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NEW DELHI SATURDAY 16 MARCH 2024



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N. VAMSI SRINIVAS and MOULI MAREEDU

In a major development that is likely to have political ramifications

in Telangana in the run-

up to the Lok Sabha

polls, the Enforcement

Directorate on Friday arrested BRS MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha, daughter of former chief

Chandrasekhar Rao,

from her house on charges of money laundering in the Delhi liquor scam case.

Kavitha,

accused in the liquor

case, was picked up from

her palatial bungalow in Banjara Hills at 6.30 pm after five hours of ques-

tioning. A visibly shak-

en Ms Kavitha, who was

comforted by her moth-

er Shobha, husband D.R.

Anil Kumar and children, came out of residence raising her fist and quickly got into

The BRS leader was taken on a regular flight to the national capital,

where she will be pro-

duced before the magis-

trate on Saturday. The

ED will seek police cus-

tody for further ques-

arrest and her transfer

to Shamshabad international airport turned out

to be a smooth affair,

except for a few party

activists squatting in

front of her residence

and raising slogans

against arrest. The city police chased them

away, clearing the route

Friday's development

brought curtains down to the uncertainty over

Ms Kavitha's arrest, which lasted for more

than a year and led to a

political slugfest among

the three top political players — the BJP, the

Congress and the BRS.

Each party accused the

other two of entering

RAJIB CHOWDHURI

KOLKATA, MARCH 15

A day after West Bengal

chief minister Mamata

Banerjee fell down at

her residence and suf-

fered deep facial injuries, the Trinamul

Congress described it as

while the doctor, who earlier stated that a "push from behind"

London, March 15: British

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has firmly ruled out an early general elec-

tion to coincide with local

polls scheduled for May 2

amid intense speculation from the Opposition

Labour benches.
The British Indian leader had indicated ear-

lier in the year that he

was considering going to

the polls in the second

half of the year but in

recent weeks there had

been mounting theories that he may call a snap

"accident",

Turn to Page 3

for ED's convoy.

tioning, it was learnt. Contrary to expectations, Ms Kavitha's

minister

Vol. 31 No. 30 | 16 pages | ₹5.00

BRS' Kavitha arrested from **Hyd by ED in** excise probe



Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas during the red carpet of Bvlgari's event at Antilia in Mumbai on Friday.

Modi plans 2-day visit to Bhutan on March 21, 22

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will make a two-day visit to Bhutan. probably on March 21 and 22, in what could be his last foreign visit in his current second tenure as PM. While the dates of the visit have not yet been officially announced, New Delhi on Friday said that Mr Modi accepted the invitation of his Bhutanese counterpart **Dasho Tshering Tobgay** whom he met in New Delhi earlier on Thursday to visit Bhutan next week and that the invitation had been extended on behalf of the Bhutanese King. Full report on Page 5

India plans rescue of its citizens from Haiti

New Delhi: India on Friday said it is looking at evacuating up to 90 of its nationals from Haiti in view of the deteriorating situation in the Caribbean nation. Various gangs have launched attacks on key installations in Haiti. Full report on Page 5

Ex-CM Yedivurappa booked under POCSO

Bengaluru: Senior BJP leader and former Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa has been booked under the POCSO Act based on a plaint by the mother of a 17-year-old girl, police said on Friday. Full report on Page 4



I will demand more for my vote, this time!



Max: 29°C Min: 13°C **RH:** 36% **Rain:** 0%

Forecast: Mostly Cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Shobhakrut: Uttarayana Tithi: Phalguna Shukla Saptami till 9.43 pm Star: Rohini till 4.10 pm **Varjyam:** 8.11 am to 9.47 am; 9.55 pm to 11.34 pm **Durmuhurtam:** 6.27 am to 8.02 am Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

SUNSET TODAY 6.30 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.28 AM MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.22 AM **MOONSET TODAY 12.11 AM**





SC raps **SBI** for missing bond info, issues notice

■ 'Duty bound to disclose' **■** Next hearing Monday

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said the State Bank of India is "duty bound" and has to disclose the unique alphanumeric numbers of the electoral bonds received by political par-

The apex court also sought a response from the bank for not disclosing the details as per its earlier directives regarding disclosure of all the details of bonds, including the purchaser, amount and date of pur-chase. The bench, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B.R. Justices Gavai, J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, issued notice to the SBI and posted the matter for hearing on March 18.

Pulling up the public sector banker, the CJI said, "Who is appearing for the SBI? Because in our judgement, we had directed disclosure specifically of all details of the ■ Turn to Page 4



A five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud during the hearing on the electoral bonds case in New Delhi on Friday. -PT

Freeze BJP's a/cs, probe poll money: Cong to SC

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Congress on Friday demanded a high-level probe by the Supreme Court against the ruling BJP and freezing its bank accounts for alleged corruption in the electoral bonds scheme, claiming that the saffron party got

received through these bonds. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge asked, "Why have so many companies donated only after ED, IT and CBI Congress treasurer Ajay

Maken, in a post on X, cited the missing details of 3,346 bonds and called for an investigation. More on Page 5

DMK anti-Tamil culture, traditions: Modi

phases beginning from April 11. Votes were

counted on May 23.

Nearly 97 crore people are

eligible to cast their vote

in the upcoming polls at

over 12 lakh polling stations. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the

BJP had won 303 seats

while the Congress got 52

The full commission,

comprising chief election commissioner Rajiv

Kumar, and the two new

■ Turn to Page 4

seats.

■ Lists Centre's welfare schemes for TN ■ Slams Cong, DMK rule over corruption

Nadu at the central hall of

KANYAKUMARI, MARCH 15

ends on June 16.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi came down heavily

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Election Commission

will on Saturday announce the schedule

for the Lok Sabha and

Assembly elections in four states as the term of

the Andhra Pradesh,

Assemblies comes to an end in June. The term of the present Lok Sabha

Immediately after the

Arunachal and Odisha

upon the DMK, accusing the M.K. Stalin-led party of being against Tamil culture and traditions. Addressing a mammoth gathering of the BJP cadre

at Kanyakumari on Friday, Mr Modi criti-cised the Congress-DMK combine for issuing a ban on the traditional bulltaming sport "jallikattu" of the Tamils. "But, after the BJP government came to power in 2014, the ban on jallikattu was removed," he said. The jallikattu

made her fall, claimed

that he was "misinter-

On Friday, TMC's Kunal Ghosh said, "Ms

Banerjee fell down due

to an accident at home

tionable comments about it are beyond the normal and healthy culture."

Sunak rules out early elections

after UK buzz on May 2 vote

election in early May. But

during an interview with

"ITV News West Country" channel on Thursday, he sought to quash the speculation

having previously pre-

who spread canards and pass objec-

■ More on Page 5

HC allows PM's roadshow in TN

Former chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's daughter and BRS MLC K. Kavitha being

EC to announce schedule for

Lok Sabha, 4 state polls today

NEARLY 97 crore peo-

their vote in the upcom-

ing polls at over 12 lakh

polling stations. In the

tions, the BJP had won

Congress got 52 seats

announcement, the EC's Model Code of Conduct

will come into force

across the country. In 2019, the Lok Sabha

polls were announced on

March 10 and the elec-

303 seats while the

2019 parliamentary elec-

ple are eligible to cast

arrested by the ED from her residence in Hyderabad in connection with the Delhi

excise policy-linked money laundering case on Friday.

Chennai, March 15: The Madras high court on Friday directed the police Tamil Coimbatore to grant permission with certain conditions to BJP to conduct a four km roadshow of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 18.

■ More on Page 5 Prime Minister added that the DMK could not stomach the honour given to

ancient Tamil tradition

by placing the "Sengol"

Parliament. Stating that he visited all the ancient and tradi

tional temples of Tamil Nadu before attending the Ayodhya Ram temple consecration, Mr Modi said the Tamil Nadu chief minister prevented people from witnessing the event. He accused the DMK of being blind to Tamil culture and traditions, adding that he will stand as a protector of Tamil traditions. And on his watch, nobody can shake the roots of Tamil ■ Turn to Page 3



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a rally ahead of the Lok Sabha election in Kanyakumari on Friday. -PTI

No relief for Kejriwal in 'excise scam' **No push, Mamata's fall** an accident, says TMC

Court refuses to stay proceedings for skipping ED summonses

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

In a setback to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, a sessions court on Friday rejected his plea seeking stay on the proceedings before the magisterial court in a case filed by the **Enforcement Directorate** against him for skipping the agency's summons in scraped Delhi excise poli-

ferred to keep people

we've got elections for

police and crime commis-

sioners, for local councils,

for mayors across the

country," the 43-year-old Prime Minister said.

Asked if there would

also be a general election

at the same time, Mr

Sunak said: "There won't

be a general election on

that day but when there is a general election, what

matters is the choice.'

"In several weeks' time

guessing.



Arvind Kejriwal

cy case. Regarding Mr Kejriwal's plea seeking exemption from personal

magisterial court, special judge Rakesh Syal said that the Delhi CM can file an application for the same before the magisterial court itself.

Additional chief metropolitan magistrate (ACMM) Divya Malhotra had issued summons to Mr Kejriwal in two separate complaint cases filed by the ED. While the first summons was issued to summons for the second complaint was issued on March 7. The ACMM is slated to take up both of these matters on March 16.

The ED filed the complaint cases against Mr Kejriwal after he repeatedly failed to join the investigation in the excise policy case despite the issuance of summonses to him under the provisions



Commuters travel in the India's first underwater Metro train in Kolkata after its commercial services began on Friday. The services began after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on March 6 inaugurated the Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section of the Kolkata Metro's East-West corridor.

him on February 7, the Turn to Page 4

Govt says US' CAA concern is 'misplaced **unwarranted**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

India on Friday sharply

criticised the United States for expressing "concern" over the recent implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by the Indian government, and termed the US stand as "misplaced, misinformed, and unwarranted", adding that "lectures by those who have a limited understanding of India's pluralistic traditions and the region's post-Partition history are best not attempted". At his weekly briefing, external affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that "the CAA is about giving citizenship, not about taking away citizenship", and that "it addresses the issue of stateless-ness, provides human dignity and supports human rights".

spokesperson's strong comments at a media briefing came when asked about the criticism against the CAA from Washington and various other parts of the globe. New Delhi further termed the CAA (2019)

as "an internal matter of

India and is in keeping with India's inclusive traditions and our longstanding commitment to human rights", adding that the law "grants safe haven to persecuted minorities belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities from Afghanistan, Pakistan,

Bangladesh who have entered India on or before December 31, 2014". It further said: "India's Constitution guarantees freedom of religion to all its citizens. There are no grounds for any concern on the treatment of minorities. Vote bank ■ Turn to Page 4



Smart Pradesh Uttar Pradesh







Metro rail services in Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, Lucknow, Kanpur and Agra

Implementation of Safe City Project in 17 Municipal Corporations and Gautam Buddha Nagar

Rapid Rail Service from Meerut to Delhi, First in the country

Agra and Varanasi included in top 10 cities of the country in smart cities ranking.

Uttar Pradesh as an Achiever State in 10 Various Categories at India Smart Cities Conclave-2023, Varanasi awarded as the top smart city of North Zone.

Under the Smart City Mission, **670 projects of worth ₹9313 crore under progress in 10 cities**(Agra, Aligarh, Bareilly, Jhansi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Moradabad, Prayagraj, Saharanpur and Varanasi).

646 works completed out of approved works in 6 categories in 10 smart cities.

Development of Ayodhya, Firozabad, Gorakhpur, Ghaziabad, Mathura-Vrindavan, Meerut and Shahjahanpur as smart cities under the **State Smart City Scheme**.

Under Amrut Yojana, 157 projects of drinking water, 84 of sewerage, 530 of green land & parks have been completed, work on 91 projects under progress.

Integrated Command & Control Centers and CCTV camera Surveillance for Public Safety.

Creating Vital Amenities for Women, Elderly, Differently-abled individuals and children.

Mukhyamantri Nagar Srijan Yojana operational for providing basic facilities in newly created/ extended/ upgraded municipal bodies, Provision of ₹550 crore.

Aspirational City Plan launched for overall development of 100 Aspirational Municipal Bodies.

Implementation of Aspirational City Scheme based on 3C approach i.e. **Convergence, Collaboration and Competition.**

Appointment of 100 professionals as Chief Minister Fellows in Aspirational Urban Bodies.

Construction of 9 lakh individual toilets, 69,381 community and public toilets.

Construction of 1,100 pink toilets in civic bodies.

Cleanliness campaign conducted at 75 tourist 6 historical places in the state.

Employment to more than **48,501 workers by** registering **1.50 lakh workers** through 63 urban livelihood centers in 51 cities.

E-nagar service implemented in all urban bodies for the convenience of the general public.

Formation of Emergency Response Sanitation Unit to assist Safai Mitras in cleaning sewers and septic tanks.

Live monitoring of buses in cities through 'Chalo App'

The work of preparing GIS based master plan in 59 AMRUT cities and **GIS based property tax management** system in 15 municipal corporations under progress.

Construction of 17 lakh 62 thousand houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

Construction of 1,040 houses in Lucknow under Light House Project based on Global Housing Technology Challenge.

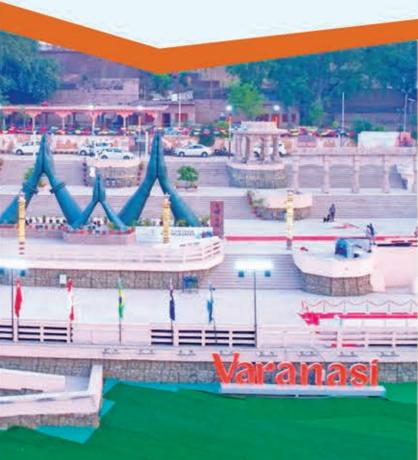
Uttar Pradesh ranks third

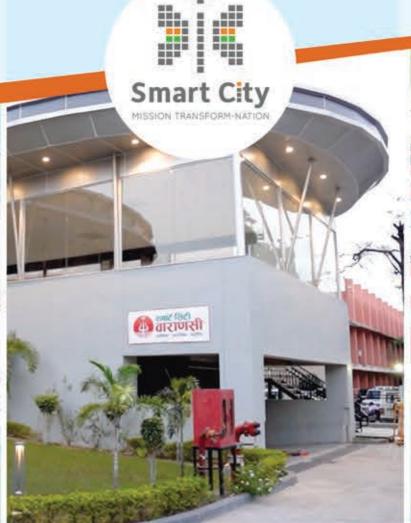
in the country in India Smart Cities Awards Contest

'Sambhav' portal and statewide

Toll Free Number 1533

operational for resolving public grievances









IN BRIFE

Criminal held after

shootout with cops New Delhi: A dreaded criminal of Bangladeshi origin and one of his associates were

arrested following a shootout in southwest Delhi's Dwarka, the police said on Friday. Miraj alias Mehraj received a bullet injury in his leg while Shahid was overpowered by a team of the Delhi police's crime branch from a spot near Dhulsiras village in the early hours of Friday, they said. A police officer said,

was involved in a dacoity in a house in the Ashok Vihar area. He had decamped with cash and jewellery worth ₹2 crore by holding the family members on gunpoint in May 2023, the officer added.

Miraj, a native of Bangladesh,

"Miraj was previously involved in five cases of dacoity and the Arms Act," the officer said, adding that he has been admitted to a

BJP: AAP didn't do

anything for women

New Delhi: Former Delhi BJP president and MP Mano Tiwari and New Delhi MP candidate Bansuri Swaraj on Friday in a press conference said that the due to negligence by the AAP ruled Delhi government the students who come to Delhi for studies are forced to pay huge rents. Speaking while proposing a to build a 1,000 bed girls hostel in Timarpur, Mr Tiwari said that there is a government in Delhi which has been in power for the last ten years but it has never done anything for the educational empowerment of girl students and women. Ms Swaraj said that a demand for a hostel was placed earlier this month and the construction is starting at a cost

DMK anti-Tamil traditions and culture, says PM

of ₹272 crores.

■ Continued From Page 1 culture and traditions.

Listing out his government the Prime Minister said that the Centre has brought out several schemes for the welfare of Tamil Nadu and alleged that the DMK-Congress combine of the INDIA bloc had done nothing for the development of the

"They are still waiting to exploit the people of Tamil Nadu by winning the elections," he alleged.

Claiming that the Central government, during the past 10 years since 2014, had liberally allocated funds to Tamil Nadu for infrastructure development, Mr Modi said among the Centrally-sponsored road projects, ₹50,000 crores worth of works have been completed and more projects worth ₹70,000 crores are being implemented.

Comparing the ₹6,300 crores of railway development projects allotted to the state since 2014 with the ₹800 crores of railway projects allotted during the UPA government between 2004 and 2014, the Prime Minister said the Congress-DMK alliance concentrated only on corruption during their regime.

"We have to our credit the optical fibre scheme, the introduction of 5G, the digital India scheme, the Udan scheme and developing India in the field of sports through the Khelo India scheme, while the DMK and the Congress have only corruptions like the 2G, in which the DMK benefited a lot, the helicopter scam and the coal scam as their achievements," he

Happy over the overwhelm ing response at the public meeting, Mr Modi said Kanyakumari has been showning ita bleen ering its blessing on the BJP, which has made many lose their sleep.

Remembering the Murli Manohar Joshi-led Ekta Yatra, of which he was a part, Mr Modi said in 1992 he took the yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and now the wave has come from Kashmir to

Kanvakumari. Predicting a hat-trick victory for the NDA in the ensuring general election, Mr Modi said the DMK-Congress combine will be wiped out of Tamil Project comprises of Kalandar Colony, Deepak Colony, Dilshad Vihar Colony

DDA to facelift 3 slum clusters

AVINASH PRABHAKAR NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

In a step towards providing homes to thousands of slum dwellers in the capital city, three jhuggi clusters in East Delhi comprising about 4,000 households will be redeveloped by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) under the in situ rehabilitation project 'Jahan Jhuggi Wahin Makan' of the Central government.

The decision was taken at a meeting headed by Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena, along with DDA vice-chairman and other senior officials of DDA on Friday.

This rehabilitation project at Dilshad Garden comprising a total of three JJ clusters— Kalandar Colony, Deepak Colony, and Dilshad Vihar Colony—will be developed over about seven hectares with multi-storeyed buildings with modern amenities for the slum dwellers.

It will be the first in situ rehabilitation project in the entire Trans Yamuna area and the fourth project overall in the national

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

Another gangster Yogesh

Dahiya alias Tunda on

Friday tied the knot under

the watch of police per-

sonnel at a temple in west

Delhi's Vikaspuri area,

officials said. Tunda, a

Haryana was given six

hours of parole between

12 pm to 6 pm by the Delhi

high court for his mar-

One of the main hench-

men of Gogi gang, Tunda

is allegedly involved in

the murder of gangster

Sunil Maan alias Tillu Tajpuria in May 2023

inside Tihar Jail, where

the former is currently

lodged. Tunda is allegedly

Sonipat,

of

native



capital after the in situ rehabilitation projects at Kalkaji Extension, Jailorwala Bagh, and Kathputli Colony, said the L-G office in a statement.

"After Mr Vinai Saxena became the lieutenantgovernor of Delhi, many clusters have been demolished by the agencies. More than 3 lakh poor residents have been rendered homeless in the last 1.5 years. These people are forced to live under the flyovers and on the footpaths

'Now, under pressure of the coming Lok Sabha elections, the L-G is trying an image makeover. However, lakhs of people who have been rendered homeless will never forgive the L-G and the Central government," the

After Jathedi, Tunda ties

knot under police watch

henchmen of Gogi gang,

involved in the murder

of gangster Sunil Maan

alias Tillu Tajpuria in

May 2023 inside Tihar

involved in over a dozen

cases of murder, attempt

to murder, robbery, extor-

tion, among others in

Delhi. He is also facing a case of MCOCA

(Maharashtra Control of

Organised Crime Act) charged by the Delhi

The wedding of Sandeep alias Kala Jadhedi, an

associate of jailed gang-

ster Lawrence Bishnoi,

police special cell.

Tunda is allegedly

DECISION WAS taken at a meeting headed by Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena, along with DDA vice-chairman and other senior officials. It will be the first in situ rehabilitation project in the entire Trans Yamuna area

Delhi government claimed in a statement.

The decision follows a visit by Mr Saxena to Colony in Kalandar Shahdara at the request of local slum dwellers where he had witnessed pathetic conditions of over 30,000-35,000 people living in unhygienic squalor and bereft of basic amenities.

Meanwhile, Mr Saxena has directed the DDA to present a detailed project report along with the finances involved at the earliest and proceed further. The L-G has issued specific directions to execute the project in a timebound manner and avoid any delay in the project, unlike in the past when the projects were delayed

Anuradha

Sector 3.

Vikaspuri.

"Policemen

alias Madam Minz was

held amid deployment of

police force on March 12.

He also had a six-hour

parole for the wedding

ceremony in a banquet hall in Delhi's Dwarka

Tunda's marriage was in

the presence of the police

at Arya Samaj Temple in

deployed in and around

the temple. Some officials

were also deployed on roads and flyovers," an

officer said. The officer

said officials from the spe-

cial cell and crime branch were also present to pre-

vent any gang related vio-

lence or the possibility of

his escape from custody.

AGE CORRESPONDENT entrepreneurs, it said. NEW DELHI, MARCH 15 Dial proposed the setting Lieutenant-governor V.K.

L-G nod to set up

SEZ, FTZ at IGI

Saxena on Friday approved setting up of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and Free Trade Zone (FTZ) at the IGI Airport over an area of five acres. The L-G has approved the proposal taking note of the strategic importance of developing an FTZ and SEZ at the airport hub, after ensuring that DDA gives a go ahead for the same as per provisions of MPD-2021, said an official on Friday.

"The SEZ would create economic activities through exports, warehousing, trading and provisions for related services at the airport complex," a statement from L-G office said. The move will reduce procedural complexities in terms of applications, licensing, clearances and other regulations, as well as provide tax benefits to

up of two multi product SEZs at the IGI Airport over an area of 2.02 hectare each (5 acres) and requested for Delhi government's recommendation under SEZ Rules, According to the notification, this move will boost the logistics sector and catalyse the economic growth apart from generating employment. The Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI has identified Delhi as a Pilot Air Cargo Hub which requires Tier 1, 2 and 3 level infra-

structure while DIAL already has developed Tier 1 and 2 infrastructure by way of developing two cargo terminals and logistics centres at the Airport, it will achieve Tier 3 once an SEZ / FTZ comes up at the Airport complex," said

Water supply to be hit in parts of Delhi today

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

Due to the maintenance work Cantonment booster pumping station, water supply will be affected in several areas on March 15 and 16. The DJB said that water supply will not be available, or will be available at low pressure in the evening of March 15 and morning of March 16.

Delhi Jal Board said, "Due to major mainte-nance work at Delhi Cantonment booster pumping station, after sudden breakdown in the common header line, the water supply in the command area of 1500 mm dia South Delhi main and 1000 mm dia Palam main will be affected'

DELHI CANTONMENT, RK Puram, Vasant Vihar, Kat-waria Sarai, Ber Sarai, Kishan Garh. Safd-arjung, Munirka, and others INA, and others to be affected

Areas where water supply will be affected are Delhi Cantonment, RK Puram, Vasant Vihar, Katwaria Sarai, Ber Sarai Kishan Garh, Safd-arjung, Munirka, INA, and Mehrauli. Other areas where water supply will be affected are Green Park, Safdarjung Enclave, Janakpuri, Deer Park, Greater Kailash, NDMC areas, Moti Bagh, Nanak Pura, Vasant Enclave, Shanti Niketan, AIIMS, the

Centre got funds from firms raided by ED, claims AAP

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

A day after the Election Commission (EC) published the electoral bonds data, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) challenged the BJP to disclose the details of overall funds it got through these bonds and accused it of receiving proceeds of crime from companies under probe by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Addressing a press conference, Delhi Cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj asked if the BJP would accept receiving funds from companies that were attached by the **Enforcement Directorate** in connection money laundering.

"The Bharatiya Janata Party received over ₹ 6,000 crore in the form of electoral bonds, the biggest share as compared to any other party. Why is the BJP not revealing how much funds it received?

"These companies bought the electoral bonds after they were raided by the ED. This means the proceeds of crime have gone to the Centre via the electoral bonds," Mr Bharadwaj alleged as he read out names of companies raided by the ED.

He also presented a timeline of the ED raids on the companies and when they bought the electoral bonds.

Mr Bharadwaj said the BJP should also be held responsible for accepting money from companies that were being investigated for money laundering. "Will the parties which **Centre nod to E-vehicle policy**

New Delhi March 15: The government on Friday 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 \$500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like USbased Tesla. According to an official statement, the companies setting up manufacturing facilities for e-vehicles will be allowed to import a limited number of cars at lower customs duty.

The policy seeks to promote India as a manufacturing destination for EVs and attract investment from reputed global EV manufacturers, it added. — PTI

companies that were investigated for money laundering be also considered an accused and investigated in the matter?" he asked. The EC on Thursday

published the data on electoral bonds bought between April 2019 and February 2024. According to the data,

the BJP received the highest contributions, ₹6,566 crore or 54.77 per cent, followed by the Congress, which received ₹1,123 crore or 9.37 per cent, and the Trinamool Congress, which got ₹1,092 crore or 9.11 per cent.
The data published by

the EC does not include the details of bonds purchased from March 2018 accepted money from to April 11, 2019.

Atishi to order probe into sewage issues in Delhi

AVINASH PRABHAKAR NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

Delhi water minister Atishi on Friday said that she will order an inquiry into the nearly 8-monthlong pendency into the sewer-related issues and fix accountability.

Speaking on the special session of the Delhi Assembly held on the issue of water and sewer problems, she said such issues had not even come up during the Covid-19 lockdown. "It is very rare that the Opposition and the ruling party are on the same page regarding water issues and everybody wants a solution," she said.

Delhi Jal Board, urban development department and finance department, Atishi said, "I am shocked that senior Delhi Jal Board officers have not been able



to take any long-term corrective action in the matter despite recurring com-plaints. In the absence of an effective public griev ance system, the people of Delhi are being forced to live in inhuman conditions'

Citing the report which was presented by the chief secretary of Delhi over the issues in the house, Atishi said, "In Highlighting the lack of last one week, work was coordination between the carried out to resolve sewer issues. If they could be resolved within four to five days, why did they remain unresolved for so long. This is a matter of investigation"

4 more arrested in fake cancer medicines racket AGE CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

In yet another development in the fake life-saving cancer chemotherapy medicines manufacturing case, the Delhi police has arrested four more persons, working with reputed hospitals in the national capital and Gurgaon.

The accused were identified as Rohit Singh Bisht (36), a resident of New Moti Nagar, and Jitendra (33), Majid Khan (34), and Sajid (33), all residents of Gurgaon.

Earlier, eight persons, including two employees of a reputed hospital and a Btech graduate from IIT Varanasi, were arrested by the police and an illegal unit indulging in manufacturing fake life-saving cancer chemotherapy medicines was also busted. The eight accused were identified as Viphil Jain Suraj Shat, Neeraj Chauhan, Parvez, Komal Tiwari, Abhinay Kohli, Aditya Krishna (23), and Tushar Chauhan. Special commissioner of

police Shalini Singh stated that during further interrogation and from conversations it was revealed that accused Neeraj Chauhan was purchasing filled vials, pur-portedly original, from hospital employees.

"Rohit, employed as a day care in-charge in the chemotherapy unit of a reputable hospital in Delhi, was supplying filled Keytruda/Opdyta vials to Neeraj. He salvaged the vials from patient doses and sold them to Neeraj. He ₹65,000 Keytruda and ₹35,000 for Opdyta," said Ms Singh.

Vagabond kills man for abusing guard, arrested New Delhi, March 15: A 32-year-old vagabond has been arrested for allegedly strangulating a man as he abused a security guard in south Delhi's Maidan Garhi area, the

police said on Friday.

According to the police,

the accused Ravindra, a

Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

resident of Etah in Uttar on March 9 when one Ajay Pradesh, used to work as a labourer at an event management company and left the job some time ago. He started residing at a DDA park as a vagabond and a security guard used to

A refugee from Pakistan shows his passport and other documents during a protest by the Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan and Afghanistan at the AICC headquar-

ters in New Delhi on Friday over statements made by the INDIA bloc leaders on the

give him food. The incident took place

allegedly abused the guard and Ravindra decided to take revenge by killing him. The matter came to light

when the police received a complaint about Ajay (24) on March 9.

last location near the DDA park in Rajpur Khurd Extension. On checking the area later, they found his body lying near the park, a senior police officer said.

A CCTV footage of the area showed Ajay enter-The police found Ajay's ing the park with another

person but they could not be seen coming out, the officer said.

Footage from other CCTV cameras installed around the park showed the suspect talking on mobile phone, he

Delhi HC cancels UP resident's Dolma Aunty Momos trademark

Delhi high court has cancelled an Uttar Pradesh resident's registration of "Dolma Aunty Momos" trademark after Dolma Tsering, who runs the popular momos stall under the same name in the Lajpat Nagar central market, filed a petition against it. Justice Anish Dayal, in a recent order, noted that the petitioner set up a small shop at Lajpat Nagar in 1994 as the first retailer of momos, Tibetan delicacy, which have since become popular across Delhi-NCR.

The petitioner sought cancellation of Mohd Akram Khan's registration of the trademark on the ground that he adopted her mark which is identical and is based on her name "Dolma".

"This court is of the view that the trademark of

New Delhi, March 15: The respondent No.1 be cancelled and removed from the Trade Marks Register and the same should accordingly be rectified. It is directed accordingly," said the judge in an exparte order. "Respondent No.1's registered trade mark be removed and cancelled in the above terms,' ordered the court. Mr Khan had registered

'Dolma Aunty Momos" in September 2018 on a "proposed to be used basis" In her rectification petition, Ms Tsering said that she was granted the registration in November 2023

on the basis of its use

since January 1994. Considering that the respondent did not appear or respond to the petition in spite of notice, the petitioner's allegations were not rebutted and therefore, would have to be accepted, the court said.

■ Continued From Page 1 into a tacit understanding with regard to the delay in

The BRS MLC's arrest coincided with the road show of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the city, covering the largest parliamentary constituency of Malkajgiri. On several earlier occasions, the BRS top leadership, including its working president K.T. Rao, dared the Prime Minister to arrest his party leaders.

The BJP, as its own leaders admitted openly, had to pay a heavy price in the state Assembly polls for peddling in Ms tha's case. The Kavitha's case. The Congress took full advan-tage of the delay, which it could successfully project as the BJP's compromise with Mr Rao.

Interestingly, the politi-

cal slugfest continued even after the arrest, with the Congress seeing in it a sinister design of the BJP to help the BRS revive from the poll debacle.

Telangana BJP chief and Union minister G. Kishan Reddy opted for the lawwill-take-its-own-course route. On the other hand, Ms Kavitha's brother and former minister K.T. Rama Rao termed the arrest part of a tacit understanding between the BJP and the Congress.

Mr Rama Rao reached Ms Kavitha's residence along with a close relative and former minister T. Harish Rao, before she was moved out and picked up an argument with the ED officials. Maintaining that the ED gave an undertaking to the Supreme Court to not take any coercive action, he warned the

ED of facing serious trouble. He also questioned the ED's decision to take his sister to Delhi without the prisoner transit warrant. The ED did not heed his resistance and proceeded

BRS' Kavitha arrested by ED in excise probe

with the arrest. While the ED officials maintained that due legal process was followed, Ms Kavitha's advocate Mohith Rao dashed off a letter on Friday stating that additional solicitorgeneral S.V. Raju gave an undertaking to the apex court on September 16, 2023, that no action will be taken when the bench was about to pass a specific

order of "protection/restraint." Further, he said the statement of the ASG was sought to be retracted on Friday, when the matter was scheduled for a final hearing on March 19.

"However, the SC did not acknowledge the same, he said, adding that the ED will be restrained from summoning or taking any coercive action.

In December 2022, the ED began Ms Kavitha's questioning in connection with alleged irregularities in obtaining licences for liquor outlets in the national capital by a cartel that also included several businessmen from the two Telugu states, including "Aurobindo" Reddy and Chandra Srinivasulu Magunta Reddy. The probe agency

claimed to have established a flow of corruption proceeds to Ms Kavitha. Around 1.45 pm on Friday, a team of ED officials - assistant directors Jogender and Sumit Goyal, deputy director

Bhanupriya Meena and

others from Delhi -- raided Ms Kavitha's residence in Banjara Hills.

During the search, a voluntary statement of Ms Kavitha was recorded under Section 17 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and five mobile phones were seized.

In the arrest panchanama, the ED officials stated that around 6 pm, a few persons who claimed themselves as brothers of Ms Kavitha, lawyers and around 20 others entered the premises unlawfully. On being asked, they did not show their identity. A ruckus was created, which delayed the proceedings.

The ED's assistant director issued the arrest order to Ms Kavitha, stating that she was found guilty of an offence punishable under the provisions of PMLA.

SHORT TAKES

Government changes Cinematograph Rules

New Delhi: The government has notified the Cinematograph (Certification) Rules, 2024 to comprehensively improve the film certification process, an official statement said on Friday. It said the rules will help in the adoption of online certification processes for enhanced transparency, efficiency and ease of doing business for the film industry. It will also put in place a system for priority screening of

films for enhancing transparency and eliminating all discretions. Statement said the rules will reduce timelines for the processing of film cer-

tification and in adopting complete digital processes for eliminating all transactional time. It also has a provision of accessibility features for certification to make watching

films inclusive for disabled persons. "Pursuant to the Cinemat-ograph (Amendment) Act. 2023, ministry of I&B ... Has notified the Cinematograph (Certification) Rules, 2024, in supersession of Cinemat-ograph (Certification) Rules, 1983. — PTI

Two TMC leaders ioin saffron party

New Delhi: After being "betrayed" by the TMC which refused to field him from his traditional Lok Sabha seat. rejoined the BJP on Thursday along with Dibyendu Adhikari brother of BJP leader and leader of opposition in West Bengal, Suvendu Adhikari. It was in March 2019 that Mr Singh had joined the BJP during the "exodus" in the ruling TMC, was fielded from his Barrackpur seat, which he won and then quit the BJP in 2022 to rejoin the TMC. Mr Adhikari, whose family pocket borough is Nandigram, which catapulted TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee to power in 2011 after The agitation against land acquisition, is an MP from Tamluk

Rajnath unveils new

Navy headquarters New Delhi: The newly-constructed headquarters of the Indian Navy, Nausena Bhawan, was officially inaugurated on Friday by the defence minister Rajnath Singh. The inauguration marks milestone for the Indian Navy as it establishes its first independent headquarters in Delhi. It is located in the Delhi Cant area. Previously, the Navy operated from 13 different locations, necessitating a consolidated and purpose-built facility such as Nausena Bhawan. The architectural design of Nausena Bhawan was selected thro-ugh a rigorous all[,] India competition process, ensuring the building's functionality and aesthetic appeal. Com-prising three wings across four stories, the building incorporates innovative construction technologies to optimise efficiency and sus-

tainability. Efforts toward

energy and water conserva-

tion are evident throughout

the complex, with the integra-

tion of solar generation sys-

tems and advanced building

materials.

Former K'taka CM BSY **booked under POCSO**

Yediyurappa denies charge, claims he tried to help her

Bengaluru, March 15: Senior BJP leader and former Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa has been booked under the POCSO Act based on a complaint by the mother of a 17-year-old girl, police said here on Friday. The girl's mother alleged that Yediyurappa sexually assaulted her daughter during a meeting on February 2. Denying the charge, the 81-year-old BJP Parliamentary board member said he would

fight the case legally.

Home minister G. Parameshwara said, "Some people say the woman is mentally sick." The complainant alleged that incident took place on February 2 when her daughter went with her to meet Yediyurappa at his

after Hours Sadashivanagar police booked the case under Section 8 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act and Section 354 A of the IPC, the Karnataka director-general of police Alok

Situation along

LAC stable but

sensitive, says

General Pande

New Delhi, March 15: Army Chief Gen. Manoj

Pande on Friday said he

would describe the situ-

ation along the Line of

Actual Control as "sta-ble but sensitive" while

asserting that deploy-

ment of Indian troops

and other elements along the LAC is "extremely robust" and

During a panel discus-

sion at a conclave here,

he also said "we need to

keep a close watch and monitor" what other

developments are taking place along the border in

terms of infrastructure

and movement of troops.

At the discussion on

"India & Indo-Pacific:

Threats and opportuni-

ties", held as part of the India Today Conclave

2024, the Army chief was

asked a range of ques-

tions in the context of

China's growing influence in the region and the

future preparedness of

the army "if the situation

along the LAC escalates"

The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted

on May 5, 2020, following

a violent clash in the

Pangong Lake area. Ties

between the two coun-

tries nose-dived signifi-

cantly following the clash in Galwan Valley in

June 2020 that marked

the most serious military

conflict between the two

sides in decades.

"balancedⁱ



B.S. Yediyurappa

Mohan issued an order transferring it to CID for further investigation with immediate effect.

Section 354 (a) (sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment) and section 8 (sexual assault of a minor) of the POCSO Act, which have been invoked against the former CM, are cognizable and non-bailable offences.

While the IPC provision provides for a rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both, the POCSO one prescribes a jail term of three years, which may extend to five years besides the

Police sources said the girl's mother had in the past lodged over 50 complaints against various people including the then Bengaluru Police Commissioner Alok Kumar, and his staff, for allegedly manhandling her and abusing her.

She lodged a complaint against Kumar twice — in 2021 and 2022 — and also against the retired Bengaluru police commissioner and BJP leader Bhaskar Rao for allegedly "conspiring to ruin her life," in 2022. Yediyurappa said the woman had been trying to meet him but was never allowed to enter his house.
"Once when she was cry-

ing, I called her inside my house and spoke to the police commissioner B. Dayananda, that some injustice had happened to her." He further said that "I heard that an FIR has been registered against me. I will do whatever has to be done legally but this also happens when one tries to help somebody,' he said..

Admiral Ramdas, former Navy chief, passes away at 90

Hyderabad, March 15: Former Navy Chief Admiral (retd) L. Ramdas passed away on Friday at a military hospital here. He was 90 and was suffering from health issues related to old age. Chief Navy Former

Admiral, who was admitted to the hospital on March 11, breathed his last Friday morning, his Sagari daughter Ramdas said.

"He came to stay with me here in Hyderabad about nine months ago because he was not keeping good health," she told

The funeral will be held in Hyderabad on March 16, she said.

Ádmiral Ramdas is survived by his wife Lalita Ramdas and three daugh-On November 30, 1990,

he had taken over as the 3th Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) and retired in 1993. Admiral Ramdas, whose name

Laxminarayan Ramdas, settled at Alibag in Maharashtra after retire-

He was born on September 5, 1933 in Matunga, Mumbai and completed his early education in Delhi at Presentation Convent and Paming College Ramjas College. with He joined the Joint lead.



Ex-Admiral L. Ramdas

Services Wing of the Armed Forces Academy in Clement Town, Dehradun in 1949, and was commissioned as an officer of the Indian Navy in September 1953. He was trained as a communications specialist.

Some of his key achievements while in service include establishing the Academy Cochin, commanding INS Beas which played a pivotal role during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, serving as the Indian Naval Attache in Bonn, west Germany (1973-76), serving as Fleet Commander of the Eastern Naval Command, and commanding both the Southern and Eastern Naval Commands, his daughter Sagari Ramdas

It was during his tenure as Chief of Naval Staff that women were inducted into the armed forces, with the Navy taking the lead. — PTI

BJD ex-MP, **PSO** critical as their car hits tanker

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 15

Senior BJD leader and former Odisha finance minister Prasanna Acharya sustained critical injuries after his car met with an accident with an oxygen-laden tanker near Beladihi in Odisha's Sambalpur's Rairakhol late Thursday night.

Mr Acharya was initially admitted into an ICU of a private hospital in Sambalpur, where his condition was stated to be critical.

However, he was airlifted to a private hospital Bhubaneswar on Friday evening.

The former legislator's car reportedly suffered a head-on collision with a gas tanker on national highway 55, Sambalpur-Rairakhol road, at around 3.15 am.

As per reports, the personal security officer (PSO) of the former Rajya Sabha MP is also critical, while the driver of the car sustained minor injuries in the

"It was a two-way road. "It was a two-way roau. We were travelling at around 70-80 km per hour when a truck coming from the opposite direction hit the car near Luhapank."

"The former Odisha

"The former Odisha finance minister Prasanna Acharya sustained serious injuries. I got a fracture injury in my hip. Our driver also sustained some injuries in the accident. Thankfully all the locals helped us to get to the hospital," Mr Acharya's personal security officer Raghav Pradhan



B.Tech Marine Engineering at the Indian Maritime University campus in Kolkata on

'First team of Indian troops back in India from Maldives'

New Delhi, March 15: India on Friday said its first team of military personnel that was operating an advanced light helicopter in the Maldives has returned from the island nation.

The military team has been replaced by civilian technical experts. Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu had set March 10 as the deadline for withdrawal of the first group of Indian military personnel from his coun-

try.
"The turnaround of the first team of personnel who were operating the ALH helicopter has been completed. The first batch of people that had to be replaced has been complet-

ed."
"The turnaround has happened," external affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media brief-

ing.
Following the second meeting of the high-level core group that was set up to address the issue of withdrawal of Indian mil-



Maldivian foreign ministry had said India will replace all its military ersonnel in two phases by May 10.

The second meeting of the core group took place in Delhi on February 2.

The two sides decided to set up the core group following a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Maldivian President Muizzu on the sidelines of the COP28 summit in Dubai in December.

The ties between India and the Maldives came under some strain since Mr Muizzu came to power in November.

Mr Muizzu, widely seen

THE TURNAROUND of the first team of personnel who were operating the ALH helicopter has been completed. The first batch of people that had to be replaced has been completed. The turnaround has happened: EAM spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal

maintained after assuming charge as the president that he will keep his election promise of evicting Indian military personnel from his coun-

Maldivian President, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Moha-med Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year.

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under previous government in Male. — *PTI*

Selfies, photos with wild animals in Ödisha may land you in prison

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 15

The office of the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF), Odisha, has asked people not to take selfies and photographs with wild animals as it violates provisions of the Wildlife (Protection)

1972.Taking note of instances where people post photographs/selfies with scheduled wild animals on social media, the PCCF and the chief wildlife warden on Friday stated that such an act disturbs the normal life cycle of the animals.

Under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, a person is liable for punishment with imprisonment up to 7 years. Apart from this, pictures and north/south

TAKING NOTE of instances where people post photographs/self-

ies with scheduled wild animals on social media, the PCCF and the chief wildlife warden on Friday stated that such an act disturbs the normal life cycle of the animals

selfies with dead wild animals or wild animal body parts are also being posted on various social media platforms which is a violation under Section 39 (I) (a), Section 39 (2), and (3) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act.

In a letter to all divisional forest officers, deputy director Similipal (wildlife), and deputy director of Nandankanan zoo, the senior official has asked to raise awareness among people to refrain from any such activities.

Moreover, everybody should abide by the laws and those keen to click pictures should take permission from forest offi-

"Helpline numbers may be displayed at prominent places and on social media to facilitate sharing of information from persons wanting to help the cause of wildlife. But unscrupulous elements trying to gain fame by violating the laws should be taken to task and you need to make them more famous by arresting and forwarding them to the court of law, the letter read.

Navy aids ship hijacked by **Somali pirates**

PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Navy extended assistance to a Bangladeshiflagged merchant vessel MV Abdullah, which was hijacked by Somali pirates whilst enroute from Mozambique to the UAE. The naval warship continued to follow the merchant vessel, which had Bangladesh nationals as crew, till it entered the territorial waters of Somalia. In some of the previous cases of hijacking, the Navy has intervened directly to release the hostages.

"The Navy intervenes when there is a scope of intervention. In this case, armed hijackers were in control of the vessel," sources said.

SC raps SBI for missing bond information, issues notice

■ Continued From Page 1

bonds, including the purchaser, the amount and the date of purchase. They have not disclosed the bond numbers. That has to be disclosed by the SBI."

The unique alphanumeric numbers will help identify the buyers of the electoral bonds and the parties that encashed

"They (SBI) have not disclosed the bond numbers. That has to be disclosed by the SBI," the CJI said. "But really speaking, we can take exception to what they have disclosed because they were duty-bound," he added.

During the hearing, senior advocate Kapil Sibal said the apex court's verdict was quite clear -- the SBI shall furnish all the details of electoral bonds to

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner NGO, said the SBI had said in its application filed in the top court seeking an extension of time to furnish the details to EC that it has the bond numbers.

Tushar Solicitor-general Mehta said he was appearing for the Centre and not for the SBI. "Would your lordships consider issuing notice to the SBI. They may have something to say," he

judgement of the Constitution Bench required the SBI to furnish to the EC all details of the electoral bonds purchased and, as the case may

be, redeemed by political par-ties, including the date of purchase... It has been submitted that the SBI has not disclosed the alpha-numeric numbers of the electoral bonds," the bench

said.
"We direct the registry to issue notice to the SBI returnable on Monday (March 18)," it said.

The notice to the SBI came while the apex court was hearing an application filed by the Election Commission seeking a modification of the operative portion of its March 11 order in the electoral bonds case.

The EC's counsel said they have filed an application for a minor modification of the March 11 order, which also directed that the poll panel upload on its website the data furnished to the court.

The EC requested the apex court that the documents be returned to it so as to enable it to comply with the March 11 order

for uploading the documents.

To this, the bench said, "The registrar (judicial) of this court shall ensure that the data that has been filed by the EC in pursuance of interim orders of this court is scanned and digitised." It further said that this exercise may preferably be carried out by 5 pm on Saturday.

Once this exercise is completed, the original documents shall be returned to the EC's counsel and the poll panel shall then upload the data on its website.

The bench said a copy of the scanned and digitised file shall also be made available to the EC's counsel.

Following the directions passed by the apex court in its April 12, 2019 and November 2, last year orders, the EC had produced the information and data so sought, both in a sealed cover envelopes) and in sealed boxes (containing 309 and 214 sealed envelopes, respectively).

On April 12, 2019, the apex court had issued an interim order directing that information about donations received and donations that will be received must be submitted by political parties to the EC in a sealed

In its March 11 order, the top court had dismissed the SBI's plea seeking an extension of time and ordered it to disclose the details of electoral bonds to the EC by the close of business hours on March 12.

The court had also directed the EC to publish the details shared by the bank on its official website by 5 pm on March 15. The EC, however, put up on its

website the data on electoral

bonds on Thursday, a day before

the deadline. Earlier on February 15, the top court had scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitu-

EC to declare schedule for LS, state polls today

■ Continued From Page 1 election commissioners, Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, who took charge on Friday, will the election

The Prime Minister-led committee picked the two new ECs on Thursday. The duo are the first ones to have been appointed as members of the EC after the new law on the appointment of chief election commissioner and ECs came into force recently.

Welcoming them, CEC Rajiv Kumar spoke about the significance of their joining at a historic point Election the Commission is all set to conduct the LS polls, the EC spokesperson said. In a post get only six seats in the cruon X, the poll panel said a cial state of UP.

announce the schedule for Lok Sabha elections and some state Assemblies will be held at 3 pm on Saturday.

The 2024 parliamentary polls are being seen as a do or die battle for the Opposition INDIA bloc. According to a News 18 opinion poll, the BJP-led NDA is headed for a "historic mandate" upcoming polls.

The opinion poll claimed that the NDA is set to win 411 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, with the BJP alone clinching a record 350 seats.

According to an opinion poll survey by ABP-CVoter, the INDIA bloc is likely to

Govt says US' CAA concern is 'misplaced, unwarranted'

■ Continued From Page 1 politics should not determine views about a laudable initiative to help those in distress." New Delhi further advised the "partners and well-wishers of India (that they) should welcome the intent with which this step

It may be noted that US state department spokesper-

son Matthew Miller had said at his weekly briefing recent-ly in Washington: "We are concerned about the notification of the CAA on March 11. We are closely monitoring how this act will be implemented. Respect for religious freedom and equal treatment under the law for all communities are fundamental democratic principles.

No relief for Delhi CM Kejriwal in 'excise scam'

■ Continued From Page 1 Laundering

The AAP national convenor joined the proceedings before the ACMM on February 17 through virtual conference mode and stated that he will appear before the court in person on March 16. However, just two days before the hearing, Mr Kejriwal chose to file his pleas before the sessions court, challenging both the orders of ACMM and the summonses issued to him on the complaints

moved by ED. Senior advocate Ramesh Gupta, along with advocate Rajiv Mohan, appeared for the Delhi chief minister and asserted that Mr Kejriwal had not skipped any summons issued to him on account of personal reasons.

"Mr Kejriwal is a public servant. They say he was summoned in his personal capacity, but I will demonstrate from the record that the summonses were sent to him in a case that was registered pursuant to an excise policy that came into being when he was the chief minister... I never said mujhe apni behen ki beti ki shaadi me jaana hai (I never said I have to go to a relative's wedding). I said I have my official duties... I have not failed (to attend summonses), I have explained the reasons, so there is no wilful skipping," Mr Gupta

argued. Senior AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh are already in custody in the Delhi

The AAP has been alleging that the ED wants to arrest Mr Kejriwal before the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The ED's money laundering probe stems from a case registered by the CBI on August 17, 2022, in connection with alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy for 2021-22. The CBI case was registered on a

complaint made by lieutenantgovernor V.K. Saxena on July 20, 2022. The ED subsequently registered a case on the money laundering angle against the accused persons on August 22, It has been alleged that a crimi-

nal conspiracy was hatched by AAP leaders, including Mr Sisodia and other unidentified and unnamed private persons or entities, during the stage of the policy's formulation.

The conspiracy, it has been alleged, stemmed from some of the loopholes "intentionally" left or created in the policy.

These were allegedly meant to favour some licensees and conspirators after the tender process.

The kickbacks are alleged to have been paid through hawala channels by a few persons in the liquor business from South India to some public servants of the AAP to achieve the objectives of "monopoly and cartelisation" among liquor manufacturers, wholesalers and retail-

Madras HC

allows PM's

roadshow in

Coimbatore

Chennai, March 15: The

Madras high court on Friday directed the

police in Tamil Nadu's

Coimbatore to grant permission with certain conditions to BJP to con-

duct a four km road show of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi in that

Justice N. Anand Venkatesh gave the directive to the assistant

commissioner of Police,

R.S. Puram Range, on a

petition filed by BJP

Coimbatore president J.

Ramesh Kumar, chal-

lenging an order denying permission to the

city on March 18.

SHORT TAKES

Cong to release final MP LS list March 18

Bhopal: The Congress will announce on March 18 its candidates for the remaining 18 Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh for the upcoming polls. The final list of 18 candidates for Madhya Pradesh will be released by the Congress on March 18, state party president Jitu Patwari said here on Friday. Last week, the Congress announced its candidates for ten LS seats in MP. The party has left Khajuraho LS seat in Madhya Pradesh for Samajwadi Party (SP) as a part of seat sharing arrangements between them. Sources said that the Central Election Committee (CEC) of Congress has asked the state election committee of the party to send single names each for 18 LS seats of MP for clearance by CEC, scheduled to meet on March 18. The Congress had won only one out of 29 seats in the 2019 LS polls in the state.

Jindal Defence starts

Hisar firearms plant New Delhi: Abhyuday Jindal led Jindal Defence Systems Private Limited (JDSPL) has begun production in its state-of-the-art firearms manufacturing plant in Hisar as part of a joint venture with Brazil-based global leader Taurus Armas S.A. The manufacturing plant has an annual production capacity of up to 2,50,000 weapons, strategically positioning J.D. Taurus to address the growing demand in the country. In the next financial year, the company aims to manufacture between 25,000 to 30,000 weapons. Engineered for rapid scalability and product diversification, JDSPL has obtained all necessary regulatory approvals and clearances, including ones saught from the ministry of home affairs. The trials and tests have been carried out with stringent quality control measures.

5 Paytm handles

for UPI transactions

New Delhi: Fintech firm One97 Communications, owner of the Paytm brand, has got five handles in partnership with four banks to continue UPI transactions, as per an update on the NPCI website.The company's existing handle @paytm is among the five handles that users can continue using without the need to make any changes at their end National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has approved @paytm and a closed user group UPI handle @ptyes for Paytm in partnership with Yes Bank NPCI has also approved @pthdfc with HDFC bank and @ptsbi with State Bank of India as a partner. However, these two handles are not active immediately. On March 14, NPCI approved a third party application provider permit for Paytm in collaboration with SBI, Axis Bank, Yes Bank and HDFC bank for continuity of

5,000 DISMISSED **STAFF REINSTATED BY C'GARH GOVT**

AGE CORRESPONDENT **RAIPUR, MARCH 15**

UPI transactions.

The Vishnu Deo Sai government in Chhattisgarh on Friday reinstated around 5,000 employees of the state health department, dismissed from service on the disciplinary ground last year. An official press release issued by the state government said that officials and employees of the state health department were on strike from August 21, 2023 to September 12, 2023. Around 5,000 employees who were absent from the office to join the strike called by the Chhattisgarh health federation were dismissed from service by the previous Congress government in the state as disciplinary action. Besides reinstating these employees, state health minister Shyam Bihari Jaiswal also ordered to release the salaries of employees withheld for join-ing the stir then. Around 25,000 employees will benefit by the decision to release their withheld salaries for taking part in the protest during the period. The employees of the state health department had gone on strike during the period

to press for their

various demands.

Day after Didi's injury, TMC terms incident an 'accident'

Misinterpreted, doctor clarifies 'sensation of push from behind' confusion

RAJIB CHOWDHURI

A day after West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supre-mo Mamata Banerjee fell down at her residence and suffered a major head injury, her party described the incident as an "accident" while a doctor, who earlier stated that a "push from behind" made her fall, clarified that he was

"misinterpreted".
On Friday, TMC state general secretary Kunal Ghosh said, "Ms Banerjee fell down due to an accident at home. Those who spread canards and pass objectionable comments about it are beyond the normal and healthy culture. Doctors are looking into if the CM had stumbled or something happened to her with a sudden jerk due to blood pres-sure-related problems."



TMC workers pray for speedy recovery of West Bengal chief minister and party supremo Mamata Banerjee in Balurghat on Friday.

Interestingly, state-run SSKM Hospital director Monimoy Bandopadhyay, in a medical bulletin on Thursday night, stated that "some push from behind" forced the CM to fall. Kajari Banerjee, a family member of the TMC chief, had also echoed him, saying, "I heard there was a push

from behind." Dr Bandopadhyay, when asked about his statement, however claimed, "There may be a misinterpretation of it. We have clarified that this is a sensation push from behind which happens when a person is weak.'

Downplaying the incident further, Mr Ghosh

said, "Many are also asking where the security personnel and the medical team were during the incident. This is really strange! When the CM lives in an individual space at home, is it possible for her security personnel to be inside? Didn't our former President Pranab Mukherjee get injured after falling down in the bathroom?' He added, "Are these

incidents unnatural or

new? Anyone can experi-

ence fluctuations in blood pressure or strain. But the BJP and other Opposition parties are playing vulture politics over it." The party's reaccomes Midnapore BJP MP Dilip Ghosh raised many unanswered questions on the security lapse and unavailability of first-aid at the CM's residence and demanded a probe

Modi will travel to Bhutan next week

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will make a two-day visit to Bhutan — probably on March 21 and 22 in what could be his last foreign official tour in his current second tenure as PM. While the dates of the visit have not yet been officially announced, New Delhi on Friday said PM Modi accepted the invitation, to visit Bhutan next week, of his Bhutanese counterpart Dasho Tshering Tobgay, whom he met in New Delhi earlier on Thursday, and that the invitation had been extended on behalf of the Bhutanese King.

when China has been trying to improve its ties with Bhutan that has been a longstanding close friend of India. New Delhi has also been trying to strengthen its developassistance Bhutan and has been stepping up engagement



years.

Delhi, while com-

Narendra o

Modi Thursday's meeting between the two prime ministers, on Friday said, "Bhutanese Prime Tshering Minister Tobgay is in India on an official visit — his first overseas visit assuming office in February 2024. Both the leaders reviewed the progress in various areas

 including infrastruct ture development, connectivity, energy, hydropower cooperation, people to exchanges and development cooperation. They reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen the special and unique India-Bhutan friendship.

of bilateral partnership

BJP to conduct the road show on Monday. In his petition, Mr Kumar submitted he had applied for permission with the police on March 14 to permit him to conduct a road show for a span of four kilometer via Mettupalayam road in Coimbatore for the purpose of enabling peo-

ple to meet PM. The roadshow was to sensitize the people of Coimbatore about various welfare schemes launched by the Prime Minister and urge them to avail them through direct benefit transfer without any interference of touts and also promote the habit of saying no to drugs keeping in perspective the recent incidents hazardous drug trafficking in Tamil Nadu, he

added. Mr Kumar said his application was rejected, the reasons being maintenance of law and order and peace and disturbance to public tranquility in Coimbatore in the event of conducting such road show and also in view of security threats as if it prevails.

The order was arbitrary and in contrary to the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 19 Constitution of the

SC to hear pleas for stay on CAA Mar 19

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear on March 19 the pleas seeking a direction to the Centre to stay the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Rules, 2024 till the petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 are decided by the top court.

bench comprising of Justice D.Y. Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), that once Indian citizenship has been granted to migrant Hindus, it cannot be taken back, and so an early hearing was neces-

Citizenship (Amendment) Act was passed in 2019. There were no rules at that time and hence, no stay was granted... Now the gov-ernment has notified the rules ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. If citizenship is granted, then it will be impossible to reverse. So the interim application may be heard," Mr Sibal

Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, questioned the locus standi of the petitioners. "No petitioner has any locus to question the grant of citizen-ship," the law officer said.

Janbhagidari beauty of democracy: PM AGE CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

On the eve of Election Commission declaring the schedule of Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday sought "ideas, suggestions and support" from people to fulfil the "resolve of building a Viksit Bharat", while noting that the "beauty of democracy lies in 'Janbhagidari' (public participation)".

In his open letter, Mr Modi noted that it was people's trust and support that major decisions like 'implementation of GST, abrogation of Article 370, new law on triple talaq, Nari Shakti Vandan Act to enhance women's participation in the Parliament, the inauguration of a new

Parliament building and strong steps against terrorism and Left-wing extremism," were passed by his government.

■ Modi seeks people's support to meet Viksit Bharat resolve

Asserting that it is people's support, which gives him the "immense strength to take bold decisions for the nation's welfare, draw up aspirational plans and implement them smoothly", Mr Modi said. "we will continue to take our nation to great heights together.'

With declaring the BJPled NDA's "400 paar" mission in the coming electoral battle, he asserted that the "transformation that has taken place in the lives of the people is the biggest achievement of our government over the last 10 years."

"Our partnership is at

▶ **THE PM** asserted that the "transformation that has taken place in the lives of the people is the biggest achievement of our government over the last 10 years'

the threshold of completing a decade. These transformative outcomes are the result of the sincere efforts made by a detergovernment to mined improve the quality of life for the poor, farmers, youth and women," Mr Modi said.

Citing the "success of such as pucca efforts' houses through Pradhan Awas Yojana, access to electricity, water and LPG for all, free medical treatments through Ayushman Bharat, finan-

cial help to farmers, assistance to women through Matru Vandana Yojana and many more, the PM said these were "possible only due to the trust that you have placed in me". He asserted that India is

'moving forward taking both tradition and modernity hand in hand"

"While the last decade witnessed unprecedented construction of next generation infrastructure, there has also been a rejuvenation of our rich national and cultural heritage. Today, every citizen is proud that the nation is marching ahead while also celebrating its rich culture," said the PM.

"I need your ideas, suggestions and support," the Prime Minister said in his letter.

Poll bonds: Cong seeks SC probe, freezing of BJP a/cs

Electoral bonds world's biggest extortion racket: Rahul

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Congress on Friday demanded a high-level probe by the Supreme Court against the ruling BJP and freezing of its bank accounts for alleged corruption in the electoral bonds scheme, as it claimed the party got 50 per cent of the money received through these bonds.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday alleged that electoral bonds was the biggest extortion racket in the world and investigative agencies were used as means to extort money. It is a serious crime that amounts to treason, he said.

Speaking in Bhiwandi in Maharashtra during the last leg of the Bharat Jodo Nvav Yatra, the former Congress president lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP over the electoral bonds scheme.

'Electoral bonds was the biggest extortion racket in world... Funds for splitting political parties and toppling opposition governments came from electoral bonds," Mr Gandhi



AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge during a press conference at party office in Bengaluru on Friday. -PTI

Taking to X, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said, "The details of 3,346 bonds are not available on the website; SBI has not provided them. Who are the people the Modi government is trying to shield? There should be an investigation. The investigation should link the IT and ED raids to these bonds. Most of the companies that donated through electoral bonds have either been raided by the IT or ED; they purchased bonds under pressure from the BJP. Two demands 1) Inquiry by the Hon'ble Supreme Court 2) Immediate freezing of the BJP's accounts.

Attacking the BJP, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the data released by State Bank of India (SBI) shows the BJP got nearly 50 per cent of the total electoral bonds money, while the principal Opposition party, Indian National Congress got only 11 per cent of the funds.

"There are many dubious donors. Who are these people? Which companies are these? Why have so many companies donated only after ED, IT and CBI raids? Who exerted the pressure on such companies," he asked.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh also hit back at finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman for her reported remarks that the link between the ED/CBI/I-T raids on firms and donations through electoral bonds were based on "assumptions", saying: "We invite her to release the full data of who donated how much to which political party."

Congress also demands the unique bond ID numbers, so that it can precisely match donors to recipients, Mr Ramesh

93 MP babus shifted ahead of model code

46 IAS transfered in reshuffle exercise, 47 IPS officers given new posts

Heard similar pleas in past: **SC** dismisses plea on EVMs

AGE CORRESPONDEN NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea alleging irregularities in the functioning of electronic voting machines (EVMs), saying it has already heard similar petitions in the past.

'Every method has its plus and minus points," bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Dipankar Datta and Augustine George Masih said, adding, this court has already examined several petitions time and again and dealt with various issues related to the functioning of EVMs.

"How many petitions shall we entertain? Recently, we have dealt with a plea related to VVPAT. We cannot go by assumptions. method has its plus and minus points. Sorry, we cannot entertain this under Article 32," the bench told petitioner Nandini Sharma. appearing in-person.

The bench recorded that the issue raised in the petition has been examined by the SC in various petitions.



Union minister of petroleum and natural gas Hardeep Singh Puri fills a car with Ethanol-blended petrol during the launch of "Ethanol 100" at Indian Oil's Irwin Road

'If there be a need, ready to evacuate Indians from Haiti'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

India on Friday said it is "ready to evacuate" Indians from the troubled Caribbean nation Haiti 'if required", adding that the MEA and Indian embassy in the neigh-Dominican bouring Republic has set up both a 24-hour control room and a 24-hour emergency helpline for the Indians in

New Delhi said there are about 50-80 Indians in Haiti where there is a "crisis" and that the Indian embassy in the Dominican Republic that is also accredited to Haiti is in touch with all Indians there.

In a statement, New Delhi said, "In view of the ongoing developments in Haiti, a 24-hours Control room has been set up in the ministry of external affairs to monitor the situation and provide information and assistance.

In addition, embassy of India in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, is concurrently accredited to the Republic

'Bodies from Russia to reach by Sunday¹

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

New Delhi on Friday expressed confidence that the bodies of the two Indians who died in Russia would reach India by this Sunday, and reiterated that it is "pressing hard" with the Russian authorities for early dis-charge of the Indians who had earlier been duped into working for the Russian Army.

of Haiti, has set up a 24hour emergency helpline."

New Delhi also said it has reached out to about 30 missionaries of chari ty nuns there and said that while they may or may not want to return, India is willing to evacuate all Indians from

According to media reports, Haiti is in a state of chaos, anarchy and lawlessness, with gangs running amok in the

there.

law on ECs' selection **RAKESH K SINGH** NEW DELHI, MARCH 15 The Supreme Court on

to stay new

Friday refused to stay the appointments of new election commissioners under a 2023 law that provides for a selection panel without the Chief Justice of India. When it was pointed out that a meeting for

the selection of election commissioners was preponed, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Dipankar Datta and Augustine George Masih told the petitioners to file a separate applica-

tion indicating the fact. Turning down the plea to stay the appointments of the ECs, the bench said, "Normally we do not stay a law by way of

an interim order."
The SC deferred till March 21 the hearing on a batch of pleas challenging the appointments of two ECs.

Senior advocate Vikas Singh, representing Congress leader Jaya Thakur, told the bench when a judgment has been passed, there can be no any transgression.

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, MARCH 15

In a major reshuffle in the bureaucracy and police administration in Madhya Pradesh ahead of the enforcement of the model code of conduct, 93 IAS and IPS officers were transferred on Friday.

While 46 IAS were transferred in the reshuffle exercise by the state government, 47 IPS officers were given new posts. This is the biggest reshuffle affected in the bureaucracy and the police administration by the Mohan

Yadav government so far. Senior IAS officer Sanjay Kumar Shukla, who was posted as principal secretary to governor, has been transferred as principal secretary, state women and child development department.

Interestingly, Mr Shukla had been transferred as principal secretary to governor just one-and-a-half months ago. Principal secretary, state planning and economic and statistics department, Mukesh Chand Gupta has been transferred as principal secretary to governor.

THE MASSIVE reshuffle in the administration came before enforcement of model code of conduct for the ensuing LS elections

Another senior IAS offitransferred as principal secretary, public health and medical education department.

cer Vivek Kumar Parwar has been shuffled from his post as commissioner, revenue department and

Similarly, 43 other IAS officers were transferred in the reshuffle exercise.

The state government has also transferred 47 IPS officers, including super-intendents of police (SPs) in 32 districts. The massive reshuffle in

the administration came before enforcement of model code of conduct for the ensuing LS elections, scheduled announced by the election commission on Saturday.

"More IAS and IPS officers may be shifted from their posts and given new posts before the enforcement of model code of conduct," a senior officer said here.

SHORT TAKES

BOEING TELLS AIRLINES TO CHECK 787 FLIGHT

Washington, March 15: Boeing said Friday it told airlines operating 787 Dreamliners to check flight deck switches after a sudden mid-air dive by a LATAM Airlines LTM.SN 787 plane left more than 50 people injured. The Air Current, an aviation industry publication, reported that movement of a flight deck seat is a key focus of the probe of Monday's flight. Boeing said it took the precautionary measure of reminding operators of a 2017 service bulletin detailing instructions for inspecting and maintaining flight deck seat switches.

INTERNET OUTAGE HITS SEVERAL AFRICAN NATIONS

Abidjan, March 15: Major internet access cuts struck several African countries because of damage to submarine communications cables, telecom

operators said. "Breaks in multiple major undersea cables have affected connectivity services in several West African countries," the South African operator MTN

Group said in a post on X. It said it was trying to reroute internet traffic through "alternative network paths" and working with partners to repair the cables, without providing details on the damage.

21 DEAD: MIGRANT **BOAT SINKS OFF TURKIYE'S COAST**

Ankara, March 15: A rubber dinghy carrying migrants sank off Turkiye's northern Aegean coast on Friday, killing at least

21 people, officials said. Turkish coast guard personnel rescued two migrants from the sea off the town of Eceabat in Canakkale province, while two others reached the shore by themselves and notified officials, Governor Ilhami Aktas said. A statement from Aktas office later said five of the dead were children. The migrants' nationalities were not immediately known. Eighteen rescue boats, a plane, two helicopters and a drone were involved in the search and rescue mission.

SOMALI EXTREMIST GROUP'S HOTEI SIEGE ENDS: POLICE

Mogadishu, March 15: A siege by Al-Shabaab Islamist milia notel in the Somali capital Mogadishu ended on Friday after more than 13 hours, a police officer said.

The assault, which began late Thursday, broke a relative lull in violence by the Al-Qaedalinked jihadist group, demonstrating its continued ability to strike despite a major military offensive against the militants

"All the terrorist gunmen were killed, and the situation has returned to normal now, the security forces are carrying out a thorough clearance and investigations," police said.

LANKA DETAINS 15 INDIAN FISHERMEN

Colombo, March 15: The Sri Lanka Navy on Friday detained at least 15 Indian fishermen off the coast of Karainagar in the northern Jaffna Peninsula for allegedly fishing in the island nation's waters, an official statement said, in the

The fishermen and their trawler were escorted by the navy to the Kankesanturai port and handed over to the fishing directorate for further action.

latest such incident this year.

In recent weeks, Sri Lankan fishermen have protested against the authorities to protect their rights from the alleged poaching.

THAI TOURIST 'HOTSPOT' WORLD'S MOST POLLUTED

Chiang Mai (Thailand), March 15: Thai tourist hotspot Chiang Mai was blanketed by hazy smog Friday, as residents and visitors to the usually picturesque northern city were left

wheezing in the toxic air. The city topped air monitoring website IQAir's table of the world's most polluted cities early Friday. Levels of PM2.5 pollutants — cancer-causing microparticles small enough to enter the bloodstream through the lungs — were classified as 'very unhealthy" and hit more than 35 times the WHO's annual guideline.

1st ship with 200 tonnes aid reaches Gaza via sea route

Gaza-bound food shipment was visible off besieged territory's coast

Wadi Gaza, March 15: A ship carrying 200 tonnes of aid approached the coast of Gaza on Friday in a mission to inaugurate a sea route from Cyprus to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the enclave five months into the war between Israel and Hamas.

The ship, operated by the Spanish aid group Open Arms, left Cyprus on Tuesday towing a barge laden with food sent by World Central Kitchen, the charity founded by celebrity chef Jos Andrs. It could be seen off Gaza's coast Friday morning.

Israel has been under increasing pressure to allow more aid into Gaza. The United States has joined other countries in airdropping supplies to the isolated region of northern Gaza and has announced separate plans to construct a pier to get

Aid groups said the air-drops and sea shipments are far less efficient ways of delivering the massive amounts of aid needed in Gaza. Instead, the groups have called on Israel to guarantee safe corridors for truck convoys after land deliveries became nearly impossible because of military restrictions, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of order after the Hamas-run police force largely vanished

from the streets. The daily number of supply trucks entering Gaza since the war began has been far below the 500 that entered before October 7.

Earlier in the week, Israel allowed six aid trucks to enter directly into the north, a step aid groups have long called for. World Central Kitchen 65 kitchens across Gaza from where it

O Yeong-su

KOREAN ACTOR

MISCONDUCT

GUILTY OF SEXUAL

Seoul, March 15: South

Korea's "Squid Game" actor O Yeong-su has

been found guilty of sex-

ual misconduct, a local

court said Friday, after

he was charged with

assaulting a woman in

The 79-year-old in 2022 became the first South

Korean to win a Golden

Globe Award for best

supporting actor in a

series for his perform-

ance as a seemingly vul-

nerable old man in the

mega-hit Netflix dystopi-

The actor was sen-

tenced to eight months

in prison, suspended for

two years, the Seongnam

Branch of the Suwon

The victim's own reco-

rds of the assault and her claims are "consis-

tent ... and appear to be

statements that cannot

be made without actual-

ly experiencing them," court said. -AFP

District Court said.

an thriller.



Aid packages are seen at left, on a platform near to the docked ship belonging to the Open Arms aid group, center front, as it prepares to ferry some 200 tonnes of rice and flour directly to Gaza, at the port in Larnaca, Cyprus.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS Vessel towed from Cyprus carrying 200 tonnes of food arrives off coast of Gaza Israel rejects latest Hamas counter-offer to ceasefire proposal, saying it was still based on 'unrealistic demands'

 Australia vowed to increase aid for the besieged enclave.

 U.S. Senate Majority Schumer calls for Israelis to hold an election and replace 'obstacle to peace' Netanyahu.

RAMADAN PRAYERS IN JERUSALEM

The first Friday prayers of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan passed without violence at the revered Al-Aqsa mosque under tight Israeli restrictions, amid fears the ongoing war Israel-Hamas war would spark

Palestinians perform the first Friday prayers of the holy month of Ramadan near the ruins of a destroyed mosque, Gaza Strip on Friday.

clashes in Jerusalem's Old City. Hamas militants have called on Palestinians to rise up and challenge tight Israeli restrictions on entry to the site.

ISRAEL DENIES PALESTINIAN CLAIM: The Palestinian accused Israeli forces of launching an attack near an aid distribution point in war-wracked northern Gaza, killing 20 people and wounding 155. The Israeli military said Friday that Palestinian gunmen opened fire in that attack and that none of its forces fired toward the waiting crowd or the aid convoy.

meals since the war started, the group said. The aid includes rice, flour, lentils, beans, tuna and canned meat, according to World Central Kitchen spokesperson Linda Roth.

It plans to distribute the

Beijing, March 15: The US

ambassador to China said

Friday that Beijing's position on a potential TikTok

ban in the United States

was "supremely ironic"

given the ruling Communist Party's cen-

forms within its borders.

The US House of Repres-

entatives approved a bill

on Wednesday that would

force the wildly popular

short-video app to break

with its Chinese parent

sorsnip of

ruling

online plat-

largely devastated target of Israels initial offensive in Gaza, which has been mostly cut off by Israeli forces since October.

Upto 300,000 Palestinians believed to have remained there despite has served 32 million food in the north, the Israeli evacuation orders, route have said.

company or face a nationwide ban.

cised the approval, slamming what it called Washi-

ngton's "bandit" mentali-

ty.
US ambassador Nicholas

Burns offered a rebuke on

Friday, "I find it supreme-

ly ironic that government

officials here in China...

have been criticising the

US for the debate we're

having on

China has sharply criti-

with many reduced to eating animal feed in recent weeks. The aid is a tiny fraction of what is required, but the shipment was intended to pave the way for other larger shipments, officials working on the

ISRAEL PLANS TO ATTEND NEW GAZA TRUCE TALKS

GazaStrip/Cairo/Dub ai, March 15: Israel said on Friday it would send a delegation to Qatar for fresh talks on a ceasefire and hostage release in Gaza, keeping faint hopes for a truce alive despite rejecting a long-awaited counter-offer from Hamas.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office also said he had approved a plan for an assault on Rafah, the city on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip where more than half of the territory's 2.3 million residents are sheltering, though it gave no time-

frame for such an attack.

Negotiators failed this week to reach a ceasefire agreement for the Gaza - REUTERS

'ATTACK' BY **HOUTHI REBELS STRIKES TANKER**

Dubai, March 15: A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels struck a tanker in the Red Sea early Friday, causing damage to the vessel while the crew was reported unharmed, authorities said.

The attack off the port city of Hodeida comes as part of rebels' campaign against shipping over Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said the ship reported being struck by a missile. The vessel has sustained some dam-

TikTok: US bats for FB, X in China **AMERICA CALL FOR GLOBAL SUPPORT TO** FIGHT AGAINST KILLER DRUG FENTANYL

thetic drugs including fentanyl, which has killed thousands of Americans, at a UN conference Friday, State Department said.

Secretary Antony Blinken will warn

Washington, March 15: of a threat "not just to the United States will call for global action on syn-nations," when he addresses the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna,

Miller told reporters. The US has been ravaged by the powerful opioid fen-

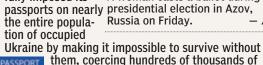
tanyl in recent years.

IN OTHER NEWS...

RUSSIA IMPOSES **ITS PASSPORTS IN OCCUPIED UKRAINE**



Russia on Friday.



people into citizenship ahead of elections. A

Russian passport is needed to prove proper-

ty ownership and keep access to health care

and retirement income. Refusal can result in losing custody of children, jail or worse. But, accepting a passport means that men living in occupied territory can be drafted to fight against the same Ukrainian army that is trying to free them.

UN-BACKED EXPERTS DECRY NEW PROOF OF TORTURE

UN-backed human rights Commission of Inquiry experts said they have gathered new evidence of horrific torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war by their Russian jailers, saying such practices could

amount to war crimes.

on Ukraine said human rights violations have been widespread since Russian President Pu-

tin ordered his troops to invade the country more than two years ago.

ODESA RISES TO 14

Odesa, March 15: Ukrai-

ne said Friday that Russi

an forces had pounded the Black Sea port city of

Odesa with missiles, kill-

ing more than a dozen pe-

ople including a param-

edic and a rescue worker.

service workers covered

with blood and dirt

doused flames and treat-

ed wounded colleagues in the wake of the strike,

images distributed by

Officials said Russian

struck residential build-

ings and cars leaving at least 14 people dead and

wounding another 46 people, including rescuers.

sa is a sign of weakness

of the enemy," said

Andriy Yermak, a senior

government official in

'Russian terror in Ode-

bombardments

authorities showed.

aerial

Exhausted emergency

Russian polls open to 'extend' Putin's regime

Moscow, March 15: Voters headed to the polls in Russia on Friday for a three-day presidential election that is all but certain to extend President Vladimir Putin's rule by six more years after he stifled dissent.

The election takes place against the backdrop of a ruthless crackdown that has crippled independent media and prominent rights groups and given Putin full control of the political system.

It also comes as Moscow's war in Ukraine enters its third year. Russia has the advantage on the battlefield, where it is making small, if slow, gains. Ukraine, meanwhile, has made Moscow look vulnerable behind the front line: Long-range drone attacks have struck deep inside Russia, while high-tech drones have put its Black Sea fleet on the defensive. Voters are casting their ballots Friday through Sunday at polling stations

across the vast country's 11 time zones, as well as in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine. Russians also can vote online, the first time the

option has been used in a presidential contest; more than 200,000 people in Moscow voted online soon after the polls opened, authorities said. The election holds little suspense since Putin, 71,

is running for his fifth term virtually unchal-His political opponents

are either in jail or in exile abroad, and the fiercest of them. Alexei Navalny, died in a remote Arctic penal colony last

First Friday prayers of Holy month

currently



at the historical Sunehri mosque in Peshawar on Pakistan.

IMF criticises Pak's claim of 'financial benchmarks'

IMF has expressed its displeasure to cash-strapped Pakistan's claim that it had achieved all structural benchmarks, and quantitative and indicative targets even before scrutinising and completing the review by the global lender. A team from the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reached Islamabad to hold talks before releasing the much-needed final \$1.1 billion tranche of a \$3 billion bailout package which was agreed last year.

According to media reports, the IMF Mission chief Nathan Porter and

their displeasure that the finance ministry had announced its verdict before the completion of the review process under the ₹3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA) programme, which they had just started and would come up with their prescriptions only after analysing the official data of various sectors of the national economy.

his colleagues expressed

Earlier, the finance ministry announced in its official handout that they had met all structural benchmarks and other targets before getting any feedback from the IMF. — PTI

IMRAN KHAN'S PARTY DEMANDS HIS RELEASE

Islamabad, March 15: Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Kh an's party has denounced his continued detention in several "fabricated" cases and demanded his immediate release. The core committee of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party in its meeting, discussed various issues, especially the delay of appeals in cases against its founding chairman.

RESURRECTION | WOES | Grief takes time and there are many different stages that can take place over many years

'AI ghosts' seen hindering grieving process for living

Dublin, March 15: We all experience loss and grief. Imagine, though, that you don't need to say goodbye to your loved ones. That you can recreate them virtually so you can have conversations and find out

how they're feeling. After all, resurrecting a deceased loved one might seem miraculous and possibly more than a little creepy but what's the impact on our health? Are Al ghosts a help or hindrance to the grieving

Resurrecting dead people

as avatars has the potential to cause more harm than good, perpetuating even more confusion, stress, depression, paranoia and, in some cases, psychosis.

Recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI) have led to the creation of ChatGPT and other chatbots that can allow users to have sophisticated human like conversations.

Using deep fake technology, AI software can create an interactive virtual representation of a deceased person by using their digital content such as photographs, emails, AI ghosts could be harm-

ful for people's mental health by interfering with the grief process Grief takes time and there are many different

stages that can take place over many years. psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud was con-cerned with how human beings respond to the experience of loss. He pointed out potential added diffi-

culties for those grieving if

there's negativity sur-

rounding a death.

For example, if a person had ambivalent feelings towards someone and they died, the person could be left with a sense of guilt. Or if a person died in horrific circumstances such as a murder, a grieving person might find it more difficult to accept it

Freud referred to this as melancholia, but it can also be referred to as complicated grief. In some extreme cases, a person may experience appari-

tions and hallucinate that

they see the dead person and begin to believe they are alive.

AI ghostbots could further traumatise someone experiencing complicated grief and may exacerbate associated problems such as hallucinations.

There are also risks that these ghost-bots could say harmful things or give bad advice to someone in mourning. Similar generative software such as ChatGPT chatbots are already widely criticised for giving misinformation -PTI

HUMANITY'S ISSUES FACE REALITY CHECK

Austin. March 15: Artificial intelligence aficionados are betting that the technology will help solve humanity's biggest problems, from wars to global warming, but in practice, these may be unrealistic ambitions for now.

Michael Littman, a Brown University professor of computer science, said, "It's a pipe dream. It's a little bit science fiction. Mostly what people are doing is they're trying to bring AI to bear on specific problems that they're already solving, but just want to be more efficient.' It's not just a matter of pushing this button and everything's fixed," he said.

Initially, AI should accelerate the design of new, more sustainable drugs or



THE ASIAN AGE

16 MARCH 2024

State Bank should have shared all info on bonds

there was no room for equivocating after the Supreme Court had ruled that the information regarding the electoral bonds sold by the bank and bonds redeemed by political parties be made public through the Election Commission's website. Even so, State Bank of India acted coy with the release of the data when it shared most of the details of the bonds issued and redeemed but without giving out the alphanumeric code of the

Having sullied its reputation in having sought an impossibly long time (till June 30) to put out the information on the bonds that facilitated donating to political parties, the bank had to take another rap on the knuckles in being told to be completely forthcoming and publish the unique numerals on the bonds by March 16.

The court had never said that the bonds purchased had to be matched with the names of donors. The Bank's argument that it would take time to recon-

There is no reason for any party to feel unduly embarrassed even if some regional parties got funds disproportionate to their size when compared with the oldest national party

cile the two silos of information was specious and was shot down. 'In for a penny, in for a pound' should have been the logic driving this exercise in transparency, which the Bank failed to accept

wholeheartedly, for whatever reason.

A plain disclosure was all that the five-judge bench of the Supreme Court had asked for and the full information will be in the public domain soon. It would be up to those who can match the bonds marked by an alphanumeric code with the political party that benefited to draw their own conclusions and feel free to exercise their franchise in the forthcoming general elections to the Lok Sabha and a few Assemblies.

The driving principle behind the disclosure was that information on political funding in a democracy was essential to help voters decide who they will vote for and that political parties were subject to the same disclosures as individual candidates who put their hats in the elec-

There was little surprise that the ruling party at the Centre had attracted a little more than the contributions made to all the others put together and yet there is no denying the fact that all parties had drawn money from the ingenious scheme that was shot down as illegal and unconstitutional.

The details that came tumbling out of a Pandora's box were in many ways astonishing given that the biggest donor was a lottery agent who operates out of the state of Tamil Nadu which had banned lotteries in 2003. The credentials of many other big donors are unclear, to say the least.

This is the nature of the game of politics in which ties between ruling parties at the Centre or State and their benefactors are bound by the greed index of market forces and secured by quid quo pros and there is no reason for any party to feel unduly embarrassed even if some regional parties got funds disproportionate to their size when compared with the oldest national party.

What India needs most is clean funding that is totally transparent, and not driven by black money dynamics as it used to be before the bonds scheme kicked in. Clean money is an ideal that seems a concept too far in a country with a history of graft in politics and administration. The minimum is being done now to tell the voter what it is through a window to the byzantine world of political funding for the netas and their parties.

ONOE: Proceed with caution

he approach taken by the apex committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind on One Nation, One Election (ONOE) is both pragmatic and wise. There might not be a consensus yet on the issue of ONOE either politically or socially, but if it is a desired objective, the panel led by former President Kovind, which was submitted to President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday for further action, has the inbuilt mechanisms to attempt to create such a consensus.

The biggest challenge to the idea of one election for the entire nation, eventually, is legal and constitutional, which the report of 18,626 pages is supposed to have covered strongly and recommends amendments in at least five articles of the Constitution to ensure that the legal grounding is sound.

Established last year in September, the committee, which looked at elections at all levels, from the parliamentary to state Assemblies and local bodies as part of its purview, interacted with almost all the stakeholders, besides getting expert opinse as nart of its work, before making its recommendations

One of the biggest pragmatic challenges thrown up by the idea was the issue of ensuring concurrence of the length of the various Houses, in cases of hung Assemblies or Parliament, governments losing majority mid-term, and other collapses. It was met with by the panel by creating a provision for ensuring a "complete the reminder" of the original term approach.

The idea of the panel, if recommended by the next Lok Sabha elections, would in its current shape possibly see the elections happening to Parliament and all state Assemblies. The next step would co-opt the local bodies — within 100 days, covering bodies like municipalities, panchayats and others.

The panel said that the ONOE would enhance "transparency, inclusivity, ease and confidence of voters" and argued that synchronised polls for all the three layers and tiers of government "would improve governance architecture". The panel also suggested measures to revamp logistics, manpower, security and other arrangements for implementing the idea.

The panel, besides former President Kovind, also had home minister Amit Shah, former minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, retired bureaucrat N.K. Singh, constitutional expert Subhash Kashyap and senior advocate Harish Salve. Sadly, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury declined to be part of the panel's work.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER

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- ▶ London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ. RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Farrukh Dhondy Cabbages &



Of Labour, Tories and a storm in a teacup in Britain over racism, MPs

"We've heard the burdened donkey start to bray But is the sound a curse, or does he pray To God complaining that if every dog Can have one, why can't donkeys have a day? They say, O Bachchoo, cat's can look at Kings And there are angels who, like birds, have wings Why do they need them, they're above the skies? Perhaps we humans believe stupid things?"

— From **The Rubaiyat of Holika**, by Bachchoo

n this teacup of a country called the UK, an important almighty storm has broken... Suppose, gentle reader, that the sentence above began one of my weekly columns. Would I, then, be labelled as a "countryist" for call-

"It's like trying not to be racist but you see Diane Abbott on the TV, and you're just like I hate, you just want to hate all black women because she's there, and I don't hate all black women at all, but I

This, the Guardian reported, was what a capitalist called Frank Hester, donor of 10 million pounds to the Tory Party, said to a private gathering in

Regardless of the fact that the Guardian's news desk seems a bit slow off the mark (2019?), the nasty statement was this week labelled a "racist"

This condemnation came from a shadow minister in the Labour Party, a colleague of Dianne... err no... hang on — NOT a colleague at the moment, as Dianne, an East London MP, is at present suspended from the Labour Party for... err... racist anti-Semitism.

Nevertheless, the Labour Party leader, Sir Keir Starmer, the person who suspended her from the party, spoke this week after the Guardian's report, very strongly in her favour, calling Hester's words

In contrast, as the media pointed out, Hedgie and the Tories remained schtum. Until... until Kemi Badenoch, a Tory Cabinet minister, of Nigerian origin and so, like Dianne, a black woman, spoke out calling Hester's remarks "racist"

Hah! Immediately, Hedgie's No. 10 spokespeople joined in, condemning Hester's diatribe as just that. Could this response from Hedgie have anything to do with the fact that this Kemi Badenoch is an open rival challenging Hedgie for the leader-

ship of the party? What an absurd thought! Hedgie's hesitation was owing to not insulting a huge fat-cat Party donor. Ten million pounds! Conscience? What the

Competition for the leader's post — we feel it, we



All that glitters not growth, well-being for most Indians



Subhani

Patralekha Chatteriee

Dev 360

Indians — the aspiring and the perspiring will soon be voting in what could turn out to be one of India's most consequential general elections. For many, the return of the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a foregone conclusion, as inevitable as the dramatic rise of India on the world

But "India" simply cannot be reduced to just one story. And it does not coalesce into one story even on the eve of

In a polarised country of over 1.4 billion, with deepening fault lines, the glaring issue in the poll discourse is not what we are discussing but what we are not discussing loudly enough. These gaps matter hugely because they affect the quality of life of ordinary citizens, including minorities, those who have been nuched to the margine of the economy and society. Being a citizen is not about casting a vote during elections and remaining a spectator in between. It means being a participant in one's destiny, asking relevant questions all the time.

As part of spectatorial engagement with India's political economy, we may marvel at the razzle dazzle of pre-weddings or weddings of India's super-rich or at luxury car makers who have set their sights on the world's most populous nation. Bentley is introduc-ing its "Opulence Edition Collection", an exclusive series of five models just for India. "Each model is imbued with the Indian spirit, inspired in particular by the colours of the nation-

al flag," says its publicist. But as a citizen, one must contextualise and heed the other India stories which lie buried in the meta narrative of India's fast-growing economy, new airports, highways, railway stations and its rising geopolitical

stature. Despite its GDP growth which makes it a very attractive market globally, 800 million Indians are still surviving on a government-supported scheme

that offers free foodgrains. India's gross domestic product for the October to December period grew by 8.4 per cent but, irrespective of who comes to power, ordinary citizens must ask how this translates into better jobs and a better quality of life for them.

All that glitters is not growth or well-being for every Indian.

The unemployment rate in India increased to eight per cent in February 2024 from 6.8 per cent in January 2024, according to the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy (CMIE), an independent think tank. "While the unemployment rate eased in urban India, it rose substantially in rural India. Rural unemployment rate increased sharply to 7.8 per cent in February 5.8 per cent in January. Urban unemployment rate fell from 8.9 per cent to 8.5 per cent," according to CMIE.

Many economists have pointed out that India's GDP growth is not translating into better jobs/work for ordinary Indians who are part of the informal economy.

In a recent commentary piece in a national newspaper, titled "India's Suboptimal Use of its Labour Power", scholars Maitreesh Ghatak and Mrinalini Jha pointed out that although recent official data shows an increase in labour force participation and a decrease in unemployment rates in India, the growth is primarily driven by self-employment and unpaid family workers. More than 75 per cent of India's working population continues to be engaged in typically low productivity work; in the period of demo-graphic dividend, the economy is utilising its labour capital in a suboptimal fashion with a majority in low

India's GDP growth have been launched in the is not translating into better jobs/work for ordinary Indians who are part of the informal economy. It is a young nation (median age 28), but it is also ageing.

quality work, said Jha in a post on microblogging site, X, formerly Twitter. Labour surveys in India count unpaid family helpers as employed". The Opposition parties

have tried to draw attention to many of these challenges too. But citizens must be more vocal.

Most Indians continue to have low-wage work with little social protection. This translates into a low quality of life, and not just by first world standards. There are a host of issues which affect the ordinary Indian like access to quality health care, water, sanitation, the environment, transport, impact of technology on lives and livelihoods and so on. These are barely visible in the poll discourse till date.

expenses, for example, are among my top concerns though I am relatively privileged and have health insurance. But all health expenses are not covered by insurance. A medical emergency can mean financial devastation.

"India is experiencing a rapid health transition with a rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCD) surpassing the burden of communicable diseases like water-borne or vector borne diseases, TB, HIV, etc. The non-communicable diseases like cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, etc, are estimated to account for around 60 per cent of all deaths. NCDs cause considerable loss in potentially productive years of life. Losses due to premature deaths related to heart diseases, stroke and diabetes are also projected to increase over the years, acknowledges India's National Health Mission.

Several official initiatives

past decade to address the enormous challenge posed by NCDs, "Around 6.22 crore hospital admissions worth ₹79,174 crores were authorised under the Ayushman Bharat health Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme till January 15 (2024) since its inception in 2018," Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya told the Lok Sabha last month. Out of this, approximately 3.37 crore hospital admissions worth ₹52,207 crores were authorised in private hospi-

tals, the minister added. But data about hospital admissions alone does not capture the state of health of Indians.

The political class needs to engage in a granular discussion on the ground reality who is left out and why?

India is a young nation (median age 28), but it is also ageing. Right now, the focus is on jobs. In a few decades, we will have to worry as much about care for the elderly who do not have support systems and resources. This too does not feature prominently in the poll discourse or in the talk about Viksit Bharat (Developed India).

Then there is the environmental crisis. Polluted air, polluted rivers and so on. engaluru, India's Silicon Valley, is running out of

Talking about Silicon Valley and technology, one cannot resist mentioning artificial intelligence. AI is being used in the ongoing political campaigns. The BJP is using AI to dub Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches into eight Indian languages. But there is more to AI, including its dark side. Has there been a survey gauging AI awareness among ordinary Indians? How many Indians are fully aware about deep fakes and how they can be manipulated? The link between technology and society is among the issues that deserve to be part of the poll discourse.

Citizens must raise these issues, even if vote-seekers

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee @gmail.com.

The CEO of Niti Aayog has recently made a claim that India's poverty level has fallen below five per cent in 2024, based on the findings of the **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey** (HCES) 2022-23. The question is how far the claim is close to reality when the CEO's report reportedly didn't substantiate it with data. Also does it make any sense that the poverty level has declined when unemployment in India grew from 10 million in 2011-12 to nearly 38 million in 2022? In fact, the 2023 **Multidimensional Poverty** Index Report says that a third of all poor people in the world live in South Asia, which is around 389 million, and India contributes significantly to this number.

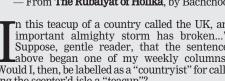
> R. Sivakumar Chennai

IS IT NOT REVDI?

THE NARENDRA MODI government LPG cylinder by ₹100 and again just Thursday, cut prices of fuel like diesel and petrol by ₹2 per litre. These cuts are coming with elections just around the corner. No one is complaining. But when the Opposition parties in their manifestos prior to elections offer freebies, Mr Modi mocks them as "revdi". But when his government gives it, is it not "revdi"? Maybe it is "mewa" or "peda" to make it distinct from "revdi"! On one hand, Mr Modi is critical of the Opposition, while on the other, he follows in their footsteps. Srinivas Kamat

GET WELL, DIDI

UNFORTUNATELY, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee sustained a significant forehead injury after falling at home. The TMC supremo received stitches and underwent medical tests at the government-run SSKM hospital in Kolkata before doctors found her stable enough to discharge her. The injury, which occurred before the Lok Sabha elections, should not affect her party's success in the state but has left her cadres concerned. Get well soon, Didi! N.J. Ravi Chander



ing the scepter'd isle a "teacup"?.

I pose the question because the above-mentioned storm that has broken out is to do, in the highest ranks of the governance of this precious stone set in the silver sea, with the interpretation of the fol-

think she should be shot."

Frank Hester himself, at first, denied that he was a racist. "Racist? Me? How dare you! Some of my best friends are racists!" (OK, he didn't actually say that, but he could have, when he publicly apologised to Dianne for his 2019 remarks).

The question is (said Alice), can you make one word mean so many different things? The answer, as Humpty Dumpty well knew, was that you could. For me, gentle reader, Hester's vicious nonsense should be condemned as "racist" though it doesn't seem to be a slur against every person of colour -- but then "mind of the beholder" and all that! I'm fine with calling his statement "racist". but for me the absolutely more serious allegation is this exhortation that Dianne ought to be shot???

British MPs are the regular recipients of hate mail and of threats of rape and murder towards them and their families, on their phones and on the social media. Two MPs have been murdered

by trolling maniacs Dianne has a right to complain and to protection

from the State.

Why was she suspended from the Labour Party? It was, ironically, about the definition or perception of "racism". She wrote a letter to the Observer newspaper which said that black people suffered a form of racism all their lives which the Irish. Jews, travellers and even people with red hair did

Jewish organisations called it anti-Semitic and, though Dianne apologised, she still remains

Dianne, whom I am acquainted with, is a colourful character in several ways. The first black woman MP and a great advocate of socialist institutions, she brought an avalanche of contemptuous criticism on herself when she sent her son to a fee-paying public school.

As shadow home secretary, she appeared on a radio programme and got extremely muddled and said her party in power would recruit thousands of police and pay them 30 pounds a year. She immediately retracted and placed the figure at 8,000 pounds — another blunder from an arith-

metically challenged potential home secretary. Now there are calls for the Tories to return the 10 million pounds to Hester. I disagree. Why should he get his loot back? Hedgie should use the money instead to start an arts fund for black and Asian playwrights and pay them generously. Yes -

great suggestion!

Dear Hedgie and Kemi: I am an Asian-British playwright and have a brilliant play featuring a black and an Asian character in the dramatic society of a London prison... No? Well maybe you'd prefer a play in which Boris Johnson introduces the serial killer Charles Sobhraj to a Daily Telegraph journalist called Mike? That would put the boot into BoJo...? No? Well then... I've got these monologues...













INDICATORS		%
Sensex	72,643.43	-0.62
Nifty 50	22,023.35	-0.56
S&P 500*	5,135.02	0.30
Dollar (₹)	82.88	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.70	0.41
Euro (₹)	90.33	0.31
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	65,657▲62	0.09
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	85.25	-0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.062	0.021
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.292	-0.006
* As of 8:30 PM IST		

NHPC secures 220MW solar power project

State-run hydro power giant NHPC has bagged a 200 MW solar project which will be set up at Gujarat State Electricity Corporation's 1,125 MW renewable energy park at Khavda, in Gujarat. The project was secured at a tariff of ₹2.66 per unit and will be completed in a period of 18 months. The NHPC will develop the project on a build-own-and-operate basis at a tentative development cost of about ₹847 crore.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: Kaushik Mitter, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Bonds have transparency on where funds are routed **Donations, ED raids not** linked, says Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

Slamming the criticism over electoral bonds, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, on Friday said that the links between any probe agency raids and electoral bonds were mere 'assumptions'.
"I think you've based

yourself on huge assumptions, that the money was given after the ED raid happened. For all you know, the money was given earlier, and despite that, we went knocking at their doors...," she said at a conclave, while commenting on a question about the link between purchase of electoral bonds and ED actions.

Minister termed the electoral bond as "white money" and it is transparent where the funds are

CRYPTO ASSETS are tech-driven and have a bearing on cross-border payment and a comprehensive regulatory framework around such assets has been considered at the G20 level.

closed the unique alphaparty. "On any link, what numeric numbers of the if the companies gave the money, and after that, we electoral bonds received by political parties and sought the bank's response. "The case is still still went and knocked at their doors through the ED? Are you sure they gave it (bonds) to the BJP? in court and SBI will submit what it has to. But, They probably gave it to the regional parties," the finance minister said. were the earlier systems 100 percent perfect?" the minister asked. The finance minister

Elaborating on stock markets' movement, she said despite huge fluctuations globally, the Indian stock market has main-

Her statement comes days after Sebi chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch had said that there are pockets of froth in the small and midcap stocks

"I allow the markets to play on their own. We should leave it to the wisdom of the market. It hasn't really gone too violent this way or that way. So, I place a lot of trust in the market," she added. On Crypto

assets. Sitharaman said, 'Currencies are to be issued by the government or the central bank of the day. Crypto assets are tech-driven and have a bearing on cross-border payment and a comprehensive regulatory framework around such assets has been considered at the

Merchandise, service exports rise in February

At \$41.4 billion, merchandise exports in February recorded both yearly as well as sequential growth. Services exports too moved up to a record high

in February.

Merchandise exports in
Feb. rose 11.9 per cent to \$41.4 billion in February, the highest in the current fiscal. It was also higher sequentially against \$36.92 billion in January.

Double-digit growth in engineering goods, electronics, organic and inorganic chemicals and drus and pharmaceuticals supported exports in Feb.

further said that on

Friday, the Supreme Court

said the State Bank of India should have dis-

"Engineering exports remained positive for the third straight month in Feb. despite challenges posed by the Red Sea crisis and a slowdown in some of the key markets," said EEPC India chairman Arun Kumar Garodia.

Merchandise imports grew 12.16 per cent to \$60.1 billion in Feb. against the same month of 2023. They were also higher than \$54.41 bn in January. A

• THE SERVICES trade surplus marked a new monthly high of \$16.7 billion in Feb. pushed up by a record high \$32.15 billion in services exports.

spike in gold imports to a four month high of \$6 bn contributed to higher imports.

"Higher prices of some commodities appear to have boosted both non-oil exports as well as non-oil non-gold imports in Feb 2024," said Aditi Nayar,

chief economist, ICRA. As a result, merchandise trade deficit widened to \$18.71 billion in Feb, compared to \$17.49 bn in Jan. and \$16.57 bn in Feb. 2023.

Services exports grew 17 per cent to \$32.15 bn, while services imports grew 2.8 per cent. Services trade surplus improved in Feb.

"The services trade surplus marked a new monthly high of \$16.7 billion in Feb. pushed up by a record high \$32.15 billion in services exports," said Rahul Bajoria, managing director, Barclays.

LIC WAGES TO RISE 17%, TO AID 1.1 L EMPLOYEES, **30K PENSIONERS**

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 15

The central governapproved a 17 per cent wage hike for Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) staff in basic wages, a move that would benefit nearly 1.10 lakh employees and about 30,000 pen-

sioners.
The wage revision of LIC employees is effective from August 1, 2022 which means that LIC emplovees receive arrears for the past two years.

According to a report, the hike is set to have a substantial financial annual impact of over

₹4,000 crore for LIC. After the hike, LIC's wage bill is expected to rise to more than ₹29,000 crore.

LIC chairman did not reply to calls and text

The revision incorporates an enhancement in contribution to the National Pension Scheme from 10 per cent to 14 per cent benefiting nearly 24,000 employees who had joined after April 1,

The revision also includes a one-time exgratia payment to 30,000 pensioners and family pensioners.

The public sector behemoth has a fiveyear wage revision policy. The last raise was given to the employees in 2017 and the next revision was due in 2022 said the insurer major in a release on Friday.

DHONI COULD

NEW CAPTAIN,

SAYS RAYUDU

Bengaluru, March 15:

Former India and Chennai

Kings

Ambati Rayudu said on

Friday that M. S. Dhoni

might exploit the Impact

Player rule to hand over

captaincy duties in the middle overs during the upcoming IPL to groom a

new leader for the five-

The Super Kings had given the captaincy to Ravindra Jadeja in 2022

but the left-arm spinner

stepped down midway

through the tournament

following a series of losses

and handed back the lead-

to lead CSK and landed

their record-equalling fifth IPL title in 2023. But

at 42, Dhoni is not getting

any younger and Chennai

will have to find a new

"With the Impact Player

rule, he (Dhoni) can take a

leader sooner than later.

ership role to Dhoni. Ever since, he continued

time champions.

PROMOTE A

Govt brings new EV policy to make India mfg. centre

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Centre on Friday approved the e-vehicle policy. The EV makers are required to make a minimum investment of ₹4,150 crore (\$500 million) with no cap on maximum investment, according to the government.

The move aims at paving the way for likes Elon Musk-led Tesla to enter the country with its new EV scheme.

Issuing an official statement, the ministry of commerce and industry said that the companies setting up manufacturing facilities for e-vehicles would be allowed to import a limited number of cars at lower customs

"The policy seeks to promote India as a manufac-turing destination for EVs and attract investment from reputed global EV manufacturers. The duty foregone on the total number of EVs allowed for import would be limited to the investment made or ₹6,484 crore (equal to incentive under PLI scheme) whichever is lower," it said.

As per the policy, a company will get three years for setting up manufacturing facilities in India and to start commercial production of e-vehicles, and reach 50 per cent domestic addition (DVA) within five years at the maximum.

"With regard to domestic value addition during manufacturing, it said, 'a



• THE INITIATIVE will provide Indian consumers access to the latest technology, boost the Make-in-India initiative, strenothen the EV ecosystem by promoting healthy competition among EV players.

cent (will have to be achieved) by the third year and 50 per cent by the fifth year," it said.

The ministry further said that the investment commitment made by the company would have to be backed up by a bank guarantee in lieu of the cus-tom duty forgone. It would be invoked in case of nonachievement of domestic value addition.

"The initiative will provide Indian consumers access to the latest technology, boost the Make-in-India initiative, strengthen the EV ecosystem by promoting healthy competition among EV players, leading to high volume of production, economies of scale, lower cost of production, reduce imports of crude oil, lower trade deficit, reduce air pollution, particularly in cities, and will have a positive impact on health and environment," it added.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Deepika's high 5 in Haryana's win

Pune: Deepika slammed five goals, including a hat-trick, as Hockey Haryana thrashed Assam Hockey 15-0 in the Senior Women National Championship here on Friday Deepika (2nd, 40th, 42nd, 49th,

56th minutes) led the show in the opening match of the day as she shone bright for Hockey Harvana, Known for her prowess from set pieces. Deepika converted two penalty corners besides scoring three field goals

at the Major Dhyanchand Hockey Stadium Nehrunager in Pimpri. Sharmila Devi (2nd 35th) Mahima Choudhary (15th, 47th), Udita (32nd from PC, 36th from PC) too sparkled scoring a brace

each, while Neha Goyal (8th), Navneet Kaur (26th), Ekta Kaushik (44th), Jyoti (50th) were the other goal getters in Hockey Haryana's emphatic vic-

Udita too was in her elements from penalty-corners as she scored both her goals from set pieces. - PTI

HI hunts for flick,

goal specialists New Delhi: In a bid to unearth

goalkeepers and drag-flickers from the grassroots level, Hockey India has announced a ground-breaking initiative aimed at investing in the future of the sport through specialised coaching across the nation. This strategic decision was taken in a meeting convened to discuss

the crucial aspects of goalkeeping and drag-flicking coaching at the grassroots level. The meeting saw the participation of eminent former India goalkeepers including Adrian D'Souza, Bharat

Chetri, Yogita Bali, Helen Mary, Dipika Murty, Akash Chikte, PT Rao, along with illustrious former India drag-flickers Rupinder Pal Singh, Jugraj Singh, VR Raghunath, and Gurjinder Singh

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III,

Noida – 201301. Editor - Kaushik Mitter. RNI Registration number 57290/94 Price in Nepal - Nep.Rs. 20.00 per copy.

RISHARP PA

Coach Ponting says Rishabh hitting ball as good as ever

Visakhapatnam, March 15: Rishabh Pant seems to be hitting the ball as well as he has ever been known to. something that is lifting the spirits of his Delhi Capitals teammates, head coach Ricky Ponting said after his first session ahead of upcoming IPL, starting next Friday.

Pant, who had been out for 14 months following a horrific car crash near his hometown Rourkee in December 2022, has been cleared by the BCCI to play both as a batter and wick-'We missed him (Pant)

incredibly last year. The whole tournament missed him. Rishabh brings so much energy to the team. He's got that smile on his face, he's hitting the ball as good as ever and he tends to lift all of his teammates around him." Ponting was quoted as saying in a press

the coach However, admitted that the team is yet to pick up pace even though only eight days (March 23) are left for DC's first game against Punjab in Mullanpur's newly constructed

Stadium. "It's just the start. We don't expect to be practising at our absolute best right now. We're not even so much looking forward to the first game yet. We're getting some volume work said the former Australia skipper, referring to the workload at the

training session. 'What I saw today was very exciting, very promising. It's great to be back with the Delhi Capitals family," the coach said.

It is not just the players, who need to up their intensity but the coach himself wants to raise his level of preparedness. Asked about the team's

approach this year, Ponting said, "It's the same, but I'm going to be more intense with the way that I go about it this year. Every time I come here, I talk about wanting to win



Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting (left) and skipper Rishabh Pant during the team's pre-tournament practice session in Visakhapatnam.

the IPL and nothing changes there. I'm just going to talk about that a lot more this year.

For Ponting, it is not about qualification for the last-four but winning the elusive championship.

NGIDI OUT OF IPL; CAPITALS SIGN AUSSIE MCGURK

Meanwhile, South African pacer Lungi Ngidi, who was signed by the Delhi Capitals, was on Friday ruled out of the IPL 2024 due to an injury.

The Capitals have roped in Australian all-rounder Jake Fraser-McGurk in place of Ngidi.

McGurk, a 21-year-old hard-hitting opener and leg-spinner Melbourne, made his ODI debut against the West Indies at Sydney last month. He has joined DC for his reserve price of ₹50

Ngidi, who has been battling an ankle niggle from India's tour to South Africa in December, 2023-January, 2024, has played 14 IPL matches and has taken 25 wickets.

Kohli should score ahead of T20 WC

Bengaluru, March 15: It is imperative for Virat Kohli to score big runs in the upcoming IPL to secure a berth in India's T20 World Cup-bound squad because a few other players have leapfrogged the star batter in the last couple of months, reckoned former South African pacer Dale

Kohli has not played for India since the T20Ĭ series against Afghanistan at home in January, skipping the ensuing fivematch Test series against England owing to family reasons.

"I think it's very important that he scores runs because it will put him in a good frame going to the World Cup. There're many who leapfrogged him recently because he's taken a bit of a break and there're many

contenders that are possible to take to that World Cup (squad)," Steyn said in an interaction.

just two T20Is since the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia.

the selectors sit to pick the India squad. "I look at runs the same way that bank balance, so to speak. stacks of runs that he stored up over many years. It is going to work

when India is looking to pick a team that goes to

the World Cup," he said.

Kohli has, infact, played However, Steyn, who is

taking a break this year from IPL coaching duties Sunrisers Hyderabad because of family commitments, said Kohli's experience might come handy for him when you look at someone's Virat has got stacks and

back seat and promote someone to captain their side in the middle (overs). So this year might be a transition year for CSK. If it's his last year, if he decides to play for a few more years, I think he would be the captain. I would personally like to see him as a captain,' Rayudu, who retired from all forms of cricket last

year, told Star Sports Press Room. Dhoni had recently created a social media buzz when he indicated a new role for himself in this year's IPL through a

Facebook post. Rayudu will be making his debut as commentator during IPL 2024.

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

Red light for MI, RCB are in final

Royal Challengers Bangalore, riding on a fine all-round display from Australian Ellyse Perry, defeated defending champions Mumbai Indians by five runs in the Eliminator here on Friday to set up a Women's Premier League title clash against Delhi Capitals.

Chasing a paltry total of 135/6, the Harmanpreet Kaur-led Mumbai faltered in the chase, thanks to some incisive bowling by Perrv (1/29)Shreyanka Patil (2/16), and could manage just 130 runs for the loss of six

wickets. Perry's 66 off 50 balls was the cornerstone of RCB's total after their toporder was blown away by a disciplined MI attack, reducing them to 24 for 3 inside the four overs of Powerplay.

In reply, Mumbai could not get the required momentum, which was lost completely after Harmanpreet was dis-missed for 33 in the 18th

over. Earlier, Perry stood tall amid ruins with yet another elegant knock.

She was at her stylish best with some crisp boundaries and a straight six off Saika but the best shot was the late cut bisecting the point and third-man

Shabnim Ismail's delivery. Perry never had anyone supporting her for a lengthy period and wickets falling at regular interval did also made her judicious in shot selection. Hayley Matthews (2/18

in 4 overs) bowled a flighted off-break that breached veteran Sophie Devine's defence to draw the first blood. Skipper Smriti Mandhana (10) was caught in the deep cover region off a Nat Sciver-Brunt delivery that stopped a bit on the southpaw and Disha Kasat (0), who simply failed to get going, was caught by Pooja Vastrakar inside the 30 yard circle off left-arm spinner Saika

SCOREBOARD

Bangalore: Mandhana c Ismail b Nat Sciver-Brunt 10, Sophie Devine b Matthews 10, Ellyse Perry c Nat Sciver Brunt b Ishaque 66, Disha Kasat c Vastrakar b Ishaque O, Richa Ghosh c Nat Sciver-Brunt b Matthews 14, Sophie Molineux b Nat Sciver-Brunt 11, Georgia Wareham not out 18, Shreyanka Patil not out 3. Extras (lb-3) 3. Total (for 6 wickets in 20 overs) 135.
Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-20,

3-23, 4-49, 5-84, 6-126. **Bowling:** Shabnim Ismail 4-1-30-0, Hayley Matthews 4-0-18-2, Nat Sciver-Brunt 4-0-18-2, Saika Ishaque 3-0-27-2, Pooja Vastrakar 3-0-21-0, Amelia Kerr 2-0-18-0. Mumbai Indians: Yastika Bhatia b Perry 19, Hayley Matthews c Wareham b Patil 15, Nat Sciver-Brunt b Wareham 23, Harmanpreet Kaur c Devine b Patil 33, Amelia Kerr not out 27, Saieevan Saiana st Ghosh b Molineux 1, Pooja Vastrakar

Molineux 1, Pooja Vastrakar st Ghosh b Sobhana 4, Amanjot Kaur not out 1. Extras (lb-4, nb-1, w-2) 7. Total (for 6 wickets in 20 overs) 130. Fall of wickets: 1-27, 2-50, 3-68, 4-120, 5-123, 6-128. Bowling: Renuka Singh 1-0-6-0, Shreyanka Patil 4-0-16-2. Sophie Devine 1-0-9-0 2, Sophie Devine 1-0-9-0, Ellyse Perry 4-0-29-1, Sophie Molineux 4-0-16-1, Georgia Wareham 4-0-37-1, Asha Sobhana 2-0-13-1.

Ishaque (2/18 in 4 overs). Richa Ghosh hit a six but Matthews slightly altered the length and the keeper-batter mistimed after failing to reach the pitch of

the delivery. Towards the end, Georgia Wareham (18 not out off 10 balls) used the long handle to good effect and hit a last ball six off Saika to take the team past 130-run mark.

Saika paid the price for Sajeevan Sajana's poor effort in the deep as she dropped a sitter offered by Wareham. The poor field ing standard of WPL con-

tinues to be a problem.