



OPINION 6

ZERO-WATER DAY IS NIGH IN BENGALURU

WORLD 8

BIDEN, TRUMP WIN LOUISIANA PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY

MONEY 10

FPIS INFUSE OVER ₹38,000 CRORE IN EQUITIES IN MARCH

RAIPUR, MONDAY MARCH 25, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

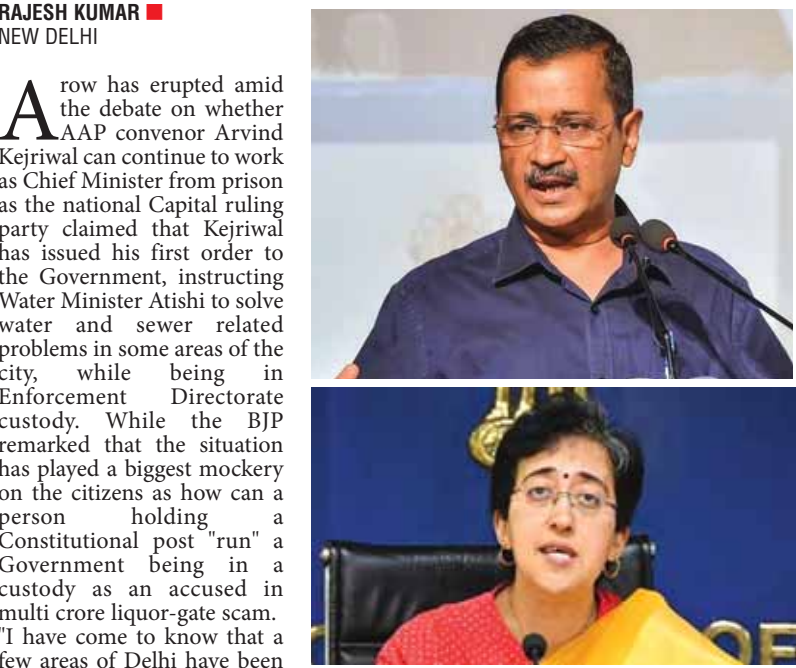
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RCB EYE BETTER OUTING FROM BOWLERS 12 SPORTS

Defiant Kejriwal to Work from Jail



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A row has erupted amid the debate on whether AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal can continue to work as Chief Minister from prison as the national Capital ruling party claimed that Kejriwal has issued his first order to the Government, instructing Water Minister Atishi to solve water and sewer related problems in some areas of the city, while being in Enforcement Directorate custody. While the BJP remarked that the situation has played a biggest mockery on the citizens as how can a person holding a Constitutional post "run" a Government being in a custody as an accused in multi crore liquor-gate scam. "I have come to know that a few areas of Delhi have been facing problems related to water and sewerage, that is why I am worried because I am in jail and because of that people of Delhi should not face any problem. Summer is also coming...where there is a shortage of water, deploy water tankers in sufficient quantity and give orders to the Chief Secretary and officers so that the public does not face any trouble. Immediate and appropriate solution should be taken to address the public's problem," Kejriwal said in a note to Atishi.



According to jail manual, an inmate can only hold two meetings in a week, which would make it difficult for Kejriwal to carry out his responsibilities as Chief Minister. The only measure that could facilitate Kejriwal's governance from within the confinement was if he was put under house arrest. The Lieutenant Governor has the power to convert any building into a prison, and if Kejriwal can convince him to put him under house arrest - it would



help him be a part of the Delhi Government's day-to-day functioning. The Enforcement Directorate has taken cognisance of Delhi minister Atishi's statement that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal sent her directions from the agency's custody to initiate the public welfare works related to water and sewerage, official sources said on Sunday. Sources the ED will conduct an investigation to ascertain if these directions from the arrested chief

minister were in line with the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court's order issued to the ED and Kejriwal during his custody period. AAP has maintained that there will be no change in the leadership, even if that means Kejriwal functions as the Chief Minister from jail. AAP leader and Delhi Minister Atishi praised Kejriwal for issuing directions pertaining to the Delhi Government's water department while being in

ED custody. Later addressing a press conference, Atishi said the directions, received late on Saturday, brought tears to her eyes with Kejriwal showing concern for the people of Delhi despite his own plight. "Arvind Kejriwal ji has sent me a letter and a direction. On reading it, I was in tears. I kept thinking who is this man, who is in prison, but is still thinking about Delhi residents' water and sewage problems. Only Arvind Kejriwal can do this because he considers himself a family member of Delhi's two crore people," she said. "Who thinks like this even in a situation? Even from jail, he is a person who is thinking about the people of Delhi," she said. The Chief Minister also directed for deploying enough water tankers in areas where there is scarcity to strengthen supply ahead of the approaching summer months, Atishi said. Taking a dig at Kejriwal and Atishi, Delhi BJP MP Manoj Tiwari hit out at Kejriwal, calling his instruction from ED custody to the Water Minister scripted and his arrest a cause of celebration for the people of the city. "In ED's custody there is a culprit and taking his reference today a script has been written that water and sewer-related facilities in Delhi are disorganised."

INDIA Bloc set to rally for Delhi CM

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Demonstrating the strength and unity of the Opposition, INDIA alliance parties—Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the left parties—have announced to hold a "maha rally" at Delhi Ramlila Maidan on March 31 against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal to "safeguard the country's interests and democracy".



"We will hold a 'maha rally' at Ramlila Maidan on March 31 against what is happening in the country. The top leadership of the INDIA bloc will participate in the event," Delhi Minister and AAP's Delhi convenor Gopal Rai during a press conference on Sunday said. The Minister asserted that India's democracy is in danger following the arrest of Kejriwal in the alleged excise policy-linked money-laundering case by Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday night from his official residence. Calling the rally as a call to



Former Congress MP. Naveen Jindal joins BJP on Sunday

Fresh soldiers join the BJP electoral army

Party Announces 5th list: Naveen Jindal, Former IAF Chief RKS Bhadauria, Kangana, Arun Govil

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut, Actor Arun Govil who played Ram in popular TV serial Ramayan, former judge of Calcutta High Court, Justice Abhijit Ganguly, and Industrial Navin Jindal (who resigned from the Congress today) are figured in the BJP's fifth list of candidates for seats in 16 States for the Lok Sabha elections, released on Sunday.



serial Ramayan, has been fielded by BJP from Meerut Lok Sabha seat. The BJP named Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut as the party Lok Sabha candidate from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh. After Ranaut's name was announced from Mandi, she said she was elated to officially join the party. "My beloved Bharat and Bhartiya Janta own party, Bharatiya Janta Party has always had my unconditional support, today the national leadership has announced me as their Lok Sabha candidate from my birth place Himachal Pradesh, Mandi (constituency), I abide by the high

command's decision on contesting Lok Sabha polls. I feel honoured and elated to officially join the party. I look forward to be a worthy karyakarta and a reliable public servant," Kangana Ranaut posted on X. In 2022, Ranaut said she has a keen interest in politics but has no plans to enter it professionally. The news of Ranaut taking the political plunge comes months after she hinted at entering electoral politics when she offered prayers at Gujarat's Dwarkadhish temple in November 2023. As part of the fifth list, a total of 111 candidates have been fielded for seats in Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Sikkim, Odisha, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh. The party gave Lok Sabha ticket to former judge of Calcutta High Court, Justice Abhijit Ganguly, from Tamluk. He is the first retired judge to join electoral politics, moving away from the way the judiciary has so far distanced itself. Arjun Singh and Tapas Roy, who recently rejoined the BJP from the TMC, will contest the Barrackpore and Kolkata North seats respectively. Senior leader K Surendran will contest against Rahul Gandhi from Kerala's Wayanad.

Further fissures in Opposition alliance against BJP

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

With the campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls peaking up, Congress "Big Brother" attitude in the crucial States — Bihar and Maharashtra— has hit a roadblock in the seat sharing dialogue between all the stakeholders of the Opposition alliance INDIA bloc. Congress is reluctant to "accept" the "diktat" of RJD offers of merely six/seven seats in the 40 Parliamentary constituencies of Bihar. "This is perennial problem in Congress which is not ready to accept its diminishing size. Nitish Kumar (JDU leader and Bihar CM), Mamata Banerjee (TMC supremo and West Bengal CM) exited from the INDIA bloc all due to Congress big brother attitude. Had the alliance worked it would have been in a position to hold the juggernaut of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We are yet to finalise the seats and others have started extensive campaigning. The only hopes of INDIA bloc of doing good were from Bihar and Maharashtra," a RJD Parliamentarian rued. RJD and Congress are stuck over seat-sharing talks in Bihar, with several Congress leaders expressing unhappiness while RJD has expressed uneasiness for the grand old party decision to include former party MP Pappu Yadav in the party. Yadav merged his Jan Adhikar Party (JAP) with the Congress last week. He is husband of Congress Rajya Sabha MP Ranjeet Ranjan. In 2015, the RJD expelled him after he kept on targeting Lalu Prasad Yadav over the question of succession in the party. RJD, which is also planning to bring in one of the daughter of its supremeo Lalu in



electoral politics, has already announced its candidates for four seats where polling is scheduled in the first phase on April 19. Both Congress and RJD insiders said the Lalu-led party was not willing to give Congress more than five to six seats as against its demand of more than ten tickets. In 2019, while the RJD contested

Former Bihar Congress president Anil Sharma and former party MP Nikhil Kumar also taken on the RJD chief over the "unilateral seat-sharing decision" for first-phase seats and he also objected to incumbent BPCC chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh's decision to invite Lalu to the state Congress's office in Patna. Another decision of the RJD that is said to have rubbed the Congress the wrong way is to allocate Begusarai to the CPI. CPI general secretary D Raja who recently met Lalu and Tejashwi Yadav has announced Awadhesh Rai's candidature from the seat. Similarly in Maharashtra too, the INDIA bloc which held a massive show of strength in Mumbai last week where all its alliance top leaders — Rahul Gandhi, Sharad Pawar, Tejashwi Yadav, Farooq Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti— were present.

Dogs conjure up images while following verbal commands

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Known to respond to command words such as "sit", dogs have now been found to conjure up mental representations when they hear known words referring to objects such as a ball, according to a new research that analysed their brain activity. The researchers said it did not matter how many object words a dog understood —known words activated mental representations anyway. This suggested that the ability is generally present in dogs and not just in some exceptional canines knowing the names of many objects, they said. "Your dog understands more than he or she shows signs of," said Lilla Magyari from Hungary's Eötvös Loránd University and co-first author of the study published in the "Current Biology" journal. "Dogs are not merely learning a specific behaviour to certain words but they might actually understand the meaning of some individual words as humans do," Magyari said. The finding that dogs may have



a general capacity to understand words in a referential manner, as humans do, can reshape the way scientists think about humans' uniqueness in using and understanding language, the researchers said. It also has important implications for theories and models of language evolution, they said. For the study, the researchers recruited 18 dog owners and had them say words for toys that their dogs knew. The dogs were then presented with objects -- sometimes matching the word their owner said and sometimes not -- and their

brain's electrical activity was measured. The brain activity recordings showed differences in patterns when the dogs were shown matching objects against those when shown non-matching ones, the researchers said and added that this was evidence of dogs understanding words. They also found a greater difference in the brain activity patterns for words that the dogs knew better. While the team also thought that dogs' ability to understand words depended on them having a large vocabulary of object words, the results showed otherwise. "Because typical dogs learn instruction words rather than object names, and there are only a handful of dogs with a large vocabulary of object words, we expected that dogs' capacity for referential understanding of object words will be linked to the number of object words they know; but it wasn't," said Magyari. The researchers now want to know if this ability to understand words through mental representations is specific to dogs or is present in other mammals as well.

the pioneer

WISHES IT'S READERS

HAPPY Holi

The Pioneer office will remain closed on March 25(Monday) and March 26(Tuesday) on account of Holi, therefore the next issue will be published on March 28(Thursday).The Pioneer wishes its readers happy and safe Holi.

People from PoK also want to join Hindustan post article 370: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The world's largest political party is Bharatiya Janata Party and all this has been possible only under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee sacrificed his life while agitating by leaving the post of Union Minister to remove Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, all of us workers will add 370 new voters to the party at each booth and offer 370 lotus flowers at the feet of Dr. Mukherjee said Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said this while addressing the meeting at Jalsa Resort in Barwani. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made the country proud in the world today. India is moving towards

becoming the third largest economy in the world. The problems which were considered intractable in the country have been solved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as soon as he became the Prime Minister. Be it Article 370, the issue of grand Ram temple, freedom of Muslim sisters from triple talaq, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done many such remarkable and powerful works in the interest of the country. He said that public trust in the government has increased due to public welfare schemes in the last 10 years and there is a historic atmosphere in the country in favor of the BJP government. We have to reach out to the public about the achievements of Modi 10 years in office. We just have to

take this belief to the polling booth and convert it into votes and reach the target of crossing 400 by delivering Narendra Modi's Ram-Ram to the beneficiaries. He said that if you do not pay the electricity bill, you will receive notices again and again. If you do not pay the penalty, your connection is sure to be disconnected. Similarly, Congress did not keep its accounts and their connection is disconnected, what should we do? We want to run the country on the basis of law, hence the watchman of the country, Prime Minister Modi has said that I will neither involve in corrupt practices nor allow anyone. Congress made Hindus and Muslims fight among themselves since independence. This is the same Congress

party which had raised the issue of Shri Ram Temple that if Ram Temple is built, there will be riots between Hindus and Muslims in the country and if Article 370 is removed from Kashmir, rivers of blood will flow. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, while addressing the Social Harmony Dialogue program, said that Congress is a divisive party. There are two types of ideologies in the country. One is going to strengthen the country and the other is going to weaken it. BJP is strengthening the country, while Congress is trying to weaken the country. The Prime Minister of the country, Shri Narendra Modi will never allow their plans to be fulfilled. Today, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, relations with the Gulf

countries are also becoming cordial and a temple of Lord Shri Ram is being built in the Gulf countries too. We also have good relations with neighboring Bangladesh, but today's India knows how to respond to the enemy country Pakistan in its own language. The Chief Minister paid homage at the feet of revered Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel ji, son of Mother Bharati, by garlanding it in Barwani. The meeting was also addressed by Lok Sabha MP and candidate Mr. Gajendra Singh Patel, Lok Sabha convenor and Khargone MLA Mr. Balkrishna Patidar and District President Mr. Kamal Nayan Ingle. The program was conducted by General Secretary Shri Ajay Yadav and former MP Shri Subhash Patel expressed gratitude.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during the celebration of the Bhagoria festival as he campaigns for BJP candidate ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election in Barwani, Madhya Pradesh on Sunday. Pioneer photo

It's Alok Sharma Vs Arun Shrivastava in Bhopal

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

After the Congress has declared candidature of Arun Shrivastava from Bhopal Lok Sabha constituency, now it is clear that there will be direct fight between Congress and BJP. BJP has already fielded Alok Sharma from Bhopal. Congress has declared Arun Shrivastava as its candidate for Bhopal Lok Sabha seat. He is considered a supporter of former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh. According to Madhya Pradesh Congress (PCC) sources, the party's Central Election Committee has given a ticket to Arun after discussion with Congress leader Digvijay. Congress has fielded Arun Shrivastava for the Bhopal Lok Sabha seat with the aim

Congress has declared Arun Shrivastava as its candidate for Bhopal Lok Sabha seat. He is considered a supporter of former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh

of securing the votes of Kayastha community. The Kayastha community has a large number of votes here. Arun Shrivastava is considered to have a good influence among the voters of the society. Earlier, on the evening of March 23, 2024, Congress had appointed Anokhi Patel as the District President of

Bhopal Rural Congress in place of Arun Shrivastava. Since then Arun Shrivastava's ticket was considered final. A few hours later, at 11 pm, AICC released the list of candidates. Along with Arun Shrivastava, this will be the fourth consecutive contest on Bhopal Lok Sabha seat, when Congress has given ticket to a new candidate from here. Earlier, Congress had fielded former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh from Bhopal in 2019, PC Sharma in 2014 and Surendra Singh Thakur in 2009. Sources claimed that the only presence of Arun in the political arena is that his mother was District Panchayat chairperson around 25 years ago. Since the BJP came to power in 2003, Arun Shrivastava was not seen in active politics.

PNS ■ INDORE

The grand finale of Moonstone 2k24 at Medi-Caps University culminated in a dazzling display of talent with the extravagant GROOVE and 'MILANGE' fashion show on March 23, 2024, where creativity, style, and glamour converged on the runway, showcasing the students' remarkable talent. In the distinguished company of Chancellor RC Mittal, Honorable Pro Chancellor Gopal Agrawal, Vice Chancellor Prof. (Dr.) D.K. Patnaik, OSD Palash Garg, and Director Branding Ms. Saloni Garg, the fashion extravaganza unfurled with elegance and finesse, orchestrated by Preeti Jain, head of the university's cultural club. The event's chief guest, Celebrity Designer Anusha



radiating confidence, charisma, and impeccable style. As Moonstone 2k24 came to a close, Medi-Caps University bid adieu to three days of exhilarating festivities with a poignant closing ceremony, marked by heartfelt speeches, expressions of gratitude, and reflections on the unforgettable experiences shared throughout the annual fest." The event, convened by Prof (Dr.) Pramod S. Nair, promises to be a

remarkable gathering of minds and talents in moonstone2k24. Moonstone 2k24 left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of all attendees, symbolizing the spirit of unity, creativity, and excellence that defines Medi-Caps University.

individuality and self-expression, resonated with themes of inclusivity and empowerment. Cultural performances, including dance and music by talented students, added to the event's charm. The crowning of Mr. and Ms. Eve marked the recognition of individuals

250 complaints lodged through cVIGIL App

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

After the implementation of the code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections, 250 complaints have been lodged in the state through the cVIGIL app. This includes putting up posters and banners without permission, distributing gifts and coupons, distributing money, giving religious inducements and other matters. Collectors have reported that after the complaint all the complaints have been investigated. Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan said that as soon as the Model Code of Conduct came into force, complaints started being received on the C-Vigil app. Till March 22, a total of 173 complaints have been received through this app from all the districts of the

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan said that as soon as the Model Code of Conduct came into force, complaints started being received on the C-Vigil app

state. All these complaints have been resolved promptly. Rajan has told the citizens of the state that if they want to make any direct complaint related to violation of the Model Code of Conduct in elections, they can do so through the cVIGIL app. For this, the concerned citizen will have to go to Google Play Store and download the cVIGIL app. For this, when-

ever a citizen gets information about any such incident, he will have to upload a photo or video on the cVIGIL app. After receiving the complaint, action will be taken within the next 100 minutes. The cVIGIL app has been developed by the Election Commission of India for redressal of complaints regarding violation of Model Code of Conduct. Through this app, any citizen can prevent the political parties or candidates from distributing money, material, clothes, jewellery, etc. in any way to woo the voters, threatening the voters to vote in their favor, sending voters in their own vehicle. Can complain about other types of complaints including transportation, putting promotional material on the building or walls of a building owner without his permission or writing advertisements on the wall.



Participants in the Shaheed-E-Azam Marathon to mark the martyrdom of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

BHEL BHOPAL ED inaugurates testing platform for train equipments

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

SM Ramanathan, Executive Director, BHEL, Bhopal the other day inaugurated the newly constructed testing platform for combined system testing for test setup of Vande Bharat train sets at the Center for Electric Transportation (CET). On this occasion RF Siddiqui General Manager (TPTN & CET), Akash Dani General Manager (TPTN EG & CET), Avinash Chandra, General Manager (WEX, MOD & LGX), Alok Sengar, General Manager (Fabrication), Additional General Manager Indranil Chattopadhyay (CET), Additional General Manager M.K. Bhagat (CET) and TPTN and officers and employees from FCX department were present. BHEL has recently received an order for 80 Vande Bharat train set coaches and propulsion systems from Indian Railways. It has been decided to do the Combined System Testing, in the C.E.T lab. Creating Vande Bharat Combined System Testing in place of MCF test set-up was

a very challenging task in itself. But on demand from customer and site, additional set-up for Vande Bharat has been given shape in the lab in addition to MCF and 20 sets non AC. EMU project, CET in just less than a month. FCX and CET of BHEL, Bhopal has walked the extra mile by adding old fabrication items lying in the plant, which was highly appreciated by Ramanathan. He also inspected the new test setup of Vande Bharat and the preparation for testing of 16 newly manufactured motors. Meanwhile, In a simple program organized at the administrative building of BHEL, Bhopal, S M Ramanathan, Executive Director, while bidding farewell to Dr. Ramprakash Shringirishi, Senior Manager, PYX, Anil Verma, Officer, HRM and 04 Supervisors on their retirement, said to make the second innings of their life meaningful and enjoy as much as possible while staying healthy. BK Singh, General Manager (Human Resources) was also present on this occasion.

Holi greetings by AIIMS Bhopal ED

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

As the festival of colors, Holi, approaches, the Executive Director of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bhopal, Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh extends heartfelt greetings to all faculty members, officers, residents, patients and the public. In the spirit of this joyous occasion, Prof. Singh conveys his sincere wishes for a vibrant and joy-filled Holi celebration. He emphasizes the significance of fostering unity, camaraderie, and spreading happiness during this auspicious festival. Prof. Singh expresses his gratitude to the entire AIIMS Bhopal community for their unwavering dedication and commitment towards healthcare excellence, especially amidst challenging times. He acknowledges the collective efforts of faculty, staff, and residents in providing quality medical care and services to patients. Recognizing the resilience and spirit of the patients undergoing treatment at AIIMS Bhopal, Prof. Singh extends special wishes for their well-being and recovery, hoping that the colors of Holi bring them renewed hope and positivity.

Locals attack ward in-charge Arbaaz Khan, manhandle him

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Locals attacked Municipal Corporation ward in-charge Arbaaz Khan who had gone to severe water tap connections which were joined illegally in Budhwara, Zone Officer RB Tripathi was also abused and heckled. After this matter, corporation officials reached the spot. Also lodged a complaint with the police station to register an FIR. The incident occurred after 1 pm on Sunday afternoon. The staff of Zone-5 had reached Budhwara to recover the outstanding dues. During this period, illegal tap connections were also investigated. During this period, illegal connections were found in some houses. After this the corporation staff started disconnecting the connections. Then some people created a ruckus and attacked the corporation staff. Due to illegal tap connection and recovery, some people of Budhwara started creating ruckus. After this the zone officer started abusing

The incident occurred after 1 pm on Sunday afternoon. The staff of Zone-5 had reached Budhwara to recover the outstanding dues

Tripathi. Seeing this, ward in-charge Arbaaz Khan stopped the people. Then a person came and slapped Arbaaz. Other people standing nearby also started fighting. The corporation staff somehow saved themselves from the sudden attack and came out of the spot. After this, complete information about the matter was given to Corporation Commissioner Harendra Narayan. The Commissioner sent officers associated with the department to the spot. Zone in-charge Tripathi said that some people have been beaten and abused. On the instructions of senior officers, an FIR is being lodged against him in the police station.



Priests from different religions and other people participate in a Ramadan Iftar and Holi Milan programme organised by Anant Mandi, Rashtriya Secular Manch and MP Sarvdharm Sadhbhavana Manch at Gandhi Bhawan in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

In 2nd list of Congress, Diggy fielded from Rajgarh

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Congress released the second list of 12 Lok Sabha candidates for Madhya Pradesh late on Saturday night. The party has fielded former chief minister Digvijaya Singh from Rajgarh and Arun Shrivastava from Bhopal. Akshay Bam has been given ticket from Indore,

while senior tribal leader Kantilal Bhuria has been fielded from Ratlam seat, reserved for ST. The other candidates includes Guddu Raja Bundela (Sagar), Nilam Mishra (Rewa), Phundel Marko (Shahdol-ST), Advocate Dinesh Yadav (Jabalpur), Samrat Saraswat (Balaghat), Sanjay Sharma (Hoshangabad),

Mahesh Parmar (Ujjain - SC), Dilip Singh Gurjar (Mandsaur). Digvijaya Singh will be contesting from Rajgarh after a gap of 33 years. He had won the LS seat from Rajgarh in 1991. In the last Lok Sabha election, Singh had contested from Bhopal but lost it to BJP candidate Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur.

NIT-R to set up advanced chip research centre

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The National Institute of Technology, Raipur (NIT-R) has signed a MoU with a Bengaluru-based firm to set up an advanced chip research and development centre on its campus in Raipur, it was announced on Sunday.

The “POSIT” system-based general purpose-graphics processing unit (GPGPU)” advanced chip research and development centre will be named ViBram Silicon Hub. The assistant professor of NIT Raipur, Dr Sonal Yadav, will head it, an official statement said. POSIT number system is an alternative to “Floating Point



number system” and claims to deliver better performance and accuracy for high-performance applications, specifically those that involve significant mathematical computations.

GPGPU advanced chips are used in smartphones, laptops, desktops, servers,

and many other digital devices. These chips are also used in tsunami detection and satellite launch applications.

The agreement was inked recently between NIT Raipur Director Dr N V Ramana Rao and Dr Vijay Holimath, chief executive

officer of VividSparks from Bengaluru.

According to Dr Yadav and Dr Holimath, the initiative will not only address India’s computational needs but also allow the centre to export its research works and products to other countries.

‘Cong will win most LS seats in C’garh’

STAFF REPORTER ■ KANKER

Former Chhattisgarh Minister and Congress MLA Kawasi Lakhma on Sunday said his party will win with the most seats in the Lok Sabha elections in the state.

“I express gratitude to the Congress party for making me a candidate from the Bastar seat,” Lakhma added.

The Congress on Saturday announced Lakhma as the Lok Sabha candidate for Naxalism-affected Bastar (ST) seat which will vote on April 19.

The party has so far named seven candidates in the state, which has 11 Lok Sabha seats.

Lakhma, an influential tribal leader, is a six-term MLA and has represented Kanta Assembly seat in Sukma district since 1998. He was the Industry and



Excise minister in the earlier Congress government in the state. Lakhma has considerable influence in the Bastar region in south Chhattisgarh.

The party has denied a ticket to the sitting MP from

Bastar Deepak Baij, who is also president of the Pradesh Congress Committee. Baij had lost the 2023 Assembly polls from Chitrakot.

The Congress had released its first list for the state earlier this month,

giving tickets to former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel from Rajnandgaon, two former state ministers and a sitting MP.

The Lok Sabha polls in Chhattisgarh will be held on April 19 and 26 and May 7.

Four held on poaching charges



STAFF REPORTER ■ BALODA BAZAR

The Chhattisgarh Forest Department has detained four persons for poaching in Baloda Bazar district, an official communiqué said on Sunday.

The department spotted a suspicious person on March 21 on the cameras set up to monitor tiger movements.

The person was

identified as 27-year-old Lochan Thakur of Ravan Panchayat.

The department raided his home and seized five pieces of shell bombs, a pangolin skin, 10 pieces of porcupine intestine and teeth and jaw of a wild boar from him.

During interrogation, he named his accomplices as Rishi Thakur (35), Shiv Thakur (33) and Mahasingh Thakur (60). A court sent them all to prison.

2 siblings die of suspected food poisoning in C’garh

STAFF REPORTER ■ KORBA

Two minor siblings died due to suspected food poisoning on Sunday while five other members of the family are undergoing treatment at the Korba district hospital in Chhattisgarh.

The incident occurred in Gidhauri village, Korba Superintendent of Police Siddharth Tiwari said.

As per preliminary information, Shravan Kumar, his wife Rajkumari, their three children Devvrat, Anant (6) and Amrita (3) and two others consumed roti with tea at around 9 am.

They started vomiting and their condition deteriorated. They were admitted to the hospital



where Anant and his sister Amrita died during

treatment. Doctors suspect that

“Doctors suspect that they took ill due to food poisoning”

they took ill due to food poisoning.

Police have registered an accidental death report.

Registration for Financial Literacy Assessment exam until May 27



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Registration for the National Financial Literacy Assessment exam for schoolchildren from grades 6 to 12 will be open until May 27, an official communiqué said. The exam will be held from May 28 to 31.

Details and references to examination material can be

obtained at <https://ncfe.org.in/NFLAT>

The test conducted by the National Centre for Financial Education aims to encourage schoolchildren to acquire basic financial skills.

E-Gift cards will be given to the winners at national and regional levels. The students who score more than 85 percent will be given certificates of excellence.



Glimpses of the flag march of Chhattisgarh Police throughout Raipur city on Sunday to ensure peace and security for Holi festival.

Nationalism, hard work will lead to Viksit Bharat: Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Education Minister and Raipur Lok Sabha BJP candidate Brijmohan Agrawal said on Saturday that nationalism and hard work of party workers will help achieve a developed India.

Speaking to party workers in Raipur, he claimed that the BJP has laid every brick of development in the state. He further highlighted the achievements of the BJP during its three-month tenure in the state. Raipur MP Sunil Soni said Brijmohan will win by the highest margin among all candidates in the state.

Raipur North MLA Purandar Mishra said the atmosphere in the entire country, including the state, favours the BJP.



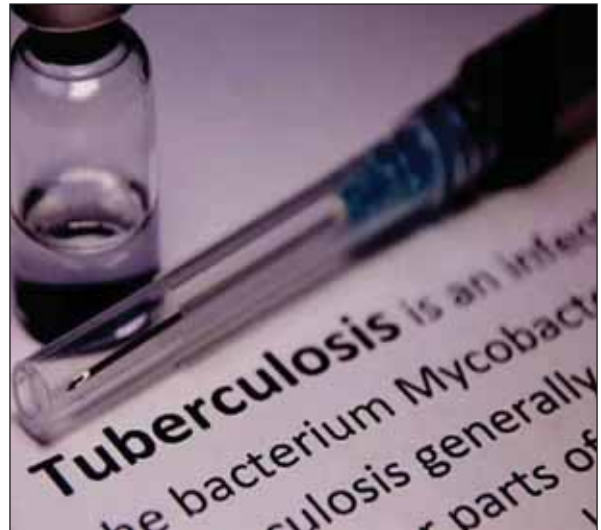
Many cases of TB can appear without symptoms like cough: Experts

AGENCIES ■

While coughing is a major symptom of tuberculosis (TB), experts on Sunday said that it is important for people to recognise that many cases manifest without this symptom. As per experts, people need to watch for signs like unexplained weight loss, fatigue, night sweats, and prolonged fever instead.

Additionally, chest pain, difficulty in breathing, and coughing up blood can indicate advanced stages of the disease.

“Vigilance in monitoring for these diverse symptoms is key to early detection and intervention. We must emphasise the importance of seeking medical attention promptly if any of these signs arise, especially in regions with high TB prevalence,” Dr Ranganatha R, Head -



Department of Pulmonology and TB Lead, Narayana Health City, Bengaluru, told IANS.

A recent meta-analysis of 12 surveys (620,682 participants) from eight countries in Africa and four

in Asia found that a majority of individuals with pulmonary TB did not report cough, and this was more common among women.

“As clinicians, we have noticed that women often

tend to present late and ignore cough or not report it. It is also equally important to note that TB, which does not affect the tissue of the lungs, represents a significant proportion of the disease and will not present with cough,” said Dr Lancelot Pinto, Consultant Pulmonologist and Epidemiologist, P. D. Hinduja Hospital & MRC, Mahim.

A recent study published in the journal Lancet Infectious Diseases showed that 82.8 per cent of people with TB had no persistent cough, and 62.5 per cent had no cough at all.

By raising awareness about the various presentations of TB, the experts said that timely diagnosis and treatment ultimately curb the spread of this infectious disease.

Exercising even once a week is better than not: Expert

AGENCIES ■

Worried about not being able to work out daily? Exercising even once a week is better than no physical activity, said Dr Sudhir Kumar, a Hyderabad-based neurologist.

The doctor, popularly known as “Hyderabad doctor” on X.com, said this on the social media platform along with a recent study on the benefits of people doing physical activity only on weekends -- known as weekend warriors.

“Too busy to exercise on a regular basis? Exercise only on weekends to derive similar mortality benefits,” he wrote on X.

The study, published in the journal BMJ, followed more than 150,000 adults for about two decades. The findings showed that people who exercised once or twice



per week had a 15 per cent lower risk of death, similar to those who worked out on 3 or more days per week. However, the benefit was evident only when the duration of exercise sessions was at least 30-60 min.

“The results suggest that even busy adults could benefit from taking part in one or two sessions of exercise per week,” said the researchers of the study from Universidad de los Andes, Colombia.

“Exercise as often as you can: exercising even once a week is better than not exercising. Ensure that the exercise session is of 30-60 minute duration,” said the doctor, from Apollo Hospital in Hyderabad.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends “at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week.”

In an earlier post, the doctor vouched for a “combination of aerobic exercises and strength training.” It may be better to combine aerobic exercises (on 2-3 days a week), and strength training (on 2-3 days a week) (with one rest day per week), for optimum benefits,” the neurologist said.

Nitish announces JD(U) candidates for all 16 LS seats in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U) on Sunday announced candidates for all 16 Lok Sabha seats it is contesting in the state, with priority being accorded to Other Backward Classes and Extremely Backward Classes, the party's core base. As per the formula announced by the BJP led NDA last week, the JD(U) has been assigned 16 out of the state's 40 seats, equivalent to its current strength in the Lok Sabha but one less than the number it had contested five years ago. According to the list made public at the JD(U) office in the presence of national vice president Vashisth Narayan Singh and Sanjay Kumar Jha, 12 of the party's sitting MPs have

been given another chance from their respective seats. However, in the seats of Sitamarhi and Siwan, sitting MPs Sunil Kumar Pintu and Kavita Singh respectively have been denied tickets by the party which has hedged its bets on legislative council chairman Devesh Chandra Thakur and Vijaylaxmi Devi, who joined the JD(U) along with her husband Ramesh Singh Thakur just the day before. "All the candidates have been decided by the CM who is also the party president. We have reposed our faith in most of our sitting MPs but in some places, there have been changes," said Jha. The party will be contesting the Muslim-majority constituency of Kishanganj, which it had lost in 2019, reposing its trust in Mujahid Alam, who was



defeated by the Congress winner by a margin of less than 35,000 votes. Besides, the party has given up its sitting seat of Karakat, represented by Mahabali Singh, for ally Rashtriya Lok Morcha, headed by former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha, but got Sheohar, which was previously held by BJP. The JD(U)'s Sheohar candidate will be Lovely Anand, wife of mafia don-turned-politician Anand Mohan and mother of RJD MLA Chetan Anand who crossed over to the NDA during the assembly's budget session last month. According to Sanjay Jha, the list of candidates includes "six OBCs, five EBCs, one Mahadalit, a Muslim and three from the upper castes. There are also two women. Care has been taken to ensure that all

sections of the society get a fair representation". The party is contesting only one of the six reserved constituencies in Bihar, Gopalganj, where sitting MP Alok Suman will seek re-election. Among the other sitting MPs who will be seeking re-election from their respective seats are former JD(U) president Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan' (Munger) and Nalanda MP Kaushalendra Kumar, who will be running for a fourth consecutive term from the seat that has in the past been represented by Nitish Kumar himself and his mentor George Fernandes. Besides, Purnea MP Santosh Kumar Kushwaha, who made his debut in 2014, when he held his own in the face of the Modi wave, and retained the seat five years later, bolstered by the JD(U)'s realignment with BJP,

will be seeking a hat-trick. The seat may be heading for a triangular contest with the Congress having promised its ticket to Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, who recently merged his Jan Adhikar Party, and signals emanating from the RJD that it may field Bima Bharti, a JD(U) MLA who joined the RJD on Saturday night. Other JD(U) candidates are Sunil Kumar (Valmiki Nagar), Rampriit Mandal (Jhanjharpur), Dileshwar Kamait (Supaul), Dulal Chandra Goswami (Katihar), Dinesh Chandra Yadav (Madhepura), Ajay Kumar Mandal (Bhagalpur), Giridhari Yadav (Banka) and Chandreshwar Prasad Chandravanshi (Jehanabad), all sitting MPs, getting tickets from their respective seats.

Rajnath celebrates Holi with troops in Leh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday celebrated Holi with soldiers in Leh. He could not visit Siachen glacier to celebrate the festival with troops due to adverse weather conditions there and promised to visit them soon and extended Holi greetings on the phone. Accompanied by Army chief General Manoj Pande and Fire and Fury Corps chief Lt General Rashim Bali, Rajnath celebrated Holi with the troops in Leh. Addressing them, the defence minister commended their valour, determination and sacrifice as they serve in harsh terrain and inclement weather conditions to protect the motherland. The positive commitment of the soldiers posted in high altitudes is much stronger than minus temperatures, he said. He termed Ladakh as India's capital of valour and bravery, just as Delhi is the national cap-



ital, Mumbai is the financial capital and Bengaluru is the technology capital. "The entire country feels safe as our brave soldiers are protecting the borders. We are progressing and leading a happy

life as our vigilant soldiers stand ready at the borders. Every citizen is proud of the Armed Forces as they live far away from their families so that we celebrate Holi and other festivals with our families peace-

fully. The nation will forever be indebted to our soldiers, and their courage and sacrifices will keep inspiring the future generations," Rajnath said. The defence minister asserted that he decided to celebrate

Holi with the soldiers a day before, as he believes that the festivals should first be celebrated by and with the protectors of the country. He urged the Chiefs of the three Services to establish a new tradition of beginning the celebrations of the festivals with the soldiers a day before. "Such celebrations with soldiers on the snowy peaks of Kargil, in the scorching plains of Rajasthan and in the submarines located in the deep seas should become an integral part of our culture," he said. On the occasion, Rajnath also laid a wreath at the War Memorial, Leh as a mark of solemn tribute to the brave hearts who have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation. Later, he spoke with the soldiers posted in the world's highest battlefield Siachen over phone and extended the Holi greetings. He told them that he will soon visit Siachen and interact with them.

Nausena Bhawan symbol of Naya Bharat, Nayi nausena: Navy Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar has said 'Nausena Bhawan', the new state of the art headquarters of the force, is not just a building but a symbol of 'Naya Bharat' and 'Nayi Nausena'. Located in Delhi Cantonment, the sprawling complex is equipped with modern facilities and cutting-edge technologies. On Saturday, Admiral Kumar held a press meet at the new 'Nausena Bhawan', the first media interaction at the complex since its inauguration last week by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. "This building is not just a building, but a symbol of 'Naya Bharat' (new India) and 'Nayi Nausena' (new Navy) and the progress of both our nation and the Navy. Inspired from maritime heritage of Bharat and modern history of Indian Navy,



it indeed represents aspirations of a rising Bharat as well as the rising maritime consciousness of our country," he said. In his address, the Navy chief said the modern landmark also represents "our resurgence as a maritime power". "I would say, this building is actually a representative of 'Naye Bharat ki Nayi Nausena aur Nayi Nausena ki nayi soch ka pratik' (new navy of new India, and new thinking of new navy). That is what it symbolises," he said. The multi-storey building has three wings, and the press interaction was held at the Seafarers Hall located in the

Central Wing. The foyers has a round cross-section, with a compass depicted in at its centre. The logo of the India Navy with its motto 'Shan No Varunah' has been prominently displayed on the facade and in the foyer area. The press interaction largely centred around the 100 days of "sustained operations" by the Navy at seas in executing anti-piracy, anti-drone and anti-missile operations under 'Op Sankalp' in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and north Arabian Sea and sea off the east coast of Somalia. "This is a testament to a new and confident Indian Navy, and we are trying to wear the new identity of Bharat," he said. The defence minister Singh on March 15 had inaugurated the 'Nausena Bhawan'. It marked a significant milestone for the Navy as it has established its 'first independent headquarters in Delhi'.

Congress releases fourth latest list with 45 LS candidates



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The latest fourth list released by the Congress with 45 candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, figures the name of its Uttar Pradesh unit chief Ajay Rai from Varanasi who will take on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. While the Congress fielded veteran leader Digvijaya Singh from Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh, it nominated newly-inducted leader Lal Singh from Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur to take on Union minister Jitendra Singh. MLA Vikas Thakare will take on Union minister Nitin Gadkari in Maharashtra's Nagpur, according to the list. In its fourth list, the party announced candidates for 12 seats of Madhya Pradesh, nine of Uttar Pradesh, seven of Tamil Nadu, four of Maharashtra, two each of Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Manipur and Jammu and Kashmir, and one each of West Bengal, Assam, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Mizoram and Chhattisgarh. The Congress has left the Nagaur parliamentary constituency in Rajasthan for the Hanuman Beniwal-led Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP). The tie-up with the RLP is significant as the Congress looks to boost its position in the desert state, where it lost the Assembly polls recently and had not won a single seat in 2019 Lok Sabha election. The party is looking to expand its support base among the jats with the tie-up with Beniwal, who has a significant following among the community. For Uttar Pradesh, where the Congress is in an alliance with the Samajwadi Party (SP) and contesting 17 seats, it has announced candidates for nine

seats. These include Rai from Varanasi, Danish Ali from Amroha, Imran Masood from Saharanpur and Alok Mishra from Kanpur. The suspense over whether Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will contest the polls from Amethi and Raebareli respectively continued. There is speculation that Rahul Gandhi may also contest the polls from Amethi, besides his declared seat of Wayanad in Kerala, and Priyanka Gandhi from Raebareli, a seat which was previously held by her mother, Sonia Gandhi. This will be Rai's third direct contest against Modi in the general election after 2014 and 2019. He had lost both times to the prime minister by big margins. Amethi and Raebareli are considered bastions of the Gandhi family and the local units of the Congress have demanded that the two scions of the family contest the polls from there. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress has also fielded Ram Nath Sikarwar from Fatehpur Sikri, Pradeep Jain Aditya from Jhansi, Tanuj Punia from Barabanki (SC), Akhilesh Pratap Singh from Deoria and Sadan Prasad from Bangaon (SC). In Tamil Nadu, the party has renominated Karti Chidambaram from Sivaganga, Manickam Tagore from Virudhunagar, S Jothamani from Karur and Vijay Vasanth from Kanniyakumari, among others. In Madhya Pradesh, the party has fielded Digvijaya Singh from Rajgarh, Kantilal Bhuria from Ratlam (ST), Akshay Bam from Indore and Arun Shrivastav from Bhopal, among others. Singh had last contested the polls from Bhopal but lost to the BJP's Pragya Thakur in 2019.

Karnataka moves SC seeking funds from NDRF

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Karnataka government has moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Centre to release financial assistance from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to the State for drought management. The petition has also sought to declare that the Centre's action in not releasing the financial assistance for drought arrangement as per the NDRF is "ex-facie violative" of the fundamental rights of the people of the state guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. It said the state is reeling under "severe drought", affecting the lives of its people and for the Kharif 2023 season, which starts in June and ends in September, a total of 223 out of 236 taluks are declared as

drought-affected. The plea said 196 taluks are categorised as severely affected and the remaining 27 as moderately affected. "Cumulatively for Kharif 2023 season, the agriculture and horticulture crop loss have been reported in more than 48 lakh hectares with the estimated loss (cost of cultivation) of Rs 35,162 crore," the plea, filed through advocate D L Chidananda, said. It said the assistance sought from Government of India under the NDRF is Rs 18,171.44 crore. "In terms of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, Union of India is under obligation to render financial assistance to the state governments," the plea, settled by senior advocate Devdatt Kamat and state's Advocate General K Shashi Kiran Shetty, said.



It said the state is constrained to move the apex court against the "arbitrary actions" of the Centre in denying the financial assistance for drought management to Karnataka under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the manual for drought management updated in 2020. "Further, the impugned action

of the Central Government is violative of statutory scheme of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the manual for drought management and the guidelines on constitution and administration of the State Disaster Response Fund and National Disaster Response Fund," the plea said. It said under the manual for

drought management, the Centre is required to take a final decision on the assistance to the state from the NDRF within a month of the receipt of the inter-ministerial central team (IMCT). "Despite the IMCT report, which visited various drought affected districts from October 4 to 9, 2023 and made a comprehensive assessment of drought situation in the state and consideration of the said report by the sub-committee of the National Executive Committee constituted under section 9 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, Centre has not taken a final decision on the assistance to the state from the NDRF even after a lapse of almost six months from the date of the said report," the plea said. It alleged that inaction on the part of the Centre to act on the

report and take a final decision to release financial assistance to the state is "ex-facie illegal, arbitrary, and violative of fundamental rights" guaranteed to its citizens under Article 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution. It said the State is duty bound to affirmatively protect the fundamental rights of its people guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had on Saturday said the state government has filed a petition in the top court demanding a direction to the Centre to immediately release grants under the NDRF to the state, which is reeling under acute drought. Accusing the Centre of sitting on Karnataka's pleas for release of funds though there is a severe drought, he had said the state government was compelled to approach the apex court.

Congress targets Centre on falling value of Rupee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue of falling value of the Indian rupee against the US dollar, and sought answers from him. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the falling value of the rupee impacts the pocket of every Indian due to rising fuel rates, inflation and higher EMIs for loans. "Before 2014, the BJP would make big claims on the relatively smaller declines in the strength of the rupee. Remember the typically uncouth remarks made by the then Gujarat CM, linking the rupee's value and Dr. Manmohan Singh's age? The rupee's value fell below the self-proclaimed Vishwaguru's own age a long time ago," Ramesh said in statement. The rupee depreciated 48 paise to settle at an all-time low of 83.61 against the American currency on Friday, tracking a surging greenback against major crosses in the overseas markets and weak Asian peers. The rupee had earlier recorded its lowest closing level of 83.40 on December 13, 2023. The Congress leader said



"when the BJP came to power in 2014, the price of one dollar to the rupee was Rs 59. Today, the BJP has increased this price from Rs 59 to Rs 84". "The weakening of the Indian rupee directly impacts your pocket: The value of the rupee decides at what price we get goods imported from abroad. In 2014, if any goods came from overseas for 1 dollar, we had to pay Rs 59. Today we must pay Rs 84 for that same good worth 1 dollar. The extra Rs 25 we are paying is because of the falling rupee," he said. He said when goods being imported from abroad come to the country at a higher price, people in turn will also get

them at a higher cost. India imports 80 percent of its crude oil and must pay for most of it in dollars, he said, adding India is now buying fuel at a higher cost due to the weakening of the Indian rupee. "Every time you go to the petrol pump, the weakening of the rupee is having an impact on your pocket. When fuel becomes more expensive, the cost of transporting goods increases. All goods, including food, are becoming more expensive. When you go to the market to buy groceries, you are paying higher prices due to the weakening of the rupee," Ramesh said.

WHO recommends tNGS tests for diagnosing drug resistant TB

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the multidrug-resistant ATB (MDR-TB) remains a significant public health crisis with only a fraction of affected individuals accessing treatment globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended adoption of targeted next-generation sequencing (tNGS) tests for diagnosing drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB). In its latest guidance, outlined in the third edition of 'WHO Consolidated Guidelines on Tuberculosis. Module 3: Diagnosis - Rapid Diagnostics for Tuberculosis Detection, the WHO said that these tests offer a more precise analysis of the specific genomic regions of TB-causing bacteria present in patient samples, thereby enhancing the detection of drug resistance compared to alternative sequencing methods. On the other hand, tests employing whole genome sequencing analyse the entire bacterial genome for drug resistance. Furthermore, implementing tNGS tests necessitates diagnostic labs to be equipped with



adequate data management and storage infrastructure. The WHO has also unveiled a new TB sequencing portal housing a vast repository of sequences, serving as a comprehensive knowledge base for Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the bacteria causing TB. Only about two in five people with drug-resistant TB are accessing treatment globally in 2022. Accompanying the guidance, the WHO has also launched a new TB sequencing portal hosting more than 56,000 sequences and representing "the most advanced sequencing and phenotyping knowledge base for Mycobacterium tuberculosis (the TB-causing bacterium)". A global study published in "The Lancet Infectious

Diseases" journal earlier this week found that India, along with most of the world, failed to achieve WHO's End TB milestones for 2020 -- including 20 per cent reduced TB incidence and 35 per cent fewer deaths, compared to the baseline figures of 2015. Only 17 of the 204 countries investigated were found to have met the 2020 End TB mortality milestone, with researchers citing drug resistance as an important factor for failing to meet the mortality targets. Dr. Vikas Tandon, Sr. Consultant - Spine Surgeon, Indian Spinal Injuries Centre said that among all the TB cases, bone and spine TB, also known as osteoarticular TB, constitute a significant portion, accounting for approximately 1-2% of all TB cases in the country. The incidence of bone and spine TB in India is high, primarily due to the country's large population, poor sanitation, and inadequate access to healthcare. The disease is more prevalent in rural areas, where access to medical care is limited, and people often live in crowded and unhygienic conditions.

FM rubbishes Karnataka claim of injustice in Central grants

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday rubbished the Karnataka government's claim that the Centre was not releasing its due share of 'special grants' as recommended by the 15th Finance Commission. She denied that there was any recommendation by the Finance Commission. "Karnataka government claims that Rs 5,495 crore special grant was not released to Karnataka and this is totally false. The Finance Commission did not in its final report recommend any such special grant," the Finance Minister claimed. Sitharaman's statement came a day after Karnataka filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court requesting a direction to the Centre to immediately release grants under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to the state, which is reeling under acute



drought. In February, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his deputy D K Shivakumar, Congress MLAs and other Congress leaders at the central level staged a demonstration in New Delhi alleging that the Centre was apathetic towards Karnataka's

woes and was not releasing its due share of funds. "I want to make it a point to tell you in detail that every penny that is due to Karnataka, every paisa that is due to Karnataka, is given, and given on time," Sitharaman said during a talk

organised by Thinkers Forum, Jayanagar in the city. According to the FM, tax devolution has increased under Prime Minister Narendra Modi between 2014 and 2024 by 258 per cent, which is 3.5 times more compared to the 10 years

during the previous UPA rule. In these 10 years of BJP rule, the grants-in-aid have also increased to 273 per cent, which is 3.7 times more than what it was the previous 10 years, she claimed. The Finance Minister said that between 2004 and 2014, the money received by Karnataka per year was Rs 81,795 crore, which went up to Rs 2,93,226 crore from 2014 to 2024. "Nobody's boasting that we've given this much or anything, but to be wrongly alleged, accused that you're not giving money due to Karnataka, I'm sorry, please look at the figures, look at the dates when the money was received and then tell us something which is specific and right, so that I can respond and I will respond," Sitharaman declared. "But when we have given it in time and given sometimes even in advance of the time, to just blanket mislead the people to say money is not coming in is not responsible

at all," she charged. Another set of payments to Karnataka that come under the name of grants-in-aid too increased 3.7 times, Sitharaman said. "The grant-in-aid between 2004-14 was Rs 60,779.84 crore, which increased to Rs 2,26,832 crore. So I just want the state government to please look into the papers, keep the facts and not mislead the people of Karnataka," she pointed out. According to Sitharaman, after Covid, Prime Minister Modi asked the Finance Ministry to give states interest-free loans for 50 years to create infrastructure and spend on the ongoing infrastructure work. "No Finance Commission had recommended, but the Centre decided to give all the state interest-free loans for 50 years... It might probably even get written off. What was the share of Karnataka in that? Rs 7,130 crore since 2020-21," the finance minister said.



BJP slams Kerala over moving SC against President

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The BJP on Sunday criticised the Left government in Kerala for its move to approach the Supreme Court against President Droupadi Murmu saying that it reflected the Marxist party's discrimination towards women and tribal communities. The CPI(M) has always adopted an "anti-woman" stand and they had even opposed when Murmu had been nominated to the supreme post of the country, senior party leader and Union Minister V Muraliedharan alleged.

To prove his argument that the Marxist party's fundamental stand was anti-woman, he said there was no woman member in the Left party's polit bureau till 2022. The saffron party's criticism came a day after the LDF government justified its move to approach the apex Court against Murmu for withholding assent to four bills passed by the state assembly, saying her action has "significant constitutional implications." "If we look back into history, we can understand why the Marxist Party is moving against President Murmu...The innate objection of the CPI (M) leadership towards women is the basic reason for this," Muraliedharan told reporters here. He said that it was not for the

first time that bills were getting delayed in the country, but it was for the first time that someone is moving against the President. Muraliedharan also said that the people of the country, who stand for social justice and equality, would oppose any move intended to humiliate President Murmu. He said it was understood that the Chief Secretary of the state and senior CPI (M) leader T P Ramakrishnan had jointly filed the case against the President. The minister questioned the legal sanctity of a civil service officer filing a case jointly with a political leader. The BJP's statement came a day after the state government filed a plea in the Supreme Court, naming the Union government, the Secretary to the President of India, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan, and his additional secretary as parties to the case. In its plea, the state government requested that the President's refusal to grant assent to the bills--the University Laws (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2021; the Kerala Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022; the University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2022; and the University Laws (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill, 2022-- without stating any reason, be declared unconstitutional.

Phone tapping case: Two additional SPs arrested in Telangana

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Two more senior police officials have been arrested by Hyderabad Police in connection with the case of phone tapping and destroying certain computer systems and official data. During investigation, Additional DCP Thirupathanna and Additional Superintendent of Police N Bhujanga Rao, were arrested, an official release from Hyderabad police late on Saturday night said. The two police officials had earlier worked as Additional Superintendents of Police in the Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) and Intelligence Department, respectively. They were accused of colluding with suspended DSP of the SIB, D Praneeth Rao, who was earlier arrested by Hyderabad police for allegedly erasing the intelligence information from various electronic gadgets as well as for alleged phone tapping during the previous BRS regime. "During the questioning, the two police officials have confessed about their involvement in the reported crimes including conspiracy to monitor private persons illegally by developing their profiles abusing their official positions; to cause disappearance of evidence by destroying the public property to conceal their involvement in collusion with the already arrested D Praneeth Kumar alias Praneeth Rao, DSP (under suspension) and some other persons", the release said. Further investigation is under progress, they said. On March 13, Praneeth Rao, accused of developing profiles of unknown persons and monitoring the same clandestinely, unauthorised and illegally besides destroying certain computer systems and official data was arrested, police earlier said. Rao was recently suspended by the Telangana government. He was a DSP during the previous BRS dispensation and was subsequently working in the office of the Director General of Police (DGP). He was earlier accused of tapping phones of opposition party leaders. Based on a complaint filed by an additional superintendent of police of the SIB on March 10, a case was registered against Praneeth Rao and others at the Panjagutta police station.

Five crushed to death by dumper over dispute in Rajasthan

PTI ■ KOTA

Two brothers were among five men allegedly crushed to death by a dumper over a dispute in the Pagaria area of Rajasthan's Jhalawar district, police said on Sunday. The alleged incident occurred late on Saturday and the two accused -- Ranjeet Singh and Dunder Singh -- fled the spot after the crime, they added. The victims are siblings Bharat Singh (22) and Dhiraj Singh (20), and Tufan Singh (33), Goverdhan Singh (28) and Balu Singh (20) of Binnyaga

Fanta village. Pagaria SHO Vijendra Singh told PTI that there was a dispute between Ranjeet Singh and Dunder Singh -- aged around 20-22 -- and Bharat Singh and others late on Saturday. The reason behind the dispute is yet to be ascertained, he told PTI. Having failed to resolve the dispute, Bharat Singh, his brother and the three other victims left for the police station on two motorcycles, he said. They had barely travelled half a kilometre when Ranjeet Singh and Dunder Singh allegedly got a dumper parked nearby and drove it



over the motorcycles, killing four on the spot. The fifth victim died on the way to hospital, the SHO said. The two accused then abandoned the dumper and fled, he said.

Circle Officer Prem Kumar said the reason behind the dispute is yet to be ascertained. It has been learnt that initially there was no major enmity or rivalry between the victims and the accused. The accused are yet to be traced, he said. The police have lodged a case under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code against Ranjeet Singh and Dunder Singh, SHO Vijendra Singh said. The victims were daily-wage labourers. The post-mortem of the bodies is underway, he added.

Bawankule attacks Sharad for rumours against BJP

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Bharatiya Janata Party's Maharashtra chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Sunday said it was unfortunate that senior leaders like Sharad Pawar were part of the group spreading rumours that the BJP intended to change the Constitution. The country's Constitution is very strong and no one can change it, the BJP leader said, adding that people should not fall prey to the "false narratives" of leaders, including NCP (SP) head Pawar. In a social media post, Bawankule said, "Rumours are being spread about BJP's intentions to change the Constitution because of the various guarantees offered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is unfortunate to see senior leaders like Sharad Pawar joining the herd." "No one can change the Constitution of the country. It is very strong. Sharad Pawar would definitely know the number of times the Congress party amended the Constitution," he said. Contrary to such record, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government always respected and honoured the Constitution in the last 10 years, Bawankule said. "PM Modi even changed the name of Parliament building to Samvidhan Sadan



(Constitution House). The BJP has always worked for constitutional values and in the interest of the nation. People should not fall prey to false narratives of leaders, especially not of Sharad Pawar," he added. Notably, BJP MP Anantkumar Hegde, known for his headline views, had said his party needs a two-third majority in both houses of Parliament to amend the Constitution and "set right the distortions and unnecessary additions made to it by the Congress". Reacting to it, Sharad Pawar earlier this month said, "The remarks reflect upon what is there in the mind of the BJP leadership and it is worrisome for the country. If someone is saying this publicly, then such things cannot be neglected." After a row sparked by Hegde's comments, the BJP had dubbed his remarks "personal opinion" and sought a clarification from him.

IIT student on way to join ISIS detained in Assam: Police

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

An IIT-Guwahati student, who had allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS and was on his way to join the terror group, was detained, police said. The student was nabbed in Hajo area near Guwahati on Saturday evening. His apprehension comes four days after ISIS India head Haris Farooqi alias Harish Ajmal Farukhi and his associate Anurag Singh alias Rehan were arrested in Dhubri district after they had crossed over from Bangladesh. "Reference @IITGuwahati student pledging allegiance to ISIS - the said student has been detained while

travelling and further lawful follow up would take place," Director General of Police GP Singh posted on X on Saturday. Additional Superintendent of Police (STF) Kalyan Kumar Pathak said, "After receiving an email, we got about to verify the authenticity of the contents and started an investigation." The email was sent by the student, in which he claimed that he was on his way to join ISIS. Pathak said the IIT-Guwahati authorities were immediately contacted, who informed them that the said student had been "missing" since noon and his mobile phone was also switched off.



He is a fourth-year student and hailed from Okhla in Delhi, he added. A search was started to locate him and he was nabbed from Hajo area, around 30 km from Guwahati, on

Saturday evening with the help of locals, the ASP said. "After initial questioning, he has been brought to the STF office. We are verifying the motive of the email," Pathak said. He said a black flag, "purportedly similar to that of ISIS", was found in his hostel room and was being sent for verification to specialised agencies which deal with proscribed outfits. "We are going through the items seized, it is early to say much. We are investigating the intention of sending the email. The student has given some details, but we cannot disclose anything further now," Pathak added.

One fisherman drowns, three missing in Tripura Dumbur lake

PTI ■ AGARTALA

One fisherman drowned and three others were missing in Dumbur lake in Tripura's Dhalai district, police said on Sunday. The body of a fisherman Hari Das (45) was recovered while search operation is on for three other missing, said a senior police officer. "Four fishermen of Gandacherra sub-division ventured out to catch fish on Saturday. They had taken shelter in a tent in the middle of the lake amidst the heavy storm. Due to strong wind, the tent collapsed and they were submerged in the lake", he said. A police team rushed to



the spot on Sunday morning and initiated a massive search operation and recovered the body of Hari Das, he said, adding the divers are still carrying out an operation to find

the missing fishermen. Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha expressed shock over the death of fishermen in Dumbur lake. "Have received information about the death of four fishermen due to a heavy storm who went to Dumbur lake to catch fish. The administration and police have already taken up follow-up action after the tragic incident. One body has already been recovered while the operation is still on. I convey my condolence to the bereaved families and the government will stand by the victim's family in this difficult time", Saha wrote in a Facebook post.

DMK MP Ganesamoorthy hospitalised

PTI ■ ERODE

A. Ganesamoorthy of the AIDMK, the sitting Lok Sabha MP from Erode, was on Sunday hospitalised here, with his condition stated to be serious by doctors. According to police, at around 9:30am today morning, Ganesamoorthy, who was elected on a DMK ticket in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls from here, developed uneasiness and was admitted to a private hospital here by his family members. After check-ups, he was admitted in the ICU and has been put on the ventilator, police said. He was later shifted to a private hospital in Coimbatore at around 2.30 p.m. With two doctors and his family members accompanying him



in the ambulance. Political leaders like S. Muthusamy, state Minister for Urban Development and Housing and Excise and Prohibition, Dr C. Saraswathy BJP MLA of Modakurichi, K.V. Ramalingam of the AIADMK and some others rushed to the hospital and enquired about Ganesamoorthy's health.

Teachers training, annual exams during Holi, Good Friday spark row in Bihar

PTI ■ PATNA

A row has erupted over the Bihar education department scheduling a training programme for government teachers and annual examinations for school students on Holi and Good Friday respectively. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav has sought the intervention of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar into the matter. A circular issued by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) on March 20 stated,

"Officials concerned must ensure that all primary school teachers (from classes 1 to 5) who have not attended training session earlier, must attend the six-day Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) training that is being organised by the council from March 25 to 30." The circular has been sent to the principals of all College of Teacher Education (CTE), District Institute for Education and Training (DIET), Primary Teacher



Education College (PTEC), Block Institute for Education and Training (BIET) and other officials concerned. As per the letter, a total of 19,200 government school teachers will attend FLN training at 78 training centres of the department from March 25 to 30. The SCERT has made it clear that "no leave will be granted" to all concerned during the training period. The SCERT is the apex academic body in the state for school and teacher education

and is a wing of the education department. The Bihar government has already declared public holidays on Holi and Good Friday and all offices of the state government will remain closed on those days. Similarly, the department's decision to conduct annual examinations for students below class 8 even on Good Friday (March 29) has triggered a controversy. Even Robert L Chongthu, principal secretary to the Bihar governor, in a letter to the chief

secretary, urged him to direct the department to change the exam schedule of March 29. Both the SCERT circular and the Raj Bhavan letter to the chief secretary are in possession with PTI. Despite repeated attempts, Education Minister Sunil Kumar was not available for his comments on the issue. In a post on X, Tejashwi Yadav said, "As per orders of the NDA government in Bihar, teachers have to be present even on the day of Holi. This has never happened in Bihar

earlier... When the entire state is celebrating Holi, teachers will stay away from their families on that day. The CM must intervene in the matter." His party RJD's spokesperson Mrityunjay Tiwary told PTI, "This shows complete anarchy in the state government and the education department. How can the department concerned organise training for teachers and hold exams on festivals? This will certainly hurt the religious sentiments of the people. These circulars must be withdrawn."

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Black & White

The Congress seeks SC-monitored probe for transparency in the Electoral Bonds issue

The controversy around the now-scrapped Electoral Bonds just refuses to die down. A day after the political funding data was made public, activists demanded an independent Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe all aspects of the scheme. The Congress has already upped the ante; the debate has been reignited as the party presses for a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the alleged malpractices surrounding these financial instruments. Accusations of “pre-paid, post-paid and post-raïd bribes” have intensified the clamour for transparency and accountability in the electoral financing system. Electoral Bonds, introduced in 2018 ostensibly to promote transparency in political funding, allow individuals and corporations to donate money anonymously to political parties. Targeted at curbing the use of black money in elections, these bonds have faced criticism since inception, primarily over their potential to facilitate unaccounted donations and influence peddling. Despite ensuring transparency, they are said to be



tools for bribing one political party or the other. The Congress alleges that the bonds have become conduits for illegal transactions, facilitating the flow of unaccounted funds to political parties. The use of terms like “pre-paid, post-paid and post-raïd bribes” reflects the suspicion that these bonds have been exploited not only to fund political campaigns but also to influence policy decisions through backdoor dealings. The call for a Supreme Court-monitored investigation underscores the lack of faith in the existing mechanisms for oversight and regulation of electoral finances. Somewhere, the Congress has apprehensions that the party in power may be able to influence the

probe. The Congress, along with other Opposition groups, contends that any inquiry conducted under the Government’s auspices would lack impartiality and could be subject to manipulation. The absence of disclosure requirements regarding the identity of donors compounds concerns about accountability and opens the door to potential misuse of funds. Furthermore, recent raids conducted by law enforcement agencies on premises linked to certain political entities have brought to light a web of dubious financial transactions allegedly involving electoral bonds. The controversy underscores broader concerns about the influence of money in politics and the need for robust mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in electoral financing. While proponents argue that such instruments are essential for sustaining political parties and facilitating democratic processes, critics contend that the lack of transparency compromises the integrity of the electoral system. The Supreme Court’s intervention in this matter could prove pivotal in restoring public trust in the electoral process. The judiciary can help ensure that the electoral process remains free from undue influence and corruption. Only through a thorough and impartial investigation can the truth be unearthed, and measures be implemented to safeguard the democratic principles upon which the nation’s governance rests.

PICTALK



Women perform rituals in preparation of ‘Holika Dahan’ on the eve of Holi festival, in Patna

Life’s palette: Colours to illuminate existence

In a world where words often fall short, colours emerge as an untapped avenue for communication, evoking emotions and thoughts

Communicate one must, to share or just to unburden oneself. Else one may cease to stay alive and kicking. Yet communication, with known modalities of gestures and words has never been an issue. It is so because both of these have limitations. The less explored is the application of colours to convey thoughts, feelings and emotions that come in myriad shades and hues. Colours speak when gestures and words betray, something Nature does with masterly finesse. In the countryside, I recently chanced to witness intriguing yellow flowers with red patches towards the centre and dark violet bands along the periphery. A miraculously impressive colour pattern mesmerising the eyes. “Colour! What a deep and mysterious language, the language of dreams,” said Paul Gauguin. Human beings are not destined to lead a drab life engrossed with ratiocinations, value judgements or analytics of what goes around or will, with heads down but to live with ease, spontaneity, relishing each moment. With colour, you stand out and

shine. Be colourful. The world needs your prismatic soul, said the media person Amy Leigh Mercree. So, Nature created colours; all in nature is in colours for a purpose. It is colours that imbue our otherwise drab routine with vibrancy and optimism. “Colours are the smiles of Nature,” said Leigh Hunt. Let the scientists and philosophers argue whether colour is a physical entity defined by the visual effect of light refracting and reflecting due to varied frequency & wavelengths of diverse colours, or just an individual perception, anything in colour makes better sense. Colours also help keep our body, mind and spirits in healthy mode so that we can live fully. “The purest and most thoughtful minds are those which love colour the most,” said John Ruskin. The 5000-odd years old abstract art tradition of Rangoli of South Indian origin, still popular, is the art of saying it with colours. Among believers of any description,

colours are widely used apropos to religious or other occasions. Rangoli is also integral to the inaugural ceremonies of scientific, engineering, and cultural meets; followers of different sects have distinctively coloured dress codes. The outsiders of main entrances are often, if not daily, decorated with Rangoli of various hues made of powdered rice, flower petals, leaves, sand, sugar etc. Coloured designs of Rangoli and other figures represent an array of diverse human sentiments and ratiocinations. The circles of Rangoli symbolise eternity, the dots and small lines depict the hurdles creeping into our lives unawares. The ambience around Rangoli is believed to be charged with energy, ushering in positive vibes, and good luck, and keeping the negative, evil spirits at bay. A look at the rainbow in the sky, the Nature’s exquisite colour pattern, made the bard’s heart leap up. Most in our strife-torn world direly await a healing touch. If you



HARISH BARTHWAL

could become a rainbow in someone’s cloud, as suggested by Maya Angelou, it would be a great, very meaningful life indeed. Artists and thinkers often compare the world with a canvas, and life with a box of crayons makes great sense. “With color one obtains an energy that seems to stem from witchcraft” said Henri Matisse, the leading proponent of modern art. Each of us is an energy pack of enormous possibilities that we rarely understand. In keeping with our destination, and optimally using discretion, we can give a shiny, dull or any colour to our life; it is one’s individual choice. This Holi, ignore for a while the propriety of playing with colours with or without song & dance. And immerse in spontaneous expression of verve, drinking life to the lees, because all moments of life are not for analysis nor a mathematical puzzle to be resolved. Like a Kolavari song just to be enjoyed, no matter if you don’t understand it! (The writer is a blogger and writes on social, spiritual and health issues. Views are personal)

Zero-water day is nigh in Bengaluru

India stands on the precipice of a dire situation as its water reservoirs dwindle and cities like Bengaluru face a looming Day Zero scenario



KOTA SRIRAJ

The World Water Day (WWD) 2024 coordinated by UN-Water was observed on 22 March. The WWD event every year aims at inspiring action to tackle the global water crisis. A core focus of WWD is to enable the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 which stands for enabling access to clean water and sanitation for all by 2030. This year’s WWD’s theme ‘Water for Peace’ focuses on the critical role of water in ensuring stability and prosperity of the world. Water is a precious resource that covers 70% of our planet, but only 3% of the world’s water is usable fresh water, and even two-thirds of that is in the form of frozen glaciers and therefore unavailable for use. India is witnessing a rather grim WWD eve this year. According to the latest Central Water Commission (CWC) report, more than half of India’s 150 major water reservoirs are having less than 40% inventory. Patchy rainfall due to El Niño has caused nearly 60% of the country to experience inadequate rainfall coupled with this the spiralling demand for water due to increasing population has meant rampant and reckless exploitation of available water resources.

These conditions aided by the upcoming summer months are paving the way for a never before water crisis India has ever seen. This possible squeeze on drinking water may also adversely impact power availability this summer. Water is the most precious and yet most taken-for-granted resource in the world. Currently, some 1.1 billion people worldwide lack access to water, and a total of 2.7 billion find water scarce for at least one month of the year. At the present consumption rate, this situation will only get worse. India currently has 18 per cent of the world’s population, but only 4 per cent of its water resources, making it among the most water-stressed nations in the world. As India finds itself amid an unfolding water crisis, the stress is becoming more visible with each passing year. The extreme water shortages in Bangalore for instance is an unfortunate exam-



ple of how on the eve of WWD the garden city has turned into a drought city. The situation is so dire that families only have access to 20 litres of water per day as 6900 borewells out of 13900 total borewells in the city have dried up. Now even drilling up to 2000 feet is not yielding any water. The worst water crisis in the last 40 years has driven up water tanker prices, encouraged black marketing and ignited water conflicts across the once-beautiful city. For a city that is on the brink of Day Zero, the WWD’s theme of “Water for Peace” holds ironic significance for Bengaluru as the city surely needs both water as well as peace now. Day Zero for water has been the most feared consequence of adverse anthropogenic intervention into the environment. The Cape Town water crisis during 2017-2018 is a well-documented example of a city’s touch-and-go with Day Zero wherein the citizens were rationed a fixed number of litres of water per day. The cause of the crisis was severe drought brought on by climate change and a growing exploitation of groundwater. The Bengaluru water crisis must wake up India to the real threat of looming Day Zero for water in its major cities. Already Hyderabad municipal authorities too have sounded alarms over the dwindling groundwater table.



THE SCARCITY OF WATER CAN BRING A CITY’S OR STATE’S ECONOMY TO ITS KNEES. RIDING ON THE PRESENT WATER CRISIS, BENGALURU IS EXPECTED TO WITNESS AN EXODUS OF IT PROFESSIONALS TO NEARBY CITIES THAT HAVE PLENTIFUL WATER SUPPLY

The scarcity of water can bring a city or state’s economy to its knees. Riding on the present water crisis, Bengaluru is expected to witness an exodus of IT professionals to nearby cities that have plentiful water supply. This will not only negatively impact the IT industry but will also stunt the growth of the real estate market, trade and industry. The government must launch special programmes to pull back water-stressed cities in India from the edge of drought. To ensure this the city’s municipal authority must bring borewells under a licensing system and those borewells operating without proper permissions must be sealed. Water meters must be installed for borewells as well to monitor the drawing of water and to rationalise the same. The government must also regulate the drilling companies and make it mandatory for the drillers to obtain permission before the procedure. The city’s concrete landscape also plays a major role in water scarcity. The manifold increase in paved surfaces causes a heat island effect resulting in peaking temperatures, but more importantly, prevents rainwater from percolating into the soil. This causes insufficient water recharges to the underground aquifers and groundwater table. As a result of this, the borewells begin to dry up.

Bengaluru for instance has 90% of its surfaces paved, this is alarming as it means that the rainfall that the city receives is never properly absorbed. The authorities across India must frame rules regarding paved surfaces. The city’s water bodies are its lifelines. In the case of Bangalore for instance the slow death of its lakes over the past decades should have served as a prediction for the impending Day Zero for water. But sadly, the signs were ignored even as the land-grabbing mafia encroached on lake beds and suffocated the critical water bodies. To prevent the abandonment of the city by its people, the government must reclaim its water bodies clear the encroachment and pump water into these lakes as they have played a pivotal role in recharging the city’s underground aquifers forever. Bangalore is probably the first city in India that is on the brink of Day Zero. The government must pull out all stops to rescue the city. The long pending fresh water piped supply project from the Cauvery River has been stuck due to various political and bureaucratic reasons. The metamorphoses of water-scarce conditions to water-absent conditions can be disastrous for our nation. (The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OPACITY IN ELECTORAL BONDS

Madam — Apropos news article “EC uploads complete electoral bond data,” published on March 22, this is my response. The secrecy surrounding the Electoral Bond Scheme, which was notified in January 2018, is now gone with the complete disclosure of the details about the Electoral Bonds. The “Electoral Bond” was a bearer banking instrument with no name of the buyer or payee. Through the Finance Act of 2017 certain provisions in India’s election law, the Companies Act, and the Income-tax law were amended to keep the Scheme completely opaque. The alphanumeric numbers in the bonds were not to be visible to the naked eye. The Supreme Court ordered that the State Bank of India, the sole designated bank to issue bonds, publish all the details through the Election Commission. The bank furnished the particulars without identifying alphanumeric numbers. The scenes in the court to stop the numbers from being published showed how panicked and desperate the Centre and the industry were. The built-in opacity of the scheme, the desperate attempts to maintain secrecy, the erratic conduct of the SBI, the panicked response of the industry and the ferocity of the government’s opposition to disclosure gave the impression that something was rotten in the state of Denmark. Analysts believe that the Electoral Bond Scheme served as a conduit for the free flow of illicit money, enabling the investigative agencies to engage in motivated actions for extortion, alter the course of court cases, quid-pro-quo award of contracts and supply substandard drugs.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

RECOGNISING ETHICAL DUTY

Madam — Is charity a moral obligation? We have a volunteer obligation to occasionally assist others which implies that we frequently have various options for aiding others. Charity is not a duty

Best article in national interest

This is in response to Kumar Chellappan’s story on the Agenda cover titled ‘CAA Passport to Freedom’ dated 24 March 2024. I write this to profusely thank you for publishing such a bold and forthright article by Mr Kumar Chellappan ‘Passport to Freedom.’ In the national interest, this is the best article I have seen. The same thing is happening in Uttarakhand and it may become another JK soon. I have been raising these issues here. Please convey my thank you to the writer for a wonderful piece of work. Thanks for such an article.

V K Bahuguna | Noida



but a moral obligation to help until personal sacrifice equates to recipients’ disparity. The decision to do charity is our powerful choice that reflects our commitment to building a better India for everyone. Moral obligation is a sense of responsibility to do what is right. Uniqueness moulds your personality to stand out in the crowd, like doing charity for needy ones, giving donations to poor children for their education, and many more good deeds. The euphoria you feel and the high regard you get are inexplicable. Charity should be a moral duty, not a casual choice. Jagrati Gehlot | Ujjain

ROW OVER SANGITA KALANIDHI

Madam — Apropos news article “Carnatic singers outraged over honour to Krishna,” published on March 22, this is my response. The row over the selection of vocalist T M Krishna for this year’s Sangita Kalanidhi by the Music Academy, Chennai, is needless. The honour for Mr Krishna must be seen solely from the perspective of his musi-

cal skills, his strict adherence to tradition, and for using Carnatic music as a tool for social reform. The allegations made by a set of musicians like, Mr. Krishna have “vilified the Carnatic music fraternity” cannot be a chief reason to oppose the selection. The Ramon Magsaysay award winner, in his efforts to obliterate caste elitism in the existing Carnatic music system, has been taking it outside the hallowed portals of Chennai city’s prestigious Sabhas and creating more inclusive egalitarian space, where people of all communities, irrespective of caste and creed, come together and listen and enjoy his music. Where were these complainants and what were they doing when the prestigious Kalakshethra Bharathanatyam Foundation was mired in controversy last year, involving allegations of sexual abuse and discrimination?

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE ESSENCE OF
WORKPLACE CULTURE

It involves intricate interaction of values, behaviours and organisational dynamics



SAKSHI SETHI

The majority of the population spends a significant portion of their life at work which highlights the fact that our workplace environment is critical to us. Culture is the way an individual interacts with others that results in work processes. We don't always see culture except for the physical surroundings. The work culture ethic rests upon delayed gratification, hyper-competitiveness and the perpetual need to outperform what machines can do. An organisation's culture includes the life experiences of its employees and is influenced by the organisational executives and those involved in the decision-making process. In layman's terms, workplace culture or workplace environment is a process because of how people learn. Employees learn to perform behaviours through a system of rewards or consequences, so it forms the work culture. Creating a positive workplace environment requires attention to the physical, social, and cultural factors that influence employee experiences and satisfaction. By prioritising employee well-being and fostering a supportive and inclusive culture, organisations can create a workplace environment where employees thrive and contribute to the success of the business. Recognition and reward systems can impact employee morale and motivation to a large extent. Recognising employees for their contributions and providing opportunities for advancement and development contributes to a positive workplace environment and if it becomes a standard and repeated behaviour by the managers, then it becomes a part of the culture.



Today, organisations supporting work-life balance provide employees with flexibility and resources to manage their personal and professional lives. This may include flexible working hours, remote work options and policies that encourage employees to take time off when needed. Factors such as lighting, temperature, noise levels, ergonomic furniture, and providing employees with up-to-date technology and the right tools for their tasks impact not only employee comfort but also increase the productivity and morale of the organisation. A positive work culture fosters employee engagement, where employees are emotionally committed to their work. Above all the most crucial role is the behaviour and actions of leaders and managers that influence the workplace environment at large. Effective leadership that communicates openly, provides feedback and supports employee development can create a positive and empowering work environment while on the contrary, Negative work culture can manifest in various ways, leading to dissatisfaction, stress and decreased productivity among employees. When leaders exhibit toxic behaviours such as micromanagement, favouritism or lack of transparency, it creates a culture of fear and distrust among employees. When there is a lack of communication or when the information is not shared transparently, rumours and gossip spread, further eroding trust. This leads to employees feeling undervalued, unappreciated or unsupported resulting in resignation or the term which is nowadays widely in use 'Quiet Quitting'. Studies have found that engaged employees are often proven to be more productive, creative and motivated to contribute to the success of the company which shows that the workplace environment encompasses the physical, social and psychological aspects of the work setting that influence employee experience and well-being. It includes everything from the layout and design of the office space to the relationships between colleagues and the organisational culture. Remember, a good salary motivates you once a month, but a good work culture does the same every single day. The values, norms and practices that define the organisational culture shape the workplace environment. A culture that values transparency, trust, and respect fosters employee engagement and satisfaction.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Debunking claims of fiscal discrimination



UTTAM GUPTA

Opposition-ruled States, especially southern States, have raised concerns about discriminatory treatment in the current system of fiscal resource sharing between the Centre and the States



Various Opposition-ruled States especially from south India have complained of 'discrimination' and 'unfair' treatment under the present scheme of sharing financial resources between the Union Government and the States. Article 270 of the Constitution provides for the sharing of net tax proceeds collected by the Union government with the States. The taxes that are shared include corporation tax, personal income tax, Central GST (Goods and Services Tax) of CGST, the Centre's share of the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST), CED on petroleum products excluding the cess and surcharge levied by the Centre etc. All these taxes put together constitute the 'divisible pool'. This division is based on the recommendation of the Finance Commission (FC) which is constituted every five years as per the terms of Article 280. At a broader level, the State's concern has to do with their spending around 60 per cent of the total expenditure (Centre and States put together) even as the share of their tax revenue in total tax revenue is about 40 per cent. For instance, during FY 2022-23, out of total spending of around Rs 100,00,000 crore, the States' expenditure was Rs 60,00,000 crore, and the remaining Rs 40,00,000 crore was by the Centre. As for the tax collection, out of total proceeds (Centre plus States) of about Rs 50,50,000 crore, the states collected around Rs 20,00,000 crore while the Centre garnered Rs 30,50,000 crore. This doesn't give the full picture. To get it, we need to add to their tax revenue, the amount of transfer by the Centre from the latter's tax collection as per the FC formula. The share of States from the 'divisible pool' currently stands at 41 per cent as per the recommendation of the 15th FC. During FY 2022-23, this was Rs 950,000 crore which means tax revenue with the states was Rs 29,50,000 crore and the net amount remaining with the Centre - after transfer to states - was Rs 21,00,000 crore. With this adjustment, the States' share in overall tax revenue works out to 58.5 per cent which is more or less close to their share



THIS DIVISION IS BASED ON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE FINANCE COMMISSION, WHICH IS CONSTITUTED EVERY FIVE YEARS AS PER THE TERMS OF ARTICLE 280

in total expenditure at 60 per cent. The second concern relates to the cess and surcharge collected by the Centre which doesn't form part of the 'divisible pool' and hence is not shared with the States. During 2017-18 and 2022-23, there has been a 133 per cent rise in the collection of the major cesses and surcharges. In the FY 2022-23, these accounted for a quarter of the total taxes collected by the Centre. The States argue that because of their exclusion, they are getting only 32 per cent of the total tax receipts of the Centre as against 41 per cent recommended by the 15th FC. This shouldn't be viewed in isolation. These cesses include a Cess like the GST Compensation Cess (GST - CC). The collections from GST - CC are used for the repayment of loans taken to compensate States for the shortfall in tax collection due to GST implementation for the period 2017-22. Flowing back to the coffers of the States in its entirety already, it makes no sense to include these collections in the divisible pool. An important Cess collected by the Centre is the Road and Infrastructure Cess (RaIC) levied on petroleum products such as petrol and diesel. As is evident from the nomenclature, the collections from this Cess are meant fundamentally for building infrastructure projects mostly national highways, expressways etc. These can't be made a part of the divisible pool as by sharing with the States thereby reducing the funds available with the Centre, the very objective behind levying the RaIC will be defeated. Considering that the cesses and surcharges are levied for a well-defined purpose, including the proceeds from their imposition in the 'divisible pool' and then, to argue that the transfer to the states works out to 32 per cent which is lower than the

devolution percentage recommended by the FC (read: 41 per cent) is untenable. The fact of the matter is that states are getting their legitimate share in full out of the tax collection by the Centre as per the FC award. Apart from the Centre bolstering States' tax revenue as per the FC devolution formula, it is also helping them on the expenditure side by pumping a sizeable share in the centrally sponsored schemes (CSSs) being implemented by states where its contribution can range from 50 per cent to a high of 90 per cent depending on the Scheme. Besides, the Union government is also helping them by making available 50-year interest-free loans for financing capital expenditure. For the current FY, the loan amount is Rs 130,000 crore. A third concern voiced by the southern States in particular, has to do with what they describe as outright discrimination they face in the distribution of the devolved funds among the States (also known in FC jargon as 'horizontal devolution'). They contend that industrially developed States (all southern States fall in this category) receive much less than a rupee for every rupee they contribute to the Centre's tax kitty as against States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. For instance, Karnataka gets back only 46 paise for every rupee it contributes while Uttar Pradesh gets Rs 1.79 against each rupee contributed by it. The argument is specious. It sounds like a high-income earner who contributes more to the government's coffers (that is the way it should be under a progressive tax regime) expecting proportionate benefits from the latter. The proposition suffers from an inherent contradiction. Likewise, a rich state like Karnataka which contributes a rupee as tax should not expect a rupee in return. Successive Finance Commissions

have followed this dictum while framing its recommendations. The criteria used by the 15th FC for determining the share of states in the divisible pool gives weights to various parameters as under 45 per cent for the income distance; 15 per cent for the population; 15 per cent for the area; 10 per cent for forest and ecology; 12.5 per cent for demographic performance and 2.5 per cent for tax effort. 'Income distance' is the distance of a State's income from the State with the highest per capita income. States with lower per capita income hence, not having the capacity to generate their resources are given a higher share to promote equitable and balanced development. Accordingly, while, 'income distance' gets the maximum weight of 45 per cent, population and area get a significant 15 per cent each as these factors put a heavy demand on resources. Even as the formula seeks to protect the disadvantaged states, it also gives incentives to states better placed (in terms of per capita income and low population) by giving weight to efforts for controlling their population and improving tax collection efficiency. A 15 per cent weight for these efforts is a good balancing act. Such States also get what is termed as post-devolution revenue deficit (PDRD) grants. These are meant to meet the gap in the Revenue Accounts of the States post-devolution. The eligibility and quantum of grants to concerned states are decided by the FC based on the gap between the assessed revenue and expenditure of the State. The 15th FC had recommended PDRD grants amounting to about Rs 300,000 crore over the five years ending FY 2025-26. To conclude, there is no merit in the argument that the States are treated unfairly in fiscal transfers.

(The writer is a policy analyst, views are personal)

The golden hour: Timely response in medical emergencies

Awareness of the golden hour, a brief window of time during which a life can be saved, is crucial

In emergency medical care, time is of the essence. Among the critical concepts that underscore this urgency is the "Golden Hour." This term refers to the crucial sixty-minute window immediately following a traumatic injury or medical emergency during which prompt medical intervention can significantly improve a patient's chances of survival and recovery. The importance of the Golden Hour lies in its acknowledgement of the delicate balance between life and death, where timely medical attention can tip the scales in favour of life. During this period, the body's physiological responses to trauma are at their most



SARIKA JHA

critical stage. Without timely intervention, cascading complications may ensue, leading to irreversible damage or even death. One of the primary reasons why the Golden Hour holds such significance is the rapid progression of trauma-induced pathophysiological changes within the body. Prompt medical care during this critical period can help mitigate these responses, stabilise the patient, and prevent further deterioration.

Moreover, the Golden Hour emphasises the importance of swift and efficient emergency response systems. Access to timely medical care, including rapid transportation to appropriate healthcare facilities, is paramount. Whether it involves dispatching ambulances equipped with life-saving equipment or giving CPR, every minute counts in maximising the chances of a positive outcome. Furthermore, the concept of the Golden Hour underscores the significance of preparedness and training among healthcare professionals and first responders. From paramedics providing initial on-site care to emer-

gency room physicians orchestrating complex treatment strategies, proficiency in trauma management is indispensable. Training programmes focused on rapid assessment, triage, and intervention empower healthcare providers to make critical decisions swiftly and effectively, optimising patient outcomes within the Golden Hour. Saving lives during the Golden Hour is not solely dependent on medical expertise but also on community awareness and proactive engagement. Education campaigns emphasising the importance of early recognition of emergencies, prompt activation of emergency medical services, and basic life support interventions



empower individuals to become active participants in the chain of survival. Awareness is the key amongst the people and that makes all the difference, feels Dr Devi Shetty, Founder of Narayana Health. "It is the first four to six hours in case of heart attack and just one hour in brain stroke that the

patient can be recovered after that no one can do anything about it. Unfortunately, unlike in heart attack where patient experiences acute pain, brain stroke is silent but is the second largest source of deaths in the country," he adds. Indeed, brain stroke is the second leading cause of death worldwide, after heart attacks. In 2020, one in six deaths from cardiovascular disease (CVD) was due to stroke. Globally, 15 million people suffer a stroke every year, with 5 million dying and 5 million becoming permanently disabled. In this crucial hour, attendees' awareness can go a long way in saving lives. From giving CPR to going to the right hospital which is

stroke-ready is crucial, if you go to a hospital that is not equipped to handle such an emergency, they will consume the golden hour figuring out what the problem is," says Dr Shetty. Unfortunately, the right information and awareness about medical emergencies are still lacking. "Insider," a new docu-drama series based on real-life events fills that void, to offer viewers an unfiltered look into medical emergencies, shedding light on the critical moments that occur within the confines of the Emergency Room. By harnessing the power of technology and fostering greater awareness within our communities, we can ensure that every individual receives the critical care they need

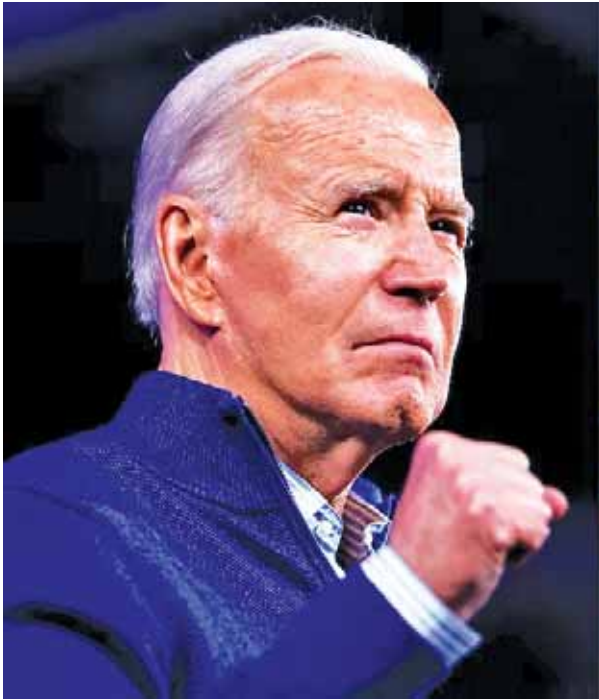
when it matters most. The Golden Hour epitomises the essence of timely intervention in emergency medical care. It serves as a poignant reminder of the profound impact that swift and efficient medical attention can have on saving lives and minimising the long-term consequences of traumatic injuries and critical medical conditions. Embracing the principles of the Golden Hour requires a collective commitment from healthcare professionals, emergency responders, policymakers, and communities at large to ensure that no precious moment is wasted when every second counts in the fight for life.

(The author is a freelance writer, views are personal)

Biden, Trump win Louisiana presidential primary

AP ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump won Louisiana's primary on Saturday, collecting more delegates after they already clinched their party nominations. Biden also appeared in Missouri's Democratic primary, with results not expected to be reported until next week. None of the races were in suspense. Biden and Trump have already beaten their major competitors. But the primary races are still closely watched by insiders for turnout and signs of protest voters. For Biden, some liberals are registering their anger with Israel's war against Hamas following the militant group's October 7 attack. More than 30,000 people, two-thirds of them women and children, have been reported killed by



Gaza authorities since Israel launched its offensive. A protest movement launched by Arab American communities in Michigan has spread to several other states. Trump is his party's dominant figure and has locked up a third straight Republican nomination. But he faces dissent from people worried about the immense legal jeopardy he faces or critical of his White House term, which ended shortly after the January 6 insurrection mounted by his supporters and fuelled by his false theories of election fraud. Saturday's primary was the Missouri Democratic Party's first party-run presidential contest since a new law took effect in August 2022. Louisiana's primaries, meanwhile, come almost four years after the state was the first to postpone its primaries due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Israeli airstrike in northeastern Lebanon wounds 3

AP ■ BEIRUT

An Israeli airstrike deep in northeastern Lebanon early Sunday wounded at least three people, a local official said. The airstrike near the city of Baalbek, a stronghold of Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, was the latest to hit the area in recent weeks. The strike occurred a few minutes after midnight and wounded three people according to Baalbek's mayor, Bachir Khodr, who posted the news on X. It was not immediately clear what was struck. The strike came hours after Hezbollah said it used two drones carrying explosives to attack an Israeli Iron Dome missile defense system in the northern Israeli town of Kfar Blum.

The Israeli military said warplanes attacked a workshop used by Hezbollah for military activities. It added that after the strike some 50 rockets were fired from Lebanon toward Israel, saying some were shot down and others fell in open areas. A pair of Israeli airstrikes March 12 near Baalbek killed at least two people and wounded 20, marking a continuing escalation between Israel and Hezbollah over the war Israel is fighting with Hamas militants in Gaza. Since the Israel-Hamas war began October 7, Hezbollah has been carrying out attacks on Israel's military posts along the border. Israel has since staged dozens of airstrikes, mostly along the border. But since late February the Baalbek area has been attacked at least three times.



Frozen in time: Kamala tours bloodstained building

AP ■ PARKLAND

US Vice President Kamala Harris toured on Saturday the bloodstained classroom building where the 2018 Parkland high school massacre happened, then announced a program to assist states that have laws allowing police to temporarily seize guns from people judges have found to be dangerous. Harris saw bullet-pocked walls and floors still covered in dried blood and broken glass left behind from the February 14, 2018, attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that killed 14 students and three staff members and wounded 17. The halls and classrooms inside the three-story structure remain strewn with shoes left behind by fleeing students and wilted Valentine's Day flowers and balloons. Textbooks, laptop computers, snacks and papers remain on desks. She was told about each victim who died. "Frozen in time," Harris said repeatedly about what she saw. She was accompanied on the tour by victims' family members, some of them pushing for more spending on school safety and others for stronger gun laws. Harris, who leads the new White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, said there are lessons to be learned from Parkland, both for stopping school shootings before they happen and mitigating them with measures such as making sure

classroom doors don't lock from the outside as they did at Stoneman Douglas. She pointed out that shootings are a leading cause of death for children and teenagers. "We must be willing to have the courage to say that on every level, whether you talk about changing laws or changing practices and protocols, that we must do better," Harris said. At Stoneman Douglas, former student Nikolas Cruz, then 19, fired about 140 shots from his AR-15-style semiautomatic rifle during his six-minute attack, moving methodically from the first floor, through the second and onto the third. He pleaded guilty in 2021. He was sentenced to life in prison in 2022 after his jury couldn't unanimously agree he deserved a death sentence, angering the victims' families. The building was preserved so his jury could tour it. It has loomed over the 3,600-student school from behind a temporary fence since the school reopened two weeks after the shooting. It is scheduled to be demolished this summer. No replacement plan has been announced. Following Harris' tour, she announced a USD 750 million grant program to provide technical assistance and training to Florida and the other 20 states that have similar "red flag laws." Florida's law allows police officers, with a judge's permission, to temporarily seize guns belonging to anyone shown to be a danger

to others or themselves. The statute has been used more than 12,000 times since it was enacted six years ago in response to the Parkland shooting. Harris also called on both Congress and states without red flag laws to adopt them. The Biden administration has called for a national red flag law. Cruz had a long history of troubling and bizarre behaviour before the shooting, including animal torture. In the weeks before the shooting, he had been reported to local law enforcement and the FBI by people fearing he was planning a mass shooting, but no action was taken. He legally purchased 10 guns in the 17 months between his 18th birthday and the massacre. "Red flag laws are simply designed to give communities a vehicle through which they can share ... Information about the concern of potential danger or the crying out for help," Harris said. Senator Rick Scott, a Republican who signed Florida's red flag law as governor, issued a statement Saturday calling the Biden administration's proposed national red flag law "radical," saying it would be modeled on California's statute and strip gun owners of their rights. California's law is broader than Florida's as it allows family members, employers and others to initiate the process, but the removal also has to be approved by a judge.

Nepal celebrates Holi

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Holi, the festival of colours, was celebrated on Sunday in Kathmandu and other hilly districts across Nepal amidst tight security. However, in Terai, the southern plains of the country, the festival will be celebrated on Monday. President Ramchandra Paudel, in his message on the occasion, expressed confidence that Holi would

"promote mutual harmony in the society and further strengthen national unity". Expressing his good wishes for happiness, peace and prosperity to all Nepalese at home and abroad, President Paudel described Holi as the celebration of "victory of justice over injustice and victory of virtue over evil". Nepal Police intensified security in and around Kathmandu Valley to avoid any untoward incident.

Around 5,000 police personnel were mobilised in the Valley to maintain law and order. Police also used drones to monitor the security situation in sensitive areas. The force also started checking vehicles at around 100 places to monitor possible traffic rule violations during the festival. The local administration has warned of action if anyone sprays colours or throws water over people without consent.

Russia mourns concert hall attack

AP ■ MOSCOW

Family and friends of those still missing after an attack that killed over 130 people at a suburban Moscow concert hall waited for news of their loved ones as Russia observed a day of national mourning on Sunday. Events at cultural institutions were cancelled, flags were lowered, and TV entertainment and ads were suspended, according to state news agency RIA Novosti. A steady stream of people brought flowers to a makeshift memorial near the burnt-out concert hall. The attack, which has been claimed by an affiliate of the Islamic State group, is the deadliest on Russian soil in years. As rescuers continue to search the damaged building, some families still don't know if members who went to the event targeted by gunmen on Friday are alive. Igor Pogadaev was desperately seeking any details of his wife's whereabouts after she went to the concert and stopped responding to his messages. He hasn't seen a message from Yana Pogadaeva since she sent her husband two photos from the Crocus City Hall music venue. After Igor saw the reports of gunmen opening fire on concertgoers, he rushed to the site but couldn't find her in the numerous ambulances or among the hundreds of people who had made their way out of the venue. "I went around, searched, I asked everyone, I showed photographs. No one saw anything, no one could say anything," Pogadaev told The Associated Press in a video message. He watched flames bursting out of the building as he made frantic calls to a hotline for relatives of the victims but received no information. As the death toll mounted on Saturday, Igor scoured hospitals in Moscow and the Moscow region,



looking for information on newly admitted patients. But his wife wasn't among the 154 reported injured, nor on the list of 50 victims authorities have already identified, he said. Refusing to believe that his wife could be one of the 133 people who died in the attack, Pogadaev still hasn't gone home. "I couldn't be alone anymore, it's very difficult, so I drove to my friend's," he said. "Now at least I'll be with someone." The Moscow Region's Emergency Situations Ministry posted a video Sunday showing equipment dismantling the damaged music venue to give rescuers access. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be trying to tie Ukraine to the attack, something his government firmly denies. Russian authorities arrested four suspected attackers on Saturday, Putin said in a nighttime address to the

nation, among 11 people detained suspicion of involvement in the attack. He claimed they were captured while fleeing to Ukraine. Though no court hearing has been officially announced, there was a heavy police presence around Moscow's Basmanny District Court on Sunday. Police tried to drive journalists away from the court. Putin called the attack "a bloody, barbaric terrorist act" and said Russian authorities captured the four suspects as they were trying to escape to Ukraine through a "window" prepared for them on the Ukrainian side of the border. Russian media broadcast videos that apparently showed the detention and interrogation of the suspects, including one who told the cameras he was approached by an unidentified assistant to an Islamic preacher via a messaging app and paid to take part in the raid. Kyiv strongly denied any involvement,

and the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate claimed responsibility. The Islamic State group released highly graphic footage from the attack on Saturday, appearing to show one of the gunmen opening fire on people lying on the ground. Putin did not mention IS in his speech to the nation, and Kyiv accused him and other Russian politicians of falsely linking Ukraine to the assault to stoke fervor for Russia's fight in Ukraine, which recently entered its third year. U.S. Intelligence officials said they had confirmed the IS affiliate's claim. "ISIS bears sole responsibility for this attack. There was no Ukrainian involvement whatsoever," National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said in a statement. The U.S. Shared information with Russia in early March about a planned terrorist attack in Moscow and issued a public warning to Americans in Russia, Watson said.

In Uganda, bamboo has Government backing

AP ■ ALONG RIVER RWIZI

Along a stretch of bush by a muddy river, labourers dug and slashed in search of bamboo plants buried under dense grass. Here and there a few plants had sprouted tall, but most of the bamboo seedlings planted more than a year ago never grew. Now, environment protection officers seeking to restore a 3-kilometer (1.8-mile) stretch of the river's degraded banks were aiming to plant new bamboo seedlings, clear room for last year's survivors to grow and look after them better than they did the first time. A successful bamboo forest by the river Rwizi - the most important in a large part of western Uganda that includes the major city of Mbarara - would create a buffer zone against sand miners, subsistence farmers and others whose activities have long

threatened the river. The National Environment Management Authority estimates that the Rwizi has lost 60 per cent of its water catchment area over the decades, and in some areas this winding river runs as narrow as a stream. "Once bamboo is established, it is almost like a net," said Jeconious Musingwire, an environment officer who was the project's technical advisor. "The roots trap everything, including the surface runoff, and stabilize the weaknesses of the banks." This East African country is seeing growing interest in bamboo, a perennial plant cultivated in many parts of the world. It can be burned for fuel in rural communities, taking pressure off dwindling forest reserves of eucalyptus and other natural resources. It's a hardy plant that can grow almost anywhere. And

businesses can turn it into products ranging from furniture to toothpicks. Some of the bamboo species grown in Uganda are imported from Asia, but many - like one whose shoots are smoked and then boiled to make a popular traditional meal in eastern Uganda - grow wild. The Ugandan government has set a 10-year policy that calls for planting 300,000 hectares (about 1,100 square miles) of bamboo, most of it on private land, by 2029 as part of wider reforestation efforts. That's an ambitious target. The Uganda Bamboo Association, the largest such group with 340 members, has planted only 500 hectares. Even with growing interest in bamboo farming, authorities will have to encourage more farmers in rural parts of Uganda to plant vast tracts of land with bamboo.



But signs are promising. Not far from the scene where labourers were tending bamboo plants sits a large commercial farm that includes

seven acres of bamboo. The plants at Kitara Farm were well-tended, and a stockpile of 10,000 bamboo poles sat waiting to be sold.

Caretaker Joseph Katumba said the property has become something of a demonstration farm for people who want to learn more about bamboo. He

recalled that when they first began planting bamboo in 2017, some people asked why they were "wasting land" by planting bamboo when it grows wild in the bush. Katumba said that's changed, with skeptics now interested in planting bamboo "because they have studied it and they love it." Unlike eucalyptus - a tall flowering plant widely planted here for its timber - "there is no bamboo season. The more you look after it well, weeding around it, the more and more years you will earn from bamboo." Bamboo grows faster than eucalyptus and regenerates like a weed. It also can thrive in poor soil. Kitara Farm stopped planting new eucalyptus lots while its bamboo acreage continues to expand, he said. "We have so many eucalyptus forests. But we realized that once you cut the eucalyptus

trees, eventually they get finished, and once they are finished there is no more money," he said. "But with bamboo, we investigated and found out that when you plant it ... the grandkids and their grandkids and their grandkids will earn from bamboo." A single bamboo pole brings a little less than a dollar, so farmers need to grow a lot to earn enough. Bamboo promoters are urging them to see a bamboo plantation as the same kind of cash crop as coffee or tea estates. Banks are offering bamboo "plantation capital" to clients, loans that promise ownership of substantial acres of bamboo. "Each person should actually plant bamboo, and a lot of it," said Taga Nuwagaba, a bamboo farmer and businessman who owns a bamboo furniture factory near the Ugandan capital of Kampala.



300 abducted kids in Nigeria freed

AP ■ ABUJA

Nearly 300 kidnapped Nigerian schoolchildren have been released, local officials said on Sunday, more than two weeks after the children were seized from their school in the northwestern state of Kaduna and marched into the forests. At least 1,400 students have been kidnapped from Nigerian schools since 2014, when Boko Haram militants kidnapped hundreds of schoolgirls from Borno state's Chibok village in 2014. In recent years, abductions have been concentrated in the country's northwestern and central regions, where dozens of armed groups often target villagers and travellers for ransom. Kaduna state Gov. Uba Sani did not give details of the release of the 287 students abducted from their school in the remote town of Kuriga on

March 7, at least 100 of them aged 12 or younger. In a statement, he thanked Nigerian President Bola Tinubu "particularly ensuring that the abducted school children are released unharmed." Tinubu had vowed to rescue the children "without paying a dime" as ransom. But ransoms are commonly paid for kidnappings, often arranged by families, and it is rare for officials in Nigeria to admit to the payments. No group has claimed responsibility for the Kaduna kidnapping, which locals have blamed on bandit groups known for mass killings and kidnappings for ransom in the conflict-battered northern region, most of them former herders in conflict with settled communities. At least two people with extensive knowledge of the security crisis in Nigeria's northwest told The Associated

Press that the identity of the abductors is known. Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, a professor of peace and conflict studies at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, and Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, a cleric who has negotiated with the bandits, said they are hiding in the region's vast and ungoverned forests. Arrests are rare in Nigeria's mass kidnappings, as victims are usually released only after desperate families pay ransoms or through deals with government and security officials. The Kaduna governor thanked Nigerian security forces and officials for the release of the students. "I spent sleepless nights with the National Security Adviser, Mal. Nuhu Ribadu ... Fine-tuning strategies and coordinating the operations of the security agencies, which eventually resulted in this successful outcome," he said.

Princess of Wales and King Charles: One in two people develop cancer during their lives

THE CONVERSATION ■ EAST ANGLIA (UK)

The Princess of Wales released a moving video message on March 22 to address speculation about her health. In it, the future queen disclosed that she'd been diagnosed with cancer following tests conducted after she underwent major abdominal surgery at a clinic in London in January. Catherine explained that she was undergoing "preventative chemotherapy" — but emphasised that her surgery had been successful, and that she was "well" and "getting stronger every day". The message was the second announcement of a royal family cancer diagnosis in recent weeks. On February 5, Buckingham Palace published a statement that King Charles III had been diagnosed with an undisclosed form of cancer, unrelated to the treatment he had been receiving for an enlarged prostate. The statement said that he had begun "regular treatments". The king postponed all public-facing duties during his treatment, but reportedly continued with his "constitutional role as head of state, including completing paperwork and holding private meetings". Cancer is the leading cause of death worldwide. One in two people will develop some form of cancer in their lifetime - so the condition will affect almost every family. However, many cancers can be cured if, as appears to be the case with the king, the condition is detected early and treated effectively.

What is cancer? Our bodies are made up of more than 100 billion cells, and cancer typically starts with changes in a small group of cells - or even a single one. We have different cell types depending upon where in the body they are and the function that the cell has. The size, amount and function of each of these cells is normally tightly regulated by genes — groups of codes held within our DNA — that instruct cells how to grow and divide. However, changes (mutations) to DNA can alter the way cells grow and multiply - often forming a lump, or solid tumour. Cancers can also develop in blood cells, such as white blood cell cancer which is known as leukaemia. This type of cancer does not form solid tumours; instead, the cancer builds up in the blood or sometimes the marrow in



the core of bones, where blood cells are produced. In all, there are more than 200 types of cancer, but all start with mutations in the DNA contained within each and every cell. **What exactly are mutations?** Think of your DNA as a big recipe book, and your genes as individual recipes for making different dishes. Mutations are smudges or missing words from this recipe that can result in key ingredients not being added into the mix. Regardless of the type of cancer or the cells from which it develops, mutations in our genes can result in a cell no longer understanding its instructions. These mutations can happen by chance when dividing, but can also be the result of lifestyle choices such as smoking, drinking, and inactivity. Research has found that in order for a

normal cell to turn into a cancerous cell, anywhere from one to ten different mutations are normally required. **How is cancer treated?** Treatment options for cancer depend on a variety of factors, including where your cancer is, how large it is, and whether it has spread to other parts of the body. The main treatments for cancer include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy. Chemotherapy uses drugs to target and kill cells that are rapidly dividing in our bodies. This approach is effective at targeting fast-growing cells in various cancers - but also has negative side effects. It also targets healthy cells that rapidly divide, such as hair and the cells lining our digestive system. This can lead to commonly reported side-effects such as hair loss, nausea and diarrhoea. Chemotherapy can be used both pre-

ventatively — as in the case of the princess — and therapeutically. Preventative chemotherapy, also known as adjuvant chemotherapy, is given after surgery or other primary treatments to eliminate any remaining cancer cells in the body. It aims to reduce the risk of the cancer returning (known as recurrence). Therapeutic chemotherapy is used as a treatment option for cancer that has spread or is well established, such as advanced-stage cancers. Surgery involves the physical removal of cancerous tissues as well as nearby lymph nodes - small glands which act as filters in your body that cancers can spread through — to eliminate the tumour. Surgery is often used to remove localised cancers that haven't spread throughout the body. Radiotherapy uses high-energy radiation beams that are able to target specific areas where tumour cells are located to destroy or shrink the tumour. Radiotherapy can be applied externally or internally. Chemotherapy, surgery, and radiotherapy are often combined in cancer treatment to improve outcomes for patients. Thanks to developments in cancer research over the last 50 years, survival rates have improved greatly — although the rate of improvement has slowed recently. Cancer survival depends on various factors such as age — people under 40 have a greater chance of survival — overall health and fitness, as well as family history. **What you should do** Particular changes in your body or warning symptoms could indicate the presence of cancer. These include, but are not limited to: ■ Unexplained weight loss; ■ Fatigue that doesn't improve with rest; ■ Changes in bowel or bladder habits; ■ Persistent cough or coughing up blood; ■ Difficulty swallowing; ■ Persistent pain; ■ Noticing lumps, such as in a breast or testicle. The symptoms may not necessarily be the result of cancer. But it is important to get checked by a doctor if you notice anything out of the ordinary or have had persistent symptoms that don't ease. Early detection and treatment can significantly improve outcomes for many types of cancer.

Greek authorities seize 3.75 million capsules of contraband nerve pain drug



AP ■ ATHENS

Greek authorities said Saturday they seized more than three tons of the prescription nerve pain drug pregabalin and impounded a yacht registered in the United Kingdom. The operation took place Thursday night at the port of Lavrio, 70 kilometers (43 miles) southeast of Athens, the coast guard said. On the yacht, the coast guard found 3.75 million capsules of Nervigesic, a brand name used by Indian pharmaceuticals firm HAB Pharma for pregabalin. The capsules were packaged in 500 cardboard boxes weighing nearly 3.15 tons, the statement said. Pregabalin is used to treat nerve pain caused by a variety of conditions, such as diabetes and shingles, and also to treat a type of seizure called partial seizure because it has its origin at a single location in the brain. The raid was ordered based on information from Greece's "National Intelligence Agency about the activity of networks of Egyptian nationals in Greek territory," the statement said. The yacht and its contents remain at the Lavrio port while local authorities conduct an investigation, the coast guard said.



Senegal to elect its next president after months of unrest

AP ■ DAKAR

Senegalese are heading to the polls Sunday to vote in a tightly contested presidential race marred by months of unrest that threatened democracy in one of West Africa's most stable nations. The election will take place after much uncertainty following President Macky Sall's unsuccessful effort to delay the February 25 vote until the end of the year — and then announcing a surprise amnesty for political prisoners. Two leading opposition figures were released from prison last week to jubilant celebrations. Sunday's election is set to be Senegal's fourth democratic transfer of power since it gained independence from France in 1960. It is also the first vote without an incumbent on the ballot since term limits were introduced and there is no clear frontrunner among the 19 candidates, including one

woman. "This is poised to be the most competitive election since the introduction of multiparty politics," Tochi Eni-Kalu, Africa analyst at the Eurasia Group, told The Associated Press. Analysts say no candidate is expected to win more than 50 per cent of the vote, which means a runoff between leading candidates is widely expected. These include Amadou Ba, a former prime minister, and Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who is backed by popular opposition figure Ousmane Sonko. Sonko, who came third in the previous election, was barred from running in January because of a prior conviction for defamation. He has faced a slew of legal troubles in recent years that supporters say are part of a government effort to derail his candidacy. Other potential frontrunners are Khalifa Sall, a former mayor of Dakar unrelated to the president, and Idrissa Seck,

a former prime minister from the early 2000s who was the runner up in the 2019 presidential race. Two candidates dropped out this week to back Faye's candidacy, a sign of the start of coalition-building that could determine the outcome of the race, according to analysts. At the forefront of concerns for many Senegalese voters is the economy, which has been squeezed by high food and energy prices partly driven by the war in Ukraine. Unemployment among the nation's youth is widespread, driving thousands to risk their lives on dangerous journeys in search of jobs in the West. "Jobs are really, truly the priority. Everyone can see that unemployment is taking over," said Oumy Sarr, a political activist. "The second priority is the high cost of living in Senegal today. What is to be done to improve people's living conditions? Inflation is rising, everyone is tired.

Russia launches another massive missile attack on Ukraine

PTI ■ KYIV

Russia launched its third massive missile attack on Ukraine in the past four days, and the second to target the capital of Kyiv, with Poland's military saying that one of the missiles launched at western Ukraine briefly entered its airspace Sunday. The head of Kyiv's military administration, Serhiy Popko, said Russia used cruise missiles launched from Tu-95MS strategic bombers. An air alert in the capital lasted for more than two hours as rockets entered Kyiv in groups from the north. He said the attacks were launched from the Engels district in the Saratov region of Russia. According to preliminary data, there were no casualties or damage in the capital, he said. The operation command of Poland, a member of NATO, said in a statement that there was a violation of Polish airspace at 4:23 am (0323GMT) by one of the cruise missiles launched by Russia against towns in western Ukraine. The object entered near the Polish town of Oserdów and stayed there for 39 seconds, the statement said. It added that military radar systems observed the missile the entire time and all necessary procedures were launched to ensure the safety of Polish airspace. Poland's Defence Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz told reporters in a televised news conference that the



Russian missile would have been shot down had there been any indication that it was heading towards a target in Poland. He said the missile penetrated Polish airspace about 1,000-2,000 meters (0.6 miles to 1.2 miles). The Polish foreign ministry said it would "demand explanations from the Russian Federation in connection with another violation of the country's

airspace." "Above all, we call on the Russian Federation to stop the terrorist air attacks on the inhabitants and territory of Ukraine, end the war, and address the country's internal problems," the statement read. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, there have been a number of intrusions into Polish airspace. In 2022, two Poles were killed in a missile blast.

Western officials blamed those deaths on a Ukrainian air defence missile that went astray but also accused Russia of culpability because it started the war and the Ukrainian missiles were launched in self-defence. Meanwhile, one person was killed and four wounded in a Ukrainian missile attack on Sevastopol on the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula Saturday night, city governor Mikhail Razvozhaev said.

Young Indian professional dies in car accident in Pennsylvania

PTI ■ NEW YORK

In a tragic incident, a 24-year-old Indian professional was killed in a car accident in the US state of Pennsylvania. Arshia Joshi lost her life in a tragic car accident in Pennsylvania on March 21, the Consulate General of India in New York said in a post on X on Saturday, expressing deep condolences to her family. Joshi had completed her graduation last year. The Consulate said it is in touch with Joshi's family and local community leaders. "Extending all possible assistance to

transport her mortal remains to India at the earliest," it said, without divulging more details about the deceased. Volunteer-based nonprofit organisation TEAM Aid is assisting in sending Joshi's mortal remains to Delhi to her family. TEAM Aid's primary focus has been to help members of the Indian community who are either travelling or living abroad and face dire situations such as accidents, suicides, homicides or sudden death of loved ones. It has been working to provide assistance and help repatriate the

mortal remains to India of people who have tragically lost their lives while in the US. "Amidst a series of tragic incidents, our hearts are heavy with grief," TEAM Aid founder Mohan Nannapaneni told PTI. In the past week alone, TEAM Aid has sent the remains of five individuals to India and organised three local funerals, he said. Nannapaneni and his team are currently assisting several more families in sending the mortal remains of their loved ones who died in the US and Canada to India. These include two truck drivers



who tragically lost their lives in an accident in New Mexico. Their remains are being sent to Punjab. A young truck driver passed away suddenly in New Mexico and his remains are being sent to Amritsar, Nannapaneni said. In Seattle, Washington, a promising 25-year-old Indian student was found dead in his apartment and his remains are being sent to Bangalore. Mourning the loss of a "talented 38-year-old restaurant chef" in San Jose, California, Nannapaneni said his remains are being sent to Kolkata. In a devastating hit-and-run

incident, a 50-year-old man in Palacios, Texas was killed. His remains will be sent to Ahmedabad for the last rites. In another tragic incident, a 27-year-old recent graduate was found dead in his apartment in Vancouver, Canada. "We will send him home to Kerala," Nannapaneni said. TEAM Aid did not disclose the names and identities of the deceased to respect their privacy. Nannapaneni said his team is in the process of initiating "educational and preventative" programmes soon to offer guidance and support

to Indian immigrants here, including students and workers, aimed at ensuring their safety and security. "Every day brings news of more loss, alongside numerous other challenges spanning health, immigration, social issues, and beyond," he said. Earlier this week, former CEO of PepsiCo Indra Nooyi released a video message, advising Indian students in the US to be "watchful" and respect local laws and urging them to not engage in drugs or excessive drinking to ensure their safety and security.

FPIs infuse over ₹38,000 crore in equities in March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

FPIs have shown a significant resurgence in their investment activity within the Indian equity markets this month, injecting over Rs 38,000 crore, mainly driven by favourable shifts in the global economic scenario and strong domestic macroeconomic outlook. The investment came following a modest investment of Rs 1,539 crore in February and a massive outflow of Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories snowed. With this, foreign portfolio investors' (FPIs) investment has turned positive to the tune of Rs 13,893 crore in equities so far in 2024 and Rs 55,480 crore in the

debt market. Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director at Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, highlighted that FPIs have become significant buyers in March. The improved global economic conditions and positive Indian macroeconomic scenario have driven FPIs to invest in high growth-oriented markets like India. Additionally, the recent market correction has provided a buying opportunity. Further, the influx of FPIs can be attributed to robust GDP growth and expectations of a potential shift in the RBI's policy, possibly leading to rate cuts of 25-50 basis points in the latter half of fiscal 2025, experts believe.



However, last week, FPIs turned net sellers, although marginally, to the tune of USD 314 million. This could be largely attributed to FPIs adopting a cautious approach. Apart from equities, FPIs have injected a massive Rs 13,223 crore into the debt market this month (till March 22). This came in the backdrop of Bloomberg announcing India's bonds inclusion in its Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Government Index and related indices from January 31 next year. Moreover, FPIs have been investing in the debt markets for the past few months. They invested Rs 22,419 crore in February and Rs 19,836 crore in

January. "The fundamental reason for this sustained FPI flows into debt is the inclusion of Indian bonds in the JP Morgan EM Bond Fund and Bloomberg Bond Index, which is expected to bring investment of around USD 25 billion. This investment will begin only by June 2024, and therefore, FPIs are doing some front running in view of this potential investment," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. Further, FPI inflows into debt are likely to continue going forward. However, a sharp surge in debt flows is unlikely since the US bond yields have also risen in recent days, he added.



RBI to conduct special audit of IIFL Finance, JM Financial Products

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IIFL Finance Ltd and JM Financial Products Ltd (JMFPL) will undergo a special audit to further probe their regulatory breaches, as the Reserve Bank has initiated the process for the appointment of auditors. The Reserve Bank has floated two separate tenders for the appointment of auditors for special audits of these two non-banking finance companies. Audit firms empanelled by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for forensic audit can participate in the tendering process, and the last date for submission of bids is April 8, as per the tender document published by the Reserve Bank of India. The selected firms will be awarded work on April 12, 2024, as per the bid documents. Earlier this month, the Reserve Bank put a curb on these two entities for non-compliance of regulatory guidelines. The central bank barred IIFL Finance from sanctioning or disbursing gold loans after certain material supervisory concerns were observed in its gold loan portfolio. The RBI had said an inspection of the company was carried out by it with reference to IIFL's financial position as of March 31, 2023. "Certain material supervisory concerns were observed in the gold loan portfolio of the company, including serious deviations in assaying and certifying purity and net weight of the gold at the time of sanction of loans and at the time of auction upon default," the RBI had said in a statement. These practices, apart from being regulatory violations, also significantly and adversely impact the interest of the customers, the central bank added.

India poised to be premier destination for commercial arbitration, says SC judge

PTI ■ PANAJI

The quickest and easiest resolution to disputes is through arbitration and mediation, Supreme Court judge Hima Kohli said. India stands as a reservoir of untapped potential, poised to ascend as a premier destination for commercial arbitration and mediation on the international level, the apex court judge said. Speaking as the chief guest at the Conference on Ease To Justice Through Arbitration and Mediation in Commercial Disputes organised by the Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA) at Vagator in North Goa on Saturday, she said India is at the forefront of business and global transactions and disputes were bound to arise. "The quickest and easiest resolution would be through alternate dispute resolutions like arbitration and mediation. The enforcement of the ADR award is imperative to keep the economy buoyant," she asserted. The ICA has been propagating the cause of ADR, particularly arbitration and mediation, for a long time and holding such conferences is a way forward, the SC judge said. "Court litigation has to be the primary focus, but if the alternatives are developed



well, it will take the burden off the court. It ensures decision-making and brings a closure between the disputing parties. Nothing can be better than that," she added. "In today's world, thanks to globalisation, everything is moving at a fast pace. This has led to increased commercial transactions, with businesses spanning across cultural and geographical boundaries. At the same time, this has thrown up a variety of legal challenges," she said. International trade and investments have grown phenomenally, making dispute resolution more complex, she said, adding these disputes can affect not only the parties involved but also the global community. "To address these challenges, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has emerged as a powerful tool for 'businesses'," Justice Kohli said.

Miners urge Centre not to impose export duty on low grade iron ore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Miners' body FIMI has urged the government not to impose any export duty on low-grade iron ore, stating that any such move would cause a significant loss of state revenues and employment and also affect foreign exchange earnings. In a representation to the government, the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries (FIMI) said the mining sector was adversely impacted when in May 2022 the export duty was imposed on low-grade iron ore fines and pellets. The government, however, withdrew the tax in November same year. A major share of the mining

sector's contribution to the country's GDP is accounted for by iron ore among the non-coal minerals. Iron ore mining also significantly contributes towards creating jobs with employment of about 5 lakh persons --45,000 direct and 4,50,000 indirect, it said. More than 90 per cent of the country's overall iron ore shipments go to China. "We request that any proposal for banning, restricting exports of iron ore and pellets may kindly not be considered and the status quo of nil export duty on these products be maintained," the miners' body said. With the opening of new mines and expansion of existing mines the iron ore production capacity is likely to rise to 330 million tonnes



in FY'25. But if there is a ban on exports of iron ore or a duty is imposed on its exports, in such a scenario the production will drop

to 225 million tonnes, it said. In the mining of iron ore, lumps are generated to the tune of only 25-30 per cent and the balance of iron ore is in the form of fines. "The fines below 58 per cent Fe are required to be kept in the mining lease area only as these cannot be utilised by the steel industry specially secondary steel sector," it said. The non-removal of low grade iron ore from the mines restrict the production of lumps also and becomes an environmental hazard besides limiting scientific mining. Thus accumulation of iron ore fines in the mines also leads to the restricted availability of lumps in the market which in turn adversely impacts the steel industry, it said.

India has incredibly affordable airfares: Akasa Air CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has "incredibly affordable" airfares and the country's aviation market has the kind of growth potential where Akasa Air as well as other carriers can do well, according to the nearly two-year-old airline's chief Vinay Dube. As Akasa Air prepares to take the international skies on March 28 with the first overseas flight from Mumbai to Doha, Dube also asserted that the airline is not about "marketing gimmicks". Akasa Air is aiming to be among the

world's top 30 airlines by 2030 and will go public in future. "We think we have a great financial future. Listing is in our future... But you never say never. We hope to list some day," he told PTI in an interview this week. While acknowledging that aviation competition has always been intense, he said that as long as the focus is on fundamentals, there is enough room not just for Akasa Air to thrive in the future but for others as well. "Thanks to the growth that we are going to see in India, it is not that Akasa will do well

only if someone else does badly, no, Akasa can do well and others can do well, that is the kind of growth that India has to offer," the airline's Founder and CEO said. The carrier, which started flying in August 2022, has a fleet of 24 planes and a domestic market share of 4.5 per cent. To a query about air ticket prices, Dube said the country has some of the cheapest airfares. India, which is one of the world's fastest-growing civil aviation markets, is also seen in some quarters as price



sensitive, especially with rising number of air travellers, including first-time fliers. There have been concerns, mainly during

festival seasons, that air ticket prices are high. "I see fares to be some of the cheapest in the world as I saw them three months ago, six months ago... I think Indian airfares when you compare them to parts of Europe, East Asia, North America, you compare to any decent-sized aviation economy in the world, India has some of the most affordable airfares by a long margin, not just by Rs 10 or 100... Indian airfares are incredibly affordable," Dube said. Travel portal Cleartrip's outgoing CEO Ayyappan

Rajagopal said airfares are expected to go up, both on international and domestic segments, as there is high demand and more people are making bookings in advance. "In the premium segment, the (price) sensitivity is not so high. There is a second set of consumers, they are a lot more bothered about pricing and they might even take three hops to reach a destination," he told PTI. Meanwhile, Akasa Air's Dube said there is no shortage of pilots at the airline and that there won't be any flight disruptions.

Tech Mahindra to merge two US based subsidiaries

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IT services and consultancy company Tech Mahindra said it plans to merge its two wholly-owned subsidiaries, BORN Group and Tech Mahindra (Americas), to synergise business operations,

optimise operational cost, and reduce compliance risks. The merger is subject to regulatory approvals in the country of incorporation. According to a regulatory filing, the appointed date of the plan of merger is April 1, 2024. "A Plan of Merger of BORN Group, Inc., a wholly-owned



step-down subsidiary of the Company with its parent company viz. Tech Mahindra (Americas) Inc., a wholly-owned material subsidiary of the Company, has been approved by the respective companies on Friday, 22nd March 2024," the company said. While BORN specializes in

providing Brand strategy, visual design, brand identity exploration, and more for digital products, mobile apps, and physical products in the US, TMA provides computer consulting, programming support services and IT Management & Consulting Services. Tech Mahindra (Americas)

(TMA) is a wholly owned material subsidiary of the company. BORN is a wholly owned subsidiary of TMA and a step-down wholly owned subsidiary of the company. According to the filing, the turnover of BORN and TMA for the financial year ended 31st March 2023 is USD

55.08 million and USD 1,201.37 million respectively. "The business of both entities BORN and TMA are complimentary hence consolidation of entities will result in synergy of business operations, optimize operational cost and reduce the compliance risk," the company said.

It added that there will be no cash consideration or issue of new shares involved under the Plan of Merger. The investment of TMA in BORN will get cancelled on the merger becoming effective. The shareholding pattern of the company will remain unchanged.

Auto players line up array of new EV models in coming years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian auto industry is gearing up to roll out an array of electric vehicle models over the next few years amid a renewed push by the government to encourage environment-friendly mobility solutions with the unveiling of a new policy. Mass market players like Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors are lining up new models to cater to the demand across segments. Mahindra & Mahindra CEO Automotive Sector Nalinikanth Gollagunta told PTI that starting January 2025, the company will be rolling out five new battery electric vehicles in the coming years. "These electric SUVs will be built on Mahindra's innovative INGLO platform and aim to cater to a variety of consumers through their diverse range. The launch of these SUVs is part of Mahindra's broader strategy to lead in the electric vehicle sector, and we expect



20-30 per cent of our portfolio to be electric by 2027," he noted. Maruti Suzuki India Executive Officer (Corporate Affairs) Rahul Bharti said the auto major is making serious investments in EVs. "We will start production of a high-spec EV designed-fresh as an EV with 550 km range in FY24-25 and will have about six EV models in the next 7-8 years," he noted. Bharti, however, noted that in

order to cut carbon and oil imports, the country will require many more technologies like hybrid-electric, CNG, Bio-CNG, Ethanol flex fuel etc. "We are committed to work on all such technologies also," he added. Hyundai Motor India COO Tarun Garg said the automaker was among the first OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) to introduce a fully long-range electric SUV

KONA in India in 2019. Last year, the company launched the IONIQ 5, its premium electric SUV. Garg noted that as per multiple industry estimates, EVs are projected to contribute around 20 per cent of India's automotive market by 2030. "With the Indian government's steadfast focus on electric vehicles and the supportive policy framework, we are confident that EVs will soon become mainstream, driving a

sustainable automotive future for India," he added. The company plans to invest around Rs 26,000 crore over 10 years in Tamil Nadu. This investment will also include setting up a battery assembly plant in the state. A Tata Motors spokesperson said that the company aims to have 10 EVs by 2026. The company plans to introduce four more EV models this year, including Curvv EV and Harrier EV. Luxury carmakers are also gearing up to enhance their EV lineup in the country. "We are invested in the market, having an aggressive product strategy with more than 12 new products planned for debut in 2024, of which three will be new BEVs," a Mercedes-Benz India spokesperson said. This well-defined roadmap will help the automaker deepen its BEV footprint, offering customers the best of luxury and technology, he added. "Mercedes-Benz remains strategically focused and

tactically flexible, as we believe customer preferences and market conditions will determine the pace of BEV transition," the spokesperson stated. Audi India expects 50 per cent of its sales in India to come from electric vehicles by 2030. The automaker, which sells four electric models in the country, plans to expand the product range to achieve its ambitious sales target. Earlier this month, the government approved an electric-vehicle policy, under which duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like US-based Tesla. Mahindra & Mahindra's Gollagunta stated that the policy reinforces the Make in India momentum, with requirements of bank guarantees, minimum investment commitment, and local value addition.

VW eyes growth in smaller cities in India

PTI ■ JAIPUR

German carmaker Volkswagen is seeking to cash in on the increasing demand for its premium performance-oriented offerings in metro and tier II and III cities as it looks to grow sales by 15 per cent in India this year, according to a senior company official. Volkswagen Passenger Cars India, which sold around 44,000 units in 2023, sells premium performance-oriented variants of its models SUV Taigun and sedan Virtus with a 1.5-litre petrol engine under the 'GT' trim. It has now brought a 1-litre petrol engine in the GT lineup to increase affordability. "Earlier, there was no sub-segment of a performance SUV or a performance sedan...So, when we introduced the GT on the Taigun and Virtus that basically created that space, which now everybody's

coming into," Volkswagen Passenger Cars India Brand Director Ashish Gupta told PTI. Bullish on the growth of the sub-segment, he said it has been fuelled by how the customer preferences are evolving over a period of time with the top-of-the-line features, safety and performance topping their demand list and are willing to pay for it. "They're not willing to compromise. So, definitely, this is a space which will continue to grow," Gupta asserted. Earlier, the GT was available only in a 1.5-litre petrol engine option, and around 35-40 per cent of sales were from the GT on both Taigun and Virtus, he added. The growth of GT sales is not limited only in the metros and cities, he said, adding that "if I look at the GTs even in the Tier II and tier III towns, almost 20 to 25 per cent of my sales are the GTs".

SOLITARY THYROID NODULES & CANCER

In this concluding part, ARCHANA JYOTI learns from the team at AIIMS Delhi's Surgical disciplines Department led by Dr. SUNIL CHUMBER, that while most thyroid nodules are benign and do not require immediate intervention, thorough evaluation is crucial to rule out malignancy. Close collaboration among patients, endocrinologists, radiologists, and surgeons is essential in managing thyroid nodules.

DOES STN CAUSE CANCER?

By Dr Catherine Halam & Dr Ankita Singh
The risk of cancer in a solitary thyroid nodule can vary depending on several factors, including the patient's age, gender, family history, and the characteristics of the nodule itself. Generally, the risk of cancer in a solitary thyroid nodule is estimated to be around 5-15%. However, it's important to note that the majority of thyroid nodules are benign (non-cancerous).

Several features of a thyroid nodule may increase the suspicion of cancer, including: **Size:** Larger nodules tend to have a higher risk of cancer, although small nodules can also be malignant.

Age: Younger patients with thyroid nodules may have a higher risk of cancer.

Gender: Women tend to have a higher prevalence of thyroid nodules and thyroid cancer compared to men. However men with STN have a higher risk of malignancy.

Family history: A family history of thyroid cancer or certain genetic syndromes can increase the risk.

Radiological characteristics: Certain features seen on ultrasound, such as microcalcifications, irregular margins, increased vascularity, and taller-than-wide shape, may suggest a higher risk of malignancy.

Further there can be 'Isolated thyroid nodule' which is single swelling in the thyroid gland and the rest of the thyroid gland is normal or a 'dominant thyroid nodule' which is a single nodule that is felt prominently, while rest of the gland is also involved. It can be solid or cystic and have different risk of cancer based on gender: Isolate solid nodule in males- 48% (highest risk), Isolate solid nodule in females- 12%, Isolate cystic nodule in males- 24%, Isolate cystic nodule in females- 6%, Dominant solid nodule in male- 24%, Dominant solid

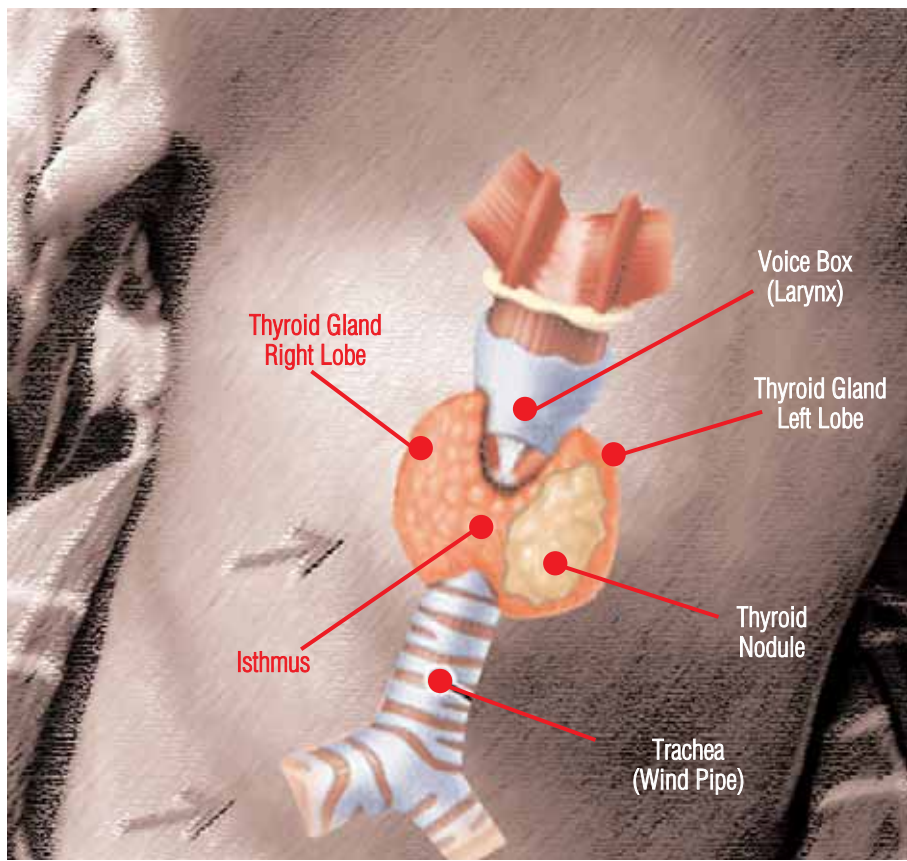
nodule in females- 6%, Dominant cystic nodule in males- 12% and Dominant cystic nodule female- 4% (lowest risk).

Ultimately, the risk of cancer in a solitary thyroid nodule should be assessed on an individual basis, taking into account various clinical and diagnostic factors. If there is concern about cancer, further evaluation and management, including biopsy and possibly surgery, may be recommended by a healthcare provider.

INDICATIONS OF OPERATION

By Dr. Piyush Ranjan & Dr. Amol Sood

Surgery may be indicated in a Benign (non-cancerous) thyroid nodule if it is causing problems like difficulty in breathing or difficulty in swallowing. Surgical removal of the nodule may also be preferred by some patients if it is cosmetically disfiguring. Nodules that are suspicious for cancer or cancerous should be removed surgically. Depending on the features of the nodule, the surgeon decides whether to proceed with the removal of only half of the thyroid gland containing the nodule or to remove the complete thyroid gland and also whether removal of the lymph nodes in the neck is required or not. Nodules for which there is uncertainty whether they are benign or cancerous need further evaluation, in the form of either a repeat FNAB test a



few weeks after the initial FNAB test, or molecular testing. A repeat FNAB test can be helpful as it may upgrade or downgrade the diagnosis of the nodule to either benign or cancerous, which can then be accordingly managed. If, however, the repeat FNAB test also classifies the nodule is indeterminate, surgery is the

next step. Typically, in this surgery, the surgeon removes half of the thyroid gland containing the suspicious nodule and sends the removed part for examination under a microscope by a pathologist. No further treatment is required if the microscopic examination reveals no cancer. However, further surgery to

remove the other half of the thyroid gland may be needed if cancer is seen on microscopic examination of the removed half of the thyroid gland. Molecular testing looks at the genetic pattern of the thyroid nodule and classifies it as low-risk or high-risk for cancer. The use of molecular testing can help avoid surgery in low-

risk indeterminate thyroid nodules, which can be kept under observation by routine ultrasound scans. However, the cost of these molecular tests can be prohibitive to many patients, who may then opt for surgical treatment.

OPERATIONS

By Dr. Rijuta Aphale & Dr. Piyush Ranjan

Type of operation depends on the factors like nodule size, and whether they are benign or cancerous. Common operations for the high-risk and cancerous solitary thyroid nodules include hemi-thyroidectomy and total thyroidectomy (i.e. partial or total removal of the thyroid gland).

Thyroid lobectomy includes removal of one lobe of the thyroid gland. It is suitable for nodules confined to a single lobe. It may also be done on suspicion of cancer if the nodule is small. Isthmusectomy- Removal of the part of the thyroid gland that is a bridge between the two thyroid lobes. It may be done if the nodule is located in the isthmus.

Total thyroidectomy- Complete removal of the thyroid gland. Usually, this operation is done for larger nodules, nodules on both lobes of the thyroid, or thyroid cancer.

Additional removal of the neck lymph nodes is done along with a thyroidectomy for cancer in selected patients.

As many important structures like nerves, vessels and parathyroid glands are close to the thyroid gland, these operations are subject to various complications. There may be temporary or permanent voice changes due to injury to the recurrent laryngeal nerve. Damage to parathyroid glands may cause temporary or permanent changes in calcium levels. Bleeding and infection may occur but are rare. Patients may develop hypothyroidism and may require lifelong thyroid hormone supplementation.

MANAGEMENT WITHOUT OPERATION

By Dr Sakshi Dholpuria & Dr Ajay Mohan

Fortunately, the majority of thyroid nodules are non-cancerous and surgery may not always be the first or only option. Non-surgical approaches, such as close monitoring, hormonal therapy, radioactive iodine, ethanol ablation, and fine-needle aspiration, offer alternative solutions tailored to the specific characteristics of the nodule. It's crucial to consult with a doctor to determine the most suitable approach based on individual circumstances. Regular follow-ups and communication with your doctor are essential for monitoring the nodule and ensuring the chosen non-surgical management plan remains effective.

Monitoring and Observation : If a thyroid nodule is small, asymptomatic and benign on FNAC, your healthcare provider may recommend a "watch-and-wait" approach. Regular monitoring through physical exams and imaging tests, such as ultrasound, can help track any changes in the nodule over time.

Thyroid Hormone Replacement Therapy: Intake of medication (levothyroxine) to maintain normal hormone level is required when the STN is associated with hypothyroidism. This may help shrink certain types of nodules.

Radioactive Iodine Therapy: This treatment involves taking a radioactive form of iodine, which is absorbed by the thyroid cells, reducing the size of the nodule in case of overactive nodules that produce excessive thyroid hormones. Ethanol Ablation is a minimally invasive procedure that involves injecting ethanol (alcohol) directly into the thyroid nodule using ultrasound guidance. This treatment is often considered for cystic nodules, causing the fluid-filled portion to shrink. Aspiration (Fine-Needle Aspiration) is more of a diagnostic procedure, but in some cases, it can also help drain cystic nodules with the help of a thin needle.

(Concluded)

Healthy Holi: Enjoy the Festival Safely

On the Holi Day, prioritizing health amid vibrant celebrations is crucial. Doctors stress protective measures like skin and eye care, hydration, food and water safety, respiratory health, and adherence to COVID-19 precautions. The HEALTH PIONEER reports

HOLI & DESSERTS

Our fondness for Holi and the festivities makes it tough to resist a Gujiya, Laddoo or a Kaju Katli. And don't we often find the festive season as an excuse to have one or more of these amazing sugary treats? That's where the dilemma is, since you are already aware that sugar isn't right for your body and health and yet you still want to have it.

Sugar is fine for you in small amounts but too much indulgence can affect your body and increase your risk of several serious medical conditions like – Increases your risk of Heart Disease – Consuming too much sugar can increase your blood pressure causing hypertension and arterial complications like atherosclerosis, a disease characterized by fatty, artery-clogging deposits and stroke. Increases your risk of Type 2 Diabetes – Diabetes is the leading cause of mortality and reduced life expectancy. Prolonged high-sugar consumption drives resistance to insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas that regulates blood sugar levels. Insulin resistance causes blood sugar levels to rise and strongly increases your risk of diabetes.

Affects your Skin — Binge-eating on the sugary treats can cause Acne, blemishes and pigmentation. **Weight Gain** — Eating large amounts of sugar can contribute to weight gain and increased body fat. Obesity is often caused by excessive sugar consumption. **Enhances Cellular Aging** — Telomeres are structures found at the end of chromosomes, which are molecules that hold part or all of your genetic information. Consuming high amounts of



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sugar has been shown to accelerate telomere shortening, which increases cellular aging. **Can lead to Fatty Liver** — A high intake of fructose has been consistently linked to an increased risk of Fatty Liver. Large amounts of added sugar in the form of fructose overload your liver, leading to Non-alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD), a condition characterized by excessive fat build-up in the liver.

Impacts Dental Health — Eating too much sugar can cause cavities. Bacteria in your mouth feed on sugar and release acid by-products, which causes tooth demineralization leading to cavities.

The best way to limit your sugar intake this Holi is to prepare your own healthy sweets at home. We should not let our guard down even when we are consuming sweets made from artificial sweeteners or if it's sugar free. We can use whole fruits as sweeteners as they are a much healthier option. We have to be restrictive to a greater extent in order to avoid sugars and be mindful about consuming sweets on this and all the other festive seasons.



HOLI & EYE CARE

To prevent any colour entering your eyes, use protective gears like sunglasses. For small children, you can advise them to wear goggles so that the colour does not enter the eyes. Avoid using synthetic colours. Play with eco-friendly or organic or natural colours. In case any colour enters the eye, use clean water to clean it with splashing. But do not rub the eyes neither use any home remedies like milk or honey or oil into your eyes as these can aggravate the problem. Also do not use any random drops or eye



DR PAYAL GUPTA
Associate Consultant-Ophthalmology Fortis
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drops. These days, industry chemicals is being used extensively in colour formulation such as motor oil, diesel, mica, and alkalis that can enter into eyes. Avoid playing in such groups. We would advise you to immediately consult nearest doctor or Ophthalmologist. If you wear contact lens then remove them before going out to play holi. Use glasses in such instances because contact lenses can trap the colours and damage your eyes.



"A lot of people request darker colours that stay on the skin longer, but the industrial chemicals in these colours can cause serious diseases like skin cancer. In addition, toxic colours combined with UV rays from the sun can cause phototoxic reactions to the skin, which further leads to blisters causing redness to the skin. Moreover, rhodamine B is also used for pink, red, and purple."



DR MANISH SHARMA
Sr Medical Oncologist, Positron
Superspeciality and Cancer Hospital, Rohtak

HOLI & PREGNANT WOMEN

In addition to colours, Holi is connected with bhang. However, a bhang overdose for pregnant women might result in major health issues. Bhang consumption can impact the fetus, neurological system, and brain in addition to raising blood pressure and heart rate.

It is essential that pregnant women avoid playing Holi at all; instead, they should stay indoors or, if they must go outside, do so in the company of reliable elders. Additionally, as we know, modern Holi colours are composed of chemicals. Certain hues can potentially cause cancer. Thus, nursing moms should use the same prudence as expectant mothers.



DR SHOBHA GUPTA
Medical Director, Gynecologist and
IVF Specialist, Mother's Lap
IVF Centre, Delhi

When a pregnant woman uses these colours in an area where lead is present, it may cause an abortion or miscarriage as well as an underweight or premature birth. The reproductive and nervous systems may also be impacted. Have a glass of lemon detox water first thing in the morning, then eat something clean and healthful.



TIPS FOR HAIR & SKIN PROTECTION

- Apply a generous dose of high levels of SPF and Vitamin E before heading outside on the day of Holi. These works as a shield to block UV radiation.
- Before you begin playing, make sure your hair is well oiled. Olive and coconut oils are good choices for shielding your hair from strong colouring.
- Use oil on your nails, ear lobes, and behind your ears as well, as these are areas where the colour tends to settle more easily.
- After playing Holi, especially if you used chemical colours, stay out of the scorching sun while the colours are still on your body or face. As a result, the colours are more vibrant and challenging to remove. If you are outside, choose a shaded spot to sit.
- Make greater use of colours that are easily removed.
- Remember to apply



DR JATIN MITTAL
Cosmetologist & Co-founder,
Abhivrit Aesthetics

waterproof sunscreen with at least SPF 30 or higher before spending a day in the sun. ● Dress mostly in coverings for your body and avoid bulky, difficult-to-dry materials like denim. ● Use a bandana or thick scarf to cover your head. ● Avoid wearing lenses when playing outside. Although the colours of Holi are irritating, lenses tend to absorb the colour, making the situation worse. Put on spectacles and make sure you clean them occasionally.

HOW TO REMOVE COLOURS

- After washing, hair needs to be deeply conditioned in order to remove colour. Ensure that your hair is tidy. After two to three days, use a hair mask to repair the damage.
- Wash your face and hair after experimenting with colour. Use a cleanser rather than roughly rubbing the skin with soaps to wipe the face of gulal. Apply a tonne of moisturiser after this, paying special attention to products designed for sensitive skin.
- Refrain from using your fingernails to remove colour since they will leave ugly stains. To remove the colours,

gently scrub the face and body with granulated sugar. ■ The week after, refrain from bleaching, shaving, waxing, and getting a facial or clean-up. Allow your body and skin some time to heal from the injury. ■ To remove stains, stay away from using kerosene, petrol and spirits as they will cause your skin to become dry. ■ Use a solution of sea salt, glycerine, and a few drops of fragrance oil to rejuvenate your skin. This mixture has antibacterial and antifungal properties and can also remove artificial colouring.





RCB EYE BETTER OUTING FROM BOWLERS

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's IPL 2024 campaign is just one-match old but it has already exposed their biggest chink — brittleness in bowling, and they need better returns from bowlers against a confident Punjab Kings at an unforgiving M Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Monday. During their six-wicket defeat against Chennai Super Kings, the pacers were guilty of blindly following a short-pitch ball strategy while the spinners just did not have enough resources to exploit a gradually slowing-down Chepauk pitch. The three RCB spinners — Mayank Dagar, Karn Sharma and Glenn Maxwell — bowled five overs between them and managed middling figures of 37 for one without actually troubling the batters. In contrast, the two CSK spinners — Ravindra Jadeja and Maheesh Theekshana — bowled a combined eight overs for figures of 57 for four when the deck was much easier to bat. So, the Royal Challengers' spinners will have to brace for a tougher task here as the 22-

yard trampoline with short fences and a quick outfield is not a friendly associate of theirs. These numbers will make that point clear. This venue holds the record of teams scoring more than 200 runs in an innings on most occasions — 27 times, and the average first innings score in the IPL here is 172. But those grim stats also put the onus on the RCB pace bowlers against Punjab. Mohammed Siraj, Alzarri Joseph, in particular, and Yash Dayal zealously used the quota of two bouncers per over against Chennai but in doing so they sacrificed their control over line and length. It reflected in their run-giving rate too — Siraj (9.5), Joseph (10.3), Dayal (9.3). Cameron Green, the fourth pacer, took pace off his deliveries and employed the cutters that fetched him two wickets but they were interspersed with loose deliveries as the Aussie conceded nine runs an over. However, following a single-channel strategy will be suicidal at Chinnaswamy and they will have to find a way to use their copious amount of skills more judiciously.



But there is another rather unnoticed glitch. As it often happens, the RCB total of 173 for six against the Super Kings is a bit of misinformative. It came after a top-order collapse that saw RCB reeling at 78 for five. It required the industry and innovation of Dinesh Karthik and Anuj Rawat for them to go past the 170-run mark. But banking on lower-order is not an everyday workable approach, as seniors such as Virat Kohli, skipper Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell will have to get those big runs. Of course, a more fruitful outing by Rajat Patidar, who had a torrid time in the recent Test series against England, too will be highly welcome as runs from him offer a cushion for batters ahead of him. It is imperative too as Punjab is a capable side as they showed while producing a clinical effort against a more fancied Delhi Capitals on Saturday. They have their own turmoil too such as lack of runs from Jonny Bairstow, whose Indian marathon encompasses last year's World Cup, the five-match Test series and now the IPL, and waywardness of left-arm seamer Sam Curran.

But the win over DC might have temporarily erased all those worries.

SQUAD:

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (captain), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (captain), Matthew Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajann, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.

Russell a phenomenal ball striker, says Phil

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Andre Russell's six-hitting carnage at the death that propelled Kolkata Knight Riders to a match-winning total did not come as a surprise to teammate Phil Salt, who described the star allrounder as the "best in the world on his day". Russell muscled his way to a 25-ball 64 studded with seven sixes and three fours to power KKR to 208 for 7. The hosts then returned to limit Sunrisers Hyderabad to 204 for 7 and record a four-run win in a thrilling IPL clash here on Saturday. Making debut for KKR, Salt, who had played alongside Russell in Manchester Originals in The Hundred, was excited to see another special from the West Indian. "I've played with Dre (Russell) in the Hundred. He's a phenomenal ball

striker. The best in the world on his day," Salt said after their win on Saturday. "So, to see him do what he did, obviously is incredible. Love watching it, but, you know, it's no surprise to me. I don't think it's a surprise to anybody on the ground. When he's on, he's incredible." Four of the top-five KKR batters got out for single digit scores managing just 18 runs in between them, but Salt held firm atop the order and found a fine ally in No 6 Ramandeep Singh (35 off 17). The duo put together 54 runs that came off just 29 balls. "Yeah, you know, what I said to the previous two batters is we'll take it to the 8th over, and if another wicket falls, we'll take it to the 10th. I said the same to Ramandeep, I said we'll take it to the 12th and we'll reassess



there. He was really smart the way he played. "He took the pressure off me to hit the boundaries. He came in and had

partnerships. And for him to come out on debut (for KKR) and do that is very impressive." Heinrich Klaasen threatened to spoil KKR's party with a counter-attacking fifty as IPL's most expensive player Mitchell Starc was hit for four sixes in his last over that yielded 26 runs for SRH. Needing 12 to defend in the last over, the inexperienced Rana delivered. "You try not to ride the wave when you're out there. The game seesawed all the way through their batting innings," Salt said. "We had a few chances we didn't take in the field, and it looked like, at one point, getting towards that final over was going to hurt us. "But Harshit held his nerves unbelievably well in the final over and I think we defended what was a pretty good score."



Rohit hopes new faces in MI make a mark in IPL right from beginning

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma hoped the new faces roped in by his side for this edition of the IPL are able to make a mark from the outset as the franchise aims for a record sixth title under new skipper Hardik Pandya. Five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians have picked some exciting prospects, including South Africa pacer Gerald Coetzee, uncapped U-19 World Cup star Kwena Maphaka, England's Luke Wood, Sri Lanka's Nuwan Thushara, West Indies' Romario Shepherd and Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi. Among the Indians, Shreyas Gopal has also been roped in. Maphaka joined the Mumbai camp last week after Sri Lanka pacer Dilshan Madushanka was ruled out, while Wood replaced injured Australian bowler Jason Behrendorff. "A lot of players that we got

from the auction, a lot of new faces, young players who have done well in domestic cricket as well as international cricket... Quite looking forward to that, hopefully they can make a mark right from the beginning," Rohit said in a video posted by Mumbai Indians. Rohit, who joined the camp on Monday, has had a customised training programme, which included simulated net sessions along with mobility, strength and conditioning drills. "For me, preparations have always been the key and that gives me a lot of confidence going into any game," he said. "There are a lot of things that I do before a game and I think I have done everything now... Just a few things here and there which is left and which I will do now and I will be ready for the game," Rohit said. Rohit is coming off a Test series against England, which India won 4-1.

Just a matter of time before Pant regains form: Sidhu

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Former India opener Navjot Sidhu is confident wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant's return to form is just a "matter of time" following his nearly 15-month-long absence from professional cricket after a horrific car crash. Pant is back leading his Indian Premier League side Delhi Capitals after missing the action last season due to his recovery and rehabilitation. Though Pant did not have the comeback he would have wished for in DC's match against Punjab Kings here on Saturday, being dismissed for 18 by Harshal Patel, he was quick between the wickets, took a catch behind the stumps and also effected a stumping. "(He is) leading Delhi Capitals and running between the wickets and playing good cricket. Just a matter of time he will regain his form. But,



importantly, Indian cricket has got its fine gem back, and we should be thankful to God on his return to the field," said Sidhu on Star Sports on 'Cricket Live' programme. Sidhu added that when he first saw the images of the crash, he wondered how anyone could survive a mishap like that. "When this accident had happened, I saw the picture of the vehicle. Everything got burned, and there was no vehicle at the scene. How anyone can survive that sort of horrifying accident? "Post that, we were in assumption that whether the operations will succeed or not, but all went well for him. And in the process of physiotherapy when the removal of plaster happens your body doesn't move at all which is a very painful experience for anyone... From that condition, he is out now," added Sidhu, following DC's four-wicket loss to PBKS in their opening game.



Rana fined 60 per cent of match fee for IPL code of conduct violation

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Harshit Rana has been fined a total of 60 percent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his team's four-run victory against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens. According to an IPL statement, Rana breached the rules under Article 2.5 of the IPL Code of Conduct on Saturday.

"He was fined 10 percent and 50 percent of his match fees for the two respective offences," the statement said. While the IPL statement did not go into details about the incident, which attracted the code of conduct violation, it could be the 22-year-old's celebration following Mayank Agarwal's wicket. After dismissing Agarwal in the sixth over, Rana walked in front of the SRH opener and blew him a flying kiss.

"Rana committed two Level 1 offences under Article 2.5 of the IPL's Code of Conduct," said the IPL statement. "Rana admitted to the two offences and accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," it added. Rana kept his calm and added 13 runs in the last over to give KKR a winning start to the season.

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Anuj Rawat on Sunday hoped to cement his position as Royal Challengers Bengaluru's long-term wicketkeeper batter after veteran Dinesh Karthik has announced that this will be his last IPL season. Rawat gave a glimpse of his versatility with a 25-ball 48 that helped RCB register a competitive 173 for six after initial struggles against the Chennai Super Kings. It was quite fitting that the 24-year-old left-hander played that innings in the company of Karthik, who did the duty of wicketkeeper-batter for RCB over the last couple of seasons with a good degree of success. Rawat said the RCB management has clearly communicated to him about his new role in the team. "The communication has been very clear to me as in batting down the order. As someone keeping wickets, you have to bat in the middle-order a lot," Rawat said in a press-conference ahead of RCB's match against Punjab Kings on Monday.

Rawat eyes long term role as RCB wicket keeper batter



The Delhi cricketer, who kept wickets for RCB in the last couple of matches during the IPL 2023, said his confidence level has improved. "Last season also, I kept wickets in a few games and it gave me more confidence and as this season goes on, I am looking forward to contributing more as a wicketkeeper batsman," said Rawat. Rawat said the Royal Challengers will be looking to win all their upcoming home fixtures after losing the first match against CSK. Apart from Punjab, the Royal Challengers will take on Kolkata Knight Riders on March 29 and Lucknow Super Giants on April 2 at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium. "We are following the same process as the last match (against CSK). We are looking forward to our home games and hoping to win all of them," he added.