

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 18 MARCH 2024



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Azad requests EC to hold Assembly election in J&K one month after LS polls

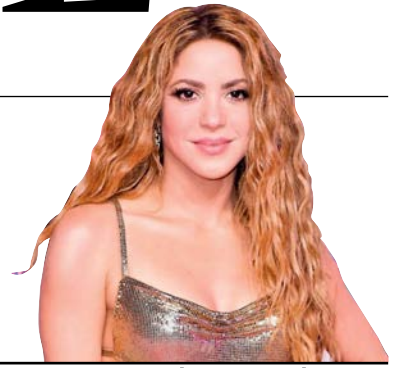


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Netanyahu vows war won't stop until 'total victory is achieved'

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Shakira says she put her music career on hold for Gerard Piqué



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WINDOWS



Bollywood actor Janhvi Kapoor walks the ramp for fashion designer Kalki during the Lakmé Fashion Week x FDCI 2024 in Mumbai on Sunday. — PTI

Hosabale re-elected RSS general secy, defends poll bonds

Nagpur: The RSS Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha re-elected Dattatreya Hosabale for the post of "Sarkaryavah" (general secretary) for three years. Mr Hosabale on Sunday said the electoral bonds is an "experiment" and time will tell how beneficial and effective it has been. The poll panel on Thursday released the electoral bonds data, with a number of billionaire tycoons being among the buyers. He said the RSS welcomes Uniform Civil Code, adding that a resolution demanding its enactment was passed in the outfit's "Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha". Full report on Page 4

CUET-UG dates to remain unchanged

New Delhi: The Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG will be conducted between May 15 and May 31, 2024, as announced earlier, and there will be no change in view of the Lok Sabha election schedule, according to UGC Chairman Jagadeesh Kumar. Full report on Page 2

Washington shooting leaves 2 dead, 5 hurt

Washington: Two people have been killed and five others injured in a shooting in Washington, D.C. early on Sunday. Police were looking for a single gunman after the seven people were shot around 3 am in the Shaw neighbourhood. The five people who were injured were all taken to hospital.

COUNTERPOINT



My firm needs ₹1,000 crore loan... ₹400 crore to buy machinery and ₹600 crore to buy electoral bonds!

WEATHER

Max: 31°C
Min: 14°C
RH: 34%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Partly Cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Shubhkrut: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Shukla Navami till 10.52 pm
Star: Arudra till 6.14 pm
Variyam: Nil
Dumuhurtam: 12.48 pm to 1.36 pm; 3.12 pm to 4 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.31 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.26 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.16 PM
MOONSET TODAY 2.12 AM

■ Modi sounds LS poll bugle in Andhra ■ TDP's Naidu back in NDA fold

How can disunited Opp. give India a stable govt, asks PM

MD ILYAS
CHILAKALURIPET (AP),
MARCH 17

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday wondered how the crisis-ridden INDIA bloc could provide stable governance if voted to power, as the partners have been fighting against each other even before the Lok Sabha polls have begun.

Addressing a mammoth public meeting in the coastal town of Chilakaluripet in Andhra Pradesh, the Prime Minister said the Bharatiya Janata Party, on the contrary, will take all the National Democratic Alliance partners along with it and achieve the goal of "Viksit Bharat". The Congress has been forced to form the INDIA bloc out of compulsion, but its "use and throw policy" towards its allies will never change.

Apparently referring to the INDIA bloc partners failing to arrive at consensus on seat-sharing, Mr Modi said, "We are seeing how the Congress and the Left Front in Kerala, the Trinamul Congress and the Left Front in West



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Telugu Desam Party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu during a public meeting at Palnadu, Andhra Pradesh, on Sunday. — PTI

■ THE PRIME Minister was addressing the first public rally in Andhra Pradesh after the principal Opposition Telugu Desam Party, headed by N. Chandrababu Naidu, came back to the NDA fold after five years

Bengal, besides the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress in Delhi, trade charges against each other. If they fight among themselves now, we can all anticipate what they are going to do after the elections."

We are seeing how the Cong and the Left Front, the TMC and the Left Front besides the AAP and the Cong trade charges against each other. If they fight among themselves now, we all can anticipate what they are going to do after the polls.

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

"The partners of the INDI Alliance work for their selfish interests," Mr Modi added.

Referring to the counting day, Mr Modi said the NDA will get a mandate of over 400 Lok Sabha seats on June 4.

The Prime Minister was addressing the first public rally in Andhra Pradesh after the principal Opposition Telugu Desam Party, headed by N. Chandrababu Naidu, came back to the NDA fold after five years.

Mr Naidu went all out against Mr Modi in the

run-up to the 2019 elections, calling not granting special status to Andhra Pradesh a failure of the Modi government.

However, the TDP suffered a poll debacle, with the archrival Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRC sweeping the 2019 elections by winning 151 seats in the state Assembly and 21 Lok Sabha seats.

After hectic lobbying by the existing NDA partner Jana Sena, founded by Telugu film actor Pawan Kalyan, the TDP, and the saffron party leaders from

■ Turn to Page 4

Set roadmap for first 100 days: PM

Asks ministers to consult officers on how to implement 5-year agenda

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday directed all his ministers to draft a roadmap for the first 100 days and the next five years for the new government, sources said.

Chairing a Cabinet meeting, the PM also asked the ministers to meet secretaries and

other officials of their respective ministries to discuss how the agenda for the first 100 days and the next five years can be better implemented.

The meeting took place a day after the Election Commission announced the schedule for the Lok Sabha polls 2024.

The Cabinet also initiated the process of notifying the dates of the seven-phase parliamentary elec-

■ PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi and his council of ministers on March 3 had brainstormed over the vision document for "Viksit Bharat: 2047"

tions by sending the Election Commission's recommendation to President Droupadi Murmu. The first notification will be issued on

March 20 for the first phase of the polls on April 19 for 102 seats. The nomination process begins for a particular phase with the issuance of the notification.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his council of ministers on March 3 had brainstormed over the vision document for "Viksit Bharat: 2047" and a

■ Turn to Page 4

CWC will meet March 19 over poll manifesto

New Delhi, March 17: The Congress Working Committee (CWC) will discuss the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections at its meeting on March 19. The Congress' central election committee chaired by party chief Mallikarjun Kharge is also likely to meet on March 19 to 20 to finalise the remaining candidates for the parliamentary polls. AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that the CWC would meet on March 19 and give its nod to the draft manifesto. ■ More on Page 3

'Modi needs EVMs, ED, CBI to win'

■ Rahul's yatra ends in Mumbai ■ Pawar, Stalin, Uddhav, others join

BHAGWAN PARAB and
SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MARCH 17

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday took a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying that he won't be able to win the Lok Sabha elections without electronic voting machines (EVMs). "Raja ki aatma EVM mein hai," he said mockingly in Mumbai.

Concluding his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra at the historic Shivaji Park, Mr Gandhi slammed the Prime Minister over the alleged manipulation of EVMs and misuse of Central investigative agencies. "Without EVM, Mr Modi cannot win elec-



Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during the party's "Nyay Sankalp Padyatra" in Mumbai on Sunday. — PTI

tions... The agencies (the ED, the CBI and the income-tax department) are used to intimidate the Opposition leaders and poach them," he said.

Without naming former

Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan, who recently quit the Congress and joined the BJP, Mr Gandhi said that a leader from the Maharashtra Congress left the party,



Devotees play with colours during the Ladoo Holi celebrations at the Sriji temple at Barsana, near Mathura, on Sunday. — PTI

Future Gaming gave us ₹509-cr, DMK tells EC

AIADMK, JD-S also disclose donors; BJP, TMC & Cong hide fund sources

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Some skeletons tumbled out as the Election Commission (EC) on Sunday made public the data submitted by political parties on the electoral bonds (EB). While parties like the BJP, Congress, TMC and SP withheld details of their donors and provided only the total amount of money received with dates, a few like the DMK, AIADMK and JD(S) went a step ahead and declared it all, including who gave how much.

According to data uploaded by the EC, out of the total ₹656.5 crores the DMK got, 83 per cent of the party's total donations amounting to ₹509 crores came from the controversial Future Gaming and Hotel Services.

The party also declared several other names, like Mega Infrastructure, which gave it ₹105 crores; Sun TV gave it ₹10 crores



Police personnel conduct a flag march after the model code of conduct was enforced in Bhopal on Sunday. — PTI

and India Cements gave it ₹5.50 crores.

At ₹1,368 crores, Coimbatore-based Future Gaming of "lottery king" Santiago Martin was the biggest purchaser of EBs, of which nearly 37 per cent went to the DMK.

Its rival party in Tamil Nadu AIADMK got a total of ₹6.05 crores, out of which India Cements, alone donated ₹5 crores, while Lakshmi Machine Works gave ₹1 crore. Another South India

Arunachal & Sikkim count 2 days earlier

New Delhi, March 17: The Election Commission on Sunday advanced the date of the counting of votes for the Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim Assembly polls to June 2 from June 4. The EC had announced earlier that the votes polled in the two Assembly elections were to be counted on June 4 along with the LS polls. ■ More on Page 3

ED calls Kejriwal in DJB case today; 9th time in excise scam

■ Summoned for excise probe March 21 ■ AAP says 'backup plan' to arrest him

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA and
BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The Enforcement Directorate has summoned Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in a second money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), and has been asked to appear before the Central agency at its office here on March 18 to record his statement under provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The Aam Aadmi Party termed it as a backup plan to arrest him anyhow and stop him from campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls.

This latest development marks the second instance where he has been summoned under the anti-money laundering law.

The agency has also issued the ninth summons against him in an ongoing probe into the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case as he has previously disregarded eight summons in this matter, terming those "illegitimate", and has been directed to appear for questioning on March 21 in the excise policy scam.

In the DJB case, the ED claimed funds obtained



Arvind Kejriwal

■ THE CENTRAL agency alleged that the DJB contract was inflated to facilitate the collection of bribes from contractors, further asserting that a significant portion of the contract value was diverted through fake expenses for illicit activities

through corruption in a contract awarded by the Delhi government's department were allegedly channelled as election funds to the AAP, the ruling party in Delhi.

The Central agency alleged that the DJB contract was inflated to facilitate the collection of bribes from contractors, further asserting that a significant portion of the contract value was diverted through fake expenses for illicit activities.

"As against the contract value of ₹38 crores, only about ₹17 crores was

Trump warns of a 'bloodbath' if he's not elected US Prez in Nov

Vandalia (US), March 17: Donald Trump told a rally in Ohio on Saturday that November's presidential election will be the "most important date" in US history, painting his campaign for the White House as a turning point for the country.

Days after securing his position as the presumptive Republican nominee, the former President also warned of a "bloodbath" if he is not elected — though it was not clear what he was referring to, with the remark coming



Donald Trump

in the middle of comments about threats to the US auto industry.

"The date — remember this, November 5 — I believe it's going to be the most important date in

the history of our country," the 77-year-old told rally-goers in Vandalia, Ohio, repeating well-worn criticisms that his rival, President Joe Biden, is the "worst" President.

Criticising what he said were Chinese plans to build cars in Mexico and sell them to Americans, he stated: "We're going to put a 100 per cent tariff on every single car that comes across the line, and you're not going to be able to sell those cars if I get elected." — AFP

■ More on Page 6



Humanitarian aid is airdropped to Palestinians in Gaza City on Sunday. — AP



IN BRIEF

Ghaziabad man held for raping doc

Ghaziabad: The Ghaziabad police on Sunday arrested a man identified as Mintoo alias Sunil (42) for allegedly raping a 32-year-old doctor, who runs a clinic in a colony in Teela More police station area here. Shalimar Garden ACP Siddhartha Gautam said that Sunil had visited the woman's clinic two years ago and befriended her. The woman in her complaint to the police on Saturday said that Sunil had promised to tie knot with her. On this pretext, Sunil sexually and financially exploited her, the ACP said, citing the complaint lodged by the woman. During this period, he took some videos and clicked obnoxious photos as well. He several times threatened the doctor to make her videos viral on social media, the police said. On Saturday night, Sunil reached her flat and forcibly raped her. When the woman's daughter opposed his bid, he molested and thrashed her, they said. —PTI

3 auto lifters linked in 58 cases arrested

New Delhi: The Delhi police arrested three alleged auto lifters and snatchers who were involved in 58 cases in the national capital. The accused named their gang as "Gulab Gang" because of Rose tattoo on their forearms DCP (Central) M. Harsha Vardhan said, the accused were identified as, Rishab (20), Saurb (22) and Deepak (20) all residents of Karol Bagh. The trio, earlier this month, snatched the gold chain of a victim when she was going to her house from the Metro station in the Patel nagar area. During the probe, the team laid a trap as per the information and nabbed the trio. One snatched gold chain, one mobile phone and five stolen motorcycles were recovered from their possession.

Delhi temp at 11.9°C, 5 below normal

New Delhi: The national capital on Sunday recorded a minimum temperature of 11.9°C, five notches below the season's average, according to the India meteorological department. The weather department predicted generally cloudy skies during the day. It said the humidity level was recorded at 67 per cent at 8.30 am. The Air Quality Index (AQI) of the national capital was recorded in the "moderate" category with a reading of 185 at 10 am, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

SCHOLARSHIP TEST FOR ALLEN ON MARCH 24

New Delhi: Allen Career Institute Pvt Ltd has announced the commencement of new batches and Allen scholarship admission test (ASAT) following the conclusion of board examinations. Dr Brajesh Maheshwari, director of Allen, said that the 'Nurture Batch' for the students moving from Class 10 to 11 will commence on March 27, for this batch the ASAT is scheduled on March 24. ASAT for subsequent batches will be held on 31st March and in April. The test will be organised in selected cities across the country. Performance in ASAT will determine scholarships for the students ranging from 10% to 90%. Information about admissions and campus will be provided to the students and the parents via messages. He said Allen's classroom program results have been better in the last decade. Allen classroom program students have secured 16 all India ranks in Jee-Main, Jee-Advanced, AIPMT, Neet-UG and AIIMS. Dr Maheshwari also shared the recent achievements of Allen students in the Jee main session 1.

NETA'S NATTER

AAP HAS FOUND A WAY TO MAKE THE DELHI BUREAUCRACY WORK

Amid the ongoing tussle with the city's bureaucracy, the AAP-led Delhi government is increasingly resorting to passing resolutions in the state Assembly to get work done on the ground. According to rumours, the AAP government is forced to take the route of resolution because the Delhi bureaucracy does not obey the orders. A case in point - after lieutenant-governor VK Saxena flagged the lack of amenities like water scarcity and sewage overflow in



different parts of the city, the Delhi Assembly passed the resolution, made the chief secretary responsible and directed him to resolve the issues. As this step yielded results, the AAP government has yet again passed a resolution over the medicine shortage in the government hospitals and has directed the chief secretary to resolve the shortage issue and lab test deficiencies within a week.

'No bets on Opposition LS polls win'

Usually the "satta bazar" is all about who has more chances of winning than others, but for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the satta bazar is witnessing a new trend, or so claims a senior BJP leader. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has declared a "hat-trick" for the BJP and "400 paar" for the BJP-led NDA, while the Opposition parties are still grappling with problems. The satta bazar, according to the BJP leader, is "now all about how close the NDA will be to achieving the target and not about whether it will retain power or not. There are no bets placed on the Opposition parties winning".

A BIRD IN THE HAND IS WORTH TWO IN THE BUSH

Fearing defeat in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections as a candidate from Delhi, a prominent Congress leader is heard saying that she is a national leader and would rather be contesting from other states. Insiders claim that the "self-proclaimed national leader" has listed the Chandigarh parliamentary seat as her first choice,



if not any other constituency in Punjab. However, much to her despair, not many in the

Congress are endorsing her Chandigarh or Punjab bid. Playing safe, while she continues to press ahead with her ticket claim from outside of the national capital, the leader has also started pitching for Delhi. Logic being - losing an election is better than not getting a ticket to contest. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!!

AAP in pickle over poll drive as Cong delays nominations

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Notwithstanding the alliance between the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress for the parliamentary polls, the former is still awaiting announcement of the names of candidates for the three seats on which the latter is slated to contest the elections in Delhi.



A covered political banner outside AAP office in New Delhi. —PTI

As Congress is yet to announce its list of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in the capital city, the AAP is in a quandary to firm up its campaign strategy, insiders said.

Out of the total seven seats in the national capital, the AAP is fighting on four - New Delhi, south Delhi, west Delhi and east Delhi - while the Congress will fight the polls from Chandni Chowk, northeast Delhi, and northwest constituencies. However, the Congress is yet to reveal the candidature for the three seats.

A party member said that Congress should not delay any further in finalising the names of the candidates so that a joint poll strategy can be rolled out. In the absence of candidates, the AAP is more focused only on the remaining four seats.

A party functionary said that the Congress should announce the list of candidates at the earliest, especially in the backdrop of the BJP naming all the candidates, so that the mobilisation of the voters could be given

effect on the ground. Countering a formidable adversary like the BJP needs a concerted effort from both the alliance partners (AAP and Congress) and take an early lead in highlighting the issues to the voters and gain traction. The lackadaisical approach on the part of the Congress in not announcing candidates in time only creates the impression of a half-hearted approach and the measure is insufficient to counter a formidable party like the BJP, said the party functionary.

Meanwhile, the AAP has fielded Somnath Bharti from New Delhi, Kuldeep Kumar from east Delhi, Mahabab Mishra from west Delhi, and Sahi Ram Pehelwan from south Delhi. Out of four candidates, the AAP has fielded three current MLAs and one former Congress MP who joined the party in 2022. Kuldeep Kumar is MLA from Kondli Assembly constituency. Mr Bharti represents Malviya Nagar and Sahiram Pehalwan is Tughlaqabad constituency MLA.

A BRIEF PROFILE OF KEY DELHI LOK SABHA CONSTITUENCIES



NEW DELHI: It is the oldest parliamentary constituency of the capital city, and has been a bastion both for the Congress and the BJP. There are 14.81 lakh voters, including 8,08,721 men and 6,72,544 women, in the constituency - all the 10 Assembly segments of which were won by the AAP in the last polls. The BJP has fielded Bansuri Swaraj from the seat.

SOUTH DELHI: It is the fourth largest Lok Sabha constituency in the national capital in terms of number of voters after west Delhi, northwest Delhi and northeast Delhi. Its around 22.21 lakh voters, including 12.34 lakh men and 9.86 lakh women, live mostly in villages and unauthorised colonies. The BJP has fielded Ramvir Singh Bidhuri from the seat.

NORTH EAST DELHI: With nearly 23.81 lakh voters, including 12.87 lakh men and 10.93 lakh women, the third largest constituency in the national capital has a large population of migrants from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. Northeast Delhi mainly has unauthorised colonies and slum settlements. It also has a sizeable population of Muslims.

CUET to be held from May 15 to 31

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG will be conducted between May 15 and May 31, 2024, as announced earlier, and there will be no change in view of the Lok Sabha election schedule, according to UGC Chairman Jagadeesh Kumar. The date sheet will be released after the registration process is completed.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) chief had earlier this month said the exam dates could change depending on the schedule of the forthcoming

Lok Sabha polls. The Election Commission on Saturday announced that polling for the 543 Lok Sabha constituencies will be held in seven phases, starting with 102 seats in the first phase on April 19. The votes will be counted on June 4.

"The National Testing Agency (NTA) will conduct CUET-UG, as announced earlier, between May 15 and May 31, 2024. In this period, two dates overlap with the election dates on the 20th and 25th of May. "After the last date for filling out applications on March 26, 2024, we will



Jagadeesh Kumar

know the number of students registered for CUET-UG and their geographical distribution," Mr Kumar said to a news agency.

"Based on this data and the election dates, NTA

will announce the date sheet for CUET-UG. But the dates will not change," he added. Prospective candidates have until March 26 to complete the application process for CUET-UG, which was introduced in 2022.

This standardised test streamlines admission processes across central, state, deemed and private universities nationwide. A notable departure from tradition, the NTA has outlined a hybrid examination format for CUET-UG 2024, including both computer based testing and pen-and-paper modes for different subjects.

Modi needs EVMs, ED, CBI to win, says Rahul as yatra ends

Continued from Page 1

"There is a word 'shakti' in Hinduism. We are fighting against a shakti," he said.

"We had to undertake the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra because today the media does not raise important issues like unemployment, inflation, farmers' plight, the Agniveer scheme etc. All these issues are not visible in the media today," Mr Gandhi added.

Upon his arrival at Shivaji Park, Mr Gandhi paid homage to the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and visited the memorial of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray to offer his respects.

The leaders of the INDIA bloc put up a grand show of strength as several top Opposition leaders attended the concluding grand function of the Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra. Prominent among them were Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin, Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray, NCP

(SP) chief Sharad Pawar, RJD leader and former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, Jharkhand chief minister Champai Soren, former CM Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren, general secretary of Communist Party of India Dipankar Bhattacharya, AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj and dalit leader Prakash Ambedkar, the grandson of B.R. Ambedkar.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Pawar said that there is a need to change the state of the country by adopting the "Chhodo BJP" call. "In 1942, Mahatma Gandhi had started 'Bharat Chhodo andolan' (against the British) from Mumbai. From the same city, we should now decide to make the country free from the BJP," he said.

Mr Pawar alleged that the Prime Minister cheated the country by making false promises. "He gave assurances to farmers,

women, dalits and adivasis but did not fulfil them. Such people should be removed (from power)," he added.

Mr Thackeray hit out at the "Modi ka Parivar" slogan, saying that Mr Modi's family includes only him and his chair. He claimed that the BJP needs a brute majority to change the constitution and name of the country. "The country, not an individual, should be our identity. We are fighting to save democracy and the country. Dictatorship ends when people unite together. The motto in Lok Sabha elections should be 'Ab ki baar, BJP Tadipaar'," he said.

Expressing confidence that the INDIA bloc will form a secular and inclusive government at the Centre, Mr Stalin criticised the BJP saying that there is no bigger threat to India than the saffron party. He also described the electoral bonds as "white collar corruption" of the ruling BJP.

Centre gets 4 mnths to frame policy for online sale of meds

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The Centre has urged the Delhi high court to grant some time to frame a policy on the online sale of medicines on the grounds that the issue was "complex" and any modification in the manner of sale of drugs would have far-reaching consequences. The high court granted the Union

ministry of health and family welfare four months as a last and final opportunity to frame the policy.

A bench of acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet P.S. Arora made clear that "if the draft policy is not prepared before the next date of hearing, this court will have no other option but to proceed ahead with the matter."

The high court, which was hearing several petitions seeking a ban on the "illegal" sale of drugs online and challenging the draft rules published by the ministry to further amend the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, listed the matter for further hearing on July 8. It had earlier asked the Centre to file a status report on the petitions.

Youtuber Elvish held in snake venom case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Youtuber Elvish Yadav was arrested on Sunday by the Noida police in connection with a probe into the suspected use of snake venom as a recreational drug at a party in Noida. He was sent to 14 days judicial custody.

Mr Yadav was among six people named in an FIR lodged at Sector 49 police

station here on November 3 last year. The five other accused were arrested but are currently out on bail, the officials said.

The case was lodged under provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and for criminal conspiracy under section 120B of the Indian Penal Code, they said. The case was later shifted from Sector 49 to Sector 20 police station for investigation.



Youtuber Elvish Yadav being produced in a court in Greater Noida. —PTI

"The accused has been arrested by a team of Sector 20 police station which was investigating

'Backup plan to arrest Kejriwal anyhow' ED summoned CM in fake DJB case: Atishi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Senior AAP leader and Delhi minister Atishi on Sunday said the Enforcement Directorate has sent chief minister Arvind Kejriwal a fresh summons in a "fake" case linked to the Delhi Jal Board. "Nobody knows what this DJB (Delhi Jal Board) case is about. This seems to be a backup plan to arrest Kejriwal anyhow and stop him from campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls," she claimed at a press conference.

Atishi said two summonses asking Mr Kejriwal to appear before the federal agency next week were received hours after the Lok Sabha poll date announcement on Saturday. She added that one of them was related to the excise policy case and the other to the DJB. The AAP leader charged that the BJP was using ED and CBI as its "goons" to finish off political opponents.

Responding to the minister's claim, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva



Delhi education minister and AAP leader Atishi addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday. —PTI

said the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was working independently. He also accused Kejriwal of repeatedly flouting the law. Refuting the allegations levelled by the AAP leaders, Mr Sachdeva said, "Arvind Kejriwal's former deputy chief minister has been in prison for over a year in the liquor scam case while another MP has also been in jail for a long time, but the repeated assertion by the Aam Aadmi Party that there was no scam in the liquor policy is ludicrous in itself."

A Delhi court on Saturday granted Mr Kejriwal bail on two complaints filed by the agency against him for skipping summons in this case.

Later in the day, AAP MLA Dilip Pandey said, "It is funny that the ED itself approached the court against Kejriwal but is not waiting for court orders. Kejriwal had said that he would appear before the court after the budget session and yesterday, he appeared before it. The ED's repeated summonses show BJP's desperation."

SC slated to pronounce verdict on Jain's bail petition

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The Supreme Court is slated to pronounce on Monday its verdict on the regular bail plea of Aam Aadmi Party leader Satyendar Jain in a money laundering case.

On January 17, a bench of Justices Bela M. Trivedi and Pankaj Mishra had reserved its judgment after hearing the arguments of senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Mr Jain, and additional solicitor-general S.V. Raju, representing the Enforcement Directorate.

The apex court had granted interim bail to Mr Jain on May 26, 2023 on medical grounds and it has been extended from time to time.

Mr Jain, a former minister in the AAP govern-



Satyendar Jain

ment here, has moved the apex court challenging the April 6, 2023 order of the Delhi high court dismissing his regular bail plea in the case.

The ED had arrested the AAP leader on May 30, 2022 on the charge of laundering money through four companies allegedly linked to him.

The anti-money laundering probe agency had arrested Mr Jain on the basis of a CBI FIR registered against him in 2017.

4 arrested for sending SIMs to Vietnam; 500 recovered

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The Delhi police airport unit arrested four persons for their alleged involvement in sending Indian activated SIM cards to Vietnam. The accused used to receive money on a Chinese crypto currency app which was recently banned in India. Around five hundred SIM cards were recovered.

DCP (IG) Usha Rangnani said, the accused were identified as, Anil Kumar (20) a native of Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, Mukul Kumar (22), Hemant (26) and Kanhaiya Gupta (29) trio native of Agra UP. The syndicate used to get SIM cards issued in the names of gullible people, enticing them for a very small amount of money and selling them to people in Vietnam at higher rates which was further used for gaming apps and social media profiteering.

Total 500 SIM cards were found in that package, kept in three separate packets of Airtel, Jio and Vi.

A sub-inspector, who was also the incharge of the local Sector 49 police station where the FIR was registered, was shunted.

SHORT TAKES

Rajbhar: Muslims being duped by Opp.

Lucknow: Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party president and UP minister O.P. Rajbhar on Sunday said the Congress and Opposition parties have been duping Muslims for years, and urged the community to support the ruling National Democratic Alliance to benefit from welfare schemes. Mr Rajbhar went on to claim that at least 15 to 20 per cent Muslims are going to vote for the BJP, and that the NDA will win all 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. "The Congress party is number one in duping Muslims, followed by the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party is at the third place," he said. "There were 38 per cent Muslims in government jobs at the time of Independence but due to Congress' over 50-year rule, now Muslims don't have one per cent of government jobs. Who is responsible for this, asked Mr Rajbhar." — PTI

Modi is afraid of Kharage: Shivakumar

Bengaluru: Karnataka deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was afraid of the Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge as he started his campaign from Mr Kharge's home district Kalaburagi. He said the party is sure to win 20 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka including Kalaburagi. "He (Modi) is afraid of the Leader of Opposition (in Rajya Sabha) Mallikarjun Kharge. Hence, he started his election campaign from there (Kalaburagi). We will win 20 seats including Kalaburagi," Mr Shivakumar told reporters here. Mr Modi started his election campaign in Karnataka from Kalaburagi on Saturday. His next campaign in the state will be in Shivamogga. — PTI

Revanth: Poll bonds are 'quid pro quo'

Hyderabad: Electoral bonds are nothing but "quid pro quo", Telangana chief minister A. Revanth Reddy said on Sunday. Addressing a "meet the press" programme, Reddy slammed former chief minister K. Chandrababhan Rao, alleging that his regime resembled "Nizam's rule". "They (electoral bonds) are nothing but 'quid pro quo' between those in power and contractors. Those in power are giving some contracts and they are giving back electoral bonds," he said replying to a query. The Election Commission on Sunday uploaded the data received in digitised form from the registry of the Supreme Court on electoral bonds, on its website. He added the Congress opposes the idea of simultaneous polls and if it comes to power at the Centre, they will have a relook on the issue and take a call. — PTI

IN SETBACK TO CONG, U'KHAND MLA JOINS BJP

New Delhi, March 17: In a setback for the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, its Uttarakhand MLA Rajendra Singh Bhandari joined the BJP here on Sunday, saying he was impressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership which motivated him to take the step. Mr Bhandari, a three-term Congress legislator who was also a minister in the state in the past, joined the BJP in the presence of its senior leaders, including Union minister Piyush Goyal and the party's national general secretary Dushyant Kumar Gautam. Mr Gautam is also the BJP's in-charge for Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami and BJP chief spokesperson Anil Baluni — a Rajya Sabha member, who will contest his first Lok Sabha election from the Garhwal seat in Uttarakhand — were also present on the occasion. Mr Bhandari, who is learnt to have resigned from the Congress before joining the BJP, represented the Badrinath seat in the state Assembly. He won the seat by defeating the BJP's Uttarakhand unit chief Mahendra Bhatt in the 2022 Assembly polls. Badrinath is one of the 14 Assembly segments falling under the Garhwal Lok Sabha constituency. — PTI

Cong: Black money routed to BJP's a/cs through poll bonds

'19 companies marked high risk by FM purchased ₹2K-cr bonds in 2018'

New Delhi, March 17: The Congress on Sunday charged the government with engaging in "quid pro quo" for receiving electoral bonds and "conspiring" to route black money into the BJP's accounts through the scheme. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah were answerable on the electoral bond "scam". He also accused the ruling party of indulging in "tax terrorism" and "surgical strikes" on the Congress after its accounts were frozen by the income-tax authorities ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The Congress also hoped the Election Commission

PM Modi promised to deposit 15 lakhs in each Indian's account by recovering black money from overseas. It appears the Prime Minister has conspired to route all the black money into the BJP's accounts instead.

— **Jairam Ramesh, Congress general secretary**



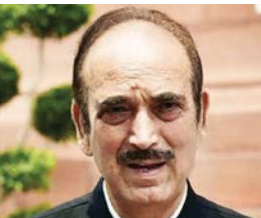
would maintain "total impartiality and neutrality" during polls and would live up to its constitutional duties as expected by the people from it. Addressing a press conference, Mr Ramesh alleged that the electoral bonds scheme introduced in 2018 was the "biggest extortion racket" ever run by the government, after it was revealed that the BJP garnered around ₹6,900

crores through electoral bonds while the Congress received over ₹1300 crores worth of bonds. He claimed that 19 companies that were marked "high risk" by the ministry of finance for violating rules under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in 2018 have collectively purchased electoral bonds for a whopping ₹2,717 crores. "As many as 18 of

these 19 companies that had bought electoral bonds did not appear in the subsequent annual lists of 'high risk' companies. Were they removed from the list because they contributed to the ruling party's coffers," he asked. Dismissing the home minister's contention that the Congress also got donations, he pointed out that the CBI, ED or the income-tax were not under the control of the Congress. "PM Modi promised to deposit 15 lakhs in each Indian's account by recovering black money from overseas. It appears the Prime Minister has conspired to route all the black money into the BJP's accounts instead," Mr Ramesh said. — PTI

Hold polls in J&K 1 month after LS, Azad requests EC

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, MARCH 17



The Election Commission, which is faced with a barrage of criticism from various of the Opposition parties following its refusal to hold the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly polls along with those for the Lok Sabha, has found support from former chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad. Endorsing the EC's view that holding the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in J&K concurrently is not viable from the security point of view, the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) leader on Sunday said, "We in J&K have five Lok Sabha seats and if ten candidates fight from each of these, we will have fifty candidates in the fray, and if fifteen candidates are there for each of the 90 Assembly segments, the total number of candidates would rise to 1,400. It may even go up to 1,500. It is difficult to provide security to so many candidates all at once." Mr Azad said in Jammu.

Ghulam Nabi Azad

The former chief minister, however, urged the EC and the Centre to ensure that the J&K Assembly elections are held a month after the process of holding the Lok Sabha polls is completed. "The Assembly polls in J&K should be held after a month's rest post the Lok Sabha polls," he said. Various Opposition political parties have sharply criticised the EC over its delaying the Assembly polls in J&K beyond the Lok Sabha elections, alleging that a crucial democratic space is being denied to the people of the erstwhile state. After holding meetings, the CEC had confirmed the demand of joint Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in J&K.



Devotees participate in "Shree Shyam Falgun Holy Dhawaja Nishan Shobha Yatra" in Patna on Sunday. — PTI

'Ram temple to play key role in polls for BJP'

YOJNA GUSAI NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Hailed as a temple of "national consciousness" by the BJP, the recently consecrated Ram Mandir will play a decisive role in the party's electoral performance, also including in Uttar Pradesh with the party's feedback suggesting that the state's ruling party will surpass its 2014 feat when it had bagged 71 of the total 80 parliamentary constituencies. Surveys conducted by

the BJP in UP have shown that Ram Mandir will have an impact on every Lok Sabha seat in UP with every parliamentary seat expected to register more than 1.5 lakh votes this time. The survey, sources said, also suggests that the "anti-Hindu" and "anti-Ram Mandir" remarks by Opposition parties leaders have not been taken lightly among non-upper caste Hindu votebank, including Dalits and OBCs including the Yadavs, the survey said

The politically important state had a voter turnout of 59.2 per cent in 2019 but according to the BJP's surveys, both before and after the consecration

increase this year. From 48.16 per cent voter turnout in 2004 and 47.79 per cent in 2009, the voting pattern in UP has been on a rise since 2014 when it jumped to 58.44 per cent. District-wise and booth-wise feedback, sources said, have shown that even in many of the Yadav and Dalit dominated areas, consecration ceremony has been "highly appreciated." "The 2014 LS elections results were a sign of peo-

ple's aspirations from PM Modi, 2019 (LS poll results) were approval of those aspirations and faith. 2024 elections will be for the momentum of Modi government's work and Ram Mandir. Opposition can say whatever it wants to defame the Ram Mandir but the reality is their criticism of Ram Mandir will bring out those devout to the polling booths, who otherwise keep themselves away from the election exercise," said a senior BJP leader from UP.

EC advances counting date for Sikkim & Arunachal

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The EC on Sunday advanced the date of the counting of votes for the Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim Assembly polls to June 2 from June 4. The EC had announced earlier that the votes polled in the two Assembly elections were to be counted on June 4 along with Lok Sabha poll votes. But as the term of the two Assemblies are ending on June 2, the date has been advanced. "The poll body is to conduct election to Legislative Assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim before the cessation of their terms, in exercise of the powers conferred upon under Article 324 read with Article 172(1) of the Constitution of India and Section 15 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. The term of house of both the Legislative Assemblies of Arunachal and Sikkim is due to expire on June 2," the EC said. "There shall be no change in respect of Schedule for Parliamentary Constituencies of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim," it added. "The commission has announced the schedule for general elections to Legislative Assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim along with the schedule for the Lok Sabha and various state legislative assemblies," it said.

Says YSRC, Congress are not different, but two sides of same coin PM calls for 'double-engine' govt in AP, Delhi

MD ILYAS BOPPUDI (AP), MARCH 17

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for the election of a double-engine NDA government in both Andhra Pradesh and New Delhi, which would "ensure the development of AP that was halted for the past five years". The Telugu Desam, Jana Sena and the BJP jointly held Praja Galam, a public meeting of the three-party alliance at Boppudi in Palnadu district on Sunday, the first after the

announcement of dates for the general elections. Mr Modi started his speech in Telugu. He made no mention of the name of chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. He urged the people of AP to recognise that the YSRC and the Congress "are not different, but two sides of the same coin". Notably, Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan, who used to sit beside Mr Modi during meetings, was seen seated next to Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu, who occupied the seat adjacent



Narendra Modi

to Mr Modi. For the first time after their April 30, 2014, public meeting at Tirupati, the PM, Mr Naidu and Pawan Kalyan addressed the Praja Galam public meeting of the NDA from the same dais at Boppudi in

Chilakaluripet of Palnadu district on Sunday. Without criticising Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Prime Minister targeted the YSRC ministers, saying, "In this election, the people of AP have decided to bring back the NDA government in Delhi. They are fed up with the present government here. The ministers of AP are competing with each other in committing corruption. In the last five years, the state's progress has been hit. Hence, the people have decided to oust the present government in AP."

"There was no development here in the last five years. By remaining silent, the Congress was trying to steer away the people's anger against the present government, to benefit the ruling party. They are together. Their effort is to drive the anger towards the BJP to lessen pressure on the ruling YSRC party," the Prime Minister observed. Criticising the INDIA bloc, Modi said that while the NDA united the political parties, the Congress used and threw them at its convenience.

CWC to meet on March 19 to give nod to manifesto

New Delhi, March 17:

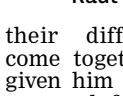
The Congress Working Committee will discuss the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections at its meeting on March 19 and give the final shape to it. The Congress' central election committee (CEC) chaired by party chief Mallikarjun Kharge is also likely to meet on March 19 to 20 to finalise the remaining candidates of the party for the seven-phase polls beginning April 19. AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the CWC — its top decision-making body — would meet on March 19 and give its nod to the draft manifesto which carries the five "guarantees" for justice. "The party would fight the polls on the issue of '5 naya' — 'Bhagidari Nyaya', 'Kisan Nyaya', 'Nari Nyaya', 'Shramik Nyaya' and 'Yuva Nyaya' — with 25 guarantees, five for each naya, which have already been announced by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and its leader Rahul Gandhi, he added. "These are the guarantees by the Congress party and not by a single person," he said in an obvious jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi. — PTI

'Formula will be out soon' MVA final round of seat talks over: Raut

Mumbai, March 17:

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday said leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi have had their final meeting on seat sharing and the formula will be announced soon. Talking to reporters here, Mr Raut said the MVA constituents comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP) and the Congress, had their final meeting to discuss seat sharing on Saturday. Congress leader Ashok Gehlot also participated in the meeting along with K.C. Venugopal and Sharad Pawar. "We have resolved the little nitty gritty," he said. The MVA is in talks with Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi chief Prakash Ambedkar and is await-

ing his response on the offer of four seats. "When the Constitution is under threat everyone should set aside their differences and come together. We have given him (Ambedkar) a proposal for four seats, and are awaiting his response, after which we will release our seat-sharing formula," Mr Raut said. Elections for the 18th Lok Sabha will begin on April 19 and votes will be counted on June 4. Maharashtra, which has 48 Lok Sabha seats, the second highest after Uttar Pradesh's 80, will vote in five phases. — PTI



Sanjay Raut

Plea in SC seeks disclosure of poll bonds sold from '18 to '19

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

An NGO, Citizen's Rights Trust, has filed a plea before the Supreme Court seeking disclosure of the details of electoral bonds sold from March 1, 2018, to April 11, 2019, saying voters are entitled to know funding to political parties for the period since the start of the scheme. The SBI is also likely to respond on Monday to Supreme Court directive to file the reasons for the non-disclosure of full data regarding the electoral bonds as ordered by the top court. In a landmark verdict last month, the top court scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding calling it "unconstitutional" and

redeemed from March 1, 2018, to April 11, 2019, including the alphanumeric number, date of purchase, denomination, names of donors and parties to the EC. "It is submitted that once the entire Electoral Bond Scheme is held to be violative of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, the citizens are entitled to know the details of the donor and donee of the entire period from March 2018 onwards (the date when the scheme turned operational). The data available on the platform of the Election Commission represents only 76 per cent of the total bonds and the voters are not aware of the details of the remaining 24 per cent of the Electoral Bonds," the plea said.

THE PLEA by Citizen's Rights Trust has contended that 9,159 bonds worth ₹4,002 crores have been sold between March 2018 to April 2019, which should also be disclosed. ordered the State Bank of India, the exclusive banker authorised under the scheme, to submit the details of the bonds purchased from April 12, 2019 to February 15, 2024 to the Election Commission. The plea by Citizen's Rights Trust has contended that 9,159 bonds worth ₹4,002 crores have been sold between March 2018 to April 2019, which should also be disclosed. The petition seeks a direction to the SBI to share the details of electoral bonds sold and

SHORT TAKES

ISIS module: NIA attaches 4 assets

New Delhi: The NIA on Sunday said that it has attached four properties as "proceeds of terrorism" in an ISIS module case in Pune, moving forward on its mandate to dismantle the global terror outfits' network in the country, an official said on Sunday. The attached properties in Kondhwa, Pune (Maharashtra) are linked with 11 accused persons, including three absconders, and were being used for the purpose of IED fabrication and its training and planning of terrorist acts. NIA has already chargesheeted all 11 in this case. Attached under Section 25 of the UA(P) Act, the properties are residential houses, flats, linked with accused Mohammed Imran Khan, Mohammed Yunus Saki, Mohammed Shahnuwaz Alam, Md. Rizwan Ali, Kadir Dastagir Pathan, Simab Kazi, Zulfikar Ali Barodawala, Abdullah Faiyaz Shaikh, Talha Liyakat Khan, Shamil Nachan and Akif Nachan. The case relates to an ISIS conspiracy to spread terror by carrying out attacks at various places across the nation

Cop dies as team attacked in Punjab

Hoshiarpur, Punjab: A constable was shot dead on Sunday when a police team came under attack while conducting a raid in a village here to nab a man suspected of harbouring illegal weapons. The incident occurred in Mansoorpur village, about 66 kilometres from here, and the deceased was identified as Crime Investigation Agency (CIA) Constable Amritpal Singh. Hoshiarpur senior superintendent of police (SSP) Surendra Lamba a CIA team was in the village to raid the residence of Sukhwinder Singh. As the team was entering the house, the suspect opened fire and constable Amritpal Singh was struck in the chest, Lamba said. The other team members escaped unharmed but Sukhwinder Singh managed to flee the scene, he said. Amritpal Singh was initially admitted to the Civil Hospital in Mukerian but given the severity of his injuries, he was referred to a private hospital, where he died, the SSP said. — PTI

Modi sounds LS bugle in Andhra

Continued from Page 1
the state, the BJP central leadership agreed to invite the TDP back into the NDA. The double-engine sarkar slogan, which otherwise was used in the states where the BJP is a major stakeholder, reverberated in the coastal state now, where the party's vote share is less than one per cent. As part of the tripartite poll alliance, the BJP is allotted six Lok Sabha seats out of 25 and 10 MLA seats out of the 175 seats in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly.

RSS leader re-elected as general secretary for 3 years
Poll bonds an experiment, time will tell effectiveness: Hosabale

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

RSS general secretary Dattatreya sa on Sunday said the electoral bonds were an "experiment" and time will tell how beneficial and effective it has been. Replying to questions posed by the media on the concluding day of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), Mr Hosabale, whose tenure was extended for three years, said people have seen the progress the country has made in the last 10 years and even renowned international experts and political thinkers have reiterated that the current century is "India's century". He was replying to a question on 10 years of Narendra Modi-led NDA



RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale with Akhil Bharatiya Prachar Pramukh Sunil Ambekar addresses a press conference on the concluding day of Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha in Nagpur on Sunday. — PTI

government. The ABPS also passed a resolution "Shri Ram Mandir to National Resurgence", which hailed the consecration ceremony as an ethereal and golden page of world's history. The ABPS was held at Smriti Bhavan' complex in Reshimbagh in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Around 1,600 RSS office bearers participated in the event which was chaired by its chief Mohan Bhagwat. When asked about the concerns being raised on the electoral bonds issue and claims that they were purchased to get favours,

Mr Hosabale said the Sangh has not yet discussed about it as the electoral bonds is an "experiment".

"It has been done with checks and balances and it is not that electoral bonds have suddenly been introduced today, it (such scheme) was brought earlier also. Whenever a change is introduced, questions are raised. Questions were also raised when the EVMs (electronic voting machines) were introduced," he said.

He also said that it is natural that questions will be raised by the people when new things come up, but time will tell how beneficial and effective the new system is. "Hence, the Sangh thinks it should be left for the experiment," Mr Hosabale said.

Intl students at Guj varsity attacked over namaz, 2 held

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) on Sunday said it "is in touch with the Gujarat government" after two foreign students were injured in an attack at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad on Saturday.

The MEA also said the Gujarat government is "taking strict action against the perpetrators" after a group of foreign students were reportedly attacked while offering "namaz". Two students — one from Tajikistan and another from Sri Lanka — were hospitalised after the incident.

The police on Sunday arrested two persons accused of thrashing and attacking several foreign students at the university hostel while they were offering namaz.

An FIR was registered against 20-25 unidentified accused persons under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and two persons, identified as Hitesh Mevada and Bharat Patel, have been arrested so far, DCP Tarun Duggal said. Nine teams have been formed to conduct a probe into the incident, the police said. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on X, "An incidence of violence took place at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad yesterday. The State Government is taking strict action against the perpetrators."



Supporters of Waris Punjab De chief Amritpal Singh stage a protest demanding his transfer from Assam's Dibrugarh Jail to Punjab Jail in Amritsar on Sunday. — PTI

Believes deceased will revive after 21 days
Mother breaks into mortuary in Odisha, 'steals' body of daughter

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 17

Apparently struck by superstition, a woman allegedly "stole" the body of her daughter from the mortuary of a hospital and went home with hope that she would regain her life after 21 days.

The incident was reported from Rourkela city in Odisha on Sunday.

According to the hospital authorities, the woman broke open the lock of the mortuary and took away the body of her daughter who died of snakebite.

According to sources, the five-year-old girl died

after being bitten by a snake on Saturday. Doctors declared her dead upon arrival in the hospital and the body was kept in the morgue. However, believing that her child would come back to life, the woman and her family members did the unimaginable on Saturday night.

They broke open the morgue and fled with the

body. "The girl's mother is unable to believe that her daughter has died. She believes that her child will come back to life after 21 days. We understand it was mother's love, but it is against the law. So, we have informed the police about the incident," a medical staff said.

The family members still believe that they would bring the daughter to life, after performing a puja and black magic, after 21 days.

Till the last report came in, the local police was trying to convince the mother of the dead girl to give back the body.

India, Seychelles will begin mega war game from today

10-day exercise to boost 'collaborative partnership'

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17: The Indian Army will from Monday carry out a 10-day mega war game with troops of Seychelles at a military facility in the island nation to boost "collaborative partnership" against the backdrop of common concerns over China's growing muscle-flexing in the Indian Ocean. Both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed tactical drills, the Indian Army said on Sunday.

The Seychelles is a strategically located archipelago of around 115 islands in the Indian Ocean region and India has been focusing on significantly ramping up defence cooperation with the country. An Indian Army contingent comprising 45 personnel, which will participate in the exercise "Lamitiye", departed for Seychelles on Sunday. An equal number of troops from the Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF) will join the exercise. "The exercise will contribute immensely in developing mutual understanding and magnify jointness between the troops of both the armies. It will also foster collaborative partnership and help in sharing best practices between the two sides," the Army said in a readout. It said the exercise aims to enhance interoperability in sub-conventional operations in semi-urban environments under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter on peacekeeping operations. "The exercise will enhance cooperation and interoperability between both sides during peacekeeping operations," the Army said. "The exercise will also build and promote bilateral military relations in addition to exchanging skills, experiences and good practices between both armies," it said. The Army said both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed tactical drills for neutralisation of likely threats that may be encountered in a semi-urban environment, while exploiting and showcasing new-generation equipment and technology. — PTI

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Mahadev app case: FIR against Baghel & others

RAIPUR, MARCH 17: The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) in Chhattisgarh has registered a case against former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and others in the alleged Mahadev online betting scam based on a probe report submitted by the ED, officials said on Sunday.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED), which has been investigating the Mahadev app-linked money laundering case for more than a year, alleged in the past that its probe has shown involvement of various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh, where the two main promoters of the app hail from.

The projected proceeds of crime in this case are about ₹6,000 crore, according to the ED. "The ED has been investigating the case and based on its report submitted to the state's Economic Offences Wing/Anti-Corruption Bureau, the FIR was registered against Baghel and others at the EOW police station here on March 4," a senior EOW official said.

The former chief minister of Chhattisgarh Baghel, the senior Congress leader, along with the app promoters Ravi Uppal, Saurabh Chandrakar, Shubham Soni and Anil Kumar Agrawal and 14 others have been named as accused in the FIR, he said.

Some bureaucrats, police officials, officers on special duty (OSDs) and other unidentified private persons have also been made accused (without being named) in the case, he said. — PTI

Male: 2nd batch of military staff to withdraw by Apr 10

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

India and the Maldives on Sunday reviewed the ongoing process of replacing Indian military personnel from the island nation with Male saying the second group will leave by April 10.

The third meeting of the India-Maldives high level core group was held in the Maldivian capital Male during which "both reviewed ongoing deputation of Indian technical personnel to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide medical evacuation services to Maldives".

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ED calls Kejriwal in DJB case today

Continued from Page 1

spent towards the contract and the remaining amounts were siphoned off in the guise of various fake expenses... Such fake expenses were booked for bribes and election funds," the ED claimed.

In February, the Central financial probe agency raised the residences of Mr Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar, AAP Rajya Sabha MP N.D. Gupta, former DJB member Shalabh Kumar, chartered accountant Pankaj Mangal, and others as part of this probe.

The ED's case stemmed from a CBI FIR alleging irregularities in a DJB contract awarded to a company — NKG Infrastructure Ltd — for a sum of ₹38 crore, even though the company "did not meet" the technical eligibility criteria.

Among those arrested in this case were former DJB chief engineer Jagdish Kumar Arora and contractor Anil Kumar Aggarwal on January 31.

In the Delhi excise policy scam case, a Delhi court on Saturday granted bail to the AAP supremo on two complaints filed by the agency against him for skipping six of the previous eight summons in this case.

The ED had moved the magisterial court seeking his prosecution for not attending the summonses issued to him in the case.

The agency has also arrested BRS leader K. Kavitha in Hyderabad in this case on Friday and brought her to New Delhi for further questioning. A local court on Saturday had remanded her to ED custody till March 23.

The ED had claimed in its chargesheet that the AAP used the "proceeds of crime" to the tune of about ₹45 crore in its Goa Assembly poll campaign. It is alleged that the Delhi government's excise policy to grant licences to liquor traders allowed cartelisation and favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge repeatedly refuted by the AAP.

Meanwhile, Delhi minister Atishi, at a press conference, expressed concern over the motive behind these actions and

said: "Nobody knows what this Delhi Jal Board case is about. This seems to be a backup plan to arrest Kejriwal anyhow and stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls."

She said two summonses asking Mr Kejriwal to appear before the Central agency next week were received hours after the Lok Sabha poll date announcement on Saturday. She added one of them was related to the excise policy case and the other to the DJB. The AAP leader charged that the BJP was using the ED and CBI as its "goons" to finish off its political opponents.

Refuting the charges levelled by the AAP leaders, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the ED was working independently. He also accused Mr Kejriwal of repeatedly flouting the law.

"Arvind Kejriwal's former deputy chief minister has been in prison for over a year in the liquor scam case while another MP has also been in jail for a long time, but the repeated assertion by the Aam Aadmi Party that there was no scam in the liquor policy is ludicrous," Mr Sachdeva said.

Future Gaming gave us ₹509cr: DMK

Continued from Page 1

party, the JD(S) declared ₹89.75 crore donation through bonds purchased by the Embassy Group of Companies (₹13 crore), Infosys (₹8 crore), Biocon (₹2.5 crore), Megha Engineering (₹5 crore) and JSW Steel (₹5 crore).

According to the latest dataset released by the EC, the BJP is the biggest beneficiary of the electoral bonds scheme, receiving the maximum funds of ₹6,986.5 crore. The ruling BJP at the Centre is followed by West Bengal's Trinamul Congress, which got ₹1,397 crore. The Congress got ₹1,334 crore and the BRS got ₹1,322 crore.

The MCP got ₹50.51 crore, while the AAP declared it got ₹5.75 crore till May 2019, mostly through the Bajaj Group, which gave ₹3 crore.

Among regional parties, the BJD encashed electoral bonds worth ₹944.5 crore, the YSR Congress ₹442.8 crore, the TDP ₹181.35 crore, the SP got ₹14.05 crore, the Akali Dal got

₹7.26 crore, the Shiv Sena got ₹60.4 crore and the RJD got ₹56 crore.

J&K's National Conference got ₹50 lakhs in EBs through Bharti Group. Sikkim Krantikari Morcha got ₹15.50 crore. The Left parties like the CPI(M), CPI, All India Forward Bloc, CPI-ML, did not participate in this process as they were principally opposed to it. The BSP, AIUDF, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, Indian Union Muslim League, Indian National Lok Dal, Naga People's Front and Lok Janshakti Party (RV) did not get any money.

The EC had sought information in detail about the electoral bonds redeemed by the political parties, specifying the dates and amount of the money received. This data was submitted by the EC in sealed covers to the Supreme Court and it was later asked to put the data in the public domain. Though the EC had sought only limited information, some parties went ahead and disclosed the names of

the donors.

"In compliance with the Supreme Court's directions contained in its orders dated February 15 and March 11, this year, the EC has already uploaded data on electoral bonds as provided by the State Bank of India (SBI) vide press note of the Commission dated March 14. Political parties had filed data on electoral bonds in sealed cover as directed by the Supreme Court's interim order dated April 12, 2019... Data so received from political parties was deposited in the Supreme Court without opening sealed covers. In pursuance of the Supreme Court's order dated March 15, the Registry of the Supreme Court has returned physical copies along with a digitised record of the same in a pen drive in sealed cover. The Election Commission has today uploaded the data received in digitised form from the registry of the Supreme Court on electoral bonds on its website," the EC said.

Set roadmap for first 100 days, says Modi

Continued from Page 1

detailed action plan for the next five years. A 100-day agenda for immediate steps to be taken after the new government is formed in June was deliberated upon during the day-long meeting of the Council. Sources had then

said the roadmap for "Viksit Bharat" was a result of more than two years of intensive preparations and entailed a "whole-of-government" approach involving all ministries and wide-ranging consultations with state governments, academia, industry

bodies, civil society, scientific organisations and mobilisation of the youth for inputs. "More than 2,700 meetings, workshops and seminars were held at various levels. Suggestions of more than 20 lakh youths were received," an official had said.

Fresh plea in SC by Kerala seeking stay on CAA rules

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The Kerala government has filed a fresh plea in the SC seeking a stay on the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024, contending it to be discriminatory, arbitrary and in contravention of the principles of secularism.

The Centre had on March 11 notified the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules 2024 under the CAA-2019 to grant Indian citizenship to undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Rules were notified four years after the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act by Parliament in 2019 and in the run-up to the announcement of the 2024 parliamentary polls.

Dubbing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act rules as "unconstitutional", the state government said classifications based on religion and country are discriminatory, arbitrary, unreasonable, and contravene the principles of secularism.

"The fact that the defendant (Union) itself has no urgency in the implementation of the 2019 Act is a sufficient cause for staying the 2024 rules," the petition said.

BJP has finalised candidates' list for Odisha: Ex-mantri

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 17

Senior BJP leader and former Union minister Pratap Sarangi on Sunday said his party had made full preparation for the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Odisha and the short-listing process of the probable candidates had been completed.

He informed that the names of the selected candidates will be sent to the party high command today and the names of selected nominees for parliamentary and Assembly constituencies will be announced from New Delhi by the party president J.P. Nadda.

Sources in the Odisha unit of the BJP said it had already chalked out its strategy for all the 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats ahead of the crucial polls. The state election committee met on Saturday and discussions were held on the candidates for the Assembly elections and the Lok

Sabha polls. The meeting, chaired by state BJP president Manmohan Samal, made seat-wise discussions and deliberated on the applications of prospective candidates.

BJP's Odisha election incharge Vijaypal Singh Tomar said, "All discussions on how to connect with people, vehicles and other aspects including management were held. We have enough time and the names of candidates will also be announced."

The BJP has decided to reach out to 1 crore people in Odisha with a letter written by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Meanwhile, the suspense of a possible BJP-BJD union continued on Sunday with both parties observing a mysterious silence over it. No leader from either side came forward to share any information on the progress with regard to the proposed coalition.

In fact, the BJP and BJD, until recently, key rivals in state politics, are trying to forge an alliance.

THE ASIAN AGE

18 MARCH 2024

Make LS polls freer, fairer; also try to make it shorter

The curtain is officially up on a 44-day-long festival of democracy that has visited India after five years. In the biggest democratic exercise in the world, around 97 crore Indians will elect 543 members to the Lower House of Parliament with a mandate to run the country for the next five years.

The general election is a reflection of the idea called India. From the below-sea-level booths in Kuttanad in Kerala to the world's highest polling booth at Himachal Pradesh's Tashigang, from the sub-zero temperatures of Ladakh to the scorching heat at Jodhpur, from bustling metros to serene tribal villages in forest interiors, from teenagers to centenarians, avid democrats to violent doomsayers, they open India to a 360-degree view of what it is to be the most diverse nation of the world.

Elections have changed dramatically in the past few decades. The exercise has become a lot fairer with the introduction of voter identity cards and the deployment of adequate security forces.

Counting has become an easier and faster affair with electronic voting machines, though there are doubts expressed by people genuinely concerned about their bona fides. The gradual increase in the share of machines with a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) system, now covering every machine, has helped alleviate some of these worries. At present, the VVPAT counterfoils from five machines in each Assembly segment of a Lok Sabha constituency are randomly selected and verified with the numbers those EVMs provided. The Election Commission must consider the popular demand for increasing this share. It may delay the results a bit but is worth the wait given the stakes involved.

The EC has listed four challenges to the conduct of fair polls: money, muscle power, misinformation and violations of the model code of conduct (MCC). It will be only doing its job if it cracks down on the perpetrators in an even-handed fashion. The EC must bear in mind the charges raised against itself about being harsh towards the Opposition parties but soft on the ruling party.

With the MCC in force to be lifted only after the counting, governance will come to a standstill for the next two-and-a-half months. While it is essential in order that the election is a fair one, the length of the period is a luxury that India can ill-afford. The EC considers seven phases to be necessary in order to ensure the deployment of Central paramilitary forces in all constituencies and in sufficient numbers. But it is time it considers optimising all the forces available so that the number of phases is less.

The EC's decision not to hold the Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir is unfortunate as it denies the people of the Union territory their right to have a popular government. For a Union government that bats for "one-nation one-election", its excuse of not being able to provide adequate security personnel to cover Assembly polls in a Union territory, albeit with extraordinary security concerns, is untenable. If one might paraphrase what former US President John F. Kennedy once said, the rights of every Indian are threatened when the rights of a citizen of Jammu and Kashmir are diminished. To ensure that the right of every Indian to elect their government is respected is the responsibility of the Election Commission.

Setback for BRS, gain for Cong

On the day Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conducting a mammoth roadshow in Hyderabad sleuths of the Enforcement Directorate raided the residence of K. Kavitha, BRS MLC and daughter of former chief minister of Telangana, K. Chandrashekar Rao, and arrested her in the Delhi liquor scam.

Based on the statements of several alleged partners and accomplices who turned approver, the ED closed in for the kill, and brought her to the national capital for further questioning. She was later remanded in a week of judicial custody.

Ever since it first broke out in Delhi, the news of the case and the alleged scam has had huge political consequences in both the Telugu states, but predominantly in Telangana.

All parties have since been making allegations and counter-allegations, with the BJP state unit using the case as a way to portray both the Congress and the BRS as corrupt and nepotist parties. But the BJP leaders in Telangana suffered a setback in the Assembly polls held last November. The Congress had successfully argued that she was targeted not because the BJP and BRS were in cahoots but clandestinely.

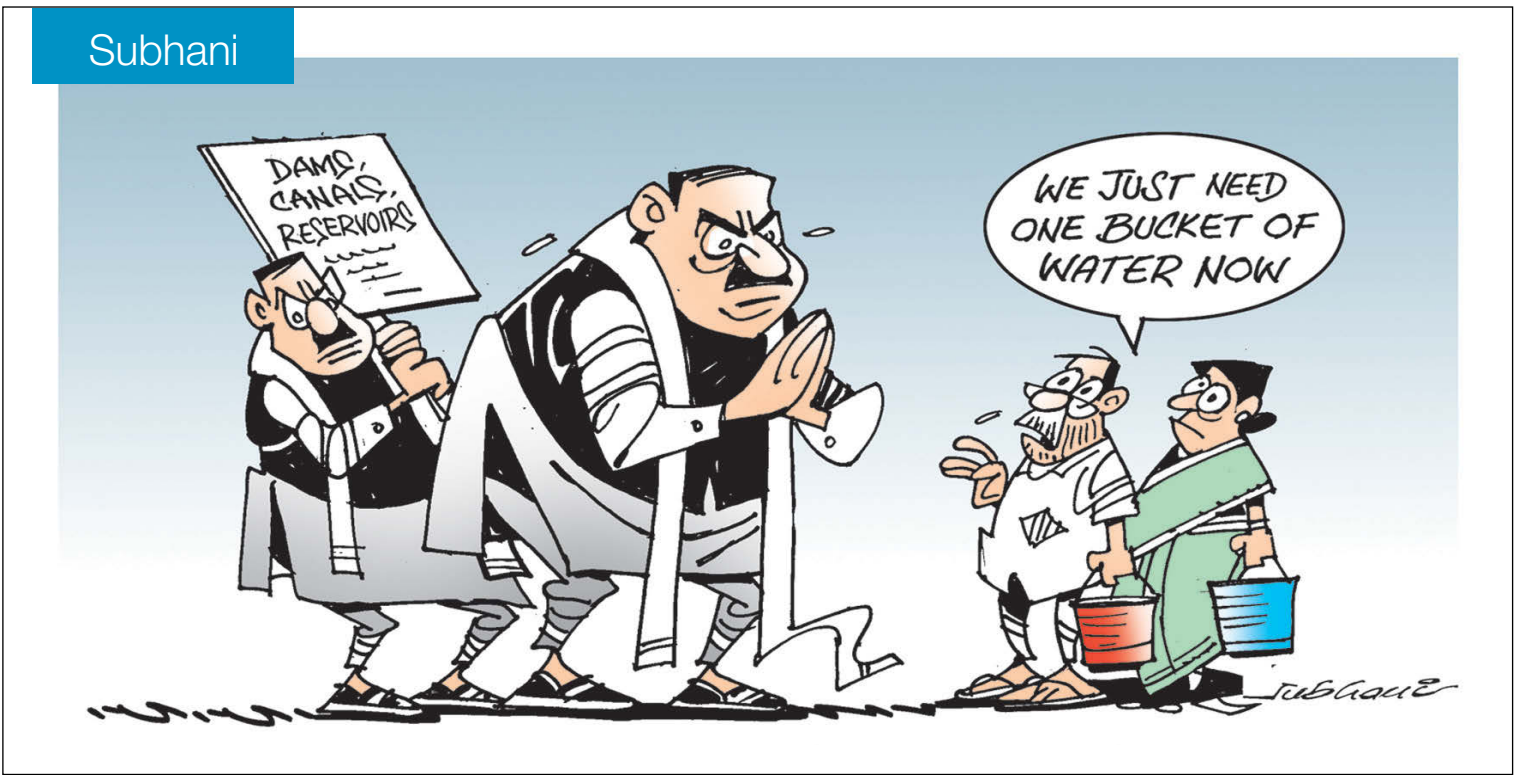
The BRS tried to dub it as a conspiracy without much success. Its various leaders had dared the BJP and ED to arrest her if they had any proof.

Interestingly, the case is primarily against the state government of Delhi, in which several of the top Aam Aadmi Party leaders are also named. The AAP has, meanwhile, forged a partnership with the Congress as part of the INDIA alliance.

The BRS is down after a terrible trouncing and its attempts to politicise the arrest has not yielded any response. There is no immediate sympathy wave for the party after the arrest.

The BJP might now claim victory but the Congress hopes a divided BRS vote bank will give it the upper hand in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Subhani



Everyone is a consumer, but consumes differently



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

I have rarely used my column for a book review, but Rama Bijapurkar is different. Rama is a fellow Hyderabad. She moved to Mumbai, while I moved to Delhi. If my books have been on politics and economics, Rama's have been about the Indian marketplace and the Indian consumer. Her first book, *We are Like That Only: Understanding the Logic of Consumer India* (2007), was a classic and a bestseller.

Over the years she has tracked the Indian consumption story closely and her second book, *A Never-Before World: Tracking the Evolution of Consumer India* (2013), placed her firmly on top of the many observers of the Indian marketplace.

Everyone is a consumer but everyone consumes differently. That should seem obvious. However, unpacking the diversity of the Indian consumer market is easier said than done. Many companies, big ones at that and not just multinationals, often fail to understand the cultural and economic diversity of the Indian consumer.

That a serious analyst of the Indian marketplace has to reiterate that obvious point is of course a bad comment on the companies that don't seem to get it. It is also a comment on the inadequate understanding of consumption habits on the part of economists.

Most tend to view consumption as being determined by income levels and geographic location of the consumer (urban/rural). Bijapurkar shows that not only is the income-consumption link more complex than imagined, but that apart from economic factors, social and cultural attributes of a consumer and her view of life and her place in society also matter. We must, therefore, thank Rama Bijapurkar for her new

book, *Lilliput Land: How Small is Driving India's Mega Consumption Story* (Penguin Random House, 2024), that neatly unpacks the Indian consumer market with data and insights.

It was Joan Robinson, the eminent Cambridge economist, who famously observed that every statement about India and its opposite is true. Bijapurkar deploys many metaphors ranging from "khichdi" to "the elephant and the blind men of Indostan" to make the point that the patterns of consumption across regions and classes point to the fact that there are "many Indias that have had different starting points and evolved in different directions at different speeds".

In structural terms, the Indian market can be classified in different ways. There is a metro market, an urban and semi-urban market, a rural market and so on. In class terms, one can distinguish between an elite market of the top five per cent, an upper class market of the top 20 per cent and markets that cater to the middle and lower classes.

These terms are easier said than defined or understood. After the economic liberalisation of 1991 many studies were conducted on the size of the emerging Indian market. Many books have been written about India's "new middle class" and so on. Yet, there is no consensus either on the actual size of this so-called "middle class" or its income and consumption characteristics.

To understand India's consumption story one must begin by understanding the investment story. Bijapurkar is right to emphasise this. This is an idea we owe to the great 20th century economist, John Maynard Keynes, that as investment rises so does income and then so

the Indian marketplace is the emergence of D2C — direct to consumer — thanks to digital marketing and e-retailing and this space is getting flooded with what Bijapurkar calls "Lilliput Brands". Lilliput because like the small people of that famous fable they are tying down big brands that have not been agile enough to cater to Indian consumer diversity. Companies, Indian or foreign, that are sensitive to the diversity of the Indian consumer market are able to perform better than those who only have an "India" strategy that is bereft of regional and cultural variations.

the numbers [on share of income] testify to a K-shaped growth process view and are a serious indictment of the growth process during Narendra Modi's decade in office

does consumption. The slowdown in investment in recent years has, therefore, quite understandably hurt consumption. However, it has not hurt all consumption. And that is a point that comes out clearly from the data analysed by Bijapurkar. Her analysis of India's consumption story in the recent past adds grist to the argument that the post-Covid recovery has been K-shaped — that is, some are better off and some worse off. If incomes across classes have moved in opposite directions, so has their consumption of various goods and services.

One striking table that Bijapurkar presents shows trends in share of income by different quintiles between 1994 and 2021. It shows how the share of the richest 20 per cent in total all-India household income went down from 50.2 per cent in 1994 to 44.9 per cent in 2015-16, while that of the poorest 20 per cent went up from 5.9 per cent to seven per cent during the same period. This points to an improvement in income distribution across economic classes. On the other hand, between 2015-16 and 2020-21 the richest 20 per cent increased their share to 56.3 per cent while the poorest 20 per cent found their share slipping further back to 3.3 per cent. These numbers testify to the K-shaped growth process view and are a serious indictment of the growth process during Narendra Modi's decade in office.

Firms that have understood the income structure of this ground reality have done well by selectively targeting different consumers differently. Bijapurkar offers many examples to make her point. The real change in

the Indian marketplace is the emergence of D2C — direct to consumer — thanks to digital marketing and e-retailing and this space is getting flooded with what Bijapurkar calls "Lilliput Brands". Lilliput because like the small people of that famous fable they are tying down big brands that have not been agile enough to cater to Indian consumer diversity. Companies, Indian or foreign, that are sensitive to the diversity of the Indian consumer market are able to perform better than those who only have an "India" strategy that is bereft of regional and cultural variations.

Bijapurkar's book is about more than just the macro changes. It details out the micro changes under way in terms of consumer behaviour and consumer preferences. The wealthy are no longer the drivers of change in consumption patterns. Indeed, even the so-called "middle class", which in fact belongs to the top 20 per cent of households in terms of income, is also not as important to the change underway. Real change is coming from below and it is the digital revolution that has empowered the small and micro retailer and the small and micro consumer.

Rama has a knack of making serious analytical points with telling stories.

Indians are many different people valuing different things and behaving in different ways, reminds Bijapurkar. "In India, adaptability is considered a far bigger virtue than uniformity. After all, the gods changed character totally to deal with whatever situation they had to: the simple, the playful, the aggressive, the gentle — all representations of the same at different times, each celebrated for what it achieved."

A useful reality check for all those seeking uniformity where none exists.

The writer is an author, a former newspaper editor and adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He has recently edited *The Importance of Shinzo Abe: India, Japan and the Indo-Pacific*.

LETTERS LONG ELECTION

One must agree with Mamata Banerjee that a longer poll serves those with deeper pockets better. A nation which aspires for a single poll covering all elections should not have voting in a single state like West Bengal in seven different phases. Even for a vast and diverse nation like India, where logistics are stretched, an election spread over one-and-a-half months is a little too much. The first job of the EC is to ensure a level playing field for all the political parties. Holding of election in a long and staggered manner suits some political parties more than the others!

Anthony Henriques Mumbai

BJP CONSPIRACY

A DAY after a Delhi court on Saturday granted bail to Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal following the ED's complaints that he was not complying with its summonses in the liquor policy case, the ED has issued two summonses to him. This shows nothing but a clear motive of the BJP and PM Narendra Modi to stop Mr Kejriwal from fighting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in Delhi. They do not want to give him time to plan his campaign in different states.

Sankar Paul Chakdaha, West Bengal

TIP OF ICEBERG

ELECTIONS are the biggest festival. For 543 seats of Lok Sabha, around ₹55,000 crores was spent by all political parties combined in 2019. From ₹9,000 crores in 1998, it has gone up six-fold. Likely a similar scale of outlay covered the 4,500 seats for the Vidhan Sabha. Even the US is not known to enjoy such a bountiful spread. The ₹12,000 crores from electoral bonds, a mere one-eighth, is thus small ticked. Clearly, the remaining seven-eighths did meet the far bigger expenses of publicity, media time, travel, logistics and handouts. This huge largesse to politics enjoys its dignity in silence.

R. Narayanan Navi Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to S. Kamat (Mar. 16). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

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Mahir Ali

As Britons face a host of problems, is the monarchy just a distraction?

The notion that Britain's royal family represents the superglue that keeps the kingdom united is a gross exaggeration, but the House of Windsor can be relied upon to provide a useful distraction every now and then.

Amid a wide range of alarming political and economic trends, a substantial proportion of the media's feeding frenzy has been focused on a photoshopped image of the Princess of Wales with her three children. For what it's worth, the officially released photograph was in the first place a response to weeks of speculation about Princess Kate's well-being, alongside the thousands of words devoted to the king's health concerns.

Prostate exams — let alone allegations of paedophilia, such as those unconvincedly denied by Prince Andrew — is probably not what Walter Bagehot imagined when, more than 150 years ago, he identified the monarchy as the 'dignified' part of Britain's political structure. But then, Bagehot also referred to cabinet government as the 'efficient' part of the political establishment.

Efficiency has hardly been a hallmark of British governance for most of this century. And while the Thatcher regime could indeed be efficient, it is rightly remembered for its ruth-

less brutality, best exemplified by its response to the miners' strike 40 years ago, in which all the coercive arms of the state joined forces to crush the challenge to the economic status quo.

It took decades for the union movement to find its feet again, and for the purportedly progressive mainstream party to recover from its 'New Labour' incarnation under Tony Blair — which Margaret Thatcher recalled as her greatest achievement, apart from anointing Blair as her favourite heir. Even though New Labour's devotion to neoliberalism depleted its vote share, it remained in power until Blair's decision to back the Bush war in Iraq, followed by Gordon Brown's dedication to rescuing banks and financiers in the wake of the global financial crisis, marginally shifted the dial.

David Cameron stepped into the breach on behalf of the Tories, armed with 'austerity' and a plan for a referendum on EU membership. Both backfired, paving the way for Theresa May, Boris Johnson (whose epicurean tendencies fed his epic tendencies towards incompetence), Liz Truss (who avoided offering even the vaguest impression of efficiency), and, finally, Rishi Sunak. The incumbent PM's strategy for limiting the extent of the Conservative wipeout evidently involves tacking further to

the right.

That's partly a response to born-again New Labour under Keir Starmer reclaiming the centre-right ground and sidelining the party's left wing, often via suspension or expulsion, by taking a sledgehammer to almost every mildly progressive Labour platform in the interests of demonstrating a fealty to markets, the captains of industry, and conservative values.

Starmer's predecessor as opposition leader was dislodged via a campaign spearheaded by the Israeli embassy in London and reinforced by local Zionist groups, the media, plus the Tories and much of the parliamentary Labour Party. Jeremy Corbyn was elected by Labour's membership (twice) because the innate decency and principled politics reflected in his long record seemed like a novelty.

That record included resistance to racism in any form. The smear of antisemitism ought to have been dismissed as absurd — it was clearly a vicious reaction to Corbyn consistently defending the Palestinian cause as part of his broader commitment to human rights. Even the tiniest likelihood of a British PM who might refuse to worship at the altar of Israeli supremacy was anathema to the Zionists and their acolytes.

Starmer effectively played the role of a snake

in the grass, and now doesn't dare offer any pronouncements on the Gaza genocide without checking with the Israeli authorities. That includes the deviously achieved recent parliamentary resolution on a 'humanitarian ceasefire', which translates as a brief interval in the deadly proceedings. After all, ceasefires are humanitarian by definition.

Anyhow, the change in government that will follow whenever Sunak takes a break from redefining 'extremism' as chiefly a left-wing, Muslim or 'woke' problem to announce the next election won't alter Britain's political landscape much. Growing poverty, hunger and homelessness — plus alarming degrees of alienation and racism — cannot be resolved via marginally superior management skills.

But blighted Blighty's denizens are encouraged to ignore their mounting woes and bring out their magnifying glasses to concentrate on a young princess's misaligned cuff or her younger brother's extended middle finger. Perhaps that finger is pointing towards a future in which Britons will abolish the anachronistic monarch and House of Lords and usher in a meaningful democracy. But it could be a long wait.

— By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

MOST OF CUBA HIT BY POWER OUTAGES: MIN.

Havana, March 17: Large swathes of Cuba, including the capital, have been hit by power outages, authorities said, as the country grapples with a dire economic crisis. "Almost the whole country has been affected since yesterday at 23:00 (03:00 GMT Saturday), including Havana," energy minister Vicente de la O Levy told state television. "There have been areas in the dark since the early hours of the morning," and this has lasted "practically all day in almost the whole country," he added.

21 DEAD IN AF AS BUS COLLIDES WITH OIL TANKER

Lashkar Gah, March 17: At least 21 people were killed and 38 injured on Sunday when a bus collided with a fuel tanker truck and burst into flames in southern Afghanistan. Traffic accidents are common in Afghanistan, due in part to poor roads after decades of conflict, dangerous driving on highways and a lack of regulation. "Twenty-one people were killed... in a traffic accident between a passenger bus, a tanker and a motorbike" on a main highway in southern Helmand province, Mohammad Qasim Riyaz, a spokesman for the provincial governor, said.

U.S. PLANS TO EVACUATE PEOPLE STUCK IN HAITI

Washington, March 17: The United States is organising a charter flight to evacuate its citizens from Haiti, the US embassy said on Saturday, after weeks of gang violence that has paralysed the country. The emergency flight will depart from Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city, as the main airport in capital Port-au-Prince remains shut.

"We are arranging a charter flight for US citizens from Cap-Haitien to the US, assuming the security situation in Cap-Haitien remains stable," the US embassy in Haiti said in a security alert posted on its website.

LANKA NABS 21 MORE INDIAN FISHERMEN

Colombo, March 17: The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 21 more Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching into the country's territorial water, the latest such incident this month. The fishermen were arrested on Saturday near the Jaffna islet of Delft and escorted to the Kankesanthurai port, the Navy said. Their two trawlers were also seized. The arrests come a day after the Sri Lanka Navy on Friday detained at least 15 Indian fishermen off Karainagar in the Jaffna Peninsula. At least 146 Indian fishermen have been arrested by Sri Lanka so far this year.

U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE NOT NEEDED: NIGER

Niamey, March 17: Niger's junta said on Saturday the US military presence in the country is no longer justified, making the announcement on state television after holding high-level talks with US diplomatic and military officials. Niger plays a central role in the US military's operations in Africa's Sahel region and is home to a major airbase. The US is concerned about the spread of jihadist violence in the region, where local groups have pledged allegiance to al-Qaida and the Islamic State extremist groups.

ICELAND LAVA NOW SLOW AFTER FOURTH ERUPTION

Reykjavik, March 17: Lava flows from a volcano in southwest Iceland that had lit up the night sky on Saturday appeared to slow on Sunday. However, authorities said they still posed a danger to infrastructure, including a nearby fishing town. The eruption — the fourth since December — began at 20:23 GMT on Saturday, sending fountains of molten rock soaring from a roughly 3 km-long (1.9 mile) fissure, roughly the same size and at the same place as the last eruption in February.

Trump warns of a 'bloodbath' if he is not elected President

Terms Presidential poll on Nov. 5 as 'most important date' in US history

Vandalia, March 17: Donald Trump told a rally in Ohio on Saturday that November's presidential election will be the "most important date" in US history, painting his campaign for the White House as a turning point for the country. Days after securing his position as the presumptive Republican nominee, the former president also warned of a "bloodbath" if he is not elected — though it was not clear what he was referring to, with the remark coming in the middle of comments about threats to the United States auto industry.

"The date — remember this, November 5 — I believe it's going to be the most important date in the history of our country," the 77-year-old told rallygoers in Vandalia, Ohio, repeating well-worn criticisms that his rival, President Joe Biden, is the "worst" president. Criticising what he said were Chinese plans to build cars in Mexico and sell them to Americans, he stated: "We're going to put a 100 per cent tariff on every single car that comes across the line, and you're not going to be able to sell those cars if I get elected."

"Now if I don't get elected it's going to be a bloodbath for the whole — that's going to be the least of it, it's going to be a bloodbath for the country. That'll be the least of it. But they're not going to sell those cars." As Trump's comment gained traction on social



Former US president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks during a Buckeye Values PAC Rally in Vandalia, Ohio. — AFP

media, Biden's campaign released a statement calling the Republican a "loser" at the ballot box in 2020 who then "doubles down on his threats of political violence."

"He wants another January 6 but the American people are going to give him another electoral defeat this November because they continue to reject his extremism, his affection for violence, and his thirst for revenge," the campaign said, referring to the deadly attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters in 2021.

Later, Biden spoke at a dinner in Washington, where he also warned of "an unprecedented moment in

history." "Freedom is under assault... The lies about the 2020 election, the plot to overturn it, to embrace the Jan. 6 insurrection pose the greatest threat to our democracy since the American Civil War," he said. "In 2020, they failed, but... the threat remains."

"The 81-year-old, who has waved off concerns that he is too old for a second term, leavened his rhetoric with humor. "One candidate's too old and mentally unfit to be president," he said of the presidential race. "The other guy's me."

Earlier this month Trump and Biden each won enough delegates to clinch their party nominations in the 2024 presidential race, all but assuring a rematch and setting up one of the longest election campaigns in US history.

Among the issues that Trump is campaigning on is sweeping reform of what he calls Biden's "horror show" immigration policies, despite the ex-president successfully pressuring Republicans to block a bill in Congress that included the toughest border security measures in decades. — AFP

BIDEN ROASTS TRUMP AT PRESS DINNER

Washington, March 17: US President Joe Biden joked about Donald Trump and his own age at an annual media dinner on Saturday — before unloading deadly serious criticisms of his rival. "One candidate's too old and mentally unfit to be president," the 81-year-old Democrat quipped at the Gridiron Club in Washington. "The other guy's me." He was making his first speech at the annual white tie gala for the United States media and political elite. — AFP

BIDEN CAMPAIGN RAISED \$53 MN LAST MONTH

Washington, March 17: President Joe Biden's campaign has amassed \$155 million in cash on hand for the 2024 election, far exceeding the in-hand total for his Republican opponent, Donald Trump. The president raised \$53 million alone last month, which was the strongest grassroots fundraising month since the campaign launched. Among those efforts was a contest for supporters to attend a fundraiser on March 28 in New York. — AP

EU, EGYPT SIGN 7.4 BILLION EURO MIGRATION, ENERGY DEAL

Cairo, March 17: The European Union on Sunday announced a 7.4 billion-euro (\$8 billion) aid package for cash-strapped Egypt as concerns mount that economic pressure and conflicts in neighbouring countries could drive more migrants to European shores.

The deal, which drew criticism from rights groups over Egypt's human rights record, is scheduled to be signed during a visit on Sunday by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and leaders of Belgium, Italy, Austria, Cyprus and Greece, according to Egyptian officials.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi met separately with von der Leyen and other European leaders before the signing ceremony on Sunday afternoon.

The aid package includes both grants and loans over the next three years for the Arab world's most populous country, according to the EU's mission in Cairo.

Most of the funds — 5 billion euros (\$5.4 billion) are macro-financial assistance, according to a document from the European Union mission in Egypt.

The mission said that the two sides have promoted their cooperation to the level of a strategic and comprehensive partnership. — AP

Thousands attend noon protest against Putin in Navalny memory

Moscow, March 17: President Vladimir Putin is poised to tighten his grip on power on Sunday in a Russian election that is certain to deliver him a landslide victory, though thousands of opponents staged a symbolic noon protest at polling stations.

Putin, who rose to power in 1999, is set to win a new six-year term that would enable him to overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving leader for more than 200 years.

The election comes just over two years since Putin triggered the deadliest European conflict since World War Two by ordering the invasion of Ukraine. He casts it as a "special military operation".

War has hung over the three day election: Ukraine has repeatedly attacked oil refineries in Russia, shelled Russian regions and sought to pierce Russian borders with proxy forces — a move Putin said would not be left unpunished. While Putin's re-election is not in doubt given his control over Russia and the absence of any real challengers, the former KGB spy wants to show that he has the overwhelming support of Russians. Several hours before polls were due to close at 18:00 GMT, the nationwide turnout surpassed 2018 levels of 67.5%.

Supporters of Putin's most prominent opponent Alexei Navalny, who died in an Arctic prison last

RUSSIA ORDERS INCREASED FIREPOWER FOR NAVY

South Ossetia discusses becoming Russia part South Ossetia, a region that broke away from Georgia and calls itself an independent state, has discussed becoming part of Russia with Moscow officials, Russian news agency RIA cited the head of South Ossetia's parliament as saying on Sunday.

Ukrainian drones attack refinery, disrupt power Ukraine launched 35 drones at targets across Russia that sparked a brief fire at an oil refinery, took aim at Moscow and disrupted electricity supplies in border areas, Russia said on Sunday, the last day of its presidential election. Russia said as it ordered increased firepower and training for the Navy to counter the threat of Ukrainian air and naval drones.



month, called on Russians to come out at a "Noon against Putin" protest to show their dissent against a leader they cast as a corrupt autocrat.

There was no independent tally of how many of Russia's 114 million voters took part in the demonstrations, amid extremely ti-



Members of the Russian diaspora in Georgia hold a banner reading 'Enough Putin, lies, war, repression' during a protest on the day of Russia's presidential election, in Tbilisi on Sunday. — AFP

Russia responds to France's Olympic truce call with demand to end Ukraine supplies Commenting on French President Emmanuel Macron's call for a ceasefire in Ukraine during the Olympic games, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova urged him to stop weapon supplies to Ukraine.

Zakharova also said Macron should have proposed the same ceasefire to the sides of the conflict in the Middle East.

thousands. Some said they were protesting, though there were few outward signs to distinguish them from ordinary voters. As noon arrived across Asia and Europe, crowds hundreds strong gathered at polling stations at Russian diplomatic missions. — Reuters

Bibi rails against US criticism Netanyahu vows war won't stop till victory achieved

Tel Aviv, March 17: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu railed on Sunday against growing criticism from the United States against his leadership amid the devastating war with Hamas, saying the pressure won't stop Israel from achieving "total victory."

In recent days, top officials from the US, Israel's staunchest ally which has provided key military and diplomatic support during the war, have publicly voiced their frustration with Netanyahu and his government. US President Joe Biden accused Netanyahu of hurting Israel because of the huge civilian death toll in Gaza. US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the country and a strong Israel supporter, then called on Israel to hold a new election, saying Netanyahu had "lost his way."

Biden then expressed support for what he called Schumer's "good speech." The US also has expressed concerns about a planned Israeli assault on the Gaza city of Rafah, where 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering, and support for a new round of talks aimed at securing a truce in exchange for the return of Israeli hostages.

The Israeli delegation to those talks wasn't expected to leave for Qatar until after Sunday evening meetings of the Security Cabinet and War Cabinet, which will give them directions for the negotiations. Despite the talks, Netanyahu made it clear on Sunday he had no plans of backing down from

EXPLOSION NEAR MERCHANT SHIP JUST OFF YEMEN

Dubai, March 17: A vessel sailing off southern Yemen reported an explosion nearby on Sunday, a British maritime security agency said, the latest incident as Houthi rebels have attacked shipping on the vital Red Sea route.

United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations said a commercial ship "has reported an explosion in close proximity to the vessel", causing no casualties or damage.

The blast hit as the ship was sailing "85 nautical miles east of Aden" in Yemen, and the vessel was "proceeding to its next port of call", said UKMTO. — AFP

the fighting that has already killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, in the more than five months since Hamas' October 7 attack on southern Israel killed 1,200 people and left another 250 hostage in Gaza, Israeli authorities say.

He said that calls for an election now — which polls show he would lose badly — would force Israel to stop fighting and would paralyse the country for six months. "If we stop the war now, before all of its goals are achieved, this means that Israel will have lost the war, and this we will not allow. Therefore, we cannot, and will not, succumb to this pressure," he said. — AP

Maritime watch not concern of 'outsiders': Male

Male, March 17: President Mohamed Muizzu has said the surveillance of the Maldives' territory should not concern any "external parties" as he announced measures to boost its defence forces, including the maiden deployment of drones to guard the archipelagic nation in the Indian Ocean.

Muizzu's latest comments came while speaking at a ceremony to launch the Maldives National Defence Force's (MNDF) Air Corps and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), a press release by the President's Office said.

Muizzu announced new initiatives to strengthen the Maldives' military capabilities at the ceremony. The pro-China Maldivian leader's remarks came days after the first batch of Indian military personnel operating a helicopter gifted by India left the island nation after Muizzu stepped up his anti-India rhetoric.

Asserting that Maldives isn't a small nation, Muizzu said the country is capable of monitoring its jurisdiction. "The Maldives isn't a small nation," he said, noting that the island nation stretches



Mohamed Muizzu along nine hundred thousand square kilometres and is capable of monitoring its jurisdiction.

"Maldives is an independent and sovereign nation and that surveillance of the Maldives' jurisdiction should not concern any external parties," he said, without naming any country. He said this would not impede the Maldives' close relations with all countries.

Muizzu said his government would double the capacity of the Coast Guard, expand the Air Corps fleet, and enhance land-based vehicles and platforms. Muizzu after assuming the office last year had asked India to withdraw nearly 90 military personnel from the island nation. — PTI

No extra budget to pay China power plant dues: Pak to IMF

Islamabad, March 17: Pakistan has assured the IMF that it does not plan to allocate an additional budget to settle the \$1.8 billion dues of Chinese power plants built under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, as the new government scrambles to revive the sinking economy, according to a media report.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team has been in Pakistan to complete the final review of the \$3 billion Standby Agreement approved for the country last year before releasing the last tranche of

IMRAN FOR TREASON PROCEEDINGS AGAINST ELECTION MANDATE THIEVES

Islamabad, March 17: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has sought high treason proceedings against officials who allegedly stole the people's mandate in the February general elections.

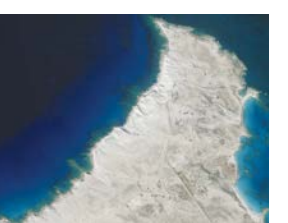
\$1.1 billion before the end of the programme next month. The team has met officials who are also interest-

ed in getting a fresh loan to keep the dollar-starved nation's economy afloat, *The Express Tribune* newspaper reported. — PTI

Harvard, March 17: Satellites sitting more than 22,200 miles (35,700 kilometres) above the Earth's surface have been capturing storms and weather data for decades. Now, scientists have hacked the data coming back for another purpose: Spotting methane emissions.

KEEPING TRACK Researchers can estimate total emissions Sat data hacked to spot methane

ch, which uses shortwave infrared observations from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites (GOES), can detect large-emitting events of tens of metric tonnes an hour or larger. Satellites observe concentrations of methane from space by analysing the way sunlight reflects off the Earth. As light passes through a cloud of the gas, its intensity is weakened on certain wavelengths. Methane absorbs light in the short-wave infrared portion of the elec-



The approach can detect large-emitting events of tens of metric tonnes an hour. — Bloomberg

tromagnetic spectrum. Although the GOES system wasn't built to detect methane, its sensor includes short-wave infrared channels designed to observe things like snow cover and fire hot spots. The new technique is already being used by ge-analytics firms and scientists to quantify major emissions events in North America. Kayros SAS used the approach to estimate that a fossil gas pipeline spewed about 840 metric tonnes of methane into the atmosphere after it was ruptured by a farmer using an excavator. That's very close to the 50.9 million cubic feet of gas operator Williams Cos. said leaked, which works out to about 900 metric tonnes of methane. — Bloomberg

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	72,643.43	-0.62
Nifty 50	22,023.35	-0.56
S&P 500*	5,117.09	-0.65
Dollar (₹)	82.88	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.70	0.41
Euro (₹)	90.33	0.31
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	65,545.3	0.001
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

Patent office grants one lakh patents in a year

The Indian patent office has granted over one lakh patents in the past year on account of steps taken by the government to further strengthen the intellectual property rights ecosystem. There has been a three-fold increase in Geographical Indication registrations compared to the previous year. As on date, 573 GIs are registered. In 2023-24, 98 new GIs have been registered and 62 more will be done this month.



Decathlon to up retail presence further, says CEO

Sports retailer Decathlon is accelerating its investments to ramp up production and enhance its retail presence further in India, one of its most important global markets, its Global CEO Barbara Martin Coppola has said. Decathlon expects to continue its high growth from the Indian market, which is also emerging as a key manufacturing hub, from where it now exports 65 per cent of production to global markets.

Kerosene usage fell significantly, says govt data

Kerosene consumption in the country has declined sharply by 26 per cent CAGR between 2013-14 and 2022-23. "The impact of energy policies of recent time is evident on the consumption of kerosene as a fuel in the country," according to Energy Statistics India 2024 of the National Statistical Office. The consumption of kerosene has seen a steady decreasing trend, the government data said.

ITC started using inland waterways for transport

ITC joined hands with Inland Waterways Authority of India to ship FMCG products through inland waterways via the National Waterway 1, the statement added. A vessel carrying eight containerised cargo of processed food items (noodles) of ITC was flagged off from Kolkata to Patna on March 14. The vessel used for movement is MV Rabindranath Tagore which has a carrying capacity of 16 TEUs.

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Govt alters need for permit for AI generated content

New Delhi, March 17: The government has dropped the permit requirement for untested AI models but emphasised the need to label AI-generated content, according to a latest advisory on Artificial Intelligence technology. Instead of permission for AI models under development, the fresh advisory issued by the Ministry of Electronics and IT on Friday evening fine-tuned the compliance requirement as per IT Rules of 2021.

The advisory is issued in suppression of the issued on March 1.

It has been observed that IT firms and platforms are often negligent in undertaking due diligence obligations underlined under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, according to the new advisory.

The government has asked firms to label content generated using their AI software or platform and inform users about the possible inherent fallibility or unreliability of the output generated using their AI tools.

"Where any intermediary through its software or any other computer resource permits or facilitates synthetic creation, generation or modification of a text, audio, visual or audio-visual information, in such a manner that such information may be used potentially as misinformation or deepfake, it is advised that such information is labelled," the advisory



● **THE GOVERNMENT** has asked firms to label content generated using their AI software or platform and inform users about the possible inherent fallibility or unreliability of the output generated.

said. In case any changes are made by the user, the metadata should be configured to enable identification of such user or computer resource that has made such change, it added.

After a controversy over a response of Google's AI platform to queries related to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government on March 1 issued an advisory for social media and other platforms to label under-trial AI models and prevent hosting unlawful content.

The government warned of criminal action in case of non-compliance. The previous advisory has asked entities to seek approval from the government for deploying under-trial artificial intelligence models. —PTI

BANKS ASKED TO CHECK MIS-SELLING OF INSURANCE PRODUCTS: OFFICIAL

New Delhi, March 17: Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi has said that public sector banks have been asked to check mis-selling of insurance products and ensure protection of account holders' interest.

Banks have been sensitised on the matter, as the Department of Financial Services (DFS) regularly gets complaints that fraudulent and unethical practices are being adopted by banks and life insurance companies for procuring policies from the bank customers, he said.

"Banks have been asked to give utmost importance to the interest of account holders," he said.

There have been instances where life insurance policies were sold to customers aged above 75 years in tier-II and III cities.

The DFS has also directed all state-owned banks to review their gold loan portfolio as instances of non-compliance have come to the government's notice.

A directive was issued last month advising them to fix anomalies relating to collection of fees and interest and closure of gold loan accounts.

The letter flagged various concerns, including disbursement of gold loans without requisite gold collateral, collection of fees and repayment in cash. —PTI

FPIs repose confidence in Indian stock markets

Invest ₹40,710 crore in Indian equities so far in March

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 17

Foreign portfolio investors have been buyers of Indian equities worth ₹40,710 crore so far in March, indicating their confidence in the Indian market, after subdued buying in February and heavy selling earlier in January 2024.

The strength in the domestic economy continues to attract foreign investors to the Indian bond market too as FPIs have bought Indian debt instruments worth ₹10,383 crore so far in March.

Current financial year has seen the highest ever combined foreign inflow in equity and debt markets at ₹3,37,539 crore as on March 15, 2024 surpassing the earlier high of



● **LAST WEEK,** market regulator Sebi made several changes in Foreign portfolio investors' investment regulations that are likely to further boost inflows in the Indian market.

₹2,67,101 cr in FY 2020-21.

Last week, market regulator Sebi made several changes in FPI investment regulations that are likely to further boost inflows in the Indian market.

"We welcome Sebi's decision to consider relaxing the timelines for disclosure of material changes by FPIs. The current 7-day deadline poses practical challenges, particularly with multiple teams

involved across jurisdictions. Extending the reporting timeframe to 30/45 days offers a more reasonable window, greatly benefiting FPIs," said Vivek Singhania, co-founder, Dovetail Group, an asset servicing firm.

"FPIs were big sellers in January and modest buyers in February. But in March they have turned big buyers, and the rising trend of FPI investment

continues," said V K Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

"FPIs have been changing strategy in response to the changes in the bond yields in the US. Now, US bond yields have again spiked up. FPIs may again turn sellers in some of the days, going forward," Vijayakumar said.

US 10 year bond yield rose by 0.1 per cent to 4.3 per cent, while its 52-week range was 3.25 to 5.02 per cent.

"March saw weakness in the mid and small caps and resilience in large caps. This persuaded FPIs to reduce selling in large caps and even buying in limited quantities in sectors like banking, telecommunications and automobiles," Vijayakumar said.

Many Swiss cos. keen on investing in India: Official

New Delhi, March 17: A number of companies from Switzerland including chocolate maker Barry Callebaut Group, and technology group Bhler are interested in investing in India, Swiss State Secretary for Economic Affairs Helene Budliger has said.

Budliger said HESS Green Mobility intends to manufacture around 3,000 electric buses in India by 2025, equating to an investment of \$110 million over six to eight years.

Chocolate maker Barry Callebaut Group is set to

make its third manufacturing facility in India operational by 2024, bringing its investment in India over the past five years to more than \$50 million, she said in an email interview.

Similarly, the Swiss technology group Bhler intends to invest an additional \$23 million over three years.

"We are aware of numerous Swiss firms interested in investing in India. There are too many to list all of them," she added.

India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA on March 10 signed a trade

● **ALMOST ALL** segments of Swiss-Indian economic relations have a lot of potential, given the untapped opportunities. Sectors with high potential are transportation, railways, and automation.

Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) - under which, New Delhi received an investment commitment of \$100 billion in 15 years from the grouping, while allowing several products such as Swiss watches,

chocolates and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Almost all segments of Swiss-Indian economic relations have a lot of potential, given the untapped opportunities.

"Sectors with high potential are transportation, railways, and automation. Swiss companies will bring quality products and services to India," she added. —PTI

Cloud kitchens on investor radars

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 17

Leading start-ups that operate cloud kitchens mopped up around \$600 million in funding in the past three years and close to \$1 billion since their inception.

According to reports, the estimated size of the cloud kitchen market would touch \$3 billion by 2024, according to TheKredible.

Among the top cloud kitchen start-ups, Rebel Foods has a topline of around ₹1200 crore in FY23. It is the only unicorn in the space. The Peak XV Partners-backed company alone raised over \$535 million till date.

In December 2023, Kitchens@ raised \$65 million from London-based private equity firm Finnest and acquired Swiggy's cloud kitchen's

● **LEADING START-UPS** that operate cloud kitchens mopped up around \$600 million in funding in the past three years and close to \$1 billion since their inception.

business 'Access Kitchens'. EatClub raised around \$75 million, according to Entracker.

Rebel Foods' revenue from operations grew 39.2 per cent to ₹1,195 crore in FY23 from ₹858.6 crore in FY22. Curefoods and EatClub follow closely, with revenues exceeding ₹300 crore each. Biryani By Kilo also claims a revenue of around ₹300 crore in FY23. However, beyond these frontrunners, no other brands have crossed the ₹100 crore revenue mark as of March 2023.



MOTHER DAIRY TO INVEST ₹750 CR IN PROCESSING UNITS

New Delhi, March 17: Mother Dairy will invest ₹650 crore to set up two new plants for processing of milk as well as fruits and vegetables to expand its business amid rising consumer demand.

Mother Dairy, which is a leading milk supplier, will also invest another ₹100 crore to expand capacities of its existing plants. "We have earmarked a capex of over ₹750 crore to enhance our dairy and fruits and vegetables processing capacities across key locations," said Mother Dairy Fruits and Vegetables managing director Manish Bandlish.

It is coming up with a big dairy plant in Nagpur, Maharashtra with an investment of around ₹525 crore, he said.

The greenfield plant will have a processing capacity of 6 lakh litres of milk per day, which can be expanded up to 10 lakh litres a day. This upcoming plant will serve the markets of central and southern regions.

"We also plan to commission a new fruit processing plant in Karnataka with an investment of over ₹125 crore under our Safal brand," Bandlish said. —PTI

Flipkart valuation erodes in 2 years

New Delhi, March 17: E-commerce firm Flipkart's valuation has declined by \$5 billion or ₹41,000 crore as of January 2024 compared to that in January 2022, according to equity transactions carried out by its US-based parent firm Walmart.

The valuation of the e-commerce firm declined to \$35 billion as of January 31, 2024, from \$40 billion in the financial year ended on January 31, 2022, as per Walmart's change in equity structure in Flipkart.

Flipkart attributed the decline in valuation to the demerger of fintech firm PhonePe into a separate company. Sources, however, peg the current valuation of Flipkart in the range of \$38-40 billion.



Walmart diluted 8 per cent equity in Flipkart for \$3.2 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2022 reflecting the enterprise value of the e-commerce at \$40 billion.

The US retail giant in FY2024 increased its shareholding by 10 per cent to 85 per cent by paying \$3.5 billion, reflecting the enterprise valuation of Flipkart at \$35 billion. "During fiscal 2024, the company paid \$3.5 billion

to acquire shares from certain Flipkart noncontrolling interest holders and settle the liability to former noncontrolling interest holders of PhonePe. The company's ownership of Flipkart increased from approximately 75 per cent as of January 2023, to about 85 per cent as of January 31, 2024," Walmart said.

Flipkart countered the decrease in valuation shown as per Walmart's report and termed it an "appropriate adjustment" in valuation.

"This interpretation is incorrect. The PhonePe separation was completed in 2023, which saw an appropriate adjustment in Flipkart's valuation," a Flipkart spokesperson said. —PTI

Sakra gets ₹1,000 crore, proposes new hospital

New Delhi, March 17: Japan's Toyota Tsusho and Secom Medical System on Saturday announced plans to set up a second multi-super specialty healthcare facility under their Sakra World Hospital operations in India at an investment of Rs 1,000 crore.

The two partners, which already run a Sakra World Hospital facility in Bengaluru, plan to add another 500-bed new unit at Banaswadi in Bengaluru North. The facility is scheduled for completion by the end of 2026.

Sakra World Hospital is

also looking to set up at a third unit, which is envisaged to have 300 beds, as part of its plans to add 1,000 beds in the upcoming years.

The second facility, to be constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 1,000 crore, will have a 500-bed capacity with a built-up area spanning 6 lakh sq ft, Sakra World Hospital said in a statement.

"The new facility is the extension of our commitment towards fulfilling the healthcare needs of the local communities," explained Tatsuro Fuse, executive director, SECOM Co. —PTI

Indore to host nat'l welding conference

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

In a move to promote micro, small and medium scale enterprises (MSMEs), a national conference on 'Recent Advances in TIG Welding' will be held on March 22.

It aims to bring together leading experts, innovators, and policy-

makers in the fields of risk assessment, technology innovation, and governance to discuss the latest trends in the welding segment.

The national conference will be hosted by Indore-based Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology under the ambit of Atal Incubation Centre - p Hub.

NEW FOCUS Revenue expansion stagnating, stock underperforming Nasdaq100

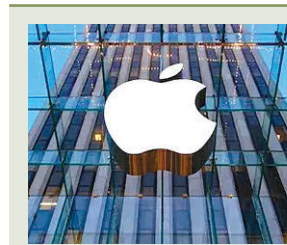
Apple investors look for new catalyst

Cupertino, March 17: For two decades, no company better embodied the promise of the stock market than Apple Inc. Its transformation from niche computer maker to the most valuable corporation made its shares a cornerstone of investment portfolios worldwide.

But in what seems like a blink of an eye, Apple's sheen is starting to fade. Artificial intelligence is the story in technology now, driving the kind of growth that the company used to count on from selling its gadgets and services to eager consumers

across the globe.

This has Apple investors in a quandary. Its revenue expansion is stagnating, and the stock is underperforming the Nasdaq 100 by about 16 percentage points, the most to start a year since 2013. The company still generates massive revenues, but whether that can keep increasing at the pace investors have come to expect is an open question. Apple executives say they have big plans for AI, which bulls hope will help revive growth. But so far it's hard to gauge its prospects.



● **APPLE'S SHEEN** is starting to fade. AI is the story in technology now, driving the kind of growth that the company used to count on from selling its gadgets, services.

All of which has investors wondering, if Apple's AI dreams don't come to fruition, what is the role of the shares today?

"It's become more of a value stock, a bit like Coca-Cola," said Phil

Blancato, chief executive officer at Ladenburg Thalmann Asset Management and chief market strategist at Osaic. "All the things you want that's going to offer you a defensive profile and market rate returns for the

foreseeable future until they have a new catalyst." Apple remains the reliable money machine it's always been.

"If you're a long-term investor that likes solid, stable growth, that's very annuity like, with growing margins, improving profitability and a business that generates significant amounts of cash and still has lots of innovation runway, we think Apple is a great place to be," said Kevin Walkush, portfolio manager at Jensen Investment Management. —Bloomberg

Coal India has signed an agreement with Rajasthan Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd (RUVNL) for a joint venture to set up 4,100 megawatt of power generation capacity in Rajasthan, Meena said.

Of this 1,125 MW will be pithead-based capacity, 200 MW pumped storage, 50 wind while the remaining will be solar, he said.

Another coal PSU NLC and RUVNL have also signed initial agreements to set up 1,125 MW power projects in Rajasthan, he said. Of this, 125 MW will be a lignite-based power plant while the other will be a 1,000 MW solar power plant. CIL is also exploring thermal projects in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Meena said. In UP, he said CIL is in talks with the government to form a joint venture. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Watson & Sammy reject Pak offer

Karachi: Pakistan's search for a foreign coach has hit hurdles with former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson and former West Indian captain Darren Sammy dropping out of the race for the next head coach of the national team. While Sammy turned down approaches by the PCB citing he is already contracted with the West Indies board as head coach of the WI white-ball teams, Watson returned home on Saturday night after rejecting the offer from the Pakistan board.

A well-informed source aware of the developments said that senior PCB officials had held detailed talks with Watson in Karachi during the PSL matches offering him the head coach position. "Watson had initially shown interest and kept certain financial and other conditions to accept the offer," the source said.

"But after the board more or less accepted Watson's financial demands the Australian was not happy that details of the proposed package were leaked out in the Pakistan media and social media." — PTI

Deepika tops trials for WC & Olympics

Sonapat: Former world number one Deepika Kumari, who missed the entire season last year after becoming mother in December 2022, topped the selection trials for the upcoming World Cups and Paris Olympics here on Sunday. The three-time Olympian, who marked her return by winning two gold medals at the Baghdad Asia Cup in February, made the cut along with Bhajan Kaur, Anika Bhakat and Komalika Bari in the four-member squad. Former youth world champion Bari came in at the expense of Simranjeet Kaur.

Making a comeback after 20 months, the 29-year-old rallied to defeat Simranjeet in a four-setter to clinch gold at the Baghdad leg of the Asia Cup. India are yet to secure a quota in the women's section for the Paris Olympics and the third stage of the World Cup in Antalya from June 18-23 will be the final qualifying event before the Games in July-August. Dhiraaj Bommadevara, who has secured the only Paris Olympic quota for India so far, topped the men's recurve section. Tarundeep Rai, Pravin Jadhav and Mrinal Chauhan are the other members of the men's recurve squad. — PTI

Gulveer shatters 16-yr-old record

New Delhi: Asian Games bronze medalist athlete Gulveer Singh shattered a 16-year-old national record in the men's 10,000m to finish second in his heat at the Ten in San Juan Capistrano in California. The 25-year-old clocked 27:41.81 on Saturday to better the earlier national mark of 28:02.89 by over 20 seconds that stood in Surendra Singh's name since 2008. However, Gulveer's effort was not enough for Olympic qualification as he missed the Paris Games qualification time of 27:00.00 by over 41 seconds. The other Indian in the heat, Kartik Kumar finished ninth in the race with a timing of 28:01.90, which was also better than Surendra's earlier national record. Avinash Sable, who was competing in the same event, did not finish (DNF) his heat, pulling out of the race in the 15th lap at the 6,000m mark. — PTI

Medvedev faces Alcaraz for title

Indian Wells, United States: Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz handed Australian Open winner Jannik Sinner his first defeat of 2024 on Saturday to set up an Indian Wells final against Daniil Medvedev. Alcaraz's 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory ended Sinner's 19-match winning streak, including a 16-0 start to the year, and ensures Alcaraz will remain No. 2 in the world rankings next week. "To be able to end something like this, it's incredible for me," Spain's Alcaraz said of busting the Italian's streak. Sunday's final against fourth-seeded Russian Medvedev is a repeat of last year's championship decider. Medvedev also had to fight back in a 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory over 17th-ranked American Tommy Paul. In the final he'll be out to thwart Alcaraz's bid to become the first repeat Indian Wells ATP champion since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014-2016. Alcaraz and Sinner's semifinal was disrupted by a three-hour rain delay. — AFP

RCB BEAUTIES!

Women win first trophy for Bangalore side

New Delhi, March 17: A spirited women's team washed away Royal Challengers Bangalore's 16 years of hurt and disappointment, landing their maiden title which came through an eight-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in front of a cheering full house at the Women's Premier League final here on Sunday.

Once the spin pair of Shreyanka Patil (4/12) and Sophie Molineux (3/20) engineered a DC collapse to 113 all out, there could have been only one winner. But the formalities had to be completed. RCB did it via their talismanic skipper Smriti Mandhana (31), Sophie Devine (32) and the impactful Elyse Perry (35 not out).

The Royal Challengers made 115 for two in 19.3 overs, a far easier victory than that tight-looking final over finish.

There will be celebrations in the dressing room, at a packed Arun Jaitley Stadium where a near full house bayed for a RCB win and in thousands of living rooms miles away in Bangalore.

A generation of RCB fans have waited for this moment, a wait that often gave fodder to social media trolls and memes. All they could show during these years were three final appearances in 2009, 2011 and 2016.

But all that changed tonight. They have a trophy in their cabinet now. But Delhi, led by Meg Lanning, will rue the missed chance of bettering their runners-up position from WPL 2023, whereas RCB improved their fourth-place finish last year in a brilliant fashion.

Chasing a modest target, RCB started cautiously with the pair of



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Shreyanka Patil (left) celebrates with captain Smriti Mandhana the wicket of Delhi Capitals batter Meg Lanning during the WPL final in New Delhi on Sunday. RCB won by eight wickets. — PTI

Mandhana and Devine sharing 49 runs in 8.1 overs.

While Mandhana played the role of an anchor, Devine opted to attack, decorating her innings with five boundaries and one maximum before she was trapped in front by pacer Shikha Pandey.

The wicket seemed to have slowed down RCB as Mandhana and Perry struggled to find their timing as boundaries dried up.

Perry finally broke the shackles in the 13th over hitting pacer Arundhati Reddy to the deep mid-wicket boundary and then two balls later Mandhana cut the bowler to back-

ward point fence. RCB were nearly at home, reaching 82 for one in the 15th over but a rash shot from Mandhana led to her downfall.

The left-hander skied a Minnu Mani delivery to Reddy at mid-on to keep the contest alive.

But Perry continued her fine run and in the company of Richa Ghosh (17 not out) calmly helped RCB reach 115 in 19.3 overs, sharing an unbeaten 33 runs for the third wicket.

Ghosh finished off the chase in style with a four off Reddy.

But the RCB spinners too can claim rightful credit for this triumph. — PTI

SCOREBOARD

Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning lbw b Patil 23, Shafali Verma c Wareham b Molineux 44, Jemimah Rodrigues b Molineux 0, Alice Capsey b Molineux 0, Marizanne Kapp c Devine b Sobhana 8, Jess Jonassen c Mandhana b Sobhana 3, Radha Yadav run out 12, Minnu Mani lbw b Patil 5, Arundhati Reddy b Patil 10, Shikha Pandey not out 5, Taniya Bhatia c Ghosh b Patil 0. Extras (w-3) 3. Total (all out in 18.3 overs) 113.

Fall of wickets: 1-64, 2-64, 3-64, 4-74, 5-80, 6-81, 7-87, 8-101, 9-113.

Bowling: Renuka Singh 2-0-28-0, Sophie Molineux 4-0-20-3, Elyse Perry 2-0-14-0, Sophie Devine 1-0-9-0, Georgia Wareham 3-0-16-0, Shreyanka Patil 3.3-0-12-4, Asha Sobhana 3-0-14-2.

Royal Challengers Bangalore: Smriti Mandhana c Reddy b Mani 31, Sophie Devine lbw b Pandey 32, Elyse Perry not out 35, Richa Ghosh not out 17. Extras 0. Total (for 2 wickets in 19.3 overs) 115.

Fall of wickets: 1-49, 2-82.

Bowling: Marizanne Kapp 4-0-20-0, Alice Capsey 3-0-13-0, Shikha Pandey 4-0-11-1, Radha Yadav 1-0-18-0, Arundhati Reddy 3.3-0-26-0, Jess Jonassen 2-0-15-0, Minnu Mani 2-0-12-1.



Kolkata Knight Riders captain Shreyas Iyer during a training session ahead of the Indian Premier League, at Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Sunday. —

KKR CAPTAIN IYER ATTENDS TRAINING CAMP

Kolkata, March 17: Kolkata Knight Riders captain Shreyas Iyer has joined the team's training camp ahead of the upcoming IPL season. There had been doubts over Iyer's participation in the initial part of the league due to his back-related issues.

KKR posted pictures of the skipper arriving in the city on Saturday.

The 29-year-old had missed the last season as he underwent a back surgery in April. He returned to action in September but his back continues to cause him discomfort. He played the opening two Tests against England before complaining of back stiffness following which he was removed for the Indian squad for the last three games. — PTI

Kohli back in India for IPL, to join RCB camp

New Delhi, March 17: Batting maestro Virat Kohli on Sunday returned to India, following the birth of his son Akaay, and is set to join his franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore's training camp ahead of the upcoming IPL.

Kohli had opted out of the India-England Test series citing "personal reasons". Later on, it was announced that the break was taken so that the batting star could be present for the birth of his son in the UK.

"@imVkohli HAS ARRIVED ...and that moment is here! The Red King is back in India, ready to start his #IPLonStar campaign on March 22 v CSK." IPL broadcaster Star Sports

tweeted. "Get ready to cheer for the King and groove to some Kingly beats as Star Sports' new anthem — Kohli Calling has dropped on all platforms. And tune in only to Star Sports (as always!) for 'all things Kohli' this IPL."

The batter landed in Mumbai on Sunday, and he is expected to join the training camp of Royal Challengers Bangalore soon.

HEAD BOOST FOR SUNRISERS

Dashing Australia opener Travis Head has joined the Sunrisers Hyderabad training camp ahead of the upcoming IPL season. The 30-year-old, who played a vital role in Australia winning the 50-

HARDIK SHARES HIS "PAINFUL" RECOVERY POST '23 WORLD CUP

Mumbai, March 17: In his desperation to regain fitness for the remaining World Cup matches last year, India all-rounder Hardik Pandya said he resorted to extreme measures like taking multiple injections and removing blood clots from his ankle but pushing the boundaries only aggravated the injury, forcing him to sit out of the showpiece.

Pandya injured his ankle during India's fourth World Cup game against Bangladesh while bowling his first over of that match, and had to limp off the field with the help of the team physio.

"I got injections done on my ankles at three different places and I had to remove blood from my ankle because of the swelling. I didn't want to give up (on playing the remainder of the World Cup); for the team I will give my best. If there is one percent chance that I can be with the team I will try my best," Pandya told Star Sports.

However, Pandya said he was aware that pushing himself hard could bring adverse results, but that's the risk he took to be with the team during a home World Cup. "I was aware that (if) I keep pushing myself I might get injured for (a) long time. For me, that was never the answer."

"While I was pushing myself, I had this recurrence (of injury) and it became a three-month injury. I was not able to walk but I was trying to run (at that point of time)," Pandya recalled.

At that time, the 30-year-old was confident of coming back in five days, but the recuperation took much longer than he expected. — PTI

FA CUP | QUARTERFINALS

Chelsea survive Leicester scare

Manchester (United Kingdom), March 17: Carney Chukwuemeka rescued Chelsea with a stoppage-time strike that inspired a 4-2 win over 10-man Leicester in an FA Cup quarterfinal thriller on Sunday.

Mauricio Pochettino's side were fortunate to survive a stirring fight-back from Championship promotion chasers Leicester amid a mutinous atmosphere.

Chukwuemeka netted in the closing minutes to save Chelsea from the embarrassment of being forced into extra-time.

Noni Madueke added Chelsea's fourth to ensure the angry fans who booed Pochettino in the second half were silenced, at least for now.

For the sixth time in the last eight years, the Blues have advanced to the last four in the FA Cup.

But this was hardly a triumphant afternoon for Blues boss Pochettino, whose inconsistent team blew the two-goal half-time lead given to them by Marc Cucurella and Cole Palmer.

In between those strikes, Raheem Sterling missed a penalty and Axel

Disasi gave Leicester hope with a farcical own goal early in the second half.

When Stephy Mavididi scored an eye-catching equaliser, Chelsea were in turmoil once again as the hapless Sterling earned the wrath of the home support.

Chelsea have failed to win a single domestic trophy since their most recent FA Cup triumph six years ago.

SILVA FIRES MAN CITY INTO SEMIS

Bernardo Silva scored twice as Manchester City beat Newcastle 2-0 to reach the semifinals on Saturday, while Coventry struck twice in stoppage time to stun Wolves 3-2.

Holders City remain on course to repeat their treble triumph of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup last season as Pep Guardiola's men stretched their unbeaten run in all competitions to 22 games.

Fortune favoured the English champions, though, as twice Silva's shots took deflections to Newcastle goalkeeper Martin Dubravka. — AFP

ENGLISH | PREMIER LEAGUE

Spurs' top four bid rocked by Fulham

London, March 17: Tottenham wasted a chance to move into the Premier League's top four as they slumped to a shock 3-0 defeat at Fulham, while Luton salvaged a crucial 1-1 draw with relegation rivals Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

Ange Postecoglou's side would have climbed above Aston Villa into fourth place with a win, but instead they handed the initiative back to their top-four rivals.

Fifth-placed Tottenham were punished for a sloppy performance as the in-form Rodrigo Muniz netted twice either side of Sasa Lukic's first goal for Fulham.

A 4-0 win at Villa last weekend was expected to act as Tottenham's

springboard to finish above Unai Emery's team in the battle to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Instead, the north Londoners crashed to a first league defeat at Craven Cottage since 2008 and failed to score for the first time in 40 games.

They sit two points behind Villa, who can extend that lead to five if they win at West Ham on Sunday. "We were careless on the ball. It goes down as a bad day at the office but we don't accept it. It wasn't our normal levels. We didn't have the same intensity," Postecoglou said.

"We're two points behind Villa. There's so much football left. It's about how we play." — AFP



Fulham's Rodrigo Muniz scores against Tottenham Hotspur during their Premier League match in London on Saturday. Fulham won 3-0. — AP

KANE BREAKS 60-YEAR RECORD IN BAYERN WIN

Berlin (Germany), March 17: Harry Kane broke a 60-year record for most goals in a debut season while Jamal Musiala scored twice as Bayern Munich won 5-2 at Darmstadt on Saturday. With 31 goals in 26 league games since arriving from Spurs in the summer, Kane overtook German legend Uwe Seeler, who scored 30 goals for Hamburg in 1963-64.

Musiala also had an assist in the win, which keeps Bayern's slim hopes of defending the Bundesliga title alive, moving them seven points behind Bayer Leverkusen, who play at Freiburg on Sunday.

"We are staying in it. We worked hard to get ourselves some opportunities and we took them," said Bayern captain Manuel Neuer, praising "difference makers like Jamal on the pitch."

The goalkeeper was however disappointed his side had conceded two goals against last-placed Darmstadt, saying: "We all need to work on it." — AFP