

OPINION 6
SIKHS HOLD TIRANGA
IN HIGH ESTEEM

WORLD 8
CHINA, RUSSIA TO COUNTER US'
INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

MONEY 10
DOT ₹33,111 CR FOR
BSNL AGR DUES

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY MARCH 23, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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AYER TO MISS
ENTIRE IPL 2023
AND WTC FINAL
11 SPORT

Plan for modern Delhi announced

- Govt gives infra-focussed ₹78,800-cr Budget
- Power subsidy, free bus rides to continue

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Finance Minister Kailash Gahlot on Wednesday presented a Rs 78,800-crore Budget, giving a major push to transport and infrastructure with an allocation of Rs 21,817 crore ahead of the G20 Summit, and announced a comprehensive plan to make the Capital a "clean, beautiful and modern city".

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the Budget has something for everyone and free schemes like bus ride for women, power subsidy and pilgrimage for senior citizens will continue in the next financial year as well. However, the education and health sectors, two highest priority areas of the AAP dispensation, have not seen a major hike.

The Government has proposed Rs 9,742 crore for the health sector, a marginal decline, while in the last Budget, it was Rs 9,769 crore.

The Education Department has been given Rs 16,575 crore. In the 2022-23 Budget, it had the highest allocation of Rs 16,278 crore. An outlay of Rs 9,337 crore in the



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi Finance Minister Kailash Gahlot arrive for the presentation of Delhi Budget for the financial year 2023-24, at Delhi Legislative Assembly, on Wednesday
Ranjana Dimri | Pioneer

transport sector has been proposed for the next financial year.

However, the Opposition BJP dismissed the Budget as "directionless" and alleged that it is a bundle of lies and has only paper announcements.

In his 150-minute speech in the Delhi Assembly, Gahlot said a comprehensive infrastructure rejuvenation project was being launched in a very significant year when Delhi will be hosting India's first G20 summit.

The comprehensive plan includes beautification of 1,400-km roads maintained by PWD, construction of 26 flyovers and three double-decker flyovers, induction of 1,600 electric buses and electrification of all bus depots.

Also, the Government has proposed to construct three world-class inter-State bus terminals, two multi-level bus depots, two modern bus terminals and nine new bus depots.

Continued on Page 10

Flares, bottles hurled at Indian Mission

High Commission in London responds to stir by pro-Khalistan protesters by putting up bigger Tricolour

PTI/PNS ■ LONDON/NEW DELHI

Around 2,000 protesters waving Khalistan flags descended upon the Indian High Commission here on Wednesday for a planned demonstration and hurled objects and chanted slogans amid a heightened security presence and barricades.

The Indian High Commission countered by unfurling an additional humongous Tricolour on the roof of its building, which seemed to rile the protesters further who then hurled coloured flares and water bottles towards the mission building and at police officers and media covering the protest.

Scotland Yard reacted by further blockading the area outside India House and several additional uniformed and mounted officers on horseback were deployed immediately to the area.

Unlike the violent disorder on Sunday when India House came under attack, the protesters were barricaded across the road with uniformed officers standing guard and patrolling the area throughout.

The protesters, including turbaned men, and some women and children, had been bused in from different parts of the UK and chanted pro-Khalistan slogans. The organisers used mikes to make anti-India speeches and attack the



Protesters gathered outside a heavily guarded Indian High Commission in London. PTI

Punjab Police for alleged human rights violations. The speeches switched between English and Punjabi to make allegations of Indian media bias for calling them fringe elements and backed by Pakistan's spy agency ISI. Banners for the so-called "National Protest", organised by groups such as the Federation of Sikh Organisations (FSO) and Sikh Youth Jathebandia, have been circulating on social media since before a protest on Sunday, which ended in violent disorder at India House.

Earlier, India had registered a strong protest over the lack of security measures at its diplomatic mission, which ended in Khalistan flag-waving protesters smashing windows of the Indian High Commission and attempting to pull down the Tricolour. In an apparent tit-for-tat act, India on Wednesday morning removed the barricade security cover of the UK High Commission and its envoy in New Delhi.

Hours after the Indian action more policemen and barricades were installed outside the Indian High Commission in London on Wednesday ahead of the planned protest, in an apparent effort to avoid a repeat of the vandalism seen three days ago.

Continued on Page 10

'Take early action on Judges' appointment'

Collegium worried over Centre holding back recommended names as it hurts their seniority

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Collegium has voiced concern over the Centre withholding or overlooking the names recommended for appointment as judges, saying this disturbs the seniority of the candidates, and asked the Government to take "necessary action" for elevation of those recommended earlier. The Collegium, headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, said a notification for the elevation of persons recommended earlier in point of time should be issued at the earliest.

The Collegium was expressing displeasure on the non-appointment of John Sathyan and Ramaswamy Neelakandan in Madras High Court and also reiterated Harpreet Singh Brar's appointment as Judge in Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The Collegium voiced its concern in a resolution dated March 21 in which it recommended the names of four district judges for appointment as judges of the Madras High Court. The Collegium, which comprises Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and KM Joseph, recommended the names of R Sakthivel, P Dhanabal, Chinnasamy Kumarappan, and K Rajasekar.

"By its resolution dated 17 January 2023, the Collegium of the Supreme Court recommended the appointment



of Ramaswamy Neelakandan, advocate practising before the Madras High Court, as a judge of the High Court. As on March 31, 2023, Ramaswamy Neelakandan was 48.07 years of age while K Rajasekar on that date was 47.09 years of age. Neelakandan, who is a member of the Bar, has been recommended earlier in point of time and must be appointed before Rajasekar is appointed. Otherwise, Rajasekar, who is a judicial officer and younger than Neelakandan, would rank senior to Neelakandan.

Such a deviation in seniority would be unfair and against the settled convention," the resolution said. The Collegium said that while recommending the name of Rajasekar for elevation, it is of the view that his appointment should be notified after the appointment of Neelakandan is notified.

"The Collegium is of the considered view that necessary action for the issuance of a notification for the elevation of persons who have been recommended earlier in point of time should be taken at the earliest including the name of R John Sathyan which has been reiterated by this Collegium on 17 January 2023.

Continued on Page 10

CAPSULE

RAILWAYS RESTORE AC 3-TIER ECONOMY FARE

New Delhi: Railways on Wednesday issued an order to restore the fare for AC 3-tier economy class travel which had been withdrawn in November last year when it was merged with AC 3-tier. Despite the restoration in price, Railways will continue offering linen to passengers, the order indicated.

MUKESH AMBANI IS RICHEST INDIAN AGAIN

Mumbai: Gautam Adani's fortunes have suffered a severe setback on concerns over corporate governance and accounting fraud, leading to Reliance Industries' Mukesh Ambani replacing the Ahmedabad-based industrialist as the richest Indian. Adani lost Rs 3,000 crore of wealth every week over the last year and his overall networth is down 60 per cent from its peak, as per the M3M Hurun Global Rich List, which pegged Adani's overall fortune at \$53 billion as of mid-March.

ISRO: CHANDRAYAAN 3, ADITYA L1 SOON

Ahmedabad: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman S Somanath on Wednesday said the launch of Chandrayaan-3, India's third lunar mission, and the first solar mission Aditya L1 will possibly happen by the middle of 2023. ISRO is also discussing a possible mission to the Moon in alliance with the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency.

PM reviews Covid, influenza situation

Modi stresses on genome sequencing, observing strict Covid protocols



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a spike in influenza and Covid-19 cases in some pockets in the country in the past two weeks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday chaired a high-level meeting and directed officials to enhance genome sequencing while also emphasising on Covid-appropriate behaviour.

India has recorded 1,134 new coronavirus cases, while the active cases increased to 7,026, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday. The death toll climbed to 5,30,813 with five deaths. One death each has been reported in Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat and Maharashtra while one fatality was reconciled by Kerala, the data updated at 8 AM stated. The number of districts with 10 per cent or more Covid-positivity has gone up to 14 during March 12-18 against nine in the March 8-14 week. Modi

chaired the meeting to assess the Covid-19 and influenza situation in the country in terms of preparedness of health infrastructure and logistics, status of the vaccination campaign, emergence of new Covid-19 variants and influenza types and their public health implications for the country, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

During the meeting, a comprehensive presentation was made covering the global Covid situation, including the rising cases, by Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan. The Prime Minister was briefed that a slight rise in new cases is being witnessed in some pockets in the country with average daily cases reported as 888 and weekly positivity reported as 0.98 per cent in the week ending March 22. However, 1.08 lakh daily average cases have been reported globally during the same week.

Continued on Page 10

SC to set up Bench to hear plea against remission to Bilkis' rapists



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to constitute a special Bench to hear a plea against the remission of sentence of 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano gang-rape case. A Bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala assured Bano, represented through her lawyer Shobha Gupta, that the new Bench will be formed.

Gupta mentioned the matter for urgent hearing and said that a new Bench needs to be constituted. "I will have a Bench constituted. Will look at it this evening," the CJI said. Earlier, on January 24, the hearing on Bano's plea challenging the remission of sentence of 11 convicts in the gang-rape case by the Gujarat Government could not be held in the top court as the Judges concerned were hearing a matter related to passive euthanasia as part of a five-Judge Constitution Bench.

All 11 convicts were granted remission and released on August 15, last year.

QR code on tomb keeps son's memories alive

Family of Kerala doc designed a Web page with his videos linked to the QR code

PTI ■ THRISSUR (KERALA)

A QR code placed on a tombstone at a church in Kerala's Thrissur helps one to relive and reminisce on the creative work rendered by a doctor, who died young at just 26. The parents of Dr Ivin Francis decided to place the QR code on the tomb of the youngster at St Joseph Church, Kuriyachira in the central Kerala district to give people a glimpse

into his world as they can watch videos of his performances by scanning the code. His family from Kuriyachira has designed a web page containing all the works of Ivin and linked it with the QR code.

Son of Francis, an officer with a private company in Oman, and Leena, principal of the Indian School in Oman, Ivin was well-versed in music and sports, and found time for it along with his medical course. He was popular among the community with his performances.

Ivin's unfortunate death came in 2021 when he collapsed and died while playing badminton. "We wanted his life to be a motivation for everyone and that is how we thought of placing a QR code on his tomb,"



Francis said. Ivin had created profiles of people using QR codes and his parents also decided to do the same for him. "He also used to send me a lot of QR codes for information," the father said. He said the idea of placing a QR code was of Ivin's sister Evelyn Francis.

"My daughter told me that just writing something about Ivin on the tomb will not be suf-

ficient to portray what all he did. We thought he may not be satisfied with just that. So, she said we can have a QR code linked to his profile and place it on the tomb. So, people who scan the code will know what was he and what all he could do. She created the site and QR code in 10 days," Francis said.

The dotting father said his daughter had asked him not to inscribe anything on the tomb when he ordered it. "She created the site and QR code and asked me whether that could be printed on the marble tomb. So I asked the maker, and he said it can be printed," Francis said.

He said, "Now, people who visit the grave can just scan the QR code and can know what sort of a person Ivin was."

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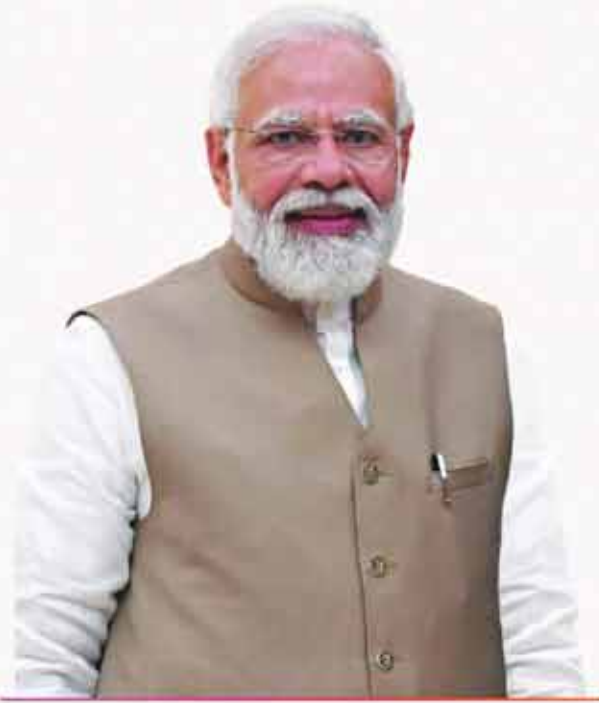
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शहीदों की चिताओं पर लगेंगे हर बरस मेले
वतन पर मिटने वालों का यही बाक़ी निशाँ होगा



नरेन्द्र मोदी
प्रधानमंत्री

युवा नीति
लाँच



शिवराज सिंह चौहान
मुख्यमंत्री, मध्यप्रदेश

शिवराज सिंह चौहान

मुख्यमंत्री, मध्यप्रदेश

द्वारा

23 मार्च, 2023

दोपहर 12 बजे

मोतीलाल नेहरू स्टेडियम, भोपाल



नरेन्द्र मोदी
प्रधानमंत्री

3 साल बढ़े हैं
सबसे आगे खड़े हैं
देख रहा है सारा देश-सबसे आगे मध्यप्रदेश



शिवराज सिंह चौहान
मुख्यमंत्री, मध्यप्रदेश

उपलब्धियां तीन वर्ष की



लाइली बहना योजना

23 से 60 वर्ष की महिलाओं को प्रतिमाह ₹ 1,000 की आर्थिक सुरक्षा



बढ़ती विकास दर

16.43% की औसतन आर्थिक विकास दर के साथ समृद्ध राज्यों में शामिल



मुख्यमंत्री कौशल अप्रेंटिसशिप योजना

1 लाख युवाओं को प्रशिक्षण के साथ ₹ 1 लाख तक का स्टैडपेंड



सशक्त अन्नदाता

मध्यप्रदेश गेहूँ निर्यात में नंबर 1, कृषि विकास दर 2022 में 18.89%



लाइली लक्ष्मी योजना 2.0

44.50 लाख से अधिक लाइली बेटियाँ हुईं लाभान्वित



सुराज कॉलोनियां

भू-माफियाओं से मुक्त कराई गई 23 हजार एकड़ भूमि पर बनेंगे गरीबों के लिए आवास



मुख्यमंत्री इंटरनीशिप योजना

4,600 से अधिक युवाओं को दी गईं पेड इंटरनीशिप



सीएम राइज़ स्कूल

₹ 6,300 करोड़ से बन रहे 9,000 आधुनिक सुविधाओं से परिपूर्ण विद्यालय



उद्योग-व्यापार की उन्नति

ग्लोबल इन्वेस्टर्स समिट से ₹ 15,42,514 करोड़ के निवेश प्रस्ताव, औसत प्रति व्यक्ति आय 2003 में ₹ 11,718 से बढ़कर अब ₹ 1,40,583 हुई



सांस्कृतिक गौरव की पुनर्स्थापना

उज्जैन में श्री महाकाल महालोक का लोकार्पण, ₹ 2200 करोड़ की लागत से ओंकारेश्वर में 'एकात्म धाम' की स्थापना, ओरछा में राम राजा लोक, चित्रकूट में दिव्य वनवासी रामलोक और सलकनपुर में श्री-देवी महालोक मंदिर प्रस्तावित

Modi to kick off ₹1K cr projects in Varanasi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Varanasi on March 24 and inaugurate and lay a number of projects in his home constituency and address the 'One World TB Summit at Rudrakash Convention Centre. Prime Minister will dedicate and lay the foundation stone of various projects worth more than Rs. 1780 crores at Sampurnanand Sanskrit University ground, according to the Prime Minister's office. On the occasion of World Tuberculosis Day, the Prime Minister will address the One World TB Summit. The summit is being organised by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and Stop TB Partnership. Founded in 2001, the Stop TB Partnership is a United Nations hosted organ-



isation that amplifies the voices of the people, communities, and countries affected by TB. He will launch various initiatives including the TB-Mukt Panchayat initiative; official pan-India rollout of a shorter TB Preventive Treatment, Family-centric care model for TB and release of India's Annual TB Report 2023. Prime Minister will also award select States and UTs and Districts for their progress towards ending Tuberculosis.

BJP seeks CBI probe into Kerala 'waste mgmt scam'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the backdrop of a major fire in the waste dump in Kochi in Kerala on March 2, the BJP on Wednesday claimed a major 'waste management scam by the son-in-laws of the UDF-LDF Government' in the state and demanded an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the alleged corruption. The BJP accused the Kerala Government of "not following rules" spelt-out by the 'Swachata abhiyan' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Addressing a press conference here, the BJP-in-charge of Kerala and former environment minister Prakash Javadekar said While the solid management rules were notified by the Centre in 2016, the Kerala Government never followed them, leading to a complete "mismanagement" of waste all over the state, he said. He said the firm chosen for the waste management in Kochi received a Rs 54 crore-contract and it in turn subcontracted the

task to other firms for over Rs 22 crore. "Rs 32 crore went straight into its pocket," the BJP leader claimed. "Goa and Indore have been among the best examples of managing waste and turning it into wealth. But the Kerala government never tried to do anything in this regard," he said. Javadekar said since Kerala government is not allow permission for the CBI probe, the High court may order such a probe into the alleged scam. The BJP leader said that corruption involving kin of the Left and Congress functionaries in Kerala led to the absence of a waste-management plan and a consequent fire at a landfill in Kochi which among damages caused innumerable health problems to the Cochin inhabitants, he said. The former union minister alleged involvement of son-in-law of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan besides sons-in-law of a former Left Democratic Front (LDF) and a Congress leader in the "monumental" corruption

Shah opens Kupwara's Sharda temple virtually

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU



The precincts of a newly constructed Maa Sharda Devi Temple, located close to the line of control in Tithwal village of North Kashmir district of Kupwara, came alive on Wednesday as large number of devotees assembled here for the first time to worship the idol, made from panch dhatu (five metals). The 3.5 feet-tall idol of Goddess Sri Sharadamba, was donated by the Sringeri Sharada mutt for installation at the newly-constructed Sharda Temple. The temple, constructed on a piece of land provided by the local villagers in the area, was formally inaugurated by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah through video conferencing. Several dignitaries including Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Manoj Sinha, were present on the occasion and became witness to the historic occasion. Several

with the blessing of Maa Sharda this place will remain the centre of worship and continue to awaken the consciousness of India for ages. "Sharda Peeth has been a historical centre of India's cultural, religious and educational heritage, like Kartarpur Corridor, Government under the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will move forward to open Sharda Peeth for devotees." The Union Home Minister said that the architecture and construction of this temple has been done according to mythological scriptures under the aegis of Sharda Peeth. Shah said the idol of Sharda Maa, donated by Sringeri Math, and its installation here, the time period from 24 January till today was like a journey. The reconstruction of Maa Sharda's temple in Kupwara is a necessary and important step in direction of discovery of Sharda-civilization and promotion of Sharda-script.

JKCCS' activist held by NIA in terror funding case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday arrested the Programme Coordinator of Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Societies (JKCCS) in connection with the NGO Terror Funding Case. Following the first arrest made in this case, the NIA arrested Khurram Parvez, the Programme Coordinator of JKCCS and Chairperson of Philippines-based NGO Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), the NIA said in a statement. "Investigations revealed that Khurram Parvez has been collecting funds under the garb of fighting for Human Rights, from various international entities/ persons based abroad and channelizing those funds for funding terror activities in the Kashmir valley," the agency said. He, along with his associates, were also propagating a secessionist agenda through his various NGOs. Khurram Parvez has already been chargesheeted in another NIA case. He was formally arrested upon production in this case on Wednesday, it said. The case relates to the terror funding of



proscribed terrorist organisations, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, by certain NGOs, Trusts and societies based in the Valley. Investigations have revealed that Khurram Parvez and his associates raised funds to support individuals who were involved in pelting stones at security forces personnel and also motivated others to extend similar support, it said. These trusts and societies, which have been under investigation, have utilised the funds raised by them to publish anti-national and incriminating materials to cause hatred and disaffection towards Government of India, it added.

NIA court sentences Bodo militant to life imprisonment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has secured conviction for life and rigorous imprisonment against a Bodo militant in the 2014 Assam indiscriminate firing case. The NIA Special Court, Guwahati, on Tuesday sentenced Bodo militant Rabi Basumatary alias Rongjabaja alias Rabi to life imprisonment, along with rigorous imprisonment for 10 years, in various cases of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in a 2014 case of indiscriminate firing on villagers in Assam, the NIA said in a statement here on Wednesday. Rabi, who was convicted by the court on March 13, 2023, has been sentenced to life imprisonment in two cases and rigorous imprisonment in two others. He has been convicted under IPC sections relating to murder, attempt to murder and common intention besides relevant provisions of the UAPA. He has also been fined in all the cases, and will have to undergo additional simple imprisonment in case of failure to pay the same. All the substantive sentences will run concurrently, the agency said.



Seven villagers were killed and two grievously injured in the case, in which Rabi was arrested in September 2016 and chargesheeted by NIA in March 2017 through the first supplementary chargesheet. Investigation in the case had revealed that Rabi Basumatary alias B Rongjabaja was a member of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), an armed separatist outfit fighting to obtain a sovereign Boroland for the Bodo people. On May 1, 2014, Rabi, along with six other NDFB cadres, had entered Balapra village under Gossaigaon police station area of Kokrajhar district of Assam, where they opened indiscriminate fire on the villagers on instructions from top NDFB leadership headed by G Bidai and Songbijit. The Special NIA Court had subsequently registered the case as Special Case 05/2015.

Tributes to the Heroes of our Nation Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev on their Martyrdom Day

March 23, 2023

"The martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev was a watershed moment in our history. Every Indian is proud that these three great men belong to our land. At the peak of their youth they sacrificed their lives so that others can live a life of freedom and dignity."
-Narendra Modi

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Already engaged

A prominent US conservative academic says BJP is the most important foreign political party in the world

The Bharatiya Janata Party and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh rarely figure in public discourse of Western countries. And when it does, it is generally for criticism. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nine years in office, and his Government's persistent emphasis on its Hindu core, seem to have changed that. Evidently, those who matter in government and decision- and opinion-making are shedding their blinkers to have a closer look at the Sangh Parivar. The blinkers, needless to say, were often manufactured at the facilities (academia, the mainstream media, et al) run by the Left-liberal establishment. But it looks like the important people in the West want to have a 360-degree view of the saffron family, especially the BJP. This is the reason that a prominent conservative academic, in an opinion piece in the prominent conservative newspaper *Wall Street Journal*, chose to state that the BJP "is, from the standpoint of American national interests, the most important foreign political party in the world. It may also be the least understood." The author Walter Russell Mead is "convinced that Americans and Westerners generally need to engage much more deeply with a complex and powerful movement [Hindutva]." It may be mentioned here that Mead is a well-known critic of China. Three years ago, he wrote an article with the self-explanatory headline, 'China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia,' in *WSJ*. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese Government was incensed; it even expelled three *WSJ* journalists.

Mead, who teaches at New York's Bard College, is quite bullish not just about India but also the BJP,

which "is headed for a repeat victory in 2024." India is emerging both as a leading economic power and, along with Japan, as the linchpin of American strategy in the Indo-Pacific, he wrote. Therefore, for the foreseeable future the BJP will be calling the shots in a country without whose help American efforts to balance rising Chinese power are likely to fall short. Mead is not exactly a cheerleader of the BJP. He talked about the anti-Government journalists who "can face harassment and worse." He also talks about "anti-conversion laws as well as occasional outbursts of mob violence." Yet, he doesn't find the BJP beyond the pale, for the party may reject many ideas and priorities of Western liberalism, "it embraces key features of modernity" (emphasis added). Further, he is appreciative of the saffron party which "combines a basically pro-market economic stance with populist rhetoric and traditionalist values." This is also a trait that American conservatives generally admire. The *WSJ* article should not be seen as just an academic's exuberance; the West's deeper engagement with Modi's India was written all over Air India's 70-billion deal to buy 470 aircraft. This could not have been possible without the consent of the big boys and girls of global finance — and of politics. Indo-Western engagement has already begun.

PICTALK



Women traditional attire celebrate Gudi Padwa festival, the beginning of Maharashtra New Year, in Nagpur

Legal remedies for crimes against women

Underreporting of crimes against women makes it difficult to assess the correct prevalence of such crimes and provide relief

Domestic violence and crimes against women have been a persistent problem in many countries, including India. Despite various initiatives and measures taken by governments and civil society organizations, these issues continue to affect women in our society. The victims of such crimes often find themselves in a vulnerable position, not aware of their legal rights and remedies.



that women are responsible for their own safety.

One of the most effective legal remedies for victims of domestic violence is obtaining a restraining order or protection order. A restraining order is a court order that prohibits the abuser from contacting or coming near the victim or their children. The order can be obtained by filing a petition in court and providing evidence of abuse. Once the order is issued, the abuser can be arrested and charged with a criminal offence if they violate the order.

Another significant legal remedy for victims of domestic violence is obtaining a divorce or separation. In many cases, the victim may need to obtain a restraining order before filing for divorce or separation to protect themselves and their children from further harm.

Domestic violence and crimes against women have been a persistent problem in many countries, including India. Despite various initiatives and measures taken by governments and civil society organizations, these issues continue to affect women in our society. The victims of such crimes often find themselves in a vulnerable position, not aware of their legal rights and remedies.

One big reason for the persistence of these issues is the under-reporting of crimes against women. Many women are hesitant to report such crimes due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, and lack of trust in the justice system. This under-reporting not only makes it difficult for victims to seek legal remedies but also makes it challenging for authorities to tackle these issues effectively. Crimes against women such as rape, sexual harassment, and trafficking constitute serious offences that can have long-lasting consequences for the victim. Victims of these crimes can seek legal remedies to hold the perpetrator accountable and obtain compensation for the harm they have suffered. It is not that we do not have laws though their implementation leaves much to be desired. The

number of crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for instance, Rape (sec.376 IPC), Kidnapping & abduction (sec.363 - 373 IPC), Dowry Deaths (sec.302/304-B of IPC), torture, both mental and physical (sec.498-A of IPC), Molestation (sec.354 of IPC), Sexual harassment (sec.509 of IPC) (referred to in the past as Eve-teasing), Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 and last but not the least, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Unfortunately, the actual number of such crime is never known as women shy away from reporting it.

Victims can also seek legal remedies through civil lawsuits, which can provide compensation for the harm they have suffered, including medical expenses, lost income, and emotional distress. It is imperative for women to be aware of their constitutional rights and seek help from law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations. (The writer is an advocate in the Delhi High court)



HITESH BAISLA

Reckless politics by earlier governments created conditions that bred an insurgency movement but Sikhs have always saluted the Tiranga

Sikhs hold Tiranga in high esteem



BHOPINDER SINGH

Healthy politics is all about disagreements (irrespective of the fact that every ruling dispensation would suggest otherwise), and so it should always be. Dissent and disagreement with a government and its perceived policies is not the same as rebelling against the nation. History is instructive that often dissent against the government can be the highest form of patriotism e.g., dissent against Emergency in 1975. However, something is sacrosanct and beyond the realm of either political usurpation or conversely destruction. These are the foundational 'Ideas of India' as enshrined in the holy book of the land i.e., the Constitution and the defined symbols within, the most sacred of them being the national flag, Tiranga or Tricolour.

Recent images of a Khalistani supporter attempting to pull down the Tiranga at the Indian High Commission in London, were simply deplorable beyond words. The shameful act militated against the inert sense of patriotism that ought to beset all Indians, irrespective of their partisan loyalties, personal identities, and disaffections. That it came from a member of a community that has given more blood and lives to protect the integrity, sovereignty, and dignity of India since time immemorial, made it even more hurtful and unbelievable.

Contrast this recent image with that of the valourous Sikh warriors (8 Sikh Regiment - the irrepressible 'Chardhikala' battalion) who battled their way to the top of Tiger Hill in the Kargil War. These fierce Khalsa warriors with unmatched josh and daredevilry reached atop the Tiger Hill and flew the Tiranga - the price to pay for flying that Tiranga was one officer, four junior commissioned officers and 30 jawans of 8 Sikh who went down fighting and charging with a war cry that sent shivers down the spine of the enemies, 'Bole So Nihal Sat Sri Akal!'

To defend their commitment to the flag, their forefathers had refused to surrender and came down fighting to the last man in earlier battles like Saragarhi. There is no surprise the latter day Sikh Regiment (along with Sikh Light Infantry) has continued to



be one of the most decorated regiments of the Indian Army due to its fiery traditions. 1st Battalion of the Sikh Regiment, later the 4th Mechanised Regiment, is considered the Commonwealth's most decorated battalion with 245 pre-independence and 82 post-independence gallantry awards. Martial Sikhs need no certificate of patriotism. Those who seek to besmirch its fine history written in blood and sacrifice, don't behoove or represent the community's unflinching standards and ethos for eons!

Sikhs may be about 1.7% of the national population but they are almost 20% of the recipients of the highest gallantry award i.e., Param Vir Chakra (with the National Emblem of India in the centre, surrounded by four copies of the Vajra). These men willingly put themselves in the line of fire to defend the Tiranga. They are Lance Naik Karam Singh, Subedar Joginder Singh, Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon and Hony Capt Major Bana Singh.

Beyond soldering, farming is the mainstay of the Sikh community and they have had many socio-economic concerns with various dispensations since independence (like any region or ethnicity). Reckless politics by earlier



RECENT IMAGES OF A KHALISTANI SUPPORTER ATTEMPTING TO PULL DOWN THE TIRANGA AT THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION IN LONDON WERE SIMPLY DEPLORABLE BEYOND WORDS

governments created conditions that bred an insurgency movement, but that didn't imply that every Sikh who had a genuine grievance against the government wanted to secede or become a Khalistani (as is instinctively and thoughtlessly attributed today). At the height of militancy in 1987, then Naib Subedar Bana Singh of 8th JAKLI had led an impossible assault and wrested control of an almost impregnable peak in Siachen Glacier. Such is the cloth from which the Sikh community is cut - societal and political differences aside, a nation first and foremost, always!

Like many proud Veterans who had guarded the nation with their lives and were later participating in the Farmers Protest a few years back, little did they know that they would be abused as Khalistanis, 'anti-nationals' by people who would never come remotely close to making the sacrifices that these men and women had made, and even by some among them, who were misguided and truly condemnable. Larger citizenry did not differentiate (unlike in the 80's) and the dispensation encouraged the wrongful narrative that a Khalistani flag had replaced the Tiranga at Red Fort - it hadn't

replaced the Tiranga and the flag hoisted on the said pole was the sacred Nishan Sahib and not the Khalistani flag. But politics of disparagement ensued and wrongfully diminished a patriotic community, as truth may not have been able to generate the much-needed polarisation!

As a result, the PVC awardee Hony Capt Bana Singh voiced his disapproval of the Agnipath scheme and even walked with an opposition leader on his Bharat Jodo Yatra - the logic of the proud Indians - "This is our country, and we have to address what issues there are". He rightfully delinked his right to dissent from any suggestions of disagreeing with the 'Idea of India'. Instead, he owned and sought to protect the 'India', which he was proud of by dissenting. Today all his tweets are signed off by emoticons of a folded hand and the Tiranga! The person who sought to remove the Tiranga from the building in London could never claim to represent the clan of defenders of the nation and its Tiranga. This is i.e., the most patriotic, gallant and noblest Sikhs.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WORRYING SIGNS IN PUNJAB

Sir — The drama surrounding the Punjab Police manhunt for fugitive radical preacher Amritpal Singh which has entered its third day, and the spurt in pro-Khalistani activity in countries abroad have brought back memories of 1984 and the Operation Bluestar misadventure that culminated in the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The preacher's supporters filing a habeas corpus petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, claiming that he has been spirited away by the police, has only muddied the waters. There is no room for error in the efforts to rein in anti-India elements that threaten to destabilise Punjab.

The reign of terror that prevailed under the Khalistani militants during the eighties must surely haunt all sane individuals in the state. It took many years for Punjab to regain at least part of its lost glory. India cannot afford a re-run of those times when militancy claimed so many lives and almost destroyed the prospects of a state that was once the food bowl of the nation.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

UNSEASONAL RAINS AND FOOD SECURITY

Sir — Incidentally, agriculture in India still thrives only on seasonal rain. The farmer, even today, patiently awaits the annual monsoon. But if that rain is unseasonal, it becomes a disaster. In recent days, farmers have been concerned about the rains caused by western disturbances. At a time when the wheat harvest has ripened in the fields and the farmer is getting ready to pick up the grain from the barns at the market. Likewise, mustard has also ripened. Due to unusual rainfall in many Northern Indian states over the past few days, wheat and mustard crops have been severely damaged. When the mustard seed was ready, it was dispersed because of hail. Furthermore, the mustard which had reached the mandis got wet because of the rain. In fact, because of rising temperatures due to global warming in recent years, there has been a rapid shift in weather patterns.

By and large, clouds of crisis are

Parliament logjam continues



This resulted in a controversy that stalled the House of Representatives. Legislators from the ruling regime want to make Mr Gandhi come to the House and apologize. Contrarily, the Opposition leaders are adamant on their demand for a probe into the Adani-Hindenburg issue by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). Ironically, these gratuitous adjournments are commonplace in all regimes and have adverse bearing on the precious time of the Members of the Houses as well as on the taxpayers' hard-earned money. Reverse columnist's observation that in a matured over-year democracy like India, what matters most is the smooth functioning of the Parliament. For that to happen, some pragmatic and corrective measures are needed.

Zeeshaan | Kazipet

threatening our food chain. The frequency, timing and quality of precipitation has shifted. The rains are heavy and short-lived. In the past, sudden temperature rises prior to time were considered harmful to wheat crops. Last year, despite a full harvest, wheat grain remained low because of an early increase in temperature. Therefore, productivity declined, and the farmer suffered. Rain is expected to fall for a few more days because of western disturbances. In such a situation, where immediate relief is required for farmers, the central and state governments must promote advancing research and research for crops. This will assist farmers in preventing the damage caused by the effects of global warming. This crisis will turn off the next generation of farmers. A country with a population of 140 million may face a food crisis in the coming decades. For that, far-reaching policies must be implemented right away.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

EXCESSIVE SALT IS DANGEROUS

Sir — It is very imperative for all of us to

consume salt in food according to taste and need. Without salt, food is tasteless and bland. Nevertheless, excessive salt consumption causes death all over the world. Recently a report from the World Health Organization has explained why salt is proving fatal. According to this WHO report, every year around 20 lakh people around the world die because of eating too much salt. At present the average use of salt per person in the world is 10.8 grams. While the WHO has set a maximum limit of 5 grams per person's consumption of salt.

That means we are consuming double the amount of salt. These figures are proof that it is healthy to take salt in limited quantities, not according to taste. If we all reduce the amount of salt, the number of deaths due to heart diseases worldwide every year can be brought down. WHO estimates that consuming less salt can save the lives of 22 lakh people by 2025 and about 70 lakh lives can be saved by 2030.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

ROBOTIC AUTOMATION IS THE FUTURE

It will be the main driver of growth in the e-commerce



SANGEET KUMAR

The face of robotics is quickly changing due to new technologies like edge computing, cloud computing, AI and machine learning. Every industry is experiencing a change as a result of the use of robots. For example, robots are used in restaurants to prepare food, in manufacturing to perform tasks like picking and placing, pelletizing, and material movement. They are also used in supply chains and warehouses to perform every conceivable task from sorting to inventory management until the product is ready for delivery.

Industries all over the world have been integrating robotics and automation into their operations because of the introduction of the latest cutting-edge technologies to increase corporate productivity, efficiency, and marketability. The e-commerce sector has grown exponentially during the last two to three years. According to Statista, global retail e-commerce sales were over 5.2 trillion dollars in 2021 and are projected to increase to 8.1 trillion dollars by 2026.

The disruption of the supply chain caused by the rise in e-commerce sales has driven businesses to find more innovative ways to meet customer demand for speedy delivery.

Increased demand for e-commerce sales in turn drives up the need for faster delivery, packing, shipping, inventory management, and supply chain management. Advanced and automated warehouses can help meet this demand. The need for automated warehouses has increased significantly in the last couple of years. The global market for warehouse automation systems, which was estimated to be worth \$21.7 billion in 2021, is expected to grow to \$93 billion by 2031, according to Allied Market Research.



In warehouses, robots have a crucial job to do. The employment of robots in warehouses helps with time-consuming and arduous chores like picking stuff up off the floor or sorting products by size, shape, or colour. Most often used in warehouses are piece-picking robots, automated guided vehicles (AGVs), collaborative robots, sorting and shuttle robots.

Inventory management plays an extremely important role in warehouse management. Automated storage and retrieval systems (AS/RS) are most frequently used for inventory control and on-demand product storage and retrieval. They are used to expedite material handling and order fulfilment procedures.

Automated robotics systems with AI capabilities aid companies in boosting the effectiveness and speed of supply chain operations. These AI-enabled systems have grown considerably as a result of technological breakthroughs; they now learn from both existing systems and the surrounding system. Robotic systems are becoming quicker, better, and more adaptable thanks to AI and machine learning, which is beneficial for e-commerce fulfilment operations.

Increased demand for online shopping and shifting customer expectations for quicker deliveries are the main causes of the rise in demand for warehouse automation. Emerging technologies like 5G, AI, ML, edge computing, and sophisticated robots will help the e-commerce sector develop at a phenomenal rate in the years to come.

(The writer is cofounder and CEO of Addverb Technologies)

Moral compass is critical for democracy



JS RAJPUT

Elected representatives must ensure proper and well-informed debates and discussions in Parliament and Assemblies



The manner the Indian Parliament conducted itself in the second half of the Budget session in March 2023 inflicts considerable disquiet amongst all those who revere it as a pious institution that could transform the lives of every Indian and give dignity and better life to those who deserve support and handholding because of exclusion and sufferings inflicted for generations due to historical, social and cultural constraints.

Could such an assembly of responsible people afford to waste their time for weeks together? They all are—officially—honourable individuals who are guardians of the Constitution; they are policymakers and lawmakers of the nation. The global image of India is changing fast; it is being viewed with considerable interest; there are high hopes in the international community. The last decade has convinced the powers that be that India is emerging as a self-confident nation; it is no more cowed down by its belligerent neighbours. India is no more willing to suffer 'thousand cuts' and terrorist attacks. The new-found sense of national pride could be seen in practically every home and hearth in India, in its farms and fields, across the high-end research labs bringing out innovations in areas, extending from artificial intelligence to space research.

India has enhanced its pace of change with full confidence and self-assurance. It has to make course corrections as well and must recall the Mahatma. 'The Lonely Pilgrim (Gandhi's Noakhali pilgrimage)', a compilation by Manubhan, contains the essence of how Gandhi realised that the national service has nowadays come to mean striving for a big name, according to many now, through which one can get a notice in the papers or is photographed—which is better—or secure ministerships as a reward for going to jail.

So everyone wants to grab power in order to rise to a ministership in the end. But how can even good ministers do any notable work without the people's support? The country does require ministers, but a minister can adorn his post only if he deserves it, Gandhi said. He observed, in



THE 75+ GENERATION OF INDIANS HAS SEEN AND OBSERVED THE DECLINE OF MORAL AND HUMANISTIC VALUES IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE, AND THE CONSEQUENT DETERIORATION OF THE CREDIBILITY OF LEADERS, ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES, AND THOSE IN OFFICE

(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity)

this very context, the presence of 'selfish stinginess' and reiterated that "we must, therefore, train ourselves to keep national interest always before us." And this was not the first time he was referred to ministers.

On September 18, 1938, when provincial governments had spent just ten months in 'power', things were not much different! The Mahatma received a letter from a citizen, indicating that the main purpose of the "Congress ministry appears to us to be to worship your idol in public and break it in secret; to worship the symbols of Imperialism in secret and denounce them in public, to play the malefactor towards their opponents when they cannot conquer by truthful and legitimate methods."

Gandhi had condensed this after "toning down the bitterest part." The letter writer had also included a sentence which after 85 years appears prophetic: "The government of a people cannot be run by the common argument of promised boons and by corrupting the electorate with hope."

The lesson to be drawn is clear: the mere scent of power coming to ministers made them leave no stone unturned to shake the moral foundation of good government. In this particular instance, the letter-writer found it strange why Gandhi's "soul should not revolt against such a predatory Ministry for creation of which the moral responsibility is entirely yours".

After over seven decades of Independence, India has more ex-ministers than serving ministers. The taste of having savoured power—exceptions apart—has been highly intoxicating. We have 'Lok-Sewaks' who swear by the name of Mahatma Gandhi but have amassed wealth by means that could be beyond the comprehension of the finest of economists.

People have seen the growth and display of affluence that follows politicians becoming elected representatives, ministers and chief ministers. In fact, most panchas and sarpanchas of village panchayats have proved to be good learners from politicians.

The issue before the nation is: why are the elected representatives losing credibility among those who elect them and put them in the saddle of power?

The manner democracy is being conducted was most crudely exposed in the recent election of the mayor of Delhi, which presented a shocking spectacle for everyone who feels a sense of pride in Indian democracy. The entire country witnessed it, as did the world. I found it shameful. Sadly enough, one could cite numerous such instances that have led to the disaffection between the representative and those represented.

On May 12, 1920, Gandhi said: "If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics today encircle us like the coils of a snake from which one cannot get out no matter how one tries. I wish to wrestle with the snake..." He did, and created a model of giving people a voice, a non-violent approach that helped not only India but so many other nations to throw away the yoke of imperialism, the caste system and apartheid.

In one word, he made people trust the moral force. On September 7, 1920, it was so articulated by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore: "We need all the moral force which Mahatma Gandhi represents, and which he alone in the world can represent." It was this moral force that every Indian was supposed to comprehend, internalise and put to practice.

Obviously, the representatives of people at every stage were—and are—supposed to be the prime torchbearers of the legacy of

Gandhi. Each one of them needs self-introspection; they must analyse the extent to which their conduct is contributing to the national cause, strengthening democracy, and helping the amelioration of the miseries from the life of the 'last man in the line.'

The 75+ generation of Indians has seen and observed the decline of moral and humanistic values in the political sphere, and the consequent deterioration of the credibility of leaders, elected representatives, and those in office. It adversely impacts the very vitals of democracy, its institutions and, above all, the people and their concerns.

Ministers are put behind bars, but continue to receive all the perks and privileges of the post and position. It is an unheard-of situation in a democracy. How could India ignore resignations on moral grounds credibility—like those of TT Krishnamachari, KD Malaviya and Lal Bahadur Shastri?

This generation of elderly citizens often recalls Gandhi and his in-depth comprehension of a free person and a free nation. He acknowledged that the superficial study of the British Parliament had made him think that all power percolates to the people from parliaments. It was not so, he himself realised: "The truth is that power resides in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives. Parliaments have no power or even existence independently of the people."

One earnestly hopes that the elected representatives realise the source of their power—the people—and ensure proper and well-informed debates and discussions in Parliament and Assemblies. Following the moral compass could strengthen their role performance and bestow the satisfaction of serving the needy.

Stress among women is rampant but it can be managed

Women can reduce the risk of burnout in their daily lives by following a few simple changes to their lifestyles

Stress is a common problem that many women experience in their daily lives. Whether it's due to work, family obligations, or other responsibilities, stress can take a toll on both mental and physical health. According to a Deloitte report in 2022, 56 per cent of Indian women's stress level is higher than it was a year ago. Globally, 53 per cent of women admitted to feeling more stressed than last year.

Due to a shift in hormonal levels (including sex hormones, like estrogen, which can also impact stress hormones, cortisol, and response), females are at a higher risk of developing mood disorders. Since a woman passes through puberty, menstruation, preg-



DR JYOTI KAPOOR

nancy, postpartum, and post-menopause, they face a host of different stressors and reactions to stress. However, the good news is that there are many effective ways for women to cut down on stress and improve their overall well-being. In this article, we will explore some of the most effective strategies for reducing stress in a woman's life.

Exercise regularly
Exercise is one of the most effective ways to reduce stress for women. Physical activity releases endorphins, which are chemicals in the brain that promote feelings of happiness and well-being. Additionally, regular exercise can help women sleep better, improve their mood, and increase their energy levels.



Practice mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation is a technique that involves focusing on the present moment and paying attention to your thoughts and emotions without judgment. It has

been shown to be effective in reducing stress and anxiety in women. By practicing mindfulness meditation regularly, women can learn to manage their emotions and respond to stressful situations in a more positive and productive way.

Get enough sleep

Sleep is essential for overall health and wellbeing, and it's also crucial for managing stress. When women don't get enough sleep, they may feel irritable, anxious, and stressed. By making sleep a priority and getting enough rest each night, women can reduce their stress levels and improve their mental and physical health.

Connect with others

Connecting with others is a vital way for women to reduce stress in their lives. Spending time with friends and family members, participating in social activities, and engaging in hobbies and interests can all help women feel more supported and less stressed.

Eat a healthy diet

Eating a healthy diet is essential for overall health and wellbeing, and it can also assist women manage stress. Foods that are high in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants can help reduce inflammation and promote feelings of wellbeing. Also, avoiding foods that are high in sugar and caffeine can help prevent spikes in blood sugar and promote better sleep.

Take breaks throughout the day

Taking breaks throughout the day is essential for managing stress. By taking short breaks to stretch, walk, or simply relax, women can give their minds and bodies a chance to recharge and refocus. This can help them feel more productive and less

stressed throughout the day.

Seek professional help
If stress is becoming overwhelming or interfering with daily life, it may be helpful to seek professional help. A mental health professional can help women develop coping strategies and manage stress in a healthy way.

In conclusion, stress is a common problem for many women, but there are many effective strategies for reducing stress and improving overall wellbeing. By exercising regularly, practicing mindfulness meditation, getting enough sleep, connecting with others, eating a healthy diet, taking breaks throughout the day, and seeking professional help when needed, women can successfully manage stress and enjoy a happier, healthier life.

China, Russia to counter US' Indo-Pacific strategy

PTI ■ BEIJING/MOSCOW



'Xi sees Russia as counterweight to US influence'

Washington (PTI): In President Vladimir Putin and Russia, Chinese President Xi Jinping sees a "counterweight" to American and NATO influence on the continent and elsewhere around the world, the White House has said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded his state visit to Moscow on Wednesday and vowed to build "an equal, open and inclusive security system" with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to counter the Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the US.

Xi held an intense round of discussions with Putin after which the leaders signed two joint statements to deepen their "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era" and "Pre-2030 Development Plan on Priorities in China-Russia Economic Cooperation".

Civilians killed by Russian missiles, drones

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's president posted video on Wednesday showing what he said was a Russian missile slamming into an apartment building in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, killing at least one person, after Moscow's forces launched exploding drones before dawn that killed another seven at a student dormitory near Kyiv.

The video posted by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Telegram appeared to be from CCTV cameras that captured the moment a missile hit the nine-story residential block by a

busy road. Ukrainian media showed charred apartments on several stories of the affected buildings, with flames billowing from some of them. Two children were among the wounded, said Zaporizhzhia City Council Secretary Anatolii Kurtiev, adding that 25 needed hospital treatment, with three in critical condition.

"Russia is shelling the city with bestial savagery," Zelenskyy wrote to accompany the video. "Residential areas where ordinary people and children live are being fired at." He appealed for countries to increase pressure on the Kremlin to give up its invasion of Ukraine. The city is about

100 kilometres (60 miles) from the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest which has previously come under threat during the war.

Russia has denied targeting residential areas even though artillery and rocket strikes hit apartment buildings and civilian infrastructure on a daily basis. Earlier Wednesday, an overnight drone attack partially destroyed a high school and two dormitories in the city of Rzhyshev, south of the Ukrainian capital, officials said.

the rubble on a dormitory's fifth floor, according to regional police chief Andrii Nebytov, adding that more than 20 people were hospitalised. Just hours earlier, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida left Kyiv after meeting Zelenskyy in a show of support for Ukraine.

Earlier Wednesday, Chinese leader Xi Jinping left Moscow after meeting with President Vladimir Putin and discussing his peace proposal, which has been rejected by the West as a non-starter. The drone barrage and other Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure drew a scathing response from Zelenskyy. "Over 20 Iranian murderous

drones, plus missiles, numerous shelling occasions, and that's just in one last night of Russian terror," he wrote in English on Twitter. "Every time someone tries to hear the word 'peace' in Moscow, another order is given there for such criminal strikes."

Zaporizhzhia's regional administration said two missiles struck the apartment block, saying Russia's goal is "to scare the civilian population of the city of thousands."

"It's hell in Zaporizhzhia," Ukrainian lawmaker Oleksiy Goncharenko wrote on Telegram, adding: "There aren't any military facilities nearby."

Pak court rejects FIA's plea to cancel Imran Khan's bail

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Wednesday rejected the country's top investigating agency's plea to cancel former prime minister Imran Khan's bail in the prohibited funding case, a media report said.



The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in October last year filed a case in the banking court against Khan, 70, and other members of his

party for allegedly receiving prohibited funding. The prohibited funding case was filed by PTT's estranged founding member Akbar S. Babar in the Election Commission of Pakistan in 2014. A two-member bench comprising Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri conducted the hearing on the plea in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday, according to the Express Tribune newspaper.

'Israel attacked Aleppo airport, no casualties'

Damascus (AP): An Israeli airstrike early on Wednesday targeted the international airport in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, causing material damage and putting it out of service, Syria's state news agency reported.

SANA quoted an unnamed military official as saying Israeli warplanes fired the missiles toward Aleppo, Syria's largest city and once commercial centre, while flying over the Mediterranean Sea. It did not mention any casualties. Bassem Mansour, head of Syria's civil aviation, told the pro-government Sham FM radio station

the strike damaged the airport's runway and put the facility out of service. Repair work has started, he said, adding that "the airport will resume work within a short period". The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said that in addition to the airport, the airstrike also destroyed a nearby arms depot of Iran-backed militia-men.

The airport has been a key channel for the flow of aid into the country after the February 6 earthquake hit Turkey and Syria, killing over 50,000 people, including more than 6,000 in Syria.

Donald Trump's potential indictment caps decades of legal scrutiny

AP ■ NEW YORK

For 40 years, former President Donald Trump has navigated countless legal investigations without ever facing criminal charges. That record may soon come to an end. Trump could be indicted by a Manhattan grand jury as soon as this week, potentially charged with falsifying business records connected to hush money payments during his 2016 campaign to women who accused him of sexual encounters.



Police officers place a barricade in front of Trump Tower, on Tuesday in NY. AP/PTI

because of the fact that a former president is being indicted for the first time, but also because one of the slipperiest people at the highest level of business, whose devotion to abusing the system is so well established, is being caught. "Throughout his life, he has done things for which he could have been investigated and potentially prosecuted and learned from those experiences that he could act with impunity," he said. Trump first faced legal scrutiny in the 1970s when the Department of Justice brought a racial discrimination case against his family's real estate business. Trump and his father fiercely fought the suit, which accused them of refusing to

rent apartments to Black tenants in predominantly white buildings. Testimony showed that applications filed by prospective Black tenants were marked with a "C" for "coloured". Trump countered for USD 100 million, accusing the government of defamation. The case ended with a settlement that opened the way for some Black tenants but did not force the Trumps to explicitly acknowledge they had "failed and neglected" to comply with the Fair Housing Act. Since then, Trump and his businesses have been the subject of thousands of civil lawsuits and numerous investigations. There have been probes into his casino and real estate dealings, allegations of bribery and improper

lobbying, fraud allegations against the now-defunct Trump University and charitable Trump Foundation and a probe by the Manhattan district attorney into sales at the Trump SoHo hotel-condominium in Lower Manhattan. Indeed, according to Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a government watchdog group abbreviated CREW, as of November 2022, Trump had been accused of committing at least 56 criminal offenses since he launched his campaign in 2015, not including allegations of fraudulent business dealings. But he has never been formally indicted. Trump is a master of delay tactics, "finding ways to endlessly delay in the hopes that the investigation and litigation will go away. And he's had remarkable success," says CREW president Noah Bookbinder, a former federal corruption prosecutor. "It makes accountability absolutely essential because we can't have people in a functioning democracy operating in positions of power with total impunity where they can commit crimes and never have to face any consequences," he said.

Indian-American receives National Humanities medal from Joe Biden

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden has presented the prestigious 2021 National Humanities Medals to Indian-American actress and producer Mindy Kaling, with several others, in recognition of her giving voice to a new generation of storytellers, at a White House ceremony. The National Medal of Arts is the highest award, given to artists, arts patrons, and groups by the US government. It honours exemplary individuals and organisations that have advanced the arts in America and inspired others through their distinguished achievement, support, or patronage. Presenting the award to the actress on Tuesday, at the ceremony attended by First Lady Dr Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and the Second Gentleman, Biden said that Kaling is the first woman of colour to create, write, and star in a primetime sitcom. He added that the 43-year-old actress empowers a new generation to tell their stories with irreverence and sincerity. "The daughter of Indian immigrants — we know about that, right? Our Vice President is a daughter of Indian immigrants — a mother who was a great scientist," the US President said. "Above all, she is hardworking and an adoring mom, just like



her own mom was. And, Mindy, we know your mom is always with you in your spirit. We know that," Biden added. "Imbued with humour and heart, Mindy Kaling's work across television, film, and books inspires and delights, capturing and uplifting the experiences of women and girls across our nation," the citation of Kaling's award, read by a military aide later, said. The award honours individuals or groups whose work has deepened the nation's understanding of the humanities and broadened citizens' engagement with history, literature, languages, philosophy,

California faces more flooding after strong storm

Santa Cruz (US): A strong late-season Pacific storm that brought damaging winds and more rain and snow to saturated California was blamed for two deaths and forecasters said additional flooding was possible Wednesday in parts of the state. Tuesday's storm focused most of its energy on central and southern parts of the state, bringing threats of heavy runoff and mountain snowfall. In the north, intense hail was reported in Sacramento, the state capital. Locally heavy rain and snowmelt may cause flooding on Wednesday in southern California and central Arizona, the National Weather Service warned. Trees and power lines were reported downed in the San Francisco Bay Area. An Amtrak commuter train carrying 55 passengers struck a downed tree and derailed near the East Bay village of Porta Costa. The train remained upright and nobody was injured, Amtrak and fire officials said. In the Bay Area community of Portola Valley, a man driving a sewer truck was killed when a tree fell onto the vehicle, the California Highway Patrol said. And in the community of Rossmore, a driver was injured and a passenger died after a large tree fell onto a car, the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District said.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE. Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems). N.I.T. No. 44A-22-23-W-2 Dated 21.03.2023.

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE. Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work.

HINDUSTAN AUTO FINANCE LIMITED. Regd. Office: Cabin No. DA-8, 02nd Floor, Vikas Marg, Shakarpur, New Delhi-110092. NOTICE OF 40TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, REMOTE E-VOTING AND INTIMATION OF BOOK CLOSURE.

HINDUSTAN AUTO FINANCE LIMITED. Regd. Office: Cabin No. DA-8, 02nd Floor, Vikas Marg, Shakarpur, New Delhi-110092. NOTICE OF 39TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, REMOTE E-VOTING AND INTIMATION OF BOOK CLOSURE.

DoT seeks ₹33,111 cr for BSNL AGR dues

Expects PSU to become profitable by FY 2027

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecom has sought Rs 33,111 crore for payment of adjusted gross revenue dues of state-run BSNL which is likely to be made in the upcoming April-June quarter, according to a Parliamentary panel report. In a submission to the Standing Committee of Communications and Information Technology, the Department of Telecom shared that against the proposal of Rs 39,725.07 crore for 2023-24, Rs 66,691.82 crore has been allocated to it in the budget. The increased amount is towards the payment of AGR Dues to BSNL, which is a part of its revival package. The Department had proposed an amount of Rs 33,111.00 crore for the AGR Dues. The payment



will be made once BSNL claims the amount and is most likely to happen in the first quarter of FY 2023-24," the DoT informed in a written reply to the panel. The Finance Ministry has allocated a total of Rs 1,08,153.25 crore under Budget Estimates for 2023-24 to the DoT comprising Rs 41,461.43 crore under revenue section and Rs 66,691.82 crore for capital section accounts. The government had allocated Rs 44,720 crore for capital infusion in the state-run BSNL and MTNL for the current fiscal which was revised to Rs 33,269.01 crore and out of the total allocated fund Rs 23,873.44

crore have been spent till December 2022. The DoT has informed the panel that the techno-commercial bids of TCS and ITI were opened by BSNL on November 23 and financial bids of January 13 for procurement of 4G equipment and as per the cabinet approval Group of Ministers will approve the process of procurement. "Due to indigenous development of 4G stack for the first time in the country and issues in supply chain of chipsets, the deployment will gradually start and completion of projects of all 1 lakhs sites is likely to take 2 years," the DoT submitted.

Stocks rise on Wall Street, even most beaten-down banks

AP ■ NEW YORK

Stocks are rising on a calming Wall Street Tuesday, even the banks most beaten down by the industry's crisis, amid hopes for more help from the U.S. Government. The S&P 500 was 0.6% higher in midday trading after halving a bigger gain from the morning. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 131 points, or 0.4%, at 32,376, as of noon Eastern time, while the Nasdaq composite was 0.6% higher. Markets around the world have pinballed sharply this month on worries the banking system may be cracking under the pressure of the fastest set of hikes to interest rates in decades. If the S&P 500 squeezes out a gain, it would mark its first back-to-back rise in two weeks. In the U.S., shares of smaller and mid-sized banks rose after Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told a bankers' group more government assistance "could be warranted" if risks arise that could bring down the system. Earlier this month, the U.S. Government said it would make



deposits at Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank whole, even those with more than the \$250,000 limit insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. They were the second- and third-largest U.S. Bank failures in history. They had struggled as depositors rushed to pull their money out en masse. Such runs can topple a bank, and investors have since been hunting for the next one that could fall. Much focus has been on First Republic Bank, which shares some similar traits with Silicon Valley Bank, and its stock had lost 90% for the month through Monday. It jumped 39.6% Tuesday. Other smaller and mid-sized banks also rallied, including a 7.2% climb for Comerica and a 7.7% gain for Zions Bancorp. Hopes for the banking industry began to turn over the weekend after regulators pushed together two huge Swiss banks. Shares of both banks in that deal rose Tuesday in Switzerland, including a 9.8% jump for acquirer UBS. Credit Suisse, meanwhile, rose 5.3% after tumbling a day earlier. Credit Suisse had long-standing problems that were relatively unique, but all banks on

both sides of the Atlantic have the shared challenge of navigating a world with much higher interest rates than a year earlier. Central banks have jacked up rates at a blistering pace in hopes of getting high inflation under control. But such moves act like huge hammers with little nuance. They try to bring down inflation by slowing the entire economy. That raises the risk of a recession later on. Higher rates also hurt prices for stocks and other investments. That's one of the factors that hurt Silicon Valley Bank, which saw the value of its bond investments drop with the rise in rates. The Federal Reserve is beginning its latest meeting on interest rates Tuesday, with an announcement slated for Wednesday. Earlier this month, much of Wall Street was bracing for the Fed to reaccelerate its hikes and raise by 0.50 percentage points. A string of reports on the economy came in hotter than expected, including data on the job market, retail sales and inflation itself.

BRIEF

PFC SIGNS MOU WITH IISC FOR NEW ENERGY RESEARCH BUILDING
Power Finance Corporation Ltd (PFC), a Maharashtra Company and India's leading NBFC in the power sector, has signed an MoU with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) to support establishing a state-of-the-art building that will house the Interdisciplinary Centre for Energy Research (ICER). The state-of-the-art building for ICER will foster cutting-edge fundamental and applied research on various energy-related areas, with special focus on green hydrogen generation.

IIFL AIMS WORLD RECORD WITH IIFL JITO AHIMSA RUN
IIFL Group, which is one of India's largest financial services conglomerates, aims to create Guinness Book of World record with IIFL Jito Ahimsa Run to be held on April 2, 2023 across 23 countries and 65 cities in India. This is the largest such run for the cause of peace and non-violence. The run is being organized by the ladies wing of Jito (Jain International Trade Organization) and IIFL besides Jito volunteers and supporters across the world.

NTPC COMMEMORATES WORLD WATER DAY
NTPC Limited, India's largest power producer, today commemorated World Water Day through a conference on 'Sustainable Supply Chain with Focus on Water Sustainability', along with prominent supply chain partners and vendors to observe World Water Day 2023. Ramesh Babu V, Director (Operations) and officials from multiple organizations participated in the discussions. The event witnessed the release of the NTPC Water Compendium 2023.

PFC INKS PLA FOR JPY 2.65 BN WITH JAPAN BANK
PFC recently signed a Project Loan Agreement (PLA) for JPY 2.65 Billion with Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) at a ceremony held at JBIC headquarters, Tokyo, Japan. This PLA was executed under General Agreement signed between PFC & JBIC for JPY 30 Billion.

Modi launches ITU Area office, innovation centre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated the new International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Area Office and Innovation Centre here. Modi also unveiled the Bharat 6G Vision Document and launched the 6G R&D Test Bed. ITU is the United Nations' specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs). Headquartered in Geneva, it has a network of field offices, regional offices and area offices. India signed a Host Country Agreement in March 2022 with ITU for establishment of an area office. The area office in India also envisaged to have an Innovation Centre embedded in it, making it unique among other area offices of ITU.

The area office, fully funded by India, is located on the second floor of the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT) building at Mehrauli in New Delhi. It will serve India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan and Iran, enhancing coordination among nations and fostering mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the region, a statement said. Bharat 6G Vision Document is prepared by Technology Innovation Group on 6G (TIG-6G) that was constituted in November 2021 with members from various ministries/departments, research and development institutions, academia, standardization bodies, telecom service providers, and industry to develop road map and action plans for 6G in India.

Tomar launches blended learning platform for higher edu in agri

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Tuesday launched a blended learning platform for higher education in agriculture, developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) as part of a World Bank-funded project. ICAR has developed the blended learning ecosystem as part of the five-year National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP) concluding this year. India and the World Bank have contributed USD 82.5 million (about Rs 600 crore) each for this project that aimed at strengthening the national agriculture education system in the country. "The blended learning is an extension of Krishi Megh. I believe it will strengthen the foundation of Krishi Megh and

will help in meeting the requirement of digital learning," Tomar said at the launch of this platform at the three-day international conference here. Krishi Megh, which is a data recovery centre of ICAR, enables the farmers, researchers, students and policymakers to be updated with latest information regarding agriculture and research. For India to become a developed nation by 2047, the minister said the blended learning ecosystem will play a key role in this journey. Blended learning is a combination of offline and online learning in a way that one complements the other. ICAR Director General Himanshu Pathak said, "I believe the World Bank will further promote research and education. ...To address the challenges of climate change and low productiv-



ity, education will play a crucial role. Our young students as well as scientists need to be equipped to combat all problems and experiment to learn new things which can be done through a blended learning ecosystem." ICAR Deputy Director General (Agricultural Education) R C Agrawal said it has been the ICAR's endeavour to enhance agricultural higher education in alignment with guidance from the National Education Policy 2020 and the UN-SDGs.

Now, all agricultural universities have access to e-learning and e-governance applications. They all have smart classrooms, video conferencing facilities and virtual reality experience labs, he said. About 86 per cent of agricultural universities have academic management systems; 90 per cent have wi-fi on campus and 92 per cent have high-speed internet connectivity. The e-content, using virtual and augmented reality, is highly immersive. Assessments, including short and long answer type questions

have been digitised, he added. The NAHEP has achieved "almost all targets" and significantly exceeded more than half of them. "The quality of students coming in is better, in that they have higher cut-off scores, the graduates have higher placement rates and the research is more effective," Bekzod Shamsiev, Senior Agriculture Economist at The World Bank, said. The next challenge is to transform digital learning into digital agriculture. Agricultural universities have an important role to play in promoting precision farming, environmental monitoring and automation of agricultural processes, he said. It should lead to better trading systems and market information, efficient supply chain logistics and provide information for better policy making and regulation, Shamsiev added.

Fresh FIR filed against Amritpal

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A fresh FIR has been filed against Amritpal Singh for extortion and rioting following a complaint by the 'granthi' of a gurdwara in Jalandhar where the pro-Khalistan preacher changed his clothes and fled on a bike to escape the police crackdown on his outfit. Police said the fugitive spent around 45 minutes at a gurdwara in Nangal Ambian village. Ranjit Singh, the granthi (Sikh priest), said in his complaint with police that the Waris Punjab De chief and his three aides entered the gurdwara and demanded clothes of his son at gunpoint to change his appearance. The priest said Amritpal Singh threatened

to kill him and his family when he refused to give clothes. They were carrying a pistol and .315 bore rifle, said Ranjit Singh. Following the complaint, police have registered a case against the radical preacher and four of his unidentified aides under various IPC sections including 386 (extortion by putting a person in fear of death), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 148 (rioting) and also under the Arms Act at Shakhot police station in Jalandhar. Meanwhile, a fresh image of the fugitive surfaced online and showed him on a motorized cart with his bike and the person who rode it. It was not clear whether the bike ran out of fuel or developed some fault.

Mamata offers prayers at Shree Jagannath Temple

PTI ■ PURI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Wednesday offered prayers at the Shree Jagannath Temple here and offered a huge flag, which was tied atop the 12th-century shrine, seeking the welfare of all people. Banerjee, accompanied by senior government officials from her state and Odisha, entered the temple at 4 pm and had a darshan of the sibling deities- Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath. "She offered prayers to the deities standing alone near the 'Bhitar Katha' (inner cordon). She is a devotee of Lord Jagannath," said Ramakrushna Dasmohapatra, her priest.

Ahead of polls, NCP chief calls meeting of Opposition leaders

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid talks of opposition unity in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, NCP supremo Sharad Pawar has invited leaders of various opposition parties here on Thursday 23 to discuss issues of common interest and efficacy of EVMs. Sources said the meeting will take place at 6 pm. Pawar has held that in the interest of free and fair elections, electronic voting machines (EVMs) need to be accurate and any doubts over their efficacy must be addressed by the Chief Election Commissioner. Experts have

said that any machine with a chip inside can be hacked and we cannot allow democracy to be hijacked by unscrupulous elements. Therefore, in the interest of free and fair elections, we must sit together and listen to the views expressed by eminent IT professionals and cryptographers, Pawar said in his letter to the opposition leaders. Leaders of several opposition parties are likely to attend the meeting keeping in view Pawar's stature. The meeting comes in the wake of several efforts being made to bring unity in opposition ranks to help take on the BJP together.

'Take early ...

From Page 1
Earlier, the Collegium expressed displeasure on Intelligence Bureau report against John Sathyan citing his social media posts, publishing articles critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The names which have been recommended earlier in point of time including the reiterated names ought not to be withheld or overlooked as this disturbs their seniority whereas those recommended later steal march on them. Loss of seniority of candidates recommended earlier in point of time has been noted by the collegium and is a matter of grave concern," the Collegium stated. The Collegium also reiterated its recommendation of appointment of Harpreet Singh Brar in Punjab and Haryana High Court. Senior Advocate Brar was recommended as Judge in July 2022. "Collegium is of the view that Harpreet Singh Brar is fit and suitable for appointment as a Judge of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana. The Collegium has also taken note of the fact that, besides being a senior advocate, the candidate has a wide-ranging experience of practice before the High Court," said the Collegium., reiterating Brar's appointment.

PM reviews...

From Page 1
The action taken on the directions given by Modi during the last Covid review held on December 22, 2022 was also briefed, the statement said. He was informed that availability and prices of 20 main Covid drugs, 12 other drugs, eight buffer drugs and one influenza drug is being monitored. A mock drill was also conducted on December 27, 2022 in 22,000 hospitals, and many remedial measures taken by hospitals thereafter. The Prime Minister was also apprised on the influenza situation in the country particularly with respect to the higher number of cases of H1N1 and H3N2 being noted in the last few months. Modi directed officials to enhance whole genome sequencing of positive samples with the designated INSACOG genome sequencing laboratories. This will support tracking of newer variants, if any, and timely response, the PMO said. He emphasized Covid-appropriate behavior, including wearing of masks in hospital premises by all --patients, health professionals and health workers. He also stressed that wearing of masks is advisable when senior citizens and those with co-morbidities visit crowded areas, the statement said.

Plan for modern Delhi...

From Page 1
As many as 1,400 new and modern bus queue shelters will also be built in the national Capital. Six-point action plan for a clean Yamuna and clearing all three garbage mountains of Delhi are also among the major schemes announced by the AAP Government on Wednesday. In the 2023-24 Budget, the Government has set aside Rs 2,034 crore for the beautification and upgrade of PWD roads. Gahlot announced that the Municipal Corporation of Delhi will be given Rs 8,241 crore in the financial year 2023-24, up from Rs 4,374 crore allocated during 2022-23. He also said a loan of Rs 850 crore was earmarked for the civic body for the removal of mountains of garbage. The Government announced that it will set up 100 mohalla clinics.

The number of free diagnostic tests in mohalla clinics will increase from 256 to 450 in the next financial year. The Delhi Government's Budget size for the financial year 2022-23 was Rs 75,800 crore and Rs 69,000 crore in the preceding year. The 2023-24 Budget is almost two and a half times the expenditure of Rs 30,940 crore in the year 2014-15, and 8.69 per cent higher than the revised estimates for 2022-23. Addressing a post-Budget Press conference, Kejriwal said this is because Delhi has an honest Government. "Finally, the Budget was presented today. It has something for everyone. We have so far invested heavily in the education, health and electricity sectors and this will continue. This Budget focuses on a clean, beautiful and modern Delhi," he said. "We have achieved so

much despite so many hurdles. This shows our excellent administrative skills. Delhi would have seen much more progress had it got full statehood," the Chief Minister said. The presentation of the Budget was delayed by a day as the Centre sought clarifications, including "higher allocations" for advertisements and "lower capital expenditure" in the annual financial statement. On Tuesday, the Union Home Ministry gave its approval to the Budget even as Kejriwal alleged that the whole issue was created by the Centre to satisfy its ego. The Budget estimate of Rs 78,800 crore includes Rs 56,983 crore under revenue expenditure and an outlay of Rs 21,817 crore under capital expenditure. Gahlot said the share of capital expenditure as part of the overall Budget has also risen to 27.68 per cent in the budget. The

AAP Government has earmarked Rs 557.2 crore for advertisements in the next financial year. It has proposed Rs 320 crore for the construction of three double-decker flyovers, which will come up at Bhajanpura-Yamuna Vihar, Azadpur-Rani Jhansi intersections and Saket-Pul Prahaladpur. Vehicles will run on the lower deck while the Metro rail will run on the upper deck. "By the end of the year 2023, Delhi will have the largest fleet of electric buses among all the States of India. By the end of 2025, Delhi will have a fleet of 10,480 buses," the finance minister said. While announcing the Mohalla bus scheme for ensuring the last mile connectivity in the city, he said 100 feeder e-buses will be procured in 2023-24 while 2,180 in next two years.

Flares, bottles hurled at Indian Mission

From Page 1
British High Commission refused to comment on the removal of barricades here and said "We do not comment on security matters." The Delhi Police on Tuesday and Wednesday removed extra barricades outside the UK High Commission here but the security remains intact, officials said. "The security arrangements outside the British High Commission here are intact. However, barricades placed on the pathway towards the commission, that created hurdles for commuters have been removed," officials said. While the British embassy is located at Shantipath in high security zone Chanakyapuri, its High Commissioner Alex Ellis lives at Rajaji Marg. Sources said Delhi Police have removed barricades "that created hur-

dles" for commuters outside the British High Commission here but the security of the diplomatic mission remains intact. India on Sunday night summoned British Deputy High Commissioner Christina Scott and demanded an explanation over the complete "absence of security" after videos of pulling down of the Indian flag at the Indian Mission in London during a protest by pro-Khalistan elements emerged on social media. Following that, top British officials said the UK Government will take the security of the Indian High Commission "seriously", as they condemned as "disgraceful" and "completely unacceptable" the vandalism at the Indian mission by a group of protesters waving separatist Khalistani flags. Since the weekend, several uniformed

officers have been patrolling the area in Aldwych and Metropolitan Police vans have been stationed at India Place. Wednesday's planned demonstration claims to be in response to alleged discriminatory actions of the police in Punjab. The Indian High Commission in London has been working to counter disinformation circulating around developments in Punjab, related to enforcement action against the separatist group 'Waris Punjab De'. "Let me assure all our friends here in the UK, especially brothers and sisters with relatives in Punjab, that there is no truth to the sensationalist lies being circulated on social media," Indian High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami said in a video posted on Twitter. "The situation in your ancestral home-

land is not what is being reported. The elected Chief Minister of the State and the local police authorities have put out detailed information, including interviews on television, please watch these. Do not believe the small handful of people putting out fiction and disinformation," he said. In an update on the enforcement action since March 18, Doraiswami said that the Punjab Police launched an operation against elements of 'Waris Punjab De' against whom criminal cases have been recorded, in particular against Amritpal Singh, the chief of this organisation. He added that the constitutional rights to a legal defence for all those arrested will be protected and reiterated that all communication services, including mobile telephone networks and internet, are up and running in the state.

Oz beat India in 3rd ODI, seal series

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Indian batting unit once again choked under relentless pressure from the Australian spinners as the visitors clinched the three-match ODI series 2-1 with a comfortable 21-run victory, here on Wednesday.

Chasing a stiff target of 270 on a tricky pitch, India were all out for 248 in 49.1 overs as Australia came back in the series after losing the first ODI by five wickets.

The series defeat is an indicator that the Indian team is far from prepared for the World Cup and there are too many loose ends that needs to be tied.

The match turned out to be an anti-climax in the final 15 overs as Australian spinners Adam Zampa (4/45) and Ashton Agar (2/41 in 10 overs) snared as many six Indian wickets, giving away only 86 runs in the 20 overs between them.

The Chepauk track got slower and slower and post 35th over in the Indian innings, it became very difficult to hit the big strokes.

Once Zampa bowled a couple of googlies to force Hardik Pandya (40 off 40 balls) and Ravindra Jadeja (1 off 33 balls) hit against the turn, the writing was on the wall.

It was Zampa's best figures against India and he certainly was the hero for the Aussies.

Incidentally, Australia were the last international team to beat India in a bilateral ODI series back in 2019. The scoreline back then was 3-2. Since that series defeat four years back, India have won seven back-to-back bilateral ODI rubber at home.

It was three games in a row that the Indian top-order flat-



tered to deceive and that too in home conditions. They could have been blanked 3-0 in the series had Australia scored at least 235 in the opening ODI.

The highest run-getter for India in the series was KL Rahul with 116 runs and that tells the story.

Between overs 35 to 43, India managed only 31 runs and that was where the game turned on its head.

Skipper Rohit Sharma (30

off 17 balls) started well but played one pull shot too many to be holed out at deep square leg fence while an alert Alex Carey's decision to convince Steve Smith into taking a DRS saw the back of Shubman Gill (37 off 49 balls). Rahul (32 off 50 balls) joined Virat Kohli (54 off 72 balls) and the duo added 69 runs in 15.3 overs but were never able to dominate as such on a track that got slower with passage of time.

Kohli's first boundary came in his 21st delivery, a pull shot off Agar and two balls later of Tamil Nadu he hit a regal six off Agar over extra cover.

Rahul's first boundary came in his 45th ball when he hit Zampa over his head for a four. Next over, Starc fired from wide off crease but the length ball was hit for a straight six. However a ball fired by Zampa into the blockhole was dug-out by Rahul but Abbot timed his jump well

to hold onto it at the boundary. Then it was the turn of Agar to quickly send back Kohli and the out-of-form Suryakumar Yadav (0) for his third first-ball duck in as many games.

From 146 to 2, India had slumped to 185 for 6 when Pandya and Jadeja joined forces with the Australian close-in fielders making it infinitely difficult.

But Pandya, however, maintained a 100-plus strike-rate

despite tight bowling by the opposition.

Earlier, a fine opening spell by Pandya and a probing effort by Kuldeep Yadav put a tight leash around the Australian batters before its tail wagged considerably to take the visitors to a fighting 269 all out in 49 overs after opting to bat first.

The five wickets added 131 to keep Australia in the game.

While Pandya (3/44 in 8 overs) shaved off the top half, Kuldeep's (3/56 in 10 overs) rhythm and guile on a helpful Chennai track was the biggest takeaway as the latter's delivery to remove Carey was the ball of the series. It was a classical left-arm wrist spinner's leg-break that beat the southpaw all ends up and Kuldeep's ecstasy was there to be seen.

India were in control after pegging Australia back at 138 for 5 but a 58-run stand between Carey and Marcus Stoinis for the sixth wicket and 42 for the eighth wicket between Sean Abbott (26) and Ashton Agar (17) took them close to 250 while Mitchell Starc and Adam Zampa added 22 precious runs for the final wicket.

What looked like a good toss to win for Australia after Mitchell Marsh (47 off 47 balls) and Travis Head (33 off 31 balls) put on 68 for the opening stand didn't seem so as Pandya bowled three different deliveries in his first three overs to completely seize the momentum in favour of the hosts.

David Warner (23 off 31 balls) and Marnus Labuschagne (28 off 45 balls) paid dearly for their indiscreet shot selection off Kuldeep's bowling before Carey (38 off 46 balls) played his first innings of substance on the final day of a long near two-month tour.



Short break for India's white ball players before joining IPL teams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian players, who are part of the ODI series against Australia, will get a short break for three to four days before joining their respective IPL camps with the tournament starting from March 31.

Defending champions Gujarat Titans and Chennai Super Kings will play in the opening match of the season in Ahmedabad.

It is understood that all the players, who are in the World Cup scheme of things, will have their workload management monitored and hence the rest is going to be paramount.

"Some players might join their IPL camps directly but they will have an option of taking a three-four day break and relax at home before touching base with their respective IPL teams," a BCCI

source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Even if the players directly join the training camp, it is unlikely that they would be training for at least next 72 hours.

AYER TO MISS ENTIRE IPL, DOUBTFUL FOR WC

Shreyas Iyer is all set to undergo lower back surgery and will not take any part in the IPL, according to sources in the board. The decision is being taken keeping the player's best interest in mind as a surgery right now will give him an outside chance of at least making a comeback before the World Cup in October, although chances of making it for the marquee event also looks dim at the moment.

Jasprit Bumrah and Prasidh Krishna are the two players who have already undergone back surgery.

Fleming to be Texas Super Kings coach in MLC

PTI ■ DALLAS

Former New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming will be the coach of Dallas-based Major League Cricket (MLC) club Texas Super Kings (TSK), which announced its partnership with IPL side Chennai Super Kings (CSK).

Four-time IPL champions, CSK had recently said that they would make a "major announcement" with regard to their association with the new T20 tournament in the US.

TSK said in a statement that CSK will bring "operational expertise" and help "Texas compete on the field".

"The (Texas Super Kings) team will be led by coach Stephen Fleming. Fleming is a former captain of the New Zealand national cricket team and head coach of Indian Premier League team Chennai Super Kings. He played in the first-ever T20 to be staged as captain of the New Zealand team in 2005," said a TSK statement.

Fleming is a long-serving CSK head coach and has guided the Chennai franchise to four IPL titles.

CSK join Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians as the third IPL side to get associated with the six-team MLC, scheduled to begin on July 13.

The six MLC teams are San Francisco Unicorns, Lost Angeles, MI New York, Seattle Orcas, Texas Super Kings and Washington DC.

Delhi Capitals, co-owned by GMR Group, are partnering with Seattle Orcas to "help build and operate a world-class cricket team", while Mumbai Indians have joined the US cricket revolution by acquiring the New York franchise.

Meanwhile, all six MLC teams completed the domestic player draft at the Space Center in Houston, where they selected nine players each from more than 100 cricketers eligible to represent the "US cricket community".

The remainder of each team's player roster will be filled with top T20 cricketers from across the world.



New IPL Rule: Captains allowed to name playing XI after toss

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The captains of IPL teams can name their playing eleven after the toss instead of handing over team sheets before the spin of coin, stated the new playing conditions issued by the BCCI.

According to playing conditions clause 1.2.1: "Each captain shall nominate 11 players plus a maximum of 5 substitute fielders in writing to the IPL Match Referee after the toss."

"Other than set out in Clause 1.2.9 no player (member of the playing eleven) may be changed after the nomination and prior to the start of play without the consent of the opposing captain."

This effectively means that after the toss, if a skipper feels that he needs to change his eleven as per demands of the situation, he is free to do that till the match starts.

The other significant change in playing conditions is penalising unfair movement by the wicketkeeper in case there is shift in position before the batter meets the ball.

In the event of unfair movement by the wicket-keeper, either umpire shall call and signal dead ball and inform the other umpire the reason for doing so. The bowler's end umpire shall then: "award the one-run penalty for Wide or No ball, if applicable or award 5 Penalty runs to the batting side. Inform the captain of the fielding side of the reason for this action. Inform the batters and, as soon as practicable, the captain of the batting side of what has occurred."

The "Impact Substitution" where a new player can be introduced during the match from the five designated substitutions had already been announced by the tournament committee.

Siraj slips from top spot to third in ODI rankings



PTI ■ DUBAI

Pacer Mohammed Siraj was on Wednesday dethroned from the top spot by Australia's Josh Hazlewood in the latest ICC rankings for ODI bowlers, as the Indian slipped to third place.

Another Australian pacer, Mitchell Starc, who impressed during the first two ODIs of the three-match series in India, also moved up to join Siraj at joint third.

Siraj, who returned with impressive figures of 3/29 to help India win the first ODI against Australia, was expensive in the second ODI giving away 37 runs in three overs and consequently lost his position as the top-ranked bowler.

The right-arm pacer had copped the brunt of the attack

by Mitchell Marsh and Travis Head during the second ODI in Visakhapatnam. Siraj, who has had a successful run across formats in recent past, was crowned as the world No. 1 bowler in ODIs in January this year.

Starc claimed three wickets in Mumbai to stage Australia's fightback while his 5/53 in the second ODI in Visakhapatnam powered the visitors to a 10-wicket win.

Hazlewood, who missed the entire tour of India consisting four Tests and three ODIs, became world No. 1 bowler in ODIs for the first time ever.

"Hazlewood, whose career-best second position was attained for the first time in June 2017 and which he had kept since August 2022, is No. 1 in ODIs for the first time," the ICC said.

Mohammad Shami, who produced a match-winning spell in Mumbai, also moved five spots up to reach to 28th in the list.

KL Rahul's unbeaten 75, which helped India recover from a poor start and win the first ODI by five wickets, helped him move up three places to get to the 39th spot.

In the ODI ranking among batters, India's Shubman Gill -- who made 'marginal progress' -- and Virat Kohli remained fifth and seventh respectively, while captain Rohit Sharma moved up one place to ninth.

New Zealand's Kane Williamson moved up to the second spot among batters in Test cricket following his dominant show with the bat against Sri Lanka, with the former skipper notching up scores of 1, 121 not out and 215 in the two-match series which the Kiwis won 2-0.

With his sixth double ton in Tests, Williamson is now just one behind Kohli (seven) as players with most scores over 200. Australia's Marnus Labuschagne remains the top ranked batter in Test cricket.

New Zealand's left-handed batter Henry Nicholls, who made 200 not out in the Wellington Test and was involved in a massive 363-run stand with Williamson in what was Test cricket's 2,500th match, jumped up 20 spots to reach to 27th.

Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne occupies the 10th spot.



2023 WC in India likely to start on Oct 5, final in Ahmedabad: report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The 2023 ODI World Cup in India is likely to start on October 5 with the final to be held at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on November 19, according to a report.

The BCCI has shortlisted at least a dozen venues for the 10-team marquee event, which will see 48 matches, including three knockouts across the 46-day period, an ESPNcricinfo report said.

The 11 other shortlisted venues, according to the report, are Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Dharamsala, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Indore, Rajkot and Mumbai.

Except for the final match, which is set to be played at the world's largest stadium in Ahmedabad, the BCCI has not specified the venues for any games as yet.

The list of 12 cities, however, does not include Mohali and Nagpur, which had hosted a Test match against visiting Australia recently.

India had won the title when it last hosted the 50-over World Cup in 2011.

WORLD NO 1 ALCARAZ RETURNS TO MIAMI AFTER RAPID RISE

AP ■ MIAMI

World number one Carlos Alcaraz heads into this week's Miami Open looking to defend both his title and top ranking and admitting even he has been surprised by his dizzying rise to the top of the sport.

A year ago, the 19-year-old came to Miami on the back of wins on clay in Croatia and Brazil and hoping to make his mark on the hard courts. His victory in South Florida launched a remarkable year.

The highlight was his US Open triumph which made him the youngest player to become world number one and he returns to Miami after last week's win in Indian Wells, achieved without dropping a set in the tournament.

"It's all been very fast, when I got to Miami last year I was around number 20 and a year later I am coming in with the number one ranking. That is something very

special. I fulfilled my dreams quicker than I expected," he told reporters on Tuesday. Because of his victory in Miami last year, Alcaraz must win at the Florida event again if he is to hold on to his number one spot, but he says he feels no pressure in that regard or to meet newly raised expectations.

"I don't feel the pressure too much. I know the things I have to do. I need to play relaxed and not mind if I lose or if I play well or not," he said.

"My goal is always the same. To feel comfortable on court. To enjoy playing tennis and try to have great thoughts when playing. That is why I am playing at a good level. I am enjoying every single second and playing relaxed. That is what I am thinking about on court," he added.

As at Indian Wells, world number two Novak Djokovic is missing after being refused entry to the United States due to his lack of a COVID vaccine and Alcaraz says he misses the Serb's presence,



along with the injured Rafael Nadal. "I'm a professional tennis player, but also I'm a huge fan of tennis and I always want to watch the best players in the world, like Rafa, like Djokovic," he said.

"I played a couple of times against Rafa and I wish to play against him more and with

Djokovic as well. I wish to play against him more times, you know, but obviously in every tournament I want them to be playing and I hope we get them back soon," he said.

Far from feeling the weight of following in the footsteps of the 'Big Three' of Djokovic, Nadal and the

now retired Roger Federer, Alcaraz says he is trying to draw lessons from their successes.

"You have to improve, you have to get better every day. That's why the big players, the Big Three, for example, did all through their careers - to improve every day a little bit," he said.

Alcaraz can expect plenty of support from the crowd in Miami, which includes many Spanish-speaking fans.

"It's so special to come back here and feel the same energy that I felt, for example, last year," he said. "I have great supporters here, a lot of people supporting me. I remember last year it was unbelievable you know, with the crowd. I feel like I am at home, you know," he added.

The top seed will begin his title defence against Argentine Facundo Bagnis or a qualifier and could face two-time Miami champion and former world number one Andy Murray in the third round.

I'VE NEVER FELT THAT MUCH HATE: SABALENKA

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

Belarus' world number two Aryna Sabalenka says she has faced "hate" in the women's tour locker-room but hopes tensions with Ukrainian players will eventually ease. Australian Open champion Sabalenka lost to Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in Sunday's Indian Wells final and at the media day for this week's ATP-WTA Miami Open was asked about her recent comments on "tensions" in the locker-room between Ukrainian and Russian and Belarus players.

"It was really, really tough for me because I've never faced that much hate in the locker room," said Sabalenka. "Of course, there are a lot of haters on Instagram when you're losing the matches, but like in the locker room, I've never faced that," she added.

"It was really tough for me to

understand that there's so many people who really hate me for no reason, like no reason. I mean, like I did nothing," she said. Sabalenka said sometimes the tension had gone beyond awkward silences and abrupt conversations.

"I had some, not like fights, but I had some weird conversations with, not the girls, but with members of their team. It was really, it was tough. It was tough period. But, now it's getting better," she said. In comments at Indian Wells Sabalenka had said she had been in a dispute with Ukrainian Lesia Tsurenko's coach Nikita Plesch. Tsurenko was due to play Sabalenka at Indian Wells but withdrew before their match.

The Ukrainian said she had a "panic attack" and had also been upset with a conversation about the war and the position of Russian and Belarusian players with WTA CEO Steve Simon.



OPENING-UP

China's development benefits the world, and China cannot develop itself in isolation from the world. We must solidly promote high-level opening up, not only making good use of the global market and resources to develop ourselves, but also promoting common development of the world.
—Excerpt from Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech at the closing meeting of the 1st session of China's 14th National People's Congress

"An open China welcomes investors from all over the world"

"An open China welcomes investors from all over the world," said Premier Li Qiang of the State Council of China on March 13 when he met with Chinese and foreign reporters and answered their questions at a press conference of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress. This year, China will further expand opening-up in alignment with high-standard international trade rules. Li was also quoted as saying.

According to Li, opening-up is a basic state policy for China. No matter how the external situation may evolve, China will stay firmly committed to pursuing this policy. Data shows that most foreign companies are still optimistic about their development prospects in China.

Alexander Lomanov, head of the Center for the Asia-Pacific Studies of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations at the Russian Academy of Sciences, said that as the world's second largest economy, China is committed to fostering an open and inclusive world economy and creating new opportunities for the world with its own new development, which will inject confidence and momentum into the world's economic recovery.

Last year, China's utilized foreign investment totaled over US\$189 billion, which is again a record high, and almost US\$50 billion higher than that of three years ago. According to *White Paper on the Business Environment in China 2023* recently

released by the American Chamber of Commerce in South China, more than 90 percent of the participating companies select China as one of the most important investment destinations, and 75 percent of the participating companies plan to reinvest in China in 2023.

Nuno Matos, Global Chief Executive Officer of Wealth and Personal Banking of HSBC Group, said that years on, China has always been committed to promoting the opening up of its financial sector to the outside world and boosting innovation-driven sustainable development. He believes that foreign investors can play an important role in the development of green financial markets, and that "the depth of China's capital markets means

it has genuine potential to become a global leader in green financial markets."

Gustavo Biscassi, Director of External Affairs of Vale, a Fortune 500 company in Brazil, said that in recent years, China's business environment has continued to improve with relevant laws and regulations put into place and customs clearance getting increasingly efficient, which has benefited multinational enterprises, including Vale. "At some ports, customs clearance time has been significantly reduced from two to three days in the past to a few hours now, allowing us to deliver high-quality iron ore products to Chinese customers more efficiently."

China sets its GDP growth target for 2023 at

around 5 percent, which is higher than not only the expected economic growth of the world but also that of emerging markets and developing countries for



the same period. China's strong economic growth will further boost the world's economic recovery. (*Xinhua and People's Daily*)

On January 1, 2023, China's "Catalogue of Encouraged Industries for Foreign Investment" (2022 Edition) came into effect. Compared with the previous edition, the new edition of the catalogue has a net increase of 239 entries, the largest number of newly added entries in recent years. The industries included in the catalogue can enjoy preferential policies such as tariff exemptions and priority land supply.

"Chinese Business Environment Research Report 2024" shows that foreign companies are generally satisfied with China's business environment, with 90.22 percent of foreign companies reporting "moderately satisfied" or higher ratings for access to business premises and taxation, and 88.26 percent reporting "moderately satisfied" or higher ratings for market access.

FOCUS

"I'm impressed by an ever-changing China"

"When I first visited China in 2005 as the Egyptian Transport Minister, I could feel the rapidly developing Chinese economy. I've visited China more than 30 times so far, and I'm deeply impressed by an ever-changing China," said former Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf. He also pointed out that China's development achievements are not only reflected in its rapidly changing cities, but also in its people's ever-improving quality of life.

"Undoubtedly China couldn't have made these achievements without the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China." For Sharaf, the CPC has won the trust and support of the Chinese people by adhering to the vision of people-centered development. The "people-centered" approach is the secret of the CPC's success in

governance. It has "built the consensus of the whole society and pooled the strength for progress".

As one of the earliest Egyptian readers of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, Sharaf attended the seminar on the launch of the Arabic edition of the book back in 2014. In his view, the Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, and Global Security Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping are global public goods that will help promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. China's initiatives and actions "not only chart the course for improving global governance and upholding multilateralism, but also bring hope for prosperity and development to other developing countries."

(*People's Daily*)

NEWS

China adjusts visa and entry policy for foreigners

China has decided to adjust the country's visa and entry policy starting from 00:00 hours on March 15, 2023. It resumed the entry function of visas issued before March 28, 2020 and still within the validity period. Hainan entry visa exemption, Shanghai

cruise ship visa exemption, visa exemption for foreigners from Hong Kong and Macao to enter Guangdong, and visa exemption for ASEAN tourist groups to enter Guilin, Guangxi were also restored together.

(*Xinhua*)

FORUM

Int'l forum held in Yunnan, focusing on global development

The 2023 International Forum on Poverty Governance and Global Development (IFPGD) kicked off March 18 in northwest Yunnan's Nujiang Lisu autonomous prefecture.

With the theme of "new blueprint for rural revitalization and exciting opportunities for consolidating poverty-reduction achievements, enabling rural high-quality development through sci-tech, and revitalizing rural areas via green development", the forum was divided into four parts: the opening ceremony, the main forum, the themed sub-forums and a round table

for ambassadors.

More than 190 ambassadors, envoys, officials, experts and scholars from 20 countries and 4 international organizations attended the 3-day forum. They gave keynote speeches and held themed discussions on consolidating poverty-reduction achievements, enabling rural high-quality development through sci-tech, and revitalizing rural areas via green development. (*Yunnan Daily*)

BUSINESS

Business Chinese proficiency promotion program for Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry in India kicks off

The second business Chinese proficiency promotion program, co-sponsored by the Chinese Consulate General in Kolkata, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Foreign Affairs Office of the Yunnan Provincial People's Government, and Yunnan University, kicked off on March 11.

The leaders of relevant institutes in China and India, as well as the instructors and participants, attended the opening ceremony online. As is learned, the participants attending this program are medium and senior management personnel sent by the Bengal Chamber

of Commerce and Industry in India. Upon completion of the 60-hour program, which will last for 15 weeks, the participants will be awarded the Business Chinese (A2) certificate.

In recent years, India and China have been increasing bilateral trade and industrial cooperation. Making the most of its advantages, Yunnan Province has been closely communicating with South and Southeast Asian countries. It is hoped that the participants will play an active role in expanding China-India cooperation in various fields and strengthening friendly exchanges between the two countries. (*Yunnan Daily*)

PEOPLE

The spirit of Lei Feng reflects common values of humanity

"Life is limited, but serving the people is limitless. If one person can put the limited life into limitless cause of serving people, his or her life will become limitless."

This is one of the most well-known quotes from Lei Feng, a humble township government messenger, civil servant and later army truck driver in the 1950s and 1960s.

March 5, marks the annual Lei Feng Day across China. As a national role model who epitomizes the spirits of selflessness, diligence, humility and dedication, he has been commemorated and learned by Chinese people for decades.

Lei Feng, however, never walks alone. Every country around the world has its own heroes and role models that keep encouraging and inspiring the public despite time changes.

Therefore, we invite 6 young representatives from the Lancang-Mekong countries to share the stories of "Lei Feng" in their hearts.

Zhang Shiqin (China)

Lei Feng has left us with innumerable stories and memories. As a teacher from the Yulong Middle School in northeast Yunnan's Lijiang, I find him particularly inspiring because education can never be bettered without the devotion of every teacher.

Chou Lin (Cambodia)

Lei Feng is not just a product of his own era. Selflessness, dedication, helpfulness, modesty... All these spirits which he shows are invaluable human assets that should

be highly recognized, learned and passed on by people from around the world.

Santisouk Lachanphet (Laos)

In China, Lei Feng is an undoubtedly a symbol of dedication. To the people in Laos, Kaysone Phomvihane is such a figure like Lei Feng. As the former president of Laos, he dedicated his entire life to the liberation of Lao people and the development of our country.

Sai Myo Min Tun (Myanmar)

People primarily remember Lei Feng by his "selfless service for the people". This reminds me of Khaing Hin Wai, a renowned actress and philanthropist in Myanmar who has helped many orphans and disabled children. To me, she is genuinely the "Lei Feng of Myanmar."

Aranee Anusuriya (Thailand)

I totally understand people's feeling for Lei Feng here in China, because we have the same admiration and respectfulness for our beloved King Bhumibol the Great. What he did for his whole life was to make Thai people live a better life.

Trinh Nguyet Lan (Vietnam)

"Serving others without any thought of self-interests" was Lei Feng's motto. In Vietnam, the story of Vo Thi Sau has inspired one after another generations. As a young female guerilla, she sacrificed her life for the nation's independence at the age of 19.

A LIFESTYLE CALLED YUNNAN



"Bang, bang, bang... thump, thump, thump..." Tourists from all over the world come to the Dayan Ancient Town in Lijiang, Yunnan. Dressed in traditional Naxi costumes, they learn to make Dongba paper and write Dongba pictographs from He Xiuchang, an inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Dongba paper-making skills. The paper, made of a rare alpine wild herb known as *Wikstroemia*, is durable, moisture-proof, and moth-proof, and can last for more than a thousand years. (*Yunnan Daily*)



VIEW

China's innovation-driven development starts with QR codes

In the plan for the reform of bodies of the State Council approved by the ongoing first session of China's 14th National People's Congress, one point attracting the attention of foreign media is the re-establishment of the Ministry of Science and Technology.

For me, an Indian working in China, this is China's latest step to strengthen the spirit of innovation and pursue self-improvement in science and technology. When I came to China from India six years ago, I was soon drawn to the vibrant and fast-paced innovation here.

One summer day after I first arrived in China, I suddenly wanted to try a bowl of cold noodles that a friend of mine had recommended. When I seated myself at a

restaurant, I noticed a board on the table with a QR code on it. I took out my phone and scan the code, and a menu popped up on the screen. Without calling the waiter, I was able to browse the menu, order the food, and check out. It was an amazing experience!

In China, the ubiquitous "black and white squares" are the door opening to a world of convenience. From paying utility bills to renting a bicycle and taking the subway, the QR codes have revolutionized the way people interact with the world. You can even scan a code to pay for the fruit you buy from a street vendor.

The "black and white squares" are an epitome of China's digital economy that has been injecting important impetus in China's

innovation-driven development. The digital economy has always been covered by the government's annual work report for the past five years. During this year's Two Sessions, China announced the establishment of the National Data Administration.

Innovation has changed every aspect of Chinese people's life. From the high-speed rail network to life-saving medical technology, the fruits of technological progress have benefited every corner of the country. Telemedicine, for example, can overcome the barriers of time and distance and allow people in remote areas to access high-quality medical care, saving lives and improving the health of millions of people.

China's high-speed trains

are amazingly comfortable and convenient. The inter-city trains operating between Beijing and Tianjin can travel at speeds of up to 350 kilometers per hour, and a single ride takes only about half an hour. I have traveled to many countries, but I do not think that any other country can match China in terms of transportation infrastructure.

From infrastructure to cutting-edge technology, high-quality innovation is changing Chinese people's life in ways previously unimaginable. As a foreigner who has been living in China for many years, I believe that China's innovations will also make my life better. (*This article is originally written by Shameen Zakaria, an Indian correspondent with Xinhua.*)

Who is Lei Feng?

Lei Feng is one of the most enduring and symbolic figures of modern China. The spirits he showed — selflessness, hardwork, humility and dedication for example — have made him a national role model since the 1960s. Lei Feng was born in a poor family in the countryside of Hunan province in 1940. He worked as a messenger and civil servant before joining the People's Liberation Army at the age of 20. Lei Feng died in an accident when he was 22.