh also addressed mediapersons on the issue, garnering support from fellow Congress leaders Shekhar Bahuguna, city president Pradeep Mishra

Anshuman, former corporator Ashok Singh, and Anand Ghildiyal, who echoed his opposition to the ordinance.

TWO DOCS REMOVED FROM MEDICAL BOARD AFTER SCUFFLE

Two doctors who scuffled over some trivial issue in the CMO office of Prayagraj were removed from the medical board here on Saturday. Both the doctors, posted in different hospitals, were part of the medical board for Divyagyan in the CMO office. Both had fought over a dispute while on duty on February 26. The matter escalated so much that police had to be called. One doctor thrashed the other by pinning him down. Due to the brawl, many Divyagyan left without getting the disability certificates from the hospital. The duo — Dr Sudhanshu Mandal and Dr Alok Pathak — were examining the Divyagyan. Meanwhile, a dispute ensued between the two over some issue and it led to a scuffle. Pathak suffered grievous injuries in the incident. He alleged that Mandal thrashed him by pinning him down. The issue was resolved after the intervention of some employees. Thereafter, both were removed from the medical board. Mandal is posted at Bhagwatpur hospital and Pathak at a health centre.

Congress has multiple accounts, just four attached not frozen: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP accused the Congress of having multiple bank accounts and just three-four of them have been attached, “not frozen”, for non-payment of tax dues. It has further slammed the Congress for making misleading statements on the issue sensing its “imminent” defeat in the Lok Sabha poll.

“These bank accounts have not been frozen, they are operational. You (Congress) can deposit money in these accounts and withdraw too, except Rs 125 crore, which has been attached by the Income Tax department due to the non-payment of dues as per Income Tax rules,” BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra said.

Referring to media reports, he said the Congress has about Rs 1,000 crore in its multiple bank accounts, opened with “multiple PAN” numbers in “violation” of its own party constitution. The Congress also has a fixed asset of worth Rs 500 crore, the BJP leader claimed. He said the Income Tax Department has attached three-four bank accounts of the Congress due to the non-payment of outstanding Rs 135 crore as per rules. He slammed senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his



claim that the party doesn't have funds to even book train tickets following the freezing of its accounts. “Rahul Gandhi is saying there is no money with the Congress to even buy train tickets while he is seen travelling by chartered plane every day,” the BJP leader charged and demanded the Congress leader give a “technical answer, instead of political” on the issue.

(Congress president) Mallikarjun Kharge, (former Congress president) Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi held a press conference in this connection and took anticipatory bail from the people's court by making wrong arguments in support of their claims seeing their imminent and miserable defeat in the Lok Sabha elections,” Patra told a

press conference at the party headquarters here. Patra also slammed the Congress for accusing the Modi government of depriving it of a level-playing field in the elections by “crippling” its finances. “How come police and dacoits would have the same level-playing field,” Patra said, taking a swipe at the main opposition party. “You want a level-playing field while playing in the field of corruption. This is not possible... The one who has committed the corruption will run and the other will chase to catch him,” the BJP spokesperson said, and listed the various alleged scam that took place during its rule. “You (Congress) talk about level-playing field. You should play on the pitch of development,” he added.

MEA summons German diplomat over remarks on arrest of Kejriwal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking exception to certain remarks by Germany regarding Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest in the liquor policy case, New Delhi on Saturday termed them as “interfering in our judicial process” and summoned Deputy Head of Mission of the Germany embassy here to lodge its protest. German deputy head of mission George Enzweiler was called by Ministry of External Affairs(MEA)here to register India's strong protest, it was learnt.

A MEA statement said “the German Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi was summoned today and conveyed India's strong protest on their Foreign Office Spokesperson's comments on our internal affairs. We see such remarks as interfering in our judicial process and undermining the independence of our judiciary. India is a vibrant and robust democracy with rule of law. As in all legal cases in the country, and elsewhere in the democratic world, law will take its own course in the instant matter. Biased assumptions made on this account are most unwarranted.” The complaint comes hours

after the German Foreign Ministry said they expected Kejriwal to get a fair and impartial trial as India is a democratic nation.

“We have taken note, India is a democratic country. We assume and expect that the standards relating to independence of Judiciary and basic democratic principles will also be applied in this case. Like anyone facing accusations, Mr Kejriwal is entitled to a fair and impartial trial, this includes he can make use of all available legal avenues without restrictions. The presumption of innocence is a central element of the rule of law and must apply to him,” the spokesperson of the German Foreign Ministry said earlier.

Kejriwal was on Thursday night arrested by the Enforcement Directorate(ED)in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. The arrest, the first of a serving chief minister, came hours after the Delhi High Court refused to grant protection to the AAP national convenor from any coercive action by the central probe agency. The case pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in formulating and executing the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped.

Modi pays tributes to icon Lohia on his 114th birth anniversary



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday paid tribute to socialist icon Ram Manohar Lohia on his 114th birth anniversary, saying he was a pillar of politics in independent India after playing an active role in the freedom movement. He will always be remembered for his robust socialist views, Modi said in a post in Hindi on X. Born in Uttar Pradesh, Lohia is credited with shaping the politics centred on the empowerment of traditionally deprived communities, playing a key role in boosting opposition forces against the then-dominant Congress. In another post in Hindi,

Modi paid homage to revolutionary freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, who were hanged by the British for their role in the Lahore conspiracy case. The nation is reverently remembering the sacrifice of these “true sons of Ma Bharti”, Modi said, paying tribute to the trio on 'Shaheed Diwas'. The three revolutionaries joined hands to oppose British rule, with Singh throwing a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly in April 1929. The bomb was not intended to kill anyone but to highlight their protest. They were hanged on this day in 1931. All three of them were less than 25 years old at the time of their deaths.

Rajnath to celebrate Holi with troops in Siachen



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh this year will play Holi with troops at world's highest battlefield Siachen Glacier on Sunday.

He said on Saturday he will visit Siachen area — the world's highest battlefield — on March 24 and celebrate Holi with the armed forces personnel deployed there. The festival of colour will be celebrated from March 24-25.

“Tomorrow, 24th March, I shall be in Siachen, the world's highest battlefield. Looking forward to celebrate Holi with the Armed Forces personnel deployed there,” Rajnath posted on X. The Siachen Glacier at the height of around 20,000 ft in the Karakoram range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world where the soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds. Avalanches and landslides are common at the glacier during the winters and temperatures can drop to as low as minus 60 degrees Celsius.

Preventive detention based on capricious exercise of powers must be nipped in bud: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that preventive detention is a draconian measure and any such move based on a capricious or routine exercise of powers must be nipped in the bud, the Supreme Court has set aside a Telangana High Court order rejecting a detenu's appeal. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Thursday said the essential concept of preventive detention is that the detention of a person is

not to punish him for something he has done but to prevent him from doing it. “Inability on the part of the state's police machinery to tackle the law-and-order situation should not be an excuse to invoke the jurisdiction of preventive detention,” the bench also comprising Justice J B Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra said. “Preventive detention being a draconian measure, any order of detention as a result of a capricious or routine exercise of powers must be nipped in

the bud. It must be struck down at the first available threshold,” the top court said. The appellant was arrested under the Telangana Prevention of Dangerous Activities Act of 1986 on the order of the Rachakonda police commissioner in Telangana on September 12 last year. Four days later, the Telangana High Court rejected the man's petition, assailing the detention order. The Supreme Court, in its recent order, said the law is well settled that the power



under any enactment relating to preventive detention has to be exercised with great care, caution and restraint. It said that the pendency of prosecution is no bar to an order of preventive detention and an order of preventive detention is also not a bar to prosecution. “We are of the view that mere registration of the two FIRs for the alleged offences of robbery etc. Could not have been made the basis to invoke the provisions of the Act 1986 for the purpose of preventively

detaining the appellant herein on the assumption that he is a “GOONDA” as defined under Section 2(g) of the Act 1986. “What has been alleged against the appellant detenu could be said to have raised the problems relating to law and order but we find it difficult to say that they impinged on public order,” the bench said. It added the court has time and again reiterated that to bring the activities of a person within the expression of “act-

ing in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order” the activities must be of such a nature that the ordinary laws cannot deal with them or prevent subversive activities affecting society. It said the advisory must take into consideration all aspects justifying the detention and its legality instead of confirming the “subjective satisfaction” of the detaining authorities. Setting aside the high court's order, the top court quashed the detention order.

Will take affirmative action to ensure safer Indian Ocean, says Navy chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Navy will take “affirmative action” to ensure a safer and more secure Indian Ocean Region, Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said here on Saturday while citing the anti-piracy operations undertaken by the naval force in the last 100 days.

The Indian Navy (IN)in the last few weeks has rescued over 100 people including 27 from Pakistan and 30 Iranians in its anti-piracy operations. The force also responded to 13 attack incidents during the last 100 days since ‘Operation Sankalp’ was launched to meet the challenge of piracy and drone attacks in the aftermath of Israel-Hamas conflict. Incidentally, Saturday marked the 100th day of the ongoing Operation Sankalp. This involved deployment of over 5,000 personnel at sea, over 450 ship days (with over 21 ships deployed) and 900 hours of flying by the maritime surveillance aircraft to address threats in the maritime domain, Navy chief said.

In response to a query during a press conference at the newly-built Nausena Bhawan here, he said “no Indian-flagged vessel” has been targeted by the Houthis at sea. Earlier in the day, INS Kolkata, carrying 35 pirates who were apprehended in a recent operation off the coast of Somalia, reached Mumbai, the Navy said. These pirates were handed over to the Mumbai police for further legal action under Indian laws, specifically the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022.

The Navy chief cited the dramatic mid-sea operation undertaken by the Navy along with the IAF that ended a three-month hijacking of a bulk carrier with the deployment of its warship INS Kolkata, long-endurance Sea Guardian drones, P-8I surveillance aircraft and air-dropping of elite MARCOS



commandos from a C-17 plane. The Navy seized the former Maltese-flagged vessel, rescued 17 hostages and captured 35 armed pirates in the nearly 40-hour operation around 2,600 km from the Indian coast that experts say was the first such successful takeover of a cargo ship from the Somali pirates in the last around seven years. In the last 10 years, this was the largest operation in which the Indian Navy caught 35 pirates, the Navy chief said. Admiral Kumar also said the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022, has been a “great enabler” for security forces, especially the Indian Navy, which is involved in anti-piracy operations. He had recently said the Navy has got a shot in the arm because of this legislation and underlined the deployment to counter-piracy attempts. Asked if this has elevated the image of the Indian Navy as the first responder, Admiral Kumar said, “Bharat is on the trajectory to becoming a great power.”

With “great power, comes great responsibility”, he said, while asserting that the “Indian Navy is determined to protect, preserve, promote and pursue our national interests in maritime domain”. Asked how long these operations will continue, Admiral Kumar replied, till the Indian Ocean is safe and secure. “Indian Navy will take affirmative action to ensure safer, more secure Indian Ocean Region.” So, whether it is Indian nationals or vessels, “we will ensure their protection”, the Navy chief said.

“We are the largest resident naval power in the Indian Ocean. Indian Navy's responsibility is to ensure the Indian Ocean Region remains safe, secure, and stable and we will ensure that it is free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order is maintained,” he added.

As regards the anti-piracy operations, based on the threat assessment in the region, the Indian Navy is conducting maritime security operations in three areas of operations viz Gulf of Aden and adjoining areas, Arabian Sea and off the East Coast of Somalia.

With the emergence of piracy in 2008, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has witnessed steady increase in the presence of warships from regional and extra regional navies, operating independently or under the ambit of various Multi-National constructs. In the present security scenario, the Indian Navy has taken the ‘lead’ in responding to security situations arising out of myriad of threats in the region.

In the ongoing endeavour since December 2023, Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) of the Indian Navy at Gurugram, has played a transformative role as a principal hub for enabling information exchange in IOR. In addition, coordinated missions with IAF and national agencies during this period has also highlighted the synergy and inter-operability of the Services.

The calibrated response, ingenuity and unflinching resolve displayed by the Indian Navy during the progress of ongoing maritime security operations under the aegis of ‘Op Sankalp’ has garnered international acclaim by virtue of the effects generated in safeguarding India's maritime interests, countering maritime threats, thwarting the resurgence of piracy and significantly denting narcotics trade in the IOR.

NCERT to release new syllabus for Classes 3 to 6

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will release a new syllabus and textbooks for Classes 3 to 6 while there will be no change in the curriculum and textbooks for other grades for the academic year 2024-25 commencing from April 1, according to CBSE officials. The NCERT has informed the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) that new syllabi and textbooks for classes 3 and 6 are currently under development and will soon be released, the CBSE said in a communication sent to affiliated schools.

“Consequently, schools are advised to follow these new syllabi and textbooks for classes 3 and 6 in place of textbooks published by NCERT till the



year 2023,” said Joseph Emmanuel, Director (Academics), CBSE. “Additionally, a bridge course for class 6, and concise guidelines for class 3 are being developed by the NCERT for facilitating a seamless transition for students to new pedagogical practices and areas of study aligned with new curriculum

framework, 2023. These resources will be disseminated to all the schools online once they are received from NCERT. “The Board will also organize capacity-building programs for school heads and Teachers to orient them with the new teaching learning perspectives as envisioned in NEP-2020,” he added in the letter.

In a revision of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) after 18 years, the Ministry of Education had last year notified the changes. The NCF had undergone four revisions in the past - in 1975, 1988, 2000, and 2005.

The council is in process of preparing new school textbooks in line with the new national curriculum framework for school education (NCF-SE) 2023 as a part of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. “There will be no change in the Curriculum and textbooks for other classes for the academic year 2024-25 commencing from April 1, 2024,” he said. The NCF for the foundational stage (FS) was launched by the Ministry of Education in 2022 and according to the curriculum framework, the NCERT developed and collected the learning-teaching material

(LTM). Toys, puzzles, puppetry, posters, flash cards, worksheets and attractive storybooks are part of the “Jaadui Pitara” launched by the Ministry of Education for learning at the foundational stage. In 2022, the NCERT had rationalised the syllabi of classes 6 to 12 to “reduce the content load” on students in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the changes, reflected in new textbooks published last year, the council had removed chapters on Mughal courts, 2002 Gujarat riots, cold war, references of Mughal emperors, and Emergency and periodic table. While the council maintained there was no selective omission of topics, the rationalisation exercise had created a political controversy with leaders from opposition parties alleging the ruling dispensation was “erasing history”.

India to help global wildlife body combat illegal trade of endangered species

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As wildlife traffickers migrate to online platforms in the digital age, exploiting the anonymity and its reach, countries across the world including India have started sharing their best practices and strategies to help the global wildlife body Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) frame universal guidelines, a first to combat the illegal trade of endangered species on e-commerce platforms and social media.

“The goal is to compile a comprehensive set of guidelines aimed at curbing the illegal trade of endangered species on e-commerce platforms and social media. The CITES in its recent order On March 13, has urged member nations to contribute their expertise and experiences in combating wildlife crime in the online space. “This includes sharing successful legislative measures, collaborative initiatives, technological

solutions, and model domestic measures for addressing wildlife crime linked to the internet. Additionally, methodologies used by agencies to regulate legal commerce and combat illegal trade of CITES species online are also requested,” said an official from the Union Environment Ministry. Through this collective effort, CITES intends to develop a robust framework that can be universally adopted to address the challenges posed by wildlife trafficking on the internet. By leveraging the knowledge and resources of its diverse membership, CITES aims to strengthen global efforts in protecting endangered species in the digital age.

The order from the Geneva-based body says, “Parties are invited to submit information to the Secretariat on best practices for addressing wildlife crime linked to the Internet... submit information on best practices and model domestic measures for addressing wildlife crime linked to the Internet.. to regu-

late legal commerce and combat illegal trade of CITES species via the Internet. “The last day for submission is May 15, 2024. With the internet user population reaching nearly 500 million in India, cyber-crime has become a mounting concern for the authorities. In fact, a report titled “Caught in the web: Wildlife trade on the internet” by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) last year shows that large quantities of wildlife products and live animals are being traded illegally and is pushing the world's most endangered species to the brink of extinction. Through the Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online, IFAW, in collaboration with World Wildlife Fund and TRAFFIC, 47 global e-commerce and social media companies have now enacted voluntary restrictions on the trade of imperiled wildlife, as well as wildlife parts and products, on their platforms, according to a report.

Congress reiterates demand for SC monitored SIT probe into electoral bonds issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday reiterated its demand for a Supreme Court-monitored SIT probe into the electoral bonds issue, alleging that the “opaque scheme” ensured that prepaid, postpaid and even post-raid bribes could be routed through the banking channel.

At a press conference, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that the person who gave a guarantee of ‘bringing back black money’, instead “legalized corruption and is desperately trying to hide it”. The opposition party also released a “python code” due to which, it claimed, it took less than 15 seconds to match the donors with political parties, “exposing the brazen and

ridiculous claim of the SBI that it would take months to provide the data asked by the Supreme Court”. The Congress has highlighted four patterns of “blatant corruption” in the “electoral bonds scam -- Chanda Do, Dhandha Lo i.e. Prepaid Bribe; Theka Lo, Rishvat Do i.e. Postpaid Bribe; Hafta Vasooli i.e. Extortion/Post-raid Bribe; Farzi Company i.e. Shell Companies”, he said. Ramesh alleged that the analysis using the code has brought to light that 38 corporate groups which have got 179 major contracts and projects approvals from the central or BJP state governments have donated electoral bonds. These companies have got a total worth of Rs 3.8 lakh crore in projects and contracts, in exchange for Rs 2,004 crore in electoral bonds donations to the BJP, Ramesh claimed.

Messages of support pour in for Kate Middleton after cancer diagnosis

PTI ■ LONDON

Messages of support wishing Britain's Princess of Wales, Kate Middleton, a speedy recovery have been pouring in from around the world on Saturday after the 42-year-old revealed she is in the early stages of preventative chemotherapy after being diagnosed with cancer. In an emotional personal video message released by Kensington Palace on Friday, the mother of Princes George, 10, and Louis, 5, and Princess Charlotte, 8, said her young family had been absorbing the news since the "huge shock" of the cancer diagnosis and requested for "space and privacy" as she completes her treatment. Her father-in-law, King Charles III who is also undergoing

treatment for cancer, praised her for her "courage in speaking as she did". "Following their time in hospital together, His Majesty has remained in the closest contact with his beloved daughter-in-law throughout the past weeks. Both Their Majesties [Charles and Camilla] will continue to offer their love and support to the whole family through this difficult time," Buckingham Palace said in a statement. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also referenced Kate's "tremendous bravery" and condemned the "intense scrutiny" she had been subjected to on social media with reference to her recovery since her abdominal surgery in January. "When it comes to matters of health, like everyone else, she must be afforded the privacy to

focus on her treatment and with her loving family. I know I speak for the whole country in wishing her a full and speedy recovery and look forward to seeing her back in action when she's ready," said Sunak in a statement posted on X. Opposition Labour Party Leader said the Princess has "the love and support of not just her whole family, but the whole nation too" during this "distressing time". From around the world, US President Joe Biden wrote on X that he and his wife Jill "join millions around the world in praying for your full recovery, Princess Kate". Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex who are based in California, shared a message of support for their sister-in-law in a state-



ment, saying: "We wish health and healing for Kate and the family, and hope they are able to do so privately and in peace." French President Emmanuel Macron wrote on X: "In this difficult period you are going through, Brigitte and I wish you

a full recovery. "Your strength and resilience inspire us all." Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wrote: "On behalf of Canadians, I'm sending my support as she undergoes treatment. We're all wishing her a swift recovery."

Hashtags such as "WeLoveYouCatherine" and "GetWellSoonCatherine" were trending social media soon after the video message as celebrities, cancer survivors and medics all added to the messages of support. Catherine, Princess of Wales, was last seen in public at Christmas time last year and was recently filmed by a member of the public out shopping with husband, Prince William, near their home in Windsor. "Having William by my side is a great source of comfort and reassurance too," said Kate in her message, which was recorded earlier this week by BBC Studios. Seated on a garden bench in Windsor, the Princess' voice cracked in places as she shared that when she underwent

"major abdominal surgery" in London in January, it was thought that her condition was non-cancerous. "However, tests after the operation found cancer had been present. My medical team therefore advised that I should undergo a course of preventative chemotherapy and I am now in the early stages of that treatment," she said. The future Queen of England shared that the news had come as a huge shock and she and Prince William had been doing everything they can to process and manage this privately. "As you can imagine, this has taken time. It has taken me time to recover from major surgery in order to start my treatment. But, most importantly, it has taken us time to explain everything to George, Charlotte and

Louis in a way that is appropriate for them, and to reassure them that I am going to be ok," she said on a note of optimism. "For everyone facing this disease, in whatever form, please do not lose faith or hope. You are not alone," she added. Her palace said the Princess is in "good spirits" and focused on her recovery and is "hugely grateful" to the medical team for the care they are providing to her. "We will not be sharing any further private medical information. The Princess has a right to medical privacy, as we all do," Kensington Palace said. Kate started her course of preventative chemotherapy in late February and will be focussed on "making a full recovery" before announcing a date to return to her public duties.

Senate passes USD 1.2 trillion funding package in early morning vote

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Senate passed a USD 1.2 trillion package of spending bills in the early morning hours on Saturday, a long overdue action nearly six months into the budget year that will push any threats of a government shutdown to the fall. The bill now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law. The vote was 74-24. It came after funding had expired for the agencies at midnight, but the White House sent out a notice shortly after the deadline announcing the Office of Management and Budget had ceased shutdown preparations because there was a high degree of confidence that Congress would pass the legislation and the president would sign it on Saturday. "Because obligations of federal funds are incurred and tracked on a daily basis, agencies will not shut down and may continue their normal operations," the White House statement said. Prospects for a short-term government shutdown had appeared to grow Friday evening after Republicans and Democrats battled over pro-

posed amendments to the bill. Any successful amendments to the bill would have sent the legislation back to the House, which had already left town for a two-week recess. But shortly before midnight Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced a breakthrough. "It's been a very long and difficult day, but we have just reached an agreement to complete the job of funding the government," Schumer said. "It is good for the country that we have reached this bipartisan deal. It wasn't easy, but tonight our persistence has been worth it." While Congress has already approved money for Veterans Affairs, Interior, Agriculture and other agencies, the bill approved this week is much larger, providing funding for the Defence, Homeland Security and State departments and other aspects of general government. The House passed the bill Friday morning by a vote of 286-134, narrowly gaining the two-thirds majority needed for approval. More than 70 per cent of the money would go to defence.

The vote tally in the House reflected anger among Republicans over the content of the package and the speed with which it was brought to a vote. House Speaker Mike Johnson brought the measure to the floor even though a majority of Republicans ended up voting against it. He said afterward that the bill "represents the best achievable outcome in a divided government". In sign of the conservative frustration, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., initiated an effort to oust Johnson as the House began the vote but held off on further action until the House returns in two weeks. It's the same tool that was used last year to remove the last Republican speaker, Kevin McCarthy of California. The vote breakdown showed 101 Republicans voting for the bill and 112 voting against it. Meanwhile, 185 Democrats voted for the bill and 22 against. Rep. Kay Granger, the Republican chair of the House Appropriations Committee that helped draft the package, stepped down from that role after the vote. She said she would stay on the committee to

India provides more grants to build houses in Sri Lanka town

PTI ■ COLOMBO

India has signed an additional grant of Sri Lanka Rupees 150 million to build houses and infrastructure facilities in the Buddhist sacred town of Anuradhapura, the Indian High Commission has said. With this, the Indian government's total commitment to the project currently stands at SLR 450 million for the construction of houses and infrastructure facilities in Sobitha Thero village of Anuradhapura. The late Sobhitha Thero was an iconic Buddhist monk in the island nation's good governance movement. "Responding to the drastic changes in the economic landscape of Sri Lanka, the Government of India decided to infuse additional funds into nine ongoing grant projects to expeditiously complete these projects, while also minimising the impact of the sharp rise in the cost of construction materials on the original scope of projects. The extent of additional funds is up to 50 per cent of the original commitment by GOI in each of the nine projects," the Indian High Commission said.

Zardari urges political parties to unite to tackle challenges faced by Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari on Saturday urged all political parties to set aside their differences to tackle the multiple problems faced by the cash-strapped country amidst increasing political polarisation and a spike in terror attacks. Zardari was addressing the 84th Pakistan Day celebrations and army parade held at the Parade Ground area here. The day marks the adoption of the historic Lahore Resolution on this day in 1940 which provided a framework for the realisation of the goal of a separate homeland for Muslims of South Asia. Saudi Defence Minister Khalid Bin Salman was the guest of honour on the occasion. Zardari inspected the parade of tri-services and admired the preparedness of the forces. He also used the occasion to urge for building internal consensus while shunning political differences. "I request all political parties that they should set aside all their political issues and work

for the development and prosperity of the country," Zardari, who was elected as President earlier this month, said. Zardari was referring to the protest by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) against the alleged rigging in the election and imprisonment of its leader Imran Khan. Zardari said that Pakistan was facing multiple challenges but the newly-elected government would address the challenges faced by the country. "I am happy that a democratic government has been set up after elections. Now it is our responsibility to tackle all challenges. I believe that as we did in the past, we will tackle all problems and we will take the country out of the current troubles," he said. He said Pakistani forces were strong enough to face the threat and defend the country, adding that the success of Pakistan against terrorism has been acknowledged by the world. The president said the country had already set up the Special Investment Facilitation Centre (SIFC), including top civil and military leadership, to make



key decisions regarding developing important sectors like mining, agriculture, and information technology. Zardari said that Pakistan being a peaceful nuclear state was eager to have good ties with all neighbours but warned that it would not tolerate any kind of aggression. "We will not tolerate any kind of effort by terrorists or any group to destabilise our country," he said, apparently referring to the spike in terror attacks in the country and tensions with neighbouring Afghanistan. The president termed the unresolved issue of Kashmir as the main source of instability in the region and urged the dispute should be resolved according to the UN resolutions.

"The people of Pakistan will always stand by Kashmiris in their struggle and will always support them," he said, reiterating Islamabad's stated stand. India has firmly told Pakistan that Jammu and Kashmir will always be an integral and inalienable part of the country. Zardari also demanded an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and urged for the opening of a humanitarian corridor to provide timely support to the besieged people of Gaza. The president especially thanked China, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Turkiye for providing support to debt-trapped Pakistan in difficult times. The main feature of the day was the grand military parade in Islamabad where contingents of three armed forces and other security forces conducted a march past while fighter planes performed aerobatic maneuvers. Separately, Zardari, who became Pakistan's president for a second time, stressed the nation to participate in the nation-building process actively, embracing the values of hard work, integrity, and compassion.

Russia launches sweeping attack on Ukraine's power sector

AP ■ KYIV

Russia unleashed one of its most devastating attacks against Ukraine's electric sector on Friday, an aerial assault it said was retaliation for recent strikes inside Russia and which could signal an escalation of the war just days after President Vladimir Putin cemented his grip on power in a preordained election. Many Ukrainians were plunged into darkness across several cities, at least five people were killed, and damage to the country's largest hydroelectric plant briefly cut off power to a nuclear plant that has been a safety risk throughout the war. Russia fired off more than 60 exploding drones and 90 missiles in what Ukrainian officials described as the most brutal attack against its energy infrastructure since the full-scale war began in early 2022. Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, sustained the most damage, officials said, and the

attack came a day after Russia had fired 31 missiles into the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been urging Western allies for weeks to provide it with additional air-defense systems and ammunition, a period in which \$60 billion in US aid has been held up by divisions in Congress. "With Russian missiles, there are no delays, like with aid packages to our state," Zelenskyy said. "It is important to understand the cost of delays and postponed decisions." Russia's defence ministry called Friday attacks "strikes of retribution". Ukraine has increased shelling of Russia's Belgorod region along its northeast border and has launched drone strikes targeting Russian oil refineries and other energy facilities. Ukraine's latest strike inside Russia on Friday killed one and injured at least three, according to local officials.

Putin has described Ukrainian attacks on Belgorod and other regions as an effort to frighten residents and derail the highly orchestrated election that ended Sunday. And he vowed to strike back. The day after he declared victory, Putin said Russia would seek to create a buffer zone inside eastern Ukraine to help protect against long-range strikes and cross-border raids. Russia has made progress on the battlefield in recent months against exhausted Ukrainian troops struggling with a shortage of manpower and ammunition along the front line that stretches over 1,000 km (620 miles). When Putin invaded in 2022, he called it a "special military operation," and his officials have mostly eschewed the word "war". But in a change of rhetoric Friday that may herald a new escalation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a Russian newspaper that "when the collective West

became a participant in this on the side of Ukraine, for us it already became a war". In the winter of 2022-23, Russia targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, causing frequent blackouts across the country. Many in Ukraine and the West expected that Russia might repeat this strategy this winter, but Russia instead focused its strikes on Ukraine's defence industries. While launching the strikes, Russia has combined sophisticated ballistic and cruise missiles with waves of cheap Iranian-made Shahed drones in a bid to oversaturate and weaken Ukrainian air defences. Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, head of the national utility Ukrenergo, described Friday's barrage as the largest assault on Ukraine's energy infrastructure since the full-scale war began. "This attack was especially dangerous because the adversary combined different means of attack, kamikaze drones, ballistic and cruise missiles," he said.

Chinese coast guard blasts Philippine boat with water cannon in disputed sea

AP ■ MANILA

Two Chinese coast guard ships fired at a Philippine supply boat with water cannon on Saturday in the latest confrontation near a disputed South China Sea shoal, causing heavy damage to the wooden vessel, Philippine officials said. It was not immediately clear if the Philippine navy crew was injured, or whether their damaged boat, the Unaizah May 4, managed to maneuver past the Chinese coast guard blockade to deliver supplies to Philippine forces manning a territorial outpost in the nearby Second Thomas Shoal. It's the second time this month the Unaizah May 4 has been damaged during an attempt to resupply the outpost. The shoal has been occupied by a small contingent of Philippine navy personnel on a marooned warship since the late 1990s, but has recently been surrounded by Chinese coast guard and suspected militia



vessels in an increasingly tense territorial standoff. Aside from China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei also have overlapping claims in the resource-rich and busy waterway, a key global trade route. The United States lays no claims to the strategic waters but has deployed Navy ships and fighter jets in what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations, which have been criticised by China. A Philippine coast guard ship that was escorting the Unaizah May 4 was also blocked and surrounded by a Chinese coast guard ship and two suspected militia vessels, Philippine coast guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela said. The escort ship, BRP Cabra, was "isolated from the resupply boat due to the irresponsible and provocative behaviour of the Chinese maritime forces",

added by China. A Philippine coast guard ship that was escorting the Unaizah May 4 was also blocked and surrounded by a Chinese coast guard ship and two suspected militia vessels, Philippine coast guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela said. The escort ship, BRP Cabra, was "isolated from the resupply boat due to the irresponsible and provocative behaviour of the Chinese maritime forces",

Tarriela said, adding that the Chinese forces were disregarding international regulations aimed at preventing collisions at sea. Video released by the Philippine military shows two Chinese coast guard ships hitting a smaller wooden-hulled boat with high-pressure water cannon sprays at close range, causing the boat to shift in the high seas. The Philippine military said without elaborating that its chartered boat "sustained significant damage". There was no immediate statement from Chinese officials in Manila or in Beijing. Chinese coast guard previously blasted the Unaizah May 4 with high-pressure water cannon blasts in a confrontation near the Second Thomas Shoal on March 5, shattering its windshield and slightly injuring a Filipino admiral and four of his men with glass shards and splinters of debris.

For Haitian diaspora, gang violence back home dims hope for eventual return

AP ■ TIJUANA (MEXICO)

When Vivianne Petit Frere fled her native Haiti for Brazil in 2019 and later walked through the Panamanian jungle and on to Mexico, where she opened a restaurant, she always believed she would eventually return home. Until now. With gang violence wracking Haiti, many of the more than 1 million who have left the Caribbean nation feel helpless when they call terrified family members who can't leave because airports are closed and crossing to the United States by sea is too risky. "Before, you could say things were OK. I knew things weren't OK, but I had faith, hope that it would change one day. We

lost faith. There is no path forward because of the gangs," Petit Frere, 36, said at a table of the restaurant she runs in downtown Tijuana with her husband, who also fled Haiti. The escalating unrest has reverberated among those who left Haiti for Brazil, Chile, Mexico and the United States. As their hopes of returning home dim, decisions lie ahead on how the US responds to the turmoil in the country long plagued by political upheaval, widespread poverty and natural disasters. A devastating earthquake in 2010 sent many Haitians to Brazil and Chile. When Brazil's economy tanked in 2016, Haitians were one of the first nationalities to make the perilous trek through Panama's Darien Gap to the United

States, some crossing the border from Tijuana to San Diego and settling in the US with others who came before them, largely in Miami, New York and Boston. Haitian Bridge Alliance has been contacting immigrants in the United States and Canada and finding many have family trapped in gang warfare, said Guerline Jozef, the advocacy group's executive director, whose childhood neighbourhood in Port-au-Prince was ravaged in attacks. Her cousin was killed by gangs last year. "It's not something that we're reading on the news. It's something that happened to my own family and that's the reality for the majority of people in the diaspora. You start hearing the realities of my cousin, my

mom, my sister, my dad, and that becomes very personal," Jozef said. Standing on a street corner in Miami's "Little Haiti," security guard Jude Guillalime said he speaks often with his two children in Haiti, who recently went two days without food or water. They ask if they can join him in Florida. He tells them not to worry. "Everything is bad, terrible," said Guillalime, 47, a legal resident in the United States who applied this year for his children to come to Florida. The US is the top destination for Haitian migrants, and President Joe Biden's carrot-and-stick approach to immigration — promoting new and expanded legal pathways while discouraging illegal crossings — has largely worked as intended with Haitians, despite critics of his

unprecedented use of "parole" authority to grant entry on humanitarian grounds. About 151,000 Haitians arrived at a US airport after applying online with a financial sponsor through February, an option that is also available to Cubans, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans. Illegal land crossings from Mexico by Haitians plunged as more entered on two-year parole with eligibility to work. Haitians accounted for only 0.02 per cent of 140,000 Border Patrol arrests in February. The drop in illegal crossings has led to fewer deportation flights to Haiti, about one a month over the past year, according to Witness at the Border, an advocacy group that tracks flight data. That's down from daily flights in the immediate aftermath of an encamp-

ment of 16,000 largely Haitian migrants that formed in the small Texas border town of Del Rio in 2021. The administration also renewed and expanded Temporary Protected Status for about 150,000 Haitians under a law that allows people already in the United States to remain if conditions created by natural disaster or civil strife are considered unsafe. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas must decide whether to renew Temporary Protected Status before it expires this year. Last week, the Coast Guard returned 65 refugees to Haiti after stopping them near the Bahamas, and the Homeland Security Department said its current policy to return migrants intercepted at sea will continue. "At this time, irregular migration

flows through the Caribbean remain low," the department said in a statement. Tijuana was a stop for thousands of Haitians who arrived in 2016 to wait for then-President Barack Obama to grant entry on parole. Many bided time in a hard-scrabble neighbourhood, renamed "Little Haiti," while working in car washes, restaurants and factories that produce goods for export to the United States. Since then, Haitians have spread out across the city and obtained legal status in Mexico, where Haitians are one of the largest nationalities seeking asylum and their children are Mexican citizens by birthright. Petit Frere planned to live in the United States but met her husband during her second week in Tijuana. The couple had a son in

Mexico, making all three Mexican citizens. "I came with my American dream, but Tijuana claimed me," Petit Frere said with a laugh as cooks worked from a menu that includes polenta with black beans and fried fish with banana. An evangelical Christian church two blocks away offers Sunday services in Creole, a sign of how Haitian culture has permeated the city. Many Haitians stay in Mexican border cities only a short time, perhaps a night or two at hotels near a border crossing after getting an appointment on the CBP One online appointment app that was introduced last year. The app is open to all nationalities, but location software requires being in Mexico City or somewhere north to apply.

India has robust regulatory for seafood units: Commerce Ministry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has a robust regulatory framework for its 548 seafood units and it has set up world-class facilities in the fish processing sector, which are regularly inspected and monitored by various government agencies, the commerce ministry said on Saturday.

The statement comes in the backdrop of some reports alleging food safety and bad labour conditions in the Indian shrimp industry.

It said that all its units are registered with MPEDA (Marine Products Export Development Authority) and FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) and approved by EIC (export inspection council) as mandated by the law.

Additionally, 46 independent pre-processing units are registered by the authority.

The shrimp hatcheries and aquaculture farms are registered with the Coastal Aquaculture Authority (CAA) and State Fisheries Departments based on their respective locations.

MPEDA also enrolls aquafarms to bolster the traceability system of aquaculture products and adhere to national and international regulatory provisions, including Seafood Import Monitoring Programme (SIMP) of the US.

“The production and processing systems are regularly monitored by regulatory agencies in India and are subjected to audits by inspectors of the US FDA (Food and Drug Administration), European Commission, GAC of China, Export Inspection Agency, MPEDA, etc., in addition to scores of private and certification audits,” it said.

It added that the pre-processing and processing units follow a HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point)-based food safety management system as per the US Code of Federal Regulations.

It also said that to promote safety of products, the usage of pharmacologically active substances has been banned in aquaculture since 2002.

The national regulations and monitoring measures such as the

National Residue Control Plan, ELISA screening labs, in-house labs, and pre-export checks ensure that the food safety hazards, including antibiotic residues, do not enter the product value chain and pose any consumer health risk.

“The inter-departmental task forces in states monitor hatcheries, farms, aquaculture input shops and feed mills and punish the violators to curtail the sale and usage of unauthorized inputs, including banned antibiotics in the aquaculture sector,” it added.

The ministry said that measures have been taken to impose a ban on the usage of the two antibiotics Chloramphenicol and Nitrofurin in all food-producing animal systems.

MPEDA has also initiated a certification scheme, Shaphari, for the production of quality produce.

The ministry said that to maintain excellent levels of hygiene and safety, all the technicians and workers in the pre-processing and processing units, along with the farmers, technicians, and workers in hatcheries and farms, receive extensive training on sanitary



practices, food safety hazards, and good management practices.

These training programmes are conducted by various agencies, including MPEDA, EIAs (export inspection agencies), NaCSA (National Centre for Sustainable Aquaculture), state departments, and ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research) institutes, underscoring the commitment to

the welfare of the workers and the quality of the products.

Further, it said that any entity engaged in business activity is licensed by the local governing body and is obliged to follow the labour welfare laws prescribed by the Union and state governments.

“The seafood pre-processing and processing units maintain all records related to processing,

quality checks, employee training, and other requirements of the applicable regulations and rules,” it said, adding that they periodically provide the services of a registered medical practitioner to address workers’ health issues.

It added that the State Labour Department regularly monitors the activities of both organised and unorganised sectors involved in aquaculture and fish processing.

“It takes appropriate action to protect the interest and welfare of the labourers. India is steadfast in its commitment to producing quality seafood products free from health hazards,” the ministry said.

This commitment is upheld through the adoption of sustainable practices to meet domestic and international market demand, it said, adding, India has also established world-class facilities in the fish processing sector, which are regularly inspected and monitored by various government agencies.

“We strongly refute the allegations levelled against the Indian shrimp farming and processing sector,” it said.

India achieved record exports of seafood both in terms of volume and value (both USD and Rupee) by shipping 17,35,286 tonnes of seafood worth Rs 63,969.14 crore (USD 8.09 billion) during the 2022-23 fiscal.

During FY23, the export improved in quantity terms by 26.73 per cent, in rupee terms by 11.08 per cent, in USD terms by 4.31 per cent.

Frozen shrimp remained the major export item in terms of both quantity and value while the US and China turned out to be the major importers of India’s seafood.

Frozen shrimp, which earned Rs 43,135.58 crore (USD 5,481.63 million), retained its position as the most significant item in the basket of seafood exports.

Frozen shrimp accounted for a share of 40.98 per cent in quantity and 67.72 per cent of the total USD earnings.

The overall export of frozen shrimps during 2022-23 was pegged at 7,11,099 tonnes.

The US imported 2,75,662 tonnes of frozen shrimp, followed by China at 1,45,743 tonnes.



Government allows UAE Adnoc to export oil from Indian strategic storage

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has allowed Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) to export crude oil it has stored in underground strategic storages at Mangalore to give operational flexibility to the foreign firm, an order of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said on Saturday.

At present, crude oil, which is the raw material for producing fuels like petrol and diesel, is not allowed to be exported except through the state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).

In an order, the ministry said the condition of export being allowed only through IOC will continue, but “AMI (Adnoc Marketing International (India) RSC Limited India) is exempted from STE conditions and is allowed to re-export crude oil from their commercial stockpile at Mangalore strategic petroleum reserve, at their own cost”.

India, the world’s third-biggest oil importer and consumer, imports over 85 per cent of its

oil needs and has built strategic storages at three locations to store up to 5.33 million tonnes of oil as insurance against any supply disruption.

The storage at Visakhapatnam (1.33 million tonnes) in Andhra Pradesh, Mangalore (1.5 million tonnes), and Padur (2.5 million tonnes) in Karnataka can meet about 9 days of national demand.

The Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Ltd has leased half of the 1.5 million tonne capacity in Mangalore storage to Adnoc. The remaining was retained by ISPR.

The idea behind leasing the storage to foreign companies was that they could store oil for sale to domestic refiners. But in case of an emergency, India held the first right on oil usage.

Adnoc had sought permission for the export of its oil from the cavern in cases where it could not find buyers in Indian refiners.

After the notification, Adnoc can now export oil stored in the Mangalore storage.

Amazon India revises seller fee structures

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce major Amazon on Saturday said it is revising its seller fees on account of inflation and interest rates, as well as to match the industry-prevalent fee structures.

Starting April 7, Amazon.in is revising its fee structure, including referral fees, closing fees, and weight handling fees besides other ancillary fee heads, for sellers on its marketplace.

“These revisions take into consideration various macroeconomic factors such as inflation, interest rates, operational costs etc, and align with industry-prevalent fee patterns,” the company said.

Referral fees will be reduced



in categories like apparel, bedsheets, cushion covers, and dinnerware, and increased in categories like business and scientific supplies, chimneys, laptop sleeves and bags, and tires, a company statement said.

Closing Fee has been increased by Rs 3 for average selling price of more than Rs

1,000. Weight handling fee has been increased by Rs 2, in line with inflationary increase in shipping costs, it said.

“We recognise seller fees and incentives as strong long-term levers that will help sustain a robust thriving marketplace, focused on digitising small and medium businesses in the country and enabling them to

grow into strong national brands.

“These changes reflect our commitment to make Amazon.in one of the most preferred marketplaces for selling in India and creating right choices for sellers to grow efficiently,” says an Amazon India spokesperson.

The other fee heads include technology fees, and pick and pack fees. Zero Fee fulfilment policy has been removed, due to which weight handling shipping fee will now be charged for standard-sized shipments priced over Rs 20,000 effective from April 30, 2024.

Amazon said it will apply 18 per cent GST (goods and services tax) to all the fee types listed.



World Cooperation Economic Forum aims to create 500 campus cooperatives in universities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Cooperation Economic Forum is targeting to establish 500 campus cooperatives in universities across the country to attract youth to this movement.

According to a statement on Saturday, World Cooperation Economic Forum (WCopEF), along with the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) and Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI), will work to establish and promote ‘Campus Cooperative’ across various universities in the country.

Under the new initiative, the forum said that it is planning to set up a ‘Campus Cooperative’ at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in the national capital.

“There is a much greater emphasis on the cooperative sector across the country, but the participation of youths holds the key to taking the movement forward,” Dileep Sanghani, Founder of WCopEF, said.

“Campus Cooperative could just be the right approach to attract talented youths to the

sector and propel it to greater heights,” said Sanghani, who is also the Chairman of IFFCO, and President of NCUI.

Binod Anand, Executive President of WCopEF, said, “The whole idea behind the move is to make university campuses self-sufficient as much as possible.”

The campus cooperatives can play a huge role in fulfilling the requirements of students for various products, including food items.

“While it will provide an opportunity for students to learn the skills of businesses as well as leadership, it will also provide direct access to farmers by eliminating middlemen,” said Anand, who is also a member of the government-constituted panel to strengthen the minimum support price (MSP) system.

Leading cooperative sector experts have come together to form the WCopEF, which endeavours to promote cooperative movement.

The forum would also raise issues and concerns of the sector with the governments and other stakeholders around the globe.

AFTER KEJRIWAL...

From Page 1

“We have approached the EC. The Central government has closed all access to AAP head office at ITO, that too in Model Code of Conduct,” he said.

In a Press conference, Bharadwaj said the EC should act as a neutral institution and ensure strict action against police officers.

The AAP office at DDU Marg near ITO in central Delhi was also blocked on Friday during a protest by party leaders and volunteers at the BJP headquarters, just a few metres ahead of it, against the arrest of Kejriwal.

Delhi CM’s wife Sunita Kejriwal, a former IRS officer, in perhaps her first such public appearance, read out his message sent from the ED custody on Saturday in which the AAP chief said he cannot be kept behind bars for long and he will return soon to fulfil his promises to the people.

In a message from the ED’s custody, the Delhi CM said no bar can keep him inside and he will soon return.

The video statement by Sunita, a former IRS officer who has so far maintained a distance from active politics, was streamed live by the AAP, a day after a court here

remanded Kejriwal in ED custody till March 28 “for his detailed and sustained interrogation” regarding his role in the excise policy scam.

“Whether inside or outside, every moment of my life is dedicated to serving the country. Every drop of my blood is dedicated to the country,” Kejriwal was quoted as saying by his wife.

BJP’s IT department head Amit Malviya took a swipe at Sunita over her remarks that “there are several forces within and outside India that are weakening the country.”

“Agree with her completely. She may want to explain what is AAP MP Raghav Chadha doing with British Labour MP Preet K Gill, who openly advocates K separatism, mobilises funds for Ks in the UK, funds violent protests outside India House in London, constantly posts anti-India, anti-Modi, anti-Hindu stuff on her social media accounts?” Malviya posted on X.

Kejriwal was remanded to Enforcement Directorate custody till March 28, following his arrest on Thursday by the agency in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy of the Delhi Government.

Russia Hit...

From Page 1

The attack, which was the deadliest in Russia in years, came just days after Putin cemented his grip on power in a highly orchestrated electoral landslide and as the country’s war in Ukraine dragged into a third year.

Shortly after the attack, some Russian lawmakers pointed the finger at Ukraine.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, denied any involvement.

“Ukraine has never resorted to the use of terrorist methods,” he posted on X, formerly Twitter.

“Everything in this war will be decided only on the battlefield.”

Images shared by Russian state media on Saturday showed a fleet of emergency vehicles still gathered outside the ruins of Crocus City Hall, which had a capacity of more than 6,000 people in Krasnogorsk, on Moscow’s western edge.

Videos posted online showed gunmen in the venue shooting civilians at point-blank range. The roof of the theatre, where crowds had gathered on Friday for a performance by the Russian rock band Picnic, collapsed in the early hours of Saturday morning as

firefighters spent hours fighting a fire that erupted during the attack.

Messages of outrage, shock and support for those affected have since streamed in from around the world.

On Friday, the UN Security Council condemned “the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack” and underlined the need for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also condemned the terrorist attack “in the strongest possible terms”, his spokesman said.

Meanwhile, in Moscow itself, hundreds of people stood in line on Saturday morning to donate blood and plasma, Russia’s Health Ministry said.

In October 2015, a bomb planted by the Islamic State downed a Russian passenger plane over Sinai, killing all 224 people on board, most of them Russian vacation-goers returning from Egypt.

The group, which operates mainly in Syria and Iraq but also in Afghanistan and Africa, also has claimed several attacks in Russia’s volatile Caucasus and other regions in the past years.

It recruited fighters from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union.

NIA reveals Chennai link to...

From Page 1

Upon investigation, it was revealed the cap was purchased towards the end of January from the mall.

NIA had earlier announced the reward of Rs 10 lakh for providing information about the bomber in this case.

The NIA had posted a picture of the suspected bomber on ‘X’ in which he is seen entering the cafe wearing a cap, mask and glasses.

While sharing the phone number and email ID, NIA has said people can send information about this ‘unknown’ person.

On March 1, at least 10 people were injured in an explosion inside Rameshwaram Cafe in Brookfield, East Bengaluru.

It was suspected that this blast was done through IED. Soon after the blast, Karnataka Police had registered a case under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and Explosive Substances Act.

The Rameshwaram café was reopened under tight security a week after the blast.

Office space demand in January, March set to rise: Colliers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Office space demand across six major cities continues to be strong, with gross leasing of workspaces set to rise 35 per cent annually in the January-March quarter, according to Colliers India.

Real estate consultant Colliers India has released the data on the office market for the January-March period, nine days before the closing of the current quarter.

As per the data, the total gross leasing of office space is estimated to rise to 13.6 million square feet across six major cities — Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Pune — during the first quarter of 2024.

The leasing stood at 10.1 million square feet (sq ft) in the year-ago period.

The demand is set to grow in Hyderabad, Mumbai,

Bengaluru and Delhi-NCR, but may fall in Chennai.

In Pune, the demand is likely to remain flat at 0.8 million sq ft.

According to the data, the leasing of office space in Hyderabad is estimated to jump more than two times to 2.9 million square feet during January-March from 1.3 million square feet in the year-ago period.

In Mumbai, the demand is expected to surge 90 per cent to 1.9 million sq ft from 1 million sq ft.

Office space leasing in Bengaluru is set to rise 25 per cent to 4 million sq ft from 3.2 million sq ft.

In Delhi-NCR, the demand is expected to rise 14 per cent to 2.5 million sq ft from 2.2 million sq ft.

Office demand in Chennai is estimated to fall 6 per cent to 1.5 million sq ft during January-March this year compared to 1.6 million

square feet in the year-ago period.

Gross absorption or leasing data does not include lease renewals, pre-commitments and those deals where only a letter of intent has been signed.

When asked about the reason for releasing the data well before the quarter ends, Colliers India said the company “considers only closed transactions while accounting for the gross absorption (leasing) numbers.

Larger and major deals expected to close have been factored in, as only 3 working days of the quarter are left in the coming week”.

Commenting on the trend, Arpit Mehrotra, Managing Director-Office Services, Colliers India, said Hyderabad continues to strengthen its role as a prominent commercial office market in the country.

China trains its water...

From Page 1

Founder of Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) and BJP’s candidate from Chandni Chowk seat Praveen Khandelwal on Friday said, “There’s an estimated increase of nearly 50 per cent in business during the Holi season nationwide, resulting in a business worth more than Rs 50,000 crore.

In Delhi alone, the expected business is around Rs 5,000 crore.”

Khandelwal also claimed that the imported Holi-related items in the country has been approximately Rs 10,000 crore, however with traders and consumers boycotting the imported products for celebrating their religious festivals, import was negligible.

"The Citizenship
Amendment Act is a
historic law. It has fulfilled
wishes of the Father of the
Nation Mahatma Gandhi"
— Ram Nath Kovind



Photos: Rajan Dinn/Pioneer

PASSPORT TO FREEDOM

All nations across the world have tough and strict laws pertaining to citizenship. It is time India did too, says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

It took more than seven decades for the Government of India to launch a mission to take on the threat posed by illegal immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The guests who reached India from East Pakistan (since 1971 known as Bangladesh) were armed with a purpose. They were tools used by anti-India forces to create subversion and counter-subversion in India, making use of the lacunae available in the country's legal system of staying in India as authorised Indians. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, (lawyer and politician who later served as President of India from 1974 to 1977), played a major role in promoting the illegal influx of Muslims from East Pakistan to Assam with an eye on converting the State into a Muslim majority region. Ahmed, who was the Minister of Finance, Law and Local Self-government of Assam during 1957 to 1962, successfully sabotaged the then Chief Minister BP Chaliha's Prevention of Infiltrators Plan. Perumbavoor, a small town in Kerala from where this article is written on March 20, 2024, has a population of more than 1.5 lakh illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. These workers possess Aadhar cards and other relevant citizenship papers. If you ask them about their village, they all say they are from Murshidabad in Bengal. There are more than 900 plywood factories in the suburbs of Perumbavoor, each employing nearly 150 workers. Most of these workers (popularly known as Bhais) claim they are from Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Interestingly, they belong to the Muslim community. During the Covid pandemic, the Kerala Government provided all facilities in the residential camps where these workers (designated by the State Government as Guest Workers) were put up and this was the major reason behind the CPI(M) sweeping the 2021 Assembly elections. The situation is similar in various districts of Kerala as well as in Tamil Nadu. Although most of the culprits arrested by the police in connection with law and order issues (including murder, rape, kidnapping and dacoity) belong to this set of migrant workers, liberals and Marxists label them as "isolated incidents". In January 2020 Kerala came to a grinding halt as the entire Muslim community was paraded by religious heads under the pretext of opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act

(CAA) enacted in Parliament to regulate citizenship laws in the country. The last week of February 2020 saw Delhi burning with a group of committed perpetrators spreading false rumours that five students of Jamila Millia Islamia were shot dead by the police. This had its ramifications in Kerala. The State awoke to the chanting of slogans like "Tera Mera Rishta Kya, La Ilaha Ill Allah", "Alla Hu Akbar", "Hindutva Ki Kabar Khudegi", "Hinduon Se Azadi", and "Jinnah Wali Azadi". Though the news about the killings of the students by Delhi Police was found out to be false, the damage was done. Muslims in India, the educated as well as the uninitiated, were made to believe that the present regime at the Centre will ask for their documents and in case they fail to furnish the required papers, they would be either deported or put in detention centres. The riots were an attempt to sabotage an important legislation enacted by Parliament to grant citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jains who had to leave Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to escape religious persecution from rulers in their respective countries. The grievance of Islamic leaders in India was that the law discriminated against the Muslim community and should be cancelled. PK Kunhalikutty, leader of the Muslim League declared that once the INDIA Bloc assumes power in New Delhi, they would throw the CAA into the Arabian Sea. The Muslim Youth League has already demanded a separate Malabar State. The male dominated Muslim community is against the Uniform Civil Code which they term as unconstitutional. The Islamists in India were totally against the law banning

Triple Talaq. One is reminded of the words of Augustus Comte, the 19th century French philosopher who said "Demography is Destiny". The Islamist invaders came to India to plunder and loot the temples by the might of their sword. Despite the country succumbing to the power of the Islamist plunderers, they could not convert the believers of the Sanatana Dharma into Islam though there were Hindu genocides in various parts of India. The 1920 Mappila Rebellion in which thousands of Hindus were massacred in Kerala's Malappuram and Kozhikode regions was just one proof of their evil designs. The religious demography of the country during the last 100 years is sufficient to prove how immaculately the Mullahs and Moulavis work round the clock to speed up the process of India's Islamisation, drawn out in detail in the book Religious Demography of India a comprehensive research work by AP Joshi, MD Srinivas and JK Bajaj of the Centre for Policy Studies. The study has some startling information. Kerala had a population of 6.4 million in 1901 out of which Hindus were 68.9 per cent, Muslims constituted 17.28 per cent while the Christians formed 13.8 per cent. By 1991, the total population of the State stood at 2.9 crore out of which the Hindus constituted 57.35 per cent, Muslims formed 23.33 per cent and Christian population was 19.32 per cent. From 2001 to 2011, Muslims in Kerala have grown by 12.8 percent, while Hindus have grown by 2.2 and Christians by 1.4 percent. Such is the yawning and persistent gap between the Muslims and the others, write Bajaj, Joshi and Srinivas.

The census operation of 2021 is yet to be launched as the Covid-19 pandemic played spoilsport. By the time the results of census 2021 would be known the Muslim community would have crossed the threshold of the "critical mass", a term used in nuclear reactors to indicate the amount of fuel needed for setting the fission process to generate power. "The most remarkable feature of the Religion Data of Census 2011 for Kerala is the extraordinarily wide gap between the growth of Muslims and others. During 2001-11, Hindus and Christians have recorded decadal growth of 2.23 and 1.38 percent respectively, while the Muslims have grown by 12.84 percent. The growth of Muslims has thus been nearly six times that of Hindus and more than nine times that of Christians," says the research work. The situation is no different in other States. The share of Muslim population in India now is above their share before Partition. Because of the forced migration of populations between Pakistan and India at the time of Partition, the number of Muslims in remaining India had declined by nearly 5 million, from 42.6 million in 1941 to 37.7 million in 1951, and their share in the population declined from 13.38 to 10.45 percent. This decline has been more than made up in the six decades since Partition; in 2001, the share of Muslims in India's was already above their share in 1941 and it has risen to 14.23 per cent in 2011. This is information which could give sleepless nights to many Indian citizens. It is here that illegal immigration, Love Jihad and forced religious conversions play a major role. Much has been written about

illegal immigration and forced religious conversions while Love Jihad remains a topic of controversy. Remember Akhila, daughter of CPI(M) activist Asokan of Kottayam in Kerala? She eloped with Shafin Jehan, a Muslim youth and got married after conversion with the name Hadiya. Two years and three children later, Shafin Jehan threw her out of his house. She then got remarried to another Muslim youth. Hadiya has three more children by the second marriage and all these kids would be deployed as Jihadis to spread the word of Mohammed. The large public meetings organised by the Islamic outfits and the CPI(M) across Kerala to express their solidarity with Hamas will always remain a blot on the face of India. The organisers got Hamas leaders to address public meetings. The report on the Delhi Riots 2020 prepared by Monika Arora, Sonali Chitalkar and Prerana Malhotra would have disappeared from public domain because of a major conspiracy. Although an international publishing company had come forward to publish the book, a research work by a Group of Intellectuals and Academicians (GIA) who studied the 2020 Delhi Riots threadbare, at the eleventh hour the UK headquartered publishers retreated. Garud, an Indian company took up the challenge of publishing this work and that is how we have Delhi Riots 2020: The Untold Story. Do remember, there are people and outfits across the world who do not want the secret of the Islamists' plot to keep proselytisation an ongoing process for them to strike at will. The beating up of Mukesh, a shopkeeper in Bangalore for daring to listen to Hanuman Chalisa at the time of Namaz or the unofficial shut down of eateries ordered by zealots in Kerala during the period of fast are all signs of their mission to attack the core of Sanatana Dharma. The Communists oppose the CAA because that never accepted the concept of India. "They do have ideological solidarity with the communists of the world, whatever their nationality. Loyalty to the Communist ideology came before loyalty to the nation of which the communist was a citizen," writes late B Raman in his book Intelligence-Past, Present and Future. The CAA is a prime key to India's national security concerns. All nations across the world have tough and strict laws pertaining to citizenship. It is time India did too.

FAKHURDIN ALI AHMED, WHO WENT ON TO BECOME THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, HAD PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN PROMOTING ILLEGAL INFLUX OF MUSLIMS FROM EAST PAKISTAN TO ASSAM WITH AN EYE ON CONVERTING THE STATE INTO A MUSLIM MAJORITY REGION. AHMED, WHO WAS THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE, LAW AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM DURING 1957 TO 1962 SUCCESSFULLY SABOTAGED THE THEN CHIEF MINISTER B P CHALIIHA'S PREVENTION OF INFILTRATORS PLAN

CHENNAI EXPRESS IN GURUGRAM



Taj Gurugram recently showcased the rich menu of its famous Chennai based Fisherman's Cove. **PAWAN SONI** drowns himself in the marine culinary wonder served on his table

I have witnessed the transformation of Vivanta hotel into Taj Gurugram and have frequented all their restaurants multiple times. Or so I thought until today when I visited BBQ, an open-air live grill restaurant adjacent to Culina 44. Chef Thirunavukarasu from Bay View at Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort at Chennai is currently in Gurugram showcasing his seafood expertise until March 17th. During a conversation with Executive Sous Chef Jagan Sardhana, I learned that BBQ, an extension of their all-day dining restaurant, Culina 44, is only open between October and March, when the weather is more favorable and allows Gurgaon residents to enjoy the winter season. The slow instrumental music, along with the soothing sounds of waves from the speakers, creates a calming atmosphere. I'm not sure if this music is specifically played along the marine life video on the projector to compliment the ongoing seafood festival theme, but it certainly adds to the comforting and romantic ambiance. The dim lighting, spaced-out seating, and the aroma of the barbecue counter at one end not only stimulate your appetite but also encourage you to enjoy a drink. We particularly enjoyed the black pepper crab broth and drumstick lentil soup, both of



which were hot and heartening for the season. The panko-crusted calamari was cooked to perfection. However, the wasabi mayo and tomato raisin relish served as dips were the real stars, even outshining the calamari. Trust me, the relish was so delicious that I could have it with rice and consider it a complete meal. The

grilled prawns were good, although I wished the prawns were all of a similar size and presented better. For the main course, Chef Thiru expertly prepared Lobster Thermidor. The first bite elicited a foodgasmic 'ah' that could be heard at the neighboring table. The combination of white sauce, cheese, and broiled lobster with herbed rice was simply magical, making it the standout dish of the day for me. The meal concluded with a delightful palm jaggery-coconut pudding. BBQ certainly warrants another visit. Unfortunately, it closes at the end of March before reopening in October.



The Way of Bengal

It was a trip way down memory lane for a Bengali to be at Tamra for their week long pop up Bengali food festival. It reminded **SHOBORI GANGULI** of her long lost grandmother's kitchen

There is an impressive global hospitality trend emerging, and flourishing, in these post-Pandemic times. It is the golden era of Roving Chefs, globally renowned, who instead of attaching themselves to any single brand or chain, are captivating the world of gourmet, literally carrying their secret kitchen of spices and ingredients to curate their pop up cuisines across continents. Shangri-La Eros in Delhi has declared 2024 as a year of celebration of one such innovative and strategic effort — to bring the secret kitchens of India to New Delhi with an army of world-renowned Indian chefs, each a unique story teller of his or her own region. These are week-long pop-ups at their restaurants, known so far only for their "world on your platter" spread. At the risk of sounding a bit parochial, I was overjoyed to be invited to Chef Ananya Banerjee's curation of traditional Bengali food this month at Shangri-La. While the region's cuisine may be relegated by the uninitiated to clichés like mustard fish, *sandesh* and *mishthi doi*, the fact is every Bengali cook, from the humble home kitchen to *dhabas*, stand alone restaurants to starred hotels, has a unique narrative to tell, and an inimitable culinary magic spell to cast. Chef Banerjee is a vivacious and charming personality. A globetrotting Chef by vocation, she is a painter, author, and a trained lawyer, but she takes the greatest pride and rightly so for the innovation that sets her Bengali kitchen apart from others of her community. It is often said that Bengali is the one Indian cuisine that the French gets closest to. One was not surprised to learn therefore that Banerjee, in her limitless journey of curating several menus of prestigious restaurants, has partnered with the French-Bengali fine dining award winning restaurant "The Mustard". Although Chef Banerjee has a unique battery of international cuisine in her arsenal, I was lucky to be personally treated to her exceptional Bengali way. For starters we had Prawn cutlets, a crumb fried delicacy marinated to perfection, accompanied by *Chhena Palong Shaaager Chop*,



The Bengal Buffet (L to R)
Narkel cholar dal, lau malai curry, dhokar dalna, rui maacher jhol, mutton rezala, Gondhoraj lanka Murgji, Gobindo Bhog Rice, Kolkata Biryani, Phulko luchi, Mishthi Doi, tomato chutney and Paati Shapta



Globally renowned Mumbai Based Chef **ANANYA BANERJEE**

Right: Her Signature Shorhe Ilish or Mustard Fish

(Cottage cheese spinach rolled with the most divine spices and fried into round chops).

What followed was a Bengali feast fit for royalty. The *thaali* was a virtual buffet. Served with *phulko luchi* (deep fried puffed flour flatbread) there was steaming *narkel cholar dal* (split Bengal gram infused with coconut). Bengalis love to play with sugar in their dishes and so did Chef Banerjee with her own twist. While the world knows about prawn *malai* curry, we were treated to a delicious vegetarian version called *lau malai* curry (bottle gourd in a dreamy creamy curry). Next to this was *dhokar dalna* (soaked Bengal gram, dry roasted into a paste, cubed, and then fried, the *dalna* a rich ginger laced curry). Legend has it that the dish was named *dhoka* or betrayal to trick family members into consuming lentils which actually tasted like meat.

Chef Banerjee's culinary twists continued with Bengal's signature mutton *rezala* (lamb in a very subtle yet extremely rich curry soaked in the favours of yogurt, cashews, poppy seeds, cardamom and nutmeg). Every *Rezala*, adopted by the Bengalis from Lucknow and now literally owned by them, has that distinct yet secret signature of the cook. So did this one. In what would easily be any epicure's delight came *Gondhoraj Lonka Murgji* (an aromatic and delicate chicken curry using whole spices, green chillies steeped in the enticing flavor of a lemon growing only in the eastern parts of the country). Even holding an uncut *Gondhoraj* will can entice you entice into its magical aroma. Served with *Gobindo bhog chaal* (a staple in every Bengali kitchen, this delicate buttery rice can easily rival the Basmati) was also the traditional *rui maacher jhol* (a mild river carp fish curry). Whispering in my ears, since I am a Bengali,

the Chef asked me whether I would like to try Bengal's world renowned *Shorhe Ilish* (Mustard Hilsa). Non-Bengalis find it impossible to plough through this because of the Hilsa's fine bones. But I simply grabbed the opportunity. No Bengali feast is complete without the Kolkata Biryani. Again adopted from north India, the Kolkata Biryani is served with potatoes and boiled eggs. Chef Banerjee's version was a dream run. Known the world over for their sweet tooth, Bengalis can never go without some hearty desserts as meal enders. So there was *Mishthi Doi* topped with molten *nolen khejur gur* (sweet yogurt with a garnishing of date jiggery) and *Paati Shapta* (sweet crepes with a filling of coconut and date molasses). Chef Banerjee was meticulous in also including tomato *aam shotto chutney* (a relish of tomatoes and mango pulp candies), something that made me go back to my long lost grandmother's kitchen.

It is indeed commendable that as a globe trotting Chef, Banerjee, alongside her international kitchen repertoire, is serving Bengal on a platter to a global audience. Based in Mumbai, she is in every sense of the word a Roving Chef. Shangri-La has done well to collaborate with Chef Pin to showcase Regional Indian Cuisines in 2024. Chef Pin has renowned home chefs aiming to promote diverse regional Indian cuisines. "The Chef Pin pop-ups at Shangri-La Eros New Delhi have always been very well received. We are excited to continue this partnership into 2024 because it provides our home chefs and expert chefs with a wonderful venue to showcase their culinary talent and to tell the stories surrounding their dishes. It is a pleasure to work with the Shangri-La team, who share our ethos to uncover the hidden gems of Indian cooking," says Siddharth Mohan, CEO and Co-Founder alongside Rocky Mohan of Chef Pin. Chef Pin provides home chefs and home bakers, operating across Delhi NCR, Bengaluru and Mumbai. The app is for diners to discover and order local, authentic and home-cooked meals from hundreds of talented home chefs.



Pizza Crunch Tatin Funghi with Mushrooms Cream of Potato and slivered meat

The Pizza Philosopher

From Verona to the world stage, Chef **RENATO BOSCO** is an artist revolutionising the concept of dough making in contemporary Italian pizza. **SHOBORI GANGULI** had the honour to be at the high table where he personally laid out his lavish spread

Starved by Covid for two years, the hospitality industry across the globe is witnessing a huge surge, years of isolation having provided the industry with time to script innovative ideas for increased footfalls. One such is the idea of the Roving Chef wherein restaurants are organising pop ups by globally known Chefs who serve their guests with their signature culinary curations. And the equally starved guests are dining out with a vengeance. A truly winning combination. Recently, Shangri-La Eros in Delhi invited the internationally acclaimed Maestro Di Pizza Chef Renato Bosco to their Sorrento Ristorante to let their patrons indulge in some exquisite artisanal Italian cuisine, handcrafted by the Chef.

Years ago, in the quaint ancient town of Verona was a young boy fired with a unique passion to revolutionise the art of dough making, the crust that humbly lies unacknowledged under the heavy accent of toppings. Today that passion is Chef Bosco's groundbreaking artisanal concept of contemporary pizza.

Chef Bosco's experiments have in fact earned him the sobriquet of *Pizza Ricercatore* (Pizza Researcher). Ranked among the world's top 50 Italian Chefs, he has indeed redefined for all of us, including Italians, what we hitherto perceived as the traditional Italian pizza.

Unveiling his mastery in an open kitchen, Chef Bosco was a bundle of energy as he emptied packets of Caputo's



Mozzarella Di Pane



Pizza Tonda

soft wheat flour, known for its airy crust, into bowls. He went on to spin magic with the dough, infused with salt and fresh yeast, kneaded and patted with olive oil, then allowed to rest for at least four hours before being placed into the oven and served with delectable toppings. For Chef Bosco, the crust or the base of a pizza is the soul and core of this culinary wonder. From alternating temperatures to consistency, thin seared crusts to fluffy melt-in-your-mouth bases, we were treated to various shapes and sizes of pizzas one could never imagine even possible. Crafted with precision, each dish that came our way was a masterpiece, each a Bosco

patent. For him, the pizza itself is not as much a focus as its myriad shapes and flavours, sourced from the freshest, seasonal ingredients.

We started our meal with the Chef's signature *Mozzarella Di Pane*, (with a delicate topping of Burrata, shrimp and bacon), a selection that offered three varieties including *Arrabbiata* and *Amatriciana*. *Pizza Al Padellino* offered *Margherita* (infused with *Pomodoro*, *Confit* and emulsion of basil). Next came the *Pizza Crunch*, *Tatin Funghi*, with mushroom, cream of potato, *Porchetta* with vegetables, closed in with a sliver of meat. This one stole my heart. The vegetarian version was a *Crunch Pizza* with Seasonal Vegetables. Chef Bosco's signature was clearly inked on his *Pizza Doppio Crunch* (Double Crunch with *Mozzarella*).

For me, personally, the *Gourmet Pizza* composition of *Ananas* was a show stealer. A crispy thin crust topped with a delicate composition of sliced pineapple, mustard and prawns, the aromatic creation was soul lifting. The *Four Cheese* was a crunchy hearty, nutty combo. The vegetarian *Risotto* with pumpkin and *Gorgonzala* was sheer poetry while the non vegetarians had a delicious delve into crab and lemon zest.

In the main course what really shone out was the *Sous Vide Young Chicken Roulade Ricotta* stuffed with *Potato Espuma* and *Morel*, the luscious chicken dancing to perfection. We ended the sumptuous feast on a sweet note with *Maritozzo* with *Cream* and *Coffee*. I will now await the next *Roving Chef* in town.

Interconnected narrative

Forest conservation | Agriculture | Food security



BKP SINHA



ARVIND K JHA

As the global population surges towards an anticipated 10 billion by 2050, the imperative of meeting the heightened demand for food presents humanity with a formidable challenge

With the global population expected to reach close to 10 billion by 2050, humanity confronts the formidable challenge of boosting food production by 50% to meet this heightened demand. Addressing this challenge entails not only increasing production but also fortifying the sustainability and resilience of our food systems to ensure food security which is defined as the state when every individual, without exception, has the physical and economic means to access sufficient, safe and nutritious food meeting their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Globally, India ranks poorly in food security and hunger indices, standing 68th out of 113 countries in the 2022 Global Food Security Index and 111th out of 125 countries in the 2023 Global Hunger Index. Numerous factors contribute to India's food insecurity, including poverty, social inequality, limited food access, price fluctuations, agricultural challenges, land ownership issues, food wastage, and natural disasters. Deforestation and climate change exacerbate these factors. Early human societies, initially nomadic, thrived on diverse wild foods, enjoying well-nourished diets. However, between 8000-4000 BCE, a shift to settled farming and animal domestication marked the onset of agriculture, laying the groundwork for future civilizations. The rise of kingdoms and empires saw advancements in irrigation, food production, and trade. During the colonial era, large forest areas were cleared and brought under cultivation of crops that included sugarcane, cotton, spices, and fruits enriching India's food diversity. Even after independence, forest lands considered suitable for crops continued to be diverted for the purpose for quite some time. The Green Revolution aimed at boosting food production and self-sufficiency through high-yielding crop varieties like rice, wheat, and maize; though progressively providing subsidies to farmers. This shift led to the decline of numerous traditional and locally suited crop varieties with high nutritional value. This era also witnessed the rise of global food conglomerates, reshaping India's food security scenario often at the expense of small-scale and local producers. Parallely globalization and urbanization introduced new cuisines, standardizing preferences



leading to the decline of many diverse and traditional nutritious dishes, resulting in crop production systems becoming homogeneous and vulnerable to shocks and stresses. India's agricultural sector and accordingly the farmers, though more specialized, became heavily dependent on external inputs and subsidies, and purely market-oriented. With just 12 crops and 14 animal species providing 98% of the world's dietary needs, achieving sustainable food security by 2050 is indeed a complex challenge suggesting a relook at the crucial role of forests as foster mothers to agriculture. In contrast to agriculture as an energy production system forests harbour a diverse range of flora and fauna, including pollinators and natural resources for germplasm conservation. Sustaining vital life processes such as nutrient cycling and water regulation in watersheds, they have the potential to safeguard and enrich the soil. They serve as a natural bulwark against climate change and extreme weather and nurture agriculture. Additionally, forests also provide a variety of nutritious foods like fruits, tubers, leaves, vegetables, honey and wild

plants and resources supporting the traditional systems of medicine. Forests are crucial for the dietary diversity and nutrition of forest-dependent people in addition to working as a vital support during times of scarcity. In addition, forests also offer financial opportunities like the sale of minor forest produce which contributes to income to be used to purchase diverse food items from markets. It's not surprising that there are no farmer suicide cases reported from villages in and near good forest areas. With rising populations, however, human encroachments and changes in land use are setting the stage for wildfires, pests, and zoonotic diseases to wreak havoc. The dwindling forested areas pose a triple threat – escalating land degradation, depleting water resources, and risks to agriculture. The dependence of one-third of the world's population on forest goods and services, however, clashes with the harsh reality that 80% of the annual net forest loss is attributable to agriculture. Notwithstanding the damage caused to the natural systems and eco-processes due to anthropogenic forces, our production methods are also increasingly taxing the

environment. They consume 70% of the world's freshwater resources, emit nearly a third of all greenhouse gases, and heavily rely on fossil fuels for fertilizers and machinery. These practices already influenced by lost culinary diversity are pushing production limits to an undeniably unsustainable point. The situation in India ranked amongst the first five countries in the world in agricultural production, is no different. India's food security intricacies are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of forest conservation and agriculture. A diverse array of stakeholders; including forest dwellers, farmers, pastoralists, private companies, and government bodies each have their unique interests, rights, and responsibilities about forest as a resource. Farmers pushed against the wall, are made to believe that the remedy for their lower returns lies just in subsidies and MSP. With this approach, ensuring food security on a sustained basis is going to be difficult. The poor implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006 has triggered recognition of cultivation rights to ineligible people, that too on refractory

lands, promoting thereby further encroachments into forest lands in India. Fragmentation of wildlife habitats and liberal diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes have increased crop predation and human-wildlife conflicts. There is a dearth of studies indicating whether the ownership of minor forest produce endowed to gram sabhas in scheduled areas has improved people's food security. Further, the imminent adverse impact on eco-services due to relaxations in penal provisions related to forest fires, grazing, and biodiversity conservation; along with the amendments in 2012 and 2023 to the Forest Rights Rules 2008 and the Forest Conservation Act 1980 respectively cannot be over-emphasized. The agro-ecological connection between forest conservation and agriculture is crucial in a monsoon country like India. Along with the recent emphasis on millet, it's equally vital to include forest-derived foods and vegetables on our dietary platter. Providing free food grains to about 81 crore poor and vulnerable people for five years from January 2024, aimed at strengthening food accessibility,

affordability, and availability, highlights the urgency of seeking better and sustainable solutions. Increasing agricultural production by increasing the area under agriculture would come at the expense of natural ecosystems. The United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Report 2017 highlighted sustainable forestry as a crucial element of sustainable food systems. It strongly suggested a paradigm shift towards agroforestry, which integrates the management of trees, crops, and livestock. This holistic approach, combined with forest conservation, can bolster the long-term resilience of our food systems. Regardless of the political scenario, however, comprehensive studies may reveal the ground truth, including the intriguing trade-offs between land sharing and land sparing for forests in addressing food security. Research institutions of Forestry, Tribal, Rural Development, and Agriculture must converge and prioritize research on this crucial aspect of land use. Further, stricter laws addressing sustainability with better implementation, good governance, preservation of gene

pool, responsible behaviour of forest right holders, empowerment of farmers, closer coordination amongst stakeholder departments, and people's active participation in institutionalizing conservation-oriented processes across related sectors are necessary to find practical solutions to achieve food security. The road to achieving SDG2 of zero hunger by 2030 is also fraught with challenges. Further research into various aspects such as the adoption of climate-friendly technologies and a climate-smart approach coupled with convincing advocacy efforts are needed to ensure that forests and biodiversity conservation remain on the agenda of policymakers and practitioners. The complex interplay between forest conservation, agriculture, and food security paints a compelling picture of our shared responsibility to foster a sustainable and resilient ecosystem; one that can ensure food security for all, now and in the future. (The writer is Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra, views are personal)

Immerse yourself in the vibrant colours of Holi

As the festival of colours, Holi, approaches, Madhya Pradesh gears up to showcase its rich cultural heritage and spiritual significance through vibrant celebrations



SHEO SHEKHAR SHUKLA

As the festival of colours approaches, Madhya Pradesh gears up to showcase its rich cultural heritage and spiritual significance through vibrant Holi celebrations. Nestled amidst the land of massive religious importance, Madhya Pradesh, boasting two jyotirlingas in Mahakal Lok, Ujjain, and Ekam Dham (Statue of Oneness), Omkareshwar, promises an enchanting experience for devotees and travelers alike. The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board encourages the local traditional and cultural values of the state by empowering local communities. Known for its fervent enthusiasm in celebrating festivals, Madhya Pradesh becomes an alluring destination during Holi, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in its vivid culture and warm hospitality. The Bhagoriya tradition of Madhya Pradesh possesses immense cultural value, where an array of sacred rituals is performed by the Bhil tribe of the state during the harvest period. At Mahakal Lok, devotees gather from across the nation to revel in the festivity amid the divine aura of Lord Shiva's abode where the first Holika Dahan of MP takes place. Adding to the allure, a grand Maha Aarti takes place at Sethani Ghat in Narmadapuram district, where the sacred waters of the Narmada River flow, offering a



spiritual ambiance to the colorful festivities. Meanwhile, in Chhindwara, the Meghnad Fair sees different Maharashtrian communities coming together to apply colors to Lord Mahadev, symbolizing unity and harmony. Indore Gair welcomes lakhs of visitors each year on Rang Panchami at the Rajwada Palace where sheer joy and colors awash the streets with majestic water cannons going on ever since the Holkar Dynasty. Bullock carts are

loaded with herbal colors as people smear each other with gulal and joy. Not to be missed is the passionate celebration of Holi in the Bundelkhand region, particularly at the Ram Raja Darbar of Orchha, where the festival is marked with fervor and reverence. In the city of Gwalior, music enthusiasts can look forward to an electrifying performance by the Saregama Music Group at Shinde Ki Chhawani Mall, adding an extra

layer of entertainment to the festive spirit. Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Department and Managing Director, MP Tourism Board Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS) highlighted that 'Madhya Pradesh stands as a beacon of cultural diversity and spiritual heritage, inviting everyone to partake in its mesmerizing Holi celebrations, creating memories to cherish for a lifetime. The Heart of Incredible India celebrates each

festival with a blend of local customs and personal touch.' In conclusion, Madhya Pradesh stands as a beacon of cultural diversity and spiritual heritage, inviting everyone to partake in its mesmerizing Holi celebrations. Throughout the state, from the sacred Mahakal Lok to the bustling streets of Indore, the fervor and enthusiasm of the festivities are palpable. Whether witnessing the first Holika Dahan at Mahakal Lok, participating in

the Bhagoriya traditions of the Bhil tribe, or experiencing the unity and harmony symbolized by the Meghnad Fair in Chhindwara, every corner of Madhya Pradesh resonates with the joy of Holi. Moreover, the state's commitment to preserving and promoting its traditional values shines through initiatives led by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, empowering local communities and showcasing the region's unique cultural tapestry. As visitors flock to witness the grandeur of Rang Panchami at the Rajwada Palace or the electrifying performances in Gwalior, it becomes evident that Madhya Pradesh celebrates Holi with a blend of ancient customs and modern festivities. As Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Department, Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla, aptly puts it, these celebrations create memories to cherish for a lifetime. So, this Holi, immerse yourself in the vibrant colors of Madhya Pradesh, where every hue tells a story, every tradition echoes history, and every moment is filled with the spirit of joy and togetherness. (The writer is Principal Secretary, Tourism Department, Madhya Pradesh and MD of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board; views are personal)



**YOUR
WEEK
AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This upcoming period promises to be bustling, filled with the energy of movement and the drive to complete outstanding tasks. Your resilience and methodical approach will be your greatest allies, enabling you to tackle challenges head-on. Your ability to manage emotions effectively and channel them into constructive efforts will serve you well, empowering you to approach conflicts with a positive mindset, potentially transforming adversaries into allies. As the week progresses, you may encounter a crossroads, presenting you with a plethora of choices related to your professional journey. Despite any initial uncertainty, you'll discover a surge of inventive thought and vitality towards the week's end, propelling you forward. This newfound inspiration acts as your guiding light, illuminating paths that were once obscured, and ensuring that you can navigate your way to making well-informed decisions on your own.

Lucky number 16 | **Lucky colour** Beige
Lucky day Sunday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

You're brimming with vibrancy and readiness to tackle forthcoming duties. Harnessing your inner vigor, you're advised to temper your passions as you progress. Your presence dominates the scene, possessing the innate talent to sway outcomes to your benefit. Embodying the resolve of a determined warrior, "conquer or perish" becomes your guiding principle. Esteem and integrity rank high in your values, overshadowing distractions of the heart. Romantic entanglements and opportunities for intimate encounters might emerge, yet they find little space in your current chapter. Engaged in both personal growth and the competitive sprint of contemporary life, you may encounter resistance from those you lead or collaborate with. They may present you with critical decisions, challenging the path you've chosen. Confronted by doubters or adversaries, it's crucial to maintain your course, undaunted by external pressures.

Lucky number 15 | **Lucky colour** Plum
Lucky day Monday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

In your home life, a deep sense of joy and connection flourishes, echoing the renewal that comes with spring. This period is marked by an increase in trust and affection within the family, including the youngest members who add their own sparkle and achievements. Material concerns fade as you bask in well-being and spiritual contentment. This is a time of great happiness, solid foundations, and peak health. Embrace this moment, valuing each loved one. However, as the week progresses, expect a shift towards more responsibilities and professional pressures. Balancing these demands with your personal life is key. Doing so not only preserves this joyful period but also encourages personal growth and skill development.

Lucky number 22 | **Lucky colour** Emerald
Lucky day Friday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week promises an array of significant moments that may transform your routine in remarkable ways. You might find yourself embarking on a change of scenery or landing an opportunity in a location you've hoped for. An exciting journey to breathtaking destinations or places steeped in history seems to be just around the corner, bringing a wave of excitement and a boost in your confidence. Embrace this period with open arms, ready to face any hurdles with a problem-solving mindset while challenging your support to those around you. As the week draws to a close, expect to be surrounded by joyous celebrations and gatherings that highlight your achievements alongside loved ones. However, immerse yourself wisely, as the remnants of this week's festivities could linger, momentarily pausing your momentum into the next.

Lucky number 13 | **Lucky colour** Violet
Lucky day Thursday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

Many of you are experiencing a sense of restlessness and confinement, feeling as though barriers prevent you from moving forward, leading to potential frustration. It's crucial to understand that reactions such as anger, despair, or impulsive actions will only exacerbate these feelings, rather than alleviate them. Therefore, it's time to embrace a change in perspective and thought processes. Achieving clarity in your thoughts will illuminate paths through challenges, offering solutions where there seemed to be none. Additionally, a focus on safety, especially while driving, and preparedness for minor mishaps by keeping a first aid kit handy, is advisable. Anticipate that situations involving legal or official decisions may turn out favorably for you, offering a glimmer of hope in navigating through current constraints.

Lucky number 21 | **Lucky colour** Lemon Yellow
Lucky day Wednesday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you'll embody the essence of grandeur and leadership. Driven by a compelling sense of ambition and innovation, you naturally guide others towards achieving collective goals. Your strength lies not in the initial creation but in transforming existing concepts to align with a grand vision, showcasing your role as a pioneering guide. You thrive under pressure, embracing challenges with a zest that fuels your determination. Confident in your path, you may encounter resistance, both professionally and personally. It's crucial to exercise patience and channel your influence constructively. Embrace your responsibilities with earnestness and continuously seek innovative solutions. Your belief in your abilities is your greatest asset, steering you towards accomplishing remarkable feats.

Lucky number 13 | **Lucky colour** Orange
Lucky day Tuesday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This period may present a series of challenges, encompassing struggles, setbacks, and hurdles. Despite diligent efforts, you might find yourself overshadowed. The relentless pace and an overflowing agenda can lead to fatigue, with the anticipated breaks offering little solace or fruitful outcomes. Each time you approach what seems to be the finish line, additional tasks emerge, extending the journey. An astute and strategic competitor could make you feel as though victory has slipped through your fingers. Embrace these setbacks as learning opportunities, setting the stage for a future triumph. History tells us that while the journey of a resilient individual may include defeats, it's the courage to rise and conquer that defines greatness.

Lucky number 20 | **Lucky colour** Grey
Lucky day Saturday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week, your wealth extends beyond material riches, embodying a wealth of spirit characterized by kindness and generosity. Your insightful approach to both financial and emotional matters bolsters your support for close companions. The week kicks off on a positive note, elevating your confidence through encouraging news. This period may also bring a significant shift in your personal connections, with someone pivotal either making an exit or an entrance in your life. Your attention turns towards spiritual and traditional pursuits, seeking guidance from a trusted mentor, which reinforces your commitment to heritage and established beliefs. Striving for equilibrium between the old and the new is advisable. Be prepared for surprising developments, possibly including a sudden boost in your finances or the joy of welcoming a new family member.

Lucky number 24 | **Lucky colour** Ivory
Lucky day Friday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

This week unfolds with a wave of sentimentality washing over you, sparking a desire to reconnect with long-lost friends and family. This yearning for familiarity and the comfort of shared memories may particularly resonate with those far from their roots, compelling a journey home. Reflecting on cherished moments offers a wellspring of motivation, amidst a week brimming with opportunities for both profound and simple joys. The notion of new beginnings is palpable, potentially heralding expansions within the family circle. For parents, moments of pride abound as children contribute to a sense of joy within the household. Professionally, a sense of pressure might loom, with outcomes arriving more slowly than anticipated and financial gains not meeting expectations. Yet, this obstacle is merely a stepping stone, as resilience emerges, guiding you toward achievement with unwavering determination.

Lucky number 20 | **Lucky colour** Black
Lucky day Sunday



CANCER June 21-July 22

Amid a period demanding relaxation, the continuous weight of professional obligations has left you seeking solace and rejuvenation. This juncture calls for a pause, allowing for self-recovery from recent challenges. It's time to embrace tranquility, tapping into your reservoir of strength and finding serenity in your current state. Embrace practices that foster both physical and mental well-being, such as engaging in calming exercises, reflective meditation, and contributing positively to the community through acts of kindness and support. Your aspirations may seem muted as you navigate the weight of your duties, yet as the week closes, a surge of vitality renews your commitment. Anticipate the possibility of a new assignment or project emerging, which you will approach with dedication and integrity, steering clear of any objections or undue influence.

Lucky number 14 | **Lucky colour** Rust
Lucky day Tuesday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

As the week unfolds, you may encounter setbacks, creating a desire to escape current challenges. This period is marked by emotional challenges, especially from unfulfilling relationships, leading to a longing for liberation from these emotional ties. However, as the week progresses to its midpoint, a transformation begins. You'll find strength and clarity, enabling you to make decisions that safeguard your emotional well-being. This newfound resilience not only helps you navigate personal challenges but also allows you to become a beacon of guidance and stability for your loved ones. By imparting wisdom and resources, you ensure their prosperity. Even without vast material wealth, the invaluable lessons and guidance you offer carve a legacy of success and security, demonstrating the profound impact of shared wisdom.

Lucky number 11 | **Lucky colour** Golden
Lucky day Wednesday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

In your career, you are enjoying a period of stability and recognition, bolstered by your hard work and dedication. This strong foundation you've built is a testament to your character and resolve. The positive dynamics and cooperation with your team members contribute significantly to shared successes, though this might inadvertently attract unwelcome attention from envious onlookers. In the coming days, be mindful of overly friendly individuals who may harbor hidden agendas, as they could attempt to undermine your achievements. It's crucial to stay vigilant about your financial and legal obligations, ensuring that all such matters are addressed promptly. Despite any obstacles, maintain your resilience against setbacks. Additionally, the latter part of the week holds promising developments in your personal life, hinting at the blossoming of a new romantic connection.

Lucky number 19 | **Lucky colour** Magenta
Lucky day Monday

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ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Lord Shiva calls for all-inclusiveness



port of the collective existence. Lord Shiva, therefore, wishes to get the best out of one and all and facilitate smooth run of the worldly order. So,

he purposely ignores their individual limitations. But it doesn't come about easily. He bears with lot of pains as He absolves them all from three types of

sins- Daihika (Body bound), Bhautika (Material), and Daivika (Cosmic), they attract as fallout of cause-effect chain they are bound to. He absorbs them all as would His poison fed blue neck implies. He does that in the larger interest of the existential order, but for which life will become unbearable. Serving as provider, He nourishes the whole living order with all His resources in hand - the cosmic energy drawn through lunar crescent, water stream of river Ganges, and other resources necessary for sustenance. It needs to be appreciated here that we plunder the earth in a bid to secure our survival. But the earth on its part bears with it kindly, and still supports us with all provisions - the food it produces or water bodies it holds in its womb, vital to our existence. We, knowingly or inadvertently, vitiate even the atmosphere, which could disturb ecological balance, evidently detrimental to our healthy existence. Nature, however, exhibits its resilience by absorbing them all, but for which our very existence would be at stake. Lord Shiva enjoys the confidence of all. For, He selflessly serves them all

without any sense of differentiation, with the sole noble objective to ensure a smooth run of the existential order. Selflessness of the all-powerful and all-knowing Shiva is exemplified by being bare bodied. We really need to draw lesson and imbibe the kindness extended by nature. The message, loud and clear, is that the existential order is premised on the concept of "Unity in diversity". Accordingly, a harmonious coexistence of all and sundry is called for. In this scheme of things, multitude of species and objects in existence are to discharge their assigned roles towards essential sustenance and smooth run of the living order. The interdependence of their existence needs to be underlined here. For, it is their collective efforts that could service existential needs of the living order. Lord Shiva, therefore, wishes to get the best out of all and ensure smooth run of the worldly order as would the bull imply. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com

Russell, Rana help KKR survive

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Harshit Rana's resilience in the final over and Andre Russell muscling fifty helped Kolkata Knight Riders survive Heinrich Klaasen's six-hitting spree and score a thrilling four-run victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad in their IPL match here on Saturday. Klaasen almost turned the match on its head with a 29-ball 63 in which he moussed eight sixes without a single four. But SRH bravely chased KKR's imposing 208/7, which was built around Russell's (64, 25b) and Phil Salt's 54 (40b), but could only make 204 for seven. The South African took IPL's costliest buy Mitchell Starc to cleaners smashing him for three sixes, while Bengal cricketer Shahbaz Ahmed ended the Aussie left-arm quick's over with another six. That 26-run over meant Starc, who joined the Knight Riders for a record Rs 24.75 crore, finished with woeful figures of 4-0-53-0. Needing 13 off the last over, KKR gambled with rookie pacer Rana as he was hammered for seven runs off the first two balls. But first he dismissed Shahabaz and then Klaasen off his penultimate delivery, which came through a superb backward diving catch by Suyash Sharma, to give the local side a fantastic win. The Hyderabad outfit needed five



runs off the last ball but skipper Pat Cummins failed to connect the ball, as Rana finished with fine figures (3/33). Chasing the imposing target on a beautiful batting deck at Eden Gardens, Hyderabad found themselves at 145/5, needing 61 runs from 19 balls before Klaasen came in. Earlier, openers Mayank Agarwal and Abhishek Sharma, who both scored identical 32, gave SRH a perfect start. The duo made 60 runs in 33 balls before Agarwal was dismissed by Rana. Before Rana got into the act, KKR's trump card Narine dished out his sorcery. The West Indian bowled from seventh to 13th over, and gave away just 19 runs in four overs.

He took only one wicket but stifled SRH's progress in the middle-overs. However, KKR's fielding was an eyesore. Varun Chakravarthy's fitness was always a concern and it came to fore when he dropped a dolly to deprive Narine the wicket of Rahul Tripathi. The former KKR batter got another reprieve in the next over and this time impact player Suyash failed to hold on to a return catch. It would have been a boundary, but umpire Yeshwant Barde got in the way of the ball, leaving him grounded. Earlier, Salt got third IPL 50 in just 38 balls before being dismissed by Mayank Markande (2/39). The Englishman made 54 off 40 after

Narine (2), Venkatesh Iyer (7), Shreyas Iyer (0) and Nitish Rana (9) fell cheaply with pacer T Natarajan (3/32) making early dents. But KKR had the 'Dre Russ' power in their ranks. Russell teed off against Markande when he launched the SRH leg-spinner deep into the stands — three sixes in five balls. Markande for a moment thought that he had the last laugh when Aiden Markram took a blinder at long-on but replays showed he grounded the forward diving catch, giving Russell a breather on 20. The warning signs were on for SRH and the Jamaican went ballistic in Bhuvneshwar Kumar's penultimate over hitting him for two fours and two sixes, taking 26 runs. Rinku Singh, at the other end, made a 15-ball 23 as the duo put together 81 runs from 33 balls as Kolkata scored 85 runs in the last five overs. However, credit should also go to Salt and Ramandeep Singh. Salt remained firm despite early wickets and got handy support from debutant Ramandeep who quickly ran off the blocks in an entertaining 54-run partnership. Ramandeep slammed Cummins for a boundary and then pulled a short one for a six. He also hit Markande and Marco Jansen and Shahbaz Ahmed for three more sixes in his 17-ball 35 before being dismissed by Cummins. The partnership set the tone for the final assault by Russell and Rinku.

Focus on fit again Rahul as LSG face RR

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The focus will be on KL Rahul's form and fitness when he returns from a quadriceps injury to lead the Lucknow Super Giants in their IPL opener against Rajasthan Royals here on Sunday. Rahul missed the last four Tests against England due to pain in his right quadriceps. He was out for four months last year after undergoing a thigh surgery. LSG captain will look to hit top gear not only as a batter but also as a leader, especially after guiding the team to successive playoffs in the first two seasons. Rahul is likely to play purely as a batter, at least in the initial phase of IPL, but the additional burden of keeping strengthen his chances of making the T20 World Cup squad. His opposite number on Sunday, Sanju Samson, is also a candidate for the wicket-keepers' role in the India squad for the ICC event and he too will be keen to find his rhythm right from the start. RR had come tantalisingly close to clinching a second title before Gujarat Titans broke their heart in the final in 2022. They looked good in the initial stages even last season but slipped to fifth place in the end. Both the teams will have some tough calls to make as they figure out their best XI. RR have a solid batting lineup, boosting of the likes of inform Yashasvi Jaiswal, Jos Buttler, besides skipper Sansom. They also have a finisher in Dhruv Jurel, who made an impressive India debut in the recent five-match Test series against England. But Samson may look to strength the middle-order by bringing in West Indies' Rovman Powell to go with countrymate Shimron Hetmyer. LSG, on the other hand, would depend on



Quinton de Kock, Marcus Stonis and Nicholas Pooran to do bulk of the scoring apart from skipper Rahul.

It will also be interesting to see how Justin Langer goes about his business in his first IPL assignment as coach of LSG.

SQUADS:

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shubham Dubey, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Riyan Parag, Rovman Powell, Kunal Singh Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Donovan Ferreira, Avesh Khan, Trent Boult, Nandre Burger, Yuzvendra Chahal, Prasad Krishna, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Kuldeep Sen, Abid Mushtaq, Tanush Kotian. **Lucknow Super Giants:** KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yuvvir Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M. Siddharth, Ashton Turner, David Willey, Mohd. Arshad Khan.

Pant fails to fire on comeback

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The returning Rishabh Pant failed to set the stage on fire as Punjab Kings rallied to stop Delhi Capitals at 174 for nine in their Indian Premier League opener here on Saturday. Batting at number nine, Abhishek Porel top-scored with an unbeaten 32 off only 10 balls and lifted DC to a competitive total after an early batting collapse. Opting to bowl after winning the toss, Punjab were put under pressure straightaway by the flamboyant Australian opening duo of David Warner (29 off 21 balls) and Mitchell Marsh (20 off 12 balls), who were dealing in fours and sixes. Marsh worked a poor Sam Curran delivery off his pads for the day's first boundary. Another mediocre offering



from Curran was expertly flicked by Marsh for a four and the Capitals were on their way. Not to be left behind when it comes to playing strokes, Warner pulled left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh (2/28) for a six in front of square and then played the

bowler between cover-point and cover to find a four. The flurry of boundaries forced Punjab Kings skipper Shikhar Dhawan to effect a bowling change but Kagiso Rabada's introduction did little to stem the flow of runs as Marsh pulled a short ball over deep backward square for a big six. Arshdeep came back and was whacked over long-off for another gigantic six by Marsh. However, the left-arm seamer had the last laugh as he had Marsh caught by an agile Rahul Chahar at cover point, after the batter played a booming drive in the air. Unperturbed by the departure of his opening partner, Warner continued to play in his usual aggressive fashion, hitting Rabada for a four through mid-off and then sat down to use the scoop shot for an incredible maximum over

shot fine. Harpreet Brar checked the flow of runs by bowling a fine first over but Chahar started with a 14-run over with Shai Hope hitting the bowler for a six and a four. Harshal Patel (2/47) got the big wicket of Warner in his first over as comeback-man Pant (18 off 13 balls) arrived at the crease to loud applause from the stands. The weekend crowd acknowledged his tale of perseverance after surviving a horrific car accident in December 2022 with cheers of joy. Pant got himself a couple of boundaries before walking back to the dugout after a rather soft dismissal off the bowling of Harshal. Meanwhile, Rabada accounted for the wicket of Hope and Chahar got rid of Tristan Stubbs as Delhi slipped to 128/6 in the 16th over.

Gaikwad captancy was impressive against RCB: Gavaskar

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar is mighty impressed with Chennai Super Kings' new captain Ruturaj Gaikwad and lauded him for the way he maneuvered his bowlers during the IPL opener against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here. Handed the leadership role just ahead of the IPL, Gaikwad has big shoes to fill and he made an impressive start under the tutelage of talisman MS Dhoni, guiding CSK to a six-wicket win over RCB on Friday night. "Absolutely! Your debut as a captain becomes very

important. You want to begin your captaincy career well with a win and that's exactly what happened. What was impressive was his bowling changes," the former India skipper told Star sports. "Because when you saw the way he kept on changing Mustafizur; the way he used Mustafizur was absolutely terrific. He kept swapping Deepak Chahar, keeping faith in Tushar Deshpande for that final over. "I think seeing that Tushar Deshpande had been taken for 25, there was an opportunity to use another bowler, but he still

stuck to Tushar Deshpande, and Deshpande responded with a win and that's exactly what happened. So, yes, I think the captaincy was most impressive." Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman produced a superb show, returning with his best IPL figures of 4/29 to rattle RCB's top-order before they managed 173/6. Gavaskar also feels the presence of Dhoni made a big difference. "And we see over here, he has, of course, MS Dhoni around him, to guide him, tell him and give him the encouragement. Sometimes, that little nod from



somebody as experienced and as accomplished as MSD, makes a big difference," he said. Gavaskar feels RCB kept bowling the short ball far too many times even though it wasn't working. "Yes, try the short ball by all means, but when it wasn't working ... It looked like that's all they were looking to do. You had somebody like a Dagar, who had bowled 2 overs for 6 six runs. I know the way the left-hand spinner can be picked for 6, but you got to take a chance," he said.

Pandya begins Mumbai Indians captancy stint

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Hardik Pandya will aim to build on the rich legacy of his predecessor Rohit Sharma when he begins his Mumbai Indians captancy stint with a match against Gujarat Titans, a team that the star all-rounder himself marshalled over last two seasons, in the IPL here on Sunday. Such are the professional ways of IPL that Pandya, having led Titans to the title and runners-up finish in the previous two seasons, has gone to back to the Mumbai Indians where he made a name for himself. The tournament also marks Pandya's comeback from a 'freak' ankle injury he picked up in the middle of the ODI World Cup in October. The form of the injury-prone all-rounder with both bat and ball will be closely tracked in the tournament that precedes the T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean.

With Pandya moving on to the other side, Titans will be led by Shubman Gill, who assumes the responsibility with very little captaincy experience. Mumbai have been grappling with fitness issues to their key players including star batter Suryakumar Yadav, who is yet to get fitness clearance from NCA. Left-arm pacers Jason Behrendorff and Dilshan Madushanka are already ruled out of the IPL while new recruit Gerald Coetzee, nursing a groin injury, might not be available for the first few games. Having led Mumbai to as many as five IPL titles, India skipper Rohit will be turning up as a player this season and would be expected to hit top form ahead of the ICC event in June. Another player whose performance will be scrutinised is Ishan Kishan, who will have a point to prove after losing his BCCI central

contract for defying the Board's diktat on domestic cricket. The southpaw, who missed the entire Test series against England, preferred to train on his own for the IPL and did not turn for his state side Jharkhand in the Ranji Trophy. The fight for the wicket-keeper batter's slot in the World Cup squad will be intense and Kishan needs to be at the top of his game over the next two months. Besides Pandya, Mohammad Nabi and Romario Shepherd are the other quality all-round options Mumbai possess. Domestic players like Akash Madhwal and Nehal Wadhwa will be looking to build on their performances of the previous season. On the Titans' front, Gill has been tasked to ensure that the team maintains the remarkable consistency it showed in its first two seasons. Gill could be one of the future leaders for

India but for that to happen, he must prove himself on the IPL stage. He was the leading run-getter last season and the franchise would be hoping that captaincy doesn't impact his batting in anyway. Titans are bound to miss the services of Mohammed Shami, who recently underwent a surgery to repair Achilles tendon and will be back only in the second half of the year. The return of trump card Rashid Khan from a back surgery is a massive boost for Titans. The Afghanistan spinner made his comeback in the series against Ireland last week. Among the new joiners, left-arm pacer Spencer Johnson and Azmatullah Omarzai, will be looking to make a mark in the world's biggest T20 league.

SQUADS:

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma,

Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan, Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwen Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Vishnu Vinod, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood, Suryakumar Yadav. **Gujarat Titans:** Shubman Gill (c), Azmatullah Omarzai, Spencer Johnson, Kartik Tyagi, Josh Little, Abhinav Manohar, David Miller, Sushant Mishra, Darshan Nalkande, Noor Ahmad, Rashid Khan, Wriddhiman Saha, Sai Kishore, Sai Sudharsan, M Shahrukh Khan, Vijay Shankar, BR Sharath, Mohit Sharma, Manav Suthar, Rahul Tewatia, Matthew Wade, Kane Williamson, Jayant Yadav, Umesh Yadav.



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