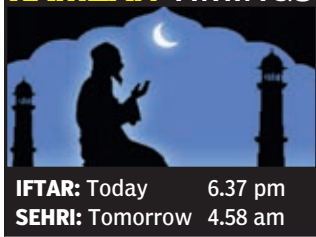


RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: Today 6.37 pm
SEHRI: Tomorrow 4.58 am

IN BRIEF

'All hosps will ensure functional CCTVs'

New Delhi: In response to concerns about women's safety, the Delhi govt has directed all the city run hospitals to ensure functional CCTV cameras. In an official circular to all the hospitals director and medical superintendent, the health department of Delhi govt has directed, "To ensure that all the CCTV Cameras installed in the Hospitals and Medical Colleges are functioning all the time and video feed are stored safely". Further, it is to be ensured that necessary CCTV provisions be made immediately to cover all relevant areas to ensure safety and security of all girl students in all medical colleges, it reads further. The hospitals have also been directed to ensure proper arrangement of audio-video recording in viva-voices of all girl students in all the medical colleges taken by the male faculties within a week's time, and till such time, a female observer shall be deployed during such viva-voices.

J&K murder: Man on run held after 16 yrs

New Delhi: A man, who was absconding in a murder case in Jammu and Kashmir for the last 14 years, was arrested from Punjab, the Delhi police said on Tuesday. The family of accused Inderpreet Singh, the son of a retired jail superintendent, had a property dispute with victim Madan Lal. So, he along with his associates planned the murder in Jammu and Kashmir and made it appear like a road accident, the police said. After a probe, sections of murder and destroying evidence were amended in the case, they said. Singh was absconding for the last 14 years but the Delhi police got a tip-off about Singh's presence in Punjab's Mohali and arrested him, ACP Sanjay Bhatia said.

US man held at IGI for smuggling

New Delhi: A US national was arrested at the international airport here for smuggling out of the country a "skull with horns appearing to be of antelope", an official statement issued on Tuesday by the customs department said. The accused, who was travelling to New York, was handed over to the customs officials by the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) security, it said. "The detailed examination of the baggage and personal search of the passenger resulted in recovery of one skull with horns appearing to be of antelope," the statement said. The recovered items were seized and the passenger was arrested, it added.

HOLI: OVER 12,000 MOTORIST FINED FOR DEFYING RULES

Noida: Over 12,200 motorists were penalised for violation of road traffic rules on the day of Holi across Noida and Greater Noida, the police said on Tuesday. Of the challans issued, 8,110 cases (or over 66 per cent) were for riding without a helmet on two-wheelers and 372 cases were for not wearing seat belts. Another 906 challans were issued for those found triple-riding on two-wheelers, they said. Challans were also issued in 82 cases of using mobile phones while driving or riding, 402 cases of violation of no-parking rules, 633 cases of driving in wrong lanes, 337 cases for defective number plates and 441 cases of jumping red lights, according to a statement. The police said a special road safety campaign was run under the supervision of DCP Anil Kumar Yadav on the day of Holi. "As part of the campaign, checking was done at 44 locations in Noida and Greater Noida. During the inspection, action was taken against 67 people who were found driving or riding under the influence of alcohol. The action ensured includes e-challans, seizure of vehicles, etc," the police said.

■ 'Notorious elements' trying to take advantage: Official ■ AAP gears up for March 31 maha rally
'Don't trust rumours, govt schemes won't stop'AVINASH PRABHAKAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

Amid the ongoing political crisis arising after the arrest of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the capital city, the Delhi government on Tuesday appealed to citizens to not fall prey to misinformation being spread by "notorious elements" who are trying to "take advantage" of the situation.

Planning secretary (Delhi government) Niharika Rai asserted that as the law takes its own course in the process of criminal investigation, it merits clarification that the administration of schemes and governance is never specific to individuals and shall continue in normal course.

"Even as the law takes its own course in the process of criminal investigation, it merits clarification that administration of schemes and governance is never specific to individuals and shall continue in normal course."

Kejriwal plea against arrest in HC today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

The Delhi high court will on Wednesday hear a petition by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam. Mr Kejriwal's petition, which has sought his immediate release on acco-unt of the arrest and the subsequent remand to ED being "illegal", is listed for hearing before Justice Swarnam Kanta Sharma at 10.30 am.

The Delhi CM was arrested on March 21 and subsequently remanded to the ED's custody.



Security personnel detain Punjab minister and AAP leader Harjot Singh Bains during their protest outside Patel Chowk Metro station in New Delhi on Tuesday against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

uals and shall continue in the normal course, as in the past," said Ms Niharika Rai in a statement.

Appealing to citizens of the city to stay away from any rumour mongers who would try to take advantage of the situation, she said in the official statement, "There shall be no disruption of any kind in the disbursement of admissible subsidies, pensions, welfare benefits, etc. Social welfare schemes are funded with public money through the consolidated fund, backed by budgetary allocations."

The statement clarified that social welfare funds are "neither the personal property of any individual or political entity nor funded by an individual or entity's personal money."

Meanwhile, the AAP has intensified preparations

We encourage fair, transparent legal process for Kejriwal: US

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

The United States has become the second foreign and Western nation after Germany to react to the recent arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, with Washington pressing for a "fair, transparent, and timely legal process" in the probe. Online media reports quoted news agency Reuters that had been told by the US state department spokesperson in an email response to a query, "We (the United States) encourage a fair, transparent, and timely legal process for chief minister Kejriwal."

Just last week, India had

▶ JUST LAST week, India had summoned the German deputy chief of mission and had lodged a strong protest after the German foreign office spokesperson had commented on the case

summoned the German deputy chief of mission (DCM) in New Delhi and had lodged a strong protest after the German foreign office spokesperson had commented on the case. It may be noted that Mr. Kejriwal was arrested last week in the national capital in the alleged Delhi liquor scam case. India has so far not yet reacted to Washington's remarks on

for a 'maha rally' at the Ramlila ground on March 31 in the backdrop of the arrest of Mr Kejriwal.

Delhi unit AAP convener and minister Gopal Rai said that several prominent leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc will join the mega rally.

Mr Rai said that preparations are underway for the mega rally for which ministers, MLAs, and office bearers of the AAP were deployed as observers for monitoring the arrangements.

He informed that the party office bearers and councillors will hold meetings with the public at all polling stations across Delhi for the rally. The observers will visit each Assembly constituency to take stock of the preparations, he added.

Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said the AAP's legal team is looking into permission for the rally and added that poll rallies are allowed normally.

Kavitha sent to 14-day custody in excise case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

BRS leader K. Kavitha was taken to Tihar jail after a Delhi court sent her to 14 days' judicial custody till April 9 on a plea made by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) that the "highly influential" arrestee, if released, was likely to influence witnesses and tamper with evidence.

"This is not a money laundering case. It is a political laundering case. One accused has already joined the BJP, the second accused is getting a BJP ticket, and the third accused has given ₹50 crore in electoral bonds. It is a fabricated and false case. We will come out clean. Jai Telangana," the leader said while being brought to the courtroom.

The 46-year-old leader was arrested by the Central probe agency on March 15 in a Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case.

The probe agency's application seeking 15-day jail custody was filed before special judge Kaveri Baweja, saying an investigation into economic crimes was more complex than ordinary crimes as economic offenders were influential, resourceful, and committed the crime meticulously.

The plea sought her judicial custody on the ground that "the arrestee is highly influential and there is every likelihood the arrestee will influence the witnesses and tamper with the evidence if released, (and) it may hamper the ongoing investigation."

BJP protests, says Kejriwal must quit

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

At least 57 BJP members, including the party's Delhi chief, were detained and water cannons were used during its protest march here on Tuesday to demand the resignation of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, according to the police. Traffic movement was also affected at ITO due to the protest.

Senior BJP leader and MP Harsh Vardhan said Mr Kejriwal has been arrested, and therefore, he should resign on moral grounds and give his responsibility to someone else.

BJP workers and leaders gathered near the Ferozshah Kotla stadium and marched towards the Delhi Secretariat, carrying their party's flag and raising slogans such as "Kejriwal Sharm Karo" and "Kejriwal Istifa Do".

The police said some workers climbed over barricades while marching towards the Secretariat. "To disperse the protestors, water cannons were used. Some of them were detained from near the Bahadur Shah

PIL in HC to stop CM from issuing directions to govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

A public interest litigation matter has been filed in the Delhi high court seeking directions to prevent chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has been arrested in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam, from issuing orders while in the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) custody. The petitioner, Surjit Singh Yadav, has said in the PIL that the issuance of such orders by Mr Kejriwal in the chief minister's capacity is against the legal framework as well as the principle of fair and proper investigation.

Zafar Marg when they tried to break through a layer of barricades," a police officer said. He said that about 57 BJP workers and leaders, including Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, were detained.



Security personnel use water cannon to disperse BJP workers during their protest in New Delhi on Tuesday against Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. — G.N. JHA

Woman, 27, killed over dowry; hubby, 3 relatives booked

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

A 27-year-old woman was killed allegedly by her husband over dowry in Bakhtawarpur area, the police said on Tuesday. According to the police, the victim's husband Manjeet, 30, allegedly slit her throat using a sharp-edged weapon at their home on Monday.

They said the police received information about a fight between the couple at around 7 pm and a team reached the spot and found the woman's body. "We got to know that there was some dowry-related issue between the husband and the wife, due to which he killed her," a senior police officer said.

Based on a complaint filed by the victim's family, an FIR was lodged at the Alipur police station under Indian Penal Code section 302 (murder) against Manjeet, his father Bhim (52), mother Meena (48), and brother Manish (27).

All accused have been apprehended and the body has been sent for a post-mortem examination, the officer said.

Butter chicken row escalates: Daryaganj sues Moti Mahal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

The restaurant chain Daryaganj has moved the Delhi high court against certain allegedly defamatory remarks made by the proprietors of Moti Mahal during an interview on the issue of the origin of "butter chicken".

"The Moti Mahal owners have filed a lawsuit claiming that their predecessor, Late Kundan Lal Gujral, invented 'butter chicken' and 'dal makhani'. They have also accused Daryaganj of 'misleading

16-yr-old girl raped; juvenile among 2 held

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

Two people, including a juvenile, have been nabbed for allegedly raping a 16-year-old girl, the police said on Tuesday.

On March 18, the girl was raped by the two accused, also her neighbours, when she was alone at home, the girl alleged in her complaint. A senior police official said a case was registered against the accused under relevant sections of IPC including 376 (2) and POCSO Act the same day.

Following this, Junaid Khan (25) was arrested from Uttar Pradesh's Amroha while the juvenile was apprehended from Shastrri Nagar; DCP M.K. Meena said.

"Despite the accused frequently changing their mobile phones and locations, their call detail records were analysed. Parallel raids were also conducted across various locations to prevent them from escaping," the DCP said.

people' on the origin of the two dishes. However, the owners of Moti Mahal have asserted that the remarks in question were an 'editorial perspective' and cannot be attributed to them. Justice Sanjeev Narula asked the proprietors of the Moti Mahal to submit an affidavit, affirming their effort to distance themselves from the statement in articles that have been published.

In an application filed in the lawsuit, Daryaganj has raised concerns regarding the 'defamatory' statements in the arti-

Speeding car hits scooter; mother dead, son hurt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

A woman died while her son, who sustained injuries, was allegedly dragged several metres after being trapped in a car when the scooter they were riding was struck in Delhi's Paschim Vihar area, an official said on Tuesday.

The incident took place on Monday.

According to the FIR, complainant Jagmeet Singh, a resident of New Mahavir Nagar, stated that around 4.00 pm on Monday, he along with his mother Mohini on scooter were on their way to Paschim Delhi.

"When we reached near Radisson Blu Hotel on Outer Ring Road, a white Creta car came speeding from behind and collided with my scooter. I was riding

Noida: Man fined ₹33,000 for flouting road rules while shooting 'vulgar' reel

Noida, March 26: A scooter-owner was slapped with fines totalling ₹33,000 for violating road safety rules here after a video surfaced online showing three people riding it, two of them women locked in a 'vulgar' embrace as they faced each other and played with colours. The suggestive video clip appeared to have been uploaded from the Instagram handle of

the scooter with my mother seated behind me," read the FIR. Mr Singh further told the police that due to the impact, his mother fell on the road and his scooter got

one of the riders.

While the two women hug and smear each other on the pillow, a man rides the two-wheeler.

Purported clips of the reel were seen on social media platforms where several users slammed it for "vulgarity and obscenity" in public.

Taking cognisance of online complaints on 'X' on Monday, the Noida traffic police said, "As per rules,

stuck in the Creta car, dragging him along for a considerable distance.

"As the car's driver slowed down near Bhairon Gol Chakkar, my scooter veered

action has been taken against the vehicle concerned for violation of traffic rules by issuing an e-challan (fine of ₹33,000)."

The challan has been issued for six violations of different laws, including the Motor Vehicles Act.

Meanwhile, some social media users slammed the video makers for "vulgarity", while it also sparked a debate online which took a communal turn. PTI

to one side and I immediately rushed to my mother's side. She had sustained injuries to her head, left shoulder, and hand," the FIR further stated.

UGC: Application deadline for CUET-UG extended till Mar 31

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

The application deadline for Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG has been extended till March 31, UGC chairman M. Jagadeesh Kumar announced on Tuesday.

Earlier, the deadline was 11.00 pm on Tuesday.

"The deadline for online submission of the application form for the CUET-UG 2024 has been extended up to 9.50 pm on March 31, 2024, based on the request received from candidates and other stakeholders," he said.

The exam is scheduled to be conducted from May 15 to 31. The standardised test was introduced in 2022 to streamline admission



M Jagadeesh Kumar

processes across Central, state, deemed and private universities nationwide.

A notable departure from tradition, the National Testing Agency (NTA) has outlined a hybrid examination format for CUET-UG 2024, including both computer-based testing and pen-and-paper modes for different subjects.

Officials have indicated that subjects witnessing high registration volumes will adopt a pen-and-paper format using OMR, while others will remain computer-based.

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-Tender Notice	
Sr. DEE-TRS-GZB acting for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender against Tender No. 230-TRS-GZB-2023-24-07. The details are as under:	
Name of the type compressor of 3-phase locomotive for a period of 24 months at Electric Work Loco Shed, Ghaziabad.	
Approx. Cost of work	Rs.46,02,490.80
Earnest Money to be Deposit	Rs.92,100.00
Last Date & Time of Submission of tender bid of tender	05.04.2024 (11:00 Hrs.)
Date & Time of opening of tender document	05.04.2024 (After 11:00 Hrs.)
Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in
Note: (i) The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in the e-tender system. (ii) For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. (iii) No manual offers are acceptable. (iv) Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only.	
No. 230-TRS-GZB-2023-24-07 Dated: 14.03.2024	
Serving Customers With A Smile	

SHORT TAKES

Mamata may resume poll drive March 31

Kolkata: West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee, who has been recuperating from her facial injuries at home over the last one week, is expected to resume her Lok Sabha election campaign from March 31. On Tuesday, the TMC announced that Ms Banerjee would address a party rally in Krishnanagar Dakshin which falls under the Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency where her expelled party MP Mahua Moitra is contesting for the second time. Interestingly, Ms Moitra's places were raided by the CBI recently in the "cash for query" case. On the other hand, Ms Banerjee has not been in public except a few occasions after she fell down at home and suffered injuries on forehead on March 14. Meanwhile, the TMC has lodged a complaint against Midnapore BJP MP Dilip Ghosh.

Nath's son files LS nomination in MP

Bhopal: Congress on Tuesday staged a show of strength in Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh with party veteran Kamal Nath's son Nakul filing nomination to retain the seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Host of senior leaders of the party in the state attended a massive rally held on the occasion. However, the absence of Mr Nath's (senior) close aide and former minister Deepak Saxena at the event has raised many eyebrows. Mr Saxena, who hails from Chhindwara, quit the Congress a week ago. Mr Nath (senior) was said to have held a meeting with him in Chhindwara on Monday to persuade him to attend the occasion. But, he did not turn up, causing a major setback to Mr Nath's efforts of keeping flock together in Chhindwara.

Former BJD MLA joins BJP in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Former Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MLA from Khallikote, Purna Chandra Sethy joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He cited being sidelined by the party the reason for his resignation. "The BJP is a democratically-run party with individual freedom. But the BJD is a one-man party. So I joined this party. I was feeling suffocated in that party. We needed a prior appointment to meet that one person (hinting at CM Naveen Patnaik). We were made to wait for days together to get a glance of him. It's easy to understand which party stands for democracy and which one for autocracy. I don't want to say anything further," Mr Sethy said. The BJP state president Manmohan Samal said Mr Sethy's joining will strengthen the BJP. Mr Sethy had represented Khallikote Assembly constituency as an MLA from 2009 to 2014.

ED SUMMONS WB MANTRI OVER ₹41L CASH SEIZE

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MARCH 26

The Enforcement Directorate has summoned West Bengal minister Chandranath Sinha into the recovery of ₹41 lakhs in cash from his residence at Bolpur in Birbhum last week. Mr Sinha — the minister of micro, small & medium enterprises and textiles department — has been asked to appear at the ED office in CGO Complex of Salt Lake on Wednesday to unlock his password-protected mobile phone that was seized during the raid, according to sources. The Bolpur Trinamul Congress MLA — who had faced the raid in connection with the school jobs scam after his suspected links were found — may not appear before ED due to his preoccupation with his party's Lok Sabha election campaign, sources claimed. He is likely to send his representative instead. On March 22, the ED recovered around ₹41 lakhs in cash during a marathon raid and search at "Chandralaya" — Mr Sinha's Bolpur residence. He then could not disclose the source of the money found at his house during questioning.



Chandranath Sinha

PM speaks to Basirhat pick, calls her 'Shakti Swarupa'

PM should speak to Manipur women also: TMC

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MARCH 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday called up Basirhat BJP candidate Rekha Patra one of the affected women of the violence at Sandeshkhali of North 24 Parganas in West Bengal and hailed her as "Shakti Swarupa" to motivate her in the Lok Sabha election-battle.

During their telephonic conversation, Mr Modi said, "Rekhaji, you are 'Shakti Swarupa' for the way you fought the atrocities at Sandeshkhali. You have sent so many powerful men to jail! Do you have any idea what a daring act you did?"

Replying to him, Ms Patra confidently said that she could do it because of the support she got from other women in the area before she vowed to move ahead with her goal.

Ms Patra, in an answer to PM's question of public reaction in Basirhat to her candidature, informed him that she faced opposition from some Trinamul Congress workers for getting a tick-



An undated photo of Rekha Patra.

— PTI

et from the BJP and alleged that she had not been able to cast her vote since 2011, as votes were looted during the previous elections.

Mr Modi told her, "I'm sure your message will reach the Election Commission, which in turn will ensure arrangements for all the voters to exercise their franchise fairly and freely. We also hope the EC will understand your pain of failing to cast your votes since 2011."

He also pledged his all out support behind the first-time BJP candidate and advised her to reach out to the voters with the message of the Central

MS PATRA, in an answer to PM's question of public reactions in Basirhat to her candidature, informed him that she faced opposition from some Trinamul Congress workers for getting a ticket from the BJP and alleged that she had not been able to cast her vote since 2011, as votes were looted

government's public welfare schemes.

The Trinamul Congress hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi immediately.

West Bengal state industry minister Shashi Panja said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi should have reprimanded Dilip Ghosh for insulting another 'Shakti Swarupa of Bengal' — our party chief Mamata Banerjee."

"Thousands of women of Manipur are waiting to hear from Mr Narendra Modi, but he is silent. What to expect from him when he himself came to Bengal in 2021 and cat-called Didi," Mr Panja added.

Modi to sound LS poll bugle from Meerut March 30

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

The "poll mascot" of the BJP-led NDA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to launch the ruling alliance's campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections on March 30 from Meerut, from where the BJP has fielded actor Arun Govil, who portrayed the role of Lord Ram in the Doordarshan's epic series "Ramayan".

While the recently consecrated "Ram Mandir" in Ayodhya will play a crucial role in the BJP's target of "400 paar" for the NDA, the party "star campaigner" PM Modi is launching the LS campaign from the politically crucial state and that too for "Lord Ram".

Mr Govil will be of great significance for the party's poll strategy. At this rally, sources said, BJP ally and RLD chief Jayant Chowdhary could also share the dais with the BJP leaders.



Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath during Holi celebrations in Gorakhpur on Tuesday.

— PTI

Tie-up talk with SAD ends, BJP will go solo in Punjab

SAD: Principles more important than number game

Chandigarh, March 26:

The BJP on Tuesday has announced that it will contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections on its own in Punjab, indicating an end to the negotiations for the revival of its alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). With the BJP deciding to go solo, the border state will see a four-cornered contest in the general election.

Polling for the 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab will be held on June 1 — the last phase of the seven-phase elections.

"The BJP is going to contest the Lok Sabha elections alone," Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar said in a video message posted on X.

After the BJP announced its decision, the SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal said, "For us, principles are more important than the number game."

He reiterated his party's commitment to Punjab and the community. Mr Jakhar said the BJP's decision to go it alone in



BJP national president J.P. Nadda with party candidate for Lok Sabha elections Bansuri Swaraj during Holi celebrations at his residence in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

Punjab was taken based on the feedback of people, party workers and leaders. The decision has been taken for the future of Punjab and the betterment of the youth, farmers, traders, labourers and the downtrodden, he said.

He exuded confidence that the people of Punjab will further strengthen the BJP by voting for it in large numbers on June 1.

The development comes almost a week after senior BJP leader and Union

home minister Amit Shah, when asked about the possibility of a tie-up with the SAD, had said, "Negotiations are on. We want all NDA parties to come together."

The SAD had walked out of the BJP-led NDA in September 2020 over the now-repealed farm laws.

The two parties had formed an alliance in 1996 and had been fighting polls together. In 2019, they won two Lok Sabha seats each in Punjab.

— PTI

Wife denied ticket, Assam leader Narah quits Cong

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MARCH 26

Amid the claims of Assam chief minister Himsanta Biswa Sarma that by 2026 most of Congress leaders will desert the grand old party, veteran Assam Congress leader and MLA Bharat Narah resigned from the party on Monday after his wife and former Union minister Ranee Narah was denied ticket from the Lakhimpur LS constituency in the state.

This has close to remarks of the Assam CM who predicted massive erosion in the Congress party. He had said, "In the last one and a half months, you have seen a big erosion of the Congress, as many Congress leaders and workers joined the BJP and AGP. I believe that there will be no Congress party in Assam by 2026. I don't want to comment on Bharat Narah, because I am not in touch with him. But I believe there will be

BJP hand in glove with AIUDF in Assam, asserts Cong leader

AGE CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI, MARCH 26

Veteran Assam Congress leader Rockybul Hussain who is contesting Lok Sabha election from Dhurbri Lok Sabha seat against AIUDF chief Baruddin Ajmal on Tuesday said that All India United Democratic Front that claims to have been fighting for Muslims

was hand in glove with the BJP and fielded candidates to support the saffron party.

Releasing photographs of Mr Ajmal and his brother MLA Sirajuddin Ajmal meeting Prime Minister Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah in New Delhi, Mr Hussain said Mr Ajmal was playing with sentiments of Muslims in Assam.

named Uday Shankar Hazarika, who switched over from the BJP in December 2023, as its Lakhimpur candidate. He was selected by the party over Ranee Narah, who has been elected from the Lakhimpur seat thrice — in 1998, 1999 and 2009 — and had also served a term as a Rajya Sabha MP and a Union minister during UPA rule in 2012.

Gaurav Gogoi, Sonowal file LS nomination

AGE CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI, MARCH 26

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and several other heavy weights including Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Tuesday filed nomination from their respective Lok Sabha constituencies for the upcoming elections to be held in the first phase of polling in Assam.

Mr Sonowal submitted his nomination as the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate for the Dibrugarh parliamentary constituency, while the Congress leader Gogoi filed from Jorhat constituency.

Desperate MVA offers 5 seats to VBA in Maha

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAR. 26

In a desperate move to prevent the division of anti-BJP votes, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Tuesday gave a new proposal of five seats to Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi. The Congress party has urged VBA chief Prakash Ambedkar to accept the new proposal. However, the VBA said it would announce its decision on Wednesday.

According to the sources, the five seats offered to the VBA include two seats each from the Congress and NCP quota and one seat from the Shiv Sena (UBT) share. The Congress has

taken the initiative to bring the Prakash Ambedkar-led VBA in its alliance.

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole said that Prakash Ambedkar-led VBA would remain with the MVA. "We have spoken with Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray regarding this. I am hopeful that both leaders would deliberate on this issue and ensure Prakash Ambedkar will remain in the MVA," the Maharashtra Congress chief said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut also said that the VBA is an alliance partner of the MVA.

Can't stop people from engaging in political activities, says apex court

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

In what could be a welcome relief for politicians in the run-up to the parliamentary polls, Supreme Court has quashed the bail condition imposed by the Orissa high court on a man barring him from getting involved in any political activity and said it would breach his fundamental rights.

A bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta passed the order on a plea filed by Siba

Shankar Das — a former mayor of Berhampur Municipal Corporation and a BJP leader — against the HC's January 18 order.

The HC had dismissed his application seeking withdrawal of the bail condition, which said that he "shall not create any untoward situation in public and shall not be involved in any political activities, directly or indirectly". The condition was imposed by the high court while ordering his release on bail in August 2022.

"We find that the imposition of such condition would breach the fundamental rights of the appellant and no such conditions could have been imposed," SC said in its order last week.

"We, therefore, quash and set aside the condition imposed by the HC, to the extent the same is extracted above," it said.

Mr Das had approached the HC seeking modification of the condition imposed by it in the August 11, 2022 order, while directing his release on bail.

Forces put 31 'forward operating bases' in Naxal-hit districts Nail in Naxals' coffin soon, says CRPF

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

Amid the shrinking footprints of Naxals in only 38 districts, the Central security forces are getting ready for a final assault to wipe out the decades old menace with a comprehensive and properly chalked-out strategy soon.

According to the sources, the security forces deployed in the hardcore Naxal-affected areas are preparing its move before the advent of the Monsoon season wherein the Maoist begins their fresh recruitment of cadres in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha.

▶ THERE HAS been a decline in Maoist violence, which has been attributed to the operations against the ultras and steps being taken by the Central and states security in the region

Recently, the CRPF DG Anish Dayal Singh made it clear that Naxalism will not last long in the country and the final assault will be in the offing soon to uproot them from their core areas.

The Central forces has so far, set up 31 "forward operating bases" (FOBs) in the Maoists' affected

areas in the three states, while the Chhattisgarh police set up a FOB in the hardcore Maoist leader Hidma's village Puvarti in Sukma district.

With the 31 FOBs in the hardcore areas of the three states has bolstered the strength of the CRPF and other Central forces in the so called "red corridor", the sources said, adding that efforts are being made to ensure that Naxals do not switch their bases to new territories.

They also indicated that the significant numbers of forces' troops have not been withdrawn from Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand for election

duty for the upcoming general election in April-May this year.

The new warfare strategy will have threadbare discussions with all security stakeholders involved in the operation including the concerned state government, a senior ground commander of the Central forces deployed in Chhattisgarh said on condition of anonymity.

There has been a decline in Maoist violence, which has been attributed to the continuous operations against these ultras and steps being taken by the Central and states government security and development in the region.

SHORT TAKES

Boy heckled for ‘Jai Shri Ram’ chants

Mumbai: An 11-year-old boy in Thane, Maharashtra, was reportedly forced to chant religious slogans by a group of minors, which has snowballed into a political controversy. The alleged incident took place at Mira Road near Mumbai. According to the complaint filed by the father of the 11-year-old, the boy greeted a watchman of his society with his community's slogan. However, another group of boys forced him to raise a different community's slogan. The police registered a case against five unknown persons. The FIR states that the victim boy had gone to purchase milk from a shop around 9.30 pm on Monday. While coming home, as usual, he said “Jai Shri Ram,” to a watchman of the society. Moments later, five boys entered the society's building and approached the victim. They forced him to say “Allah Hu Akbar” and then left the premises. The police said that all the five were minors.

Ramakrishna Mission head dies

Kolkata: President of Ramakrishna Mission Swami Smaranananda died due to old age ailments at the age of 95 on Tuesday night. He became the 16th president of the order in 2017, the RK Mission said in a statement. “Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, most revered President Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission attained Mahasamadhi today at 8.14 pm,” the statement read. The monk was admitted to Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan on January 29 with an existing urinary tract infection. He later developed respiratory failure for which he was put on a ventilator on March 3. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal chief minister Mamata condoled the death of the RK Mission president. — PTI

No ‘gula’ allowed at MP Mahakal temple

Bhopal: A day after a fire in the famous Mahakaleshwar temple in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh left 14 priests injured, the shrine management committee on Tuesday banned devotees from bringing ‘gula’ (colour powder used in celebration of holi) into its premises during the Rangpanchami festival, scheduled to be held on March 29. Meanwhile, the preliminary official probe into the incident has suggested that the gula used during the ‘bhasma aarti’ ritual in the sanctum sanctorum on Monday caused the fire. Sources said that a quintal of herbal gula, arranged by the temple administration, was used by the priests during the ‘bhasma aarti’ ritual inside the sanctum sanctorum and there was no incident of fire during the period. A magisterial inquiry ordered into the incident.

Jaishankar: India firmly supports Philippines amid tensions in SCS

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

At a time of escalating maritime tensions between the Philippines and China, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar declared in Manila on Tuesday that India “fully supports the Philippines in upholding its national sovereignty”.

The foreign minister is currently on a visit to the Southeast Asian nation that has a maritime territorial dispute with Beijing that has escalated sharply in the past few days after a Chinese coast guard vessel reportedly blocked the movement of a Philippine supply vessel.

Mr Jaishankar's remarks are being seen as a strong message to Beijing to not further escalate the tense situation.

During his meeting with Philippine foreign minis-



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar with secretary for foreign affairs of the Philippines Enrique Manalo during a meeting in Manila on Tuesday. — PTI

ter Enrique A. Manalo, Mr Jaishankar discussed strengthening the defence and security ties as well as trade ties between the two nations. Both nations decided to “accelerate maritime cooperation” and hold a bilateral maritime dialogue in Manila amid close ties reaching “unprecedented levels”.

Addressing a joint press

conference alongside his Philippines counterpart Enrique A. Manalo, Mr Jaishankar reaffirmed India's commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, emphasising its significance as the cornerstone of maritime governance.

As the world changes, it

is essential that countries like India and the Philippines cooperate more closely to shape the emerging order, he said.

Backing the Philippines, the EAM said that “every country has the right to uphold and enforce its national sovereignty”. “That is something that we have also discussed,” he added.

China has deployed hundreds of coastguard vessels throughout the South China Sea to patrol what it considers its waters, despite a 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling in a case brought by the Philippines that said the claim had no basis under international laws.

Mr Manalo said the Philippines consistently reaffirmed the need to abide by international law and also for international rules and regulations when it comes to the maritime area.

Mukhtar hospitalised after abdominal pain

Jailed don's brother alleges he was poisoned in UP jail

Lucknow, March 26: Jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari was admitted to the ICU at a hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Banda district early Tuesday with a complaint of abdominal pain. His brother and Ghazipur MP Afzal Ansari, who reached the hospital, alleged that he was given poison in jail. He told reporters that Mukhtar Ansari is in the intensive care unit (ICU) and is conscious.

An official statement of the prison department released in Lucknow said, “Due to the sudden deterioration in the health of prisoner Mukhtar Ansari and falling in the toilet in the night, he was immediately given treatment by the jail doctor.

“After informing the district administration, a



Mukhtar Ansari

team of doctors was called by which the prisoner was referred to the medical college in the night itself. The prisoner was admitted to Medical College Banda where he is undergoing treatment.”

According to a medical bulletin issued by the Banda Medical College, “Mukhtar Ansari was admitted there at 3.55 am with a complaint of pain in the abdomen... The patient is admitted and conservative treatment

has started. Patient is stable currently.”

Mukhtar Ansari, 60, is a five-time former MLA from Mau Sadar seat and has been behind bars in UP and Punjab since 2005. He has over 60 criminal cases pending against him. He has been sentenced in eight cases since September 2022 and was lodged in the Banda jail.

His family had earlier expressed apprehension that Mukhtar could be killed in a fake encounter.

Afzal Ansari claimed on Tuesday, “Mukhtar said that he was given poisonous a substance in food in jail. This happened for the second time. Around 40 days ago also he was given poison. And recently on March 19 of March 22, he was again given this (poison) due to which his condition is bad.” — PTI

Maoists kill 3 tribals playing Holi in Bastar

AGE CORRESPONDENT
RAIPUR, MARCH 26

Three tribals were brutally killed by Maoists when they were playing holi in a village in Bijapur district under Bastar in Chhattisgarh, police said on Tuesday.

The incident took place in the village of Pusaka late on Monday, police said.

The three slain youths ventured out of Basaguda, where the tribals who had purportedly taken part in the Salwa Judum (civil anti-Naxal resistance) movement launched by some tribals in Bastar in 2003, have been given shelter with police protection, to play holi in Pusaka, nearly one km away, on Monday.

Maoists suddenly attacked them when they were playing holi, police said.

Fulfil promises made to Ladakh: Wangchuk to PM

Leh, March 26: Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who is leading a hunger-strike here to demand statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, on Tuesday made a fresh appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fulfil promises made to the people.

In video messages shared on X, a frail-looking Wangchuk, whose “climate fast” entered the 21st day on Tuesday, called on the people of Ladakh to use their franchise “very carefully” this time in the interest of the nation.

Mr Wangchuk has been on “climate fast” in sub-zero temperatures since March 6, a day after talks between joint representatives of Leh-based Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), which are jointly spearheading the agita-



Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk speaks on the 21st day of his “climate fast” demanding statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. — PTI

tion to demand statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule, and the Central government hit a deadlock.

The Sixth Schedule contains provisions related to the administration of

tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram through autonomous district councils.

Reminding the Prime Minister of the promises made by the BJP in its election manifestoes, Mr Wangchuk said Modi is a devotee of Lord Ram and should follow his teaching of “*pran jaye par vachan na jaye*” (one may lose their life, but must not break their promise).

“While India is the mother of democracy, we citizens have a very special power: We are the king-makers, we can compel a government to change their ways or change the government if that doesn't work. Let us remember to use our ballot power very carefully this time in the interest of the nation,” said Mr Wangchuk, whose life inspired Amir Khan's character Rancho in 3 Idiots. — PTI

■ BRO links road connecting Manali to Leh, provides 3rd axis New road link to strategic Ladakh soon

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

Indian defence forces will now soon get a new road axis to reach strategically important Ladakh, a region witnessing continued tensions with China.

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has successfully linked the crucial Nimmu-Padam-Darcha road in Ladakh on March 25. This 298-km road will connect Manali to Leh through Darcha and Nimmu on Kargil-Leh

highway. The road is now the third axis apart from Manali-Leh and Srinagar-Leh which connects Ladakh to the hinterland.

The Nimmu-Padam-Darcha road derives its strategic importance from the fact that it is not only shorter vis-a-vis the other two axes, but crosses only one pass — Shinkun La (16,558 feet) — on which tunnel work is about to commence by the BRO. This will result in the road having all weather connectivity to the Ladakh

▶ **WHEN FULLY functional vehicle taking this road will reach Leh faster than Manali-Leh road. The connectivity will strengthen the defence preparedness.**

region. When fully functional vehicle taking this road will reach Leh faster than Manali-Leh road. The connectivity will strengthen the defence preparedness and provide a boost to the economic development in the

Zaskar valley. DG Border Roads Lt. Gen. Raghu Srinivasan said that in January, when the river Zaskakar was frozen, the equipment and personnel were mobilised and the work of establishing the connectivity was completed. He exuded confidence that the work on black topping the road will start soon. With construction of Shinkun La tunnel commencing, the third all weather axis to Ladakh will be established, he added.

BJP fields 6 Cong turncoats in HP Assembly bypolls

■ **Continued From Page 1** held on June 1, along with the election to the four Lok Sabha seats in the state — Hamirpur, Shimla, Mandi and Kangra.

With the disqualification of six Congress MLAs, the strength of the ruling party came down from 40 to 34, including the Speaker who can vote only in the case of a

tie during a floor test, in the 68-member Assembly. The BJP has 25 members.

Ever since the Rajya Sabha polls, the BJP and Congress have been trading charges with the ruling party slamming the Opposition for hatching a conspiracy to topple the democratically elected government in the state by using money power

and maintaining that the public will not forgive the Congress rebels for their betrayal.

In Gujarat, the BJP's candidates for bypolls to five seats also includes Arjun Modhvadiya, Chatursinh Chavda and Arvind Ladani, who had recently joined the party from the Congress.

The BJP also named its

candidates for the bypolls to two seats in West Bengal and one seat in Karnataka, besides for nine Assembly seats in Sikkim.

The party has named former minister Narasimha Naik, also known as Raju Gowda, as its candidate for the Shorapur Assembly bypoll in Karnataka, which is to be held on May 7. The

party has named Bhaskar Sarkar and Sajal Ghosh for the Bhanawangola Baranagar seats bypolls in West Bengal.

Assembly elections in Sikkim are held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls. The BJP recently broke its alliance with the state's ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha.

Row over remarks on Kangana, BJP moves EC

■ **Continued From Page 1** supporters on social media platforms. As the controversy erupted, Ms Shrinate on Monday denied that she had written the controversial post. She claimed that many people have access to her Facebook and Instagram accounts and one of them posted the inappropriate comment. Ms Shrinate also said she had deleted the post and will take action against a parody account that is using her name. The now-deleted post was, however, reposted by many. After the Congress leaders' comments on the social media snowballed into a controversy, Ms Ranaut, who will be making her political debut as the BJP's Mandi candidate, said, “Every woman, irrespective of her background and profession, deserves dignity.” She met BJP president J.P. Nadda later in the evening. Taking cognisance of the issue, the National

Commission for Women (NCW) has written to the Election Commission, demanding strict action against Ms Shrinate and another Congress leader A.S. Ahir. “NCW is appalled by the disgraceful conduct of Ms Shrinate and Mr Ahir, who made lewd and derogatory remarks about @KanganaTeam on social media. Such behaviour is intolerable and goes against the dignity of women...” the NCW said in a post on Monday. Joining the BJP's rank to attack the Congress and its leadership over the derogatory remarks, the daughter of former President Pranab Mukherjee, Sharmishta Mukherjee, questioned the “mentality of the Congress” and asked the top leadership of the party to apologise for the derogatory remarks. “She's saying ‘access’, not hacked! One gives access to SM accounts

only to known & trusted people. Nothing left of Congress ideology with the Rahul-Congress gang. ‘Nari Nyay’ is nothing but an empty slogan by a bunch of hypocrites!” posted Ms Mukherjee on social media. Before leaving Chandigarh for Delhi for her meeting with Mr Nadda on Tuesday, Ms Ranaut, while speaking to the media, said, “Whatever be the profession of a woman, be it a teacher, actress, journalist, politician or sex worker, all of them deserve dignity. I'm pained, especially because of the deplorable comments made about Mandi... All of us who come from Mandi have been hurt by the comments.” Several BJP leaders, including Bansuri Swaraj, Amit Malviya and former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur, spoke up on the issue. Taking on Ms Shrinate, Mr Malviya said,

“If your account is posting what a parody account posts, then it simply means that the admins of both accounts are the same. One has to be self-conceited, to the point of being deranged, to do so. Also, the administrators must have a low opinion of you to post such offensive stuff and get away.” “Such derogatory words were used for someone who is India's daughter and a woman. This is very shocking and shows the mentality of the Congress. The top leadership of the Congress should apologise for this,” Ms Swaraj told a news agency. Mr Thakur said the remarks against Ms Ranaut will be legally examined and the BJP is moving towards registering a case. He said Ms Shrinate had made a “big mistake” as people of faith come to Mandi, which is known as “Chhoti Kashi” and is an abode for over 300 tem-

ples. “It is unfortunate that, being a woman herself, the Congress spokesperson has made such remarks against another woman and now she is trying to retract by saying that someone has used her other account,” Mr Thakur said.

Former diplomat Lakshmi Puri termed the remarks against the actor “despicable, derogatory and condemnable.” “That it should come from another woman politician is all the more galling — how can we as women become transmitters of toxic patriarchy & demeaning slurs & insults that scrape at the bottom of the barrel of indignity!” she posted on X. Congress spokesperson Pawan Kherra took up cudgels on his colleague's behalf. “Anybody who has known my colleague @SupriyaShrinat will vouch for the fact that she can never resort to such objectionable language ever.”

AAP, BJP hold Delhi protests; Kejriwal issues 2nd directive

■ **Continued From Page 1** not be taken up as the high court was closed on account of Holi. Mr Kejriwal, who has been remanded to ED custody in the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, is to be produced before the Rouse Avenue court at 2 pm on Thursday.

In a post on X, city health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said, “Tomorrow is the session of Delhi Assembly. The chief secretary has been ordered to inform the status of free medicines and free tests in hospitals and mohalla clinics and if there is any deficiency, then come up with a complete plan to correct it. So that I can inform the Assembly.”

Sharing details of the chief minister's order, Mr Bharadwaj told a press conference that health-care in Delhi has always been Mr Kejriwal's priority. He said Mr Kejriwal believes that even though he has been arrested, people in Delhi should not face any problems getting free tests and medicines in government hospitals and mohalla clinics.

“He has issued a direction to me to address the issues. The health department will act immediately to address the issues,” the

minister said.

Last week, the AAP national convener, who is in ED custody till March 28, issued directions to water minister Atishi to address the water and sewer issues in some parts of the city.

Taking cognisance of the Delhi CM's order from the custody, the ED, it is learnt, will ascertain if it is in line with the legal provisions.

The Delhi government, meanwhile, has appealed to citizens not to fall prey to misinformation being spread by “notorious elements” who are trying to “take advantage” of the situation arising from the arrest of the chief minister. A note signed by planning department secretary Niharika Rai assured that the Delhi government's welfare schemes and subsidies will continue. The note read: “...administration of schemes and governance are never specific to individuals and shall continue in the normal course, as in the past.”

As protests and counter-protests continued in the national capital, several AAP leaders, including Sonnath Bharti, Delhi Assembly deputy Speaker Rakhi Birla and Punjab minister Harjot Singh Bains, were detained by

the police while heading towards the Prime Minister's residence.

Claiming that the Delhi police has turned the national capital into a “fortress”, AAP Delhi unit convener Gopal Rai said that the way the BJP-led Central government has imposed restrictions under Section 144 “across the city,” it seems Delhi has become a “police state.”

Mr Rai claimed that women workers of his party were dragged and detained. He asserted that the fight against the “dictatorship” in the country is the struggle of those who love democracy and the Constitution and announced that preparations are now underway for a “maha rally” at Delhi's Ramliia Ground on March 31.

While the AAP protested against Mr Kejriwal's arrest, senior BJP leader and MP Harsh Vardhan said the Delhi CM should resign on moral grounds and give his responsibility to someone else.

The BJP workers and leaders gathered near the Ferozshah Kotla stadium and marched towards the Delhi Secretariat, carrying the party's flag and raising slogans such as “Kejriwal sharm karo” and “Kejriwal istifa do”.

THE ASIAN AGE

27 MARCH 2024

Only probe can prove facts of murky poll bond sales

The Supreme Court of India struck down the electoral bond scheme finding it violative of the citizen's fundamental right to information under Article 19 of the Constitution. The information that has reached the public domain after the State Bank of India, which executed the scheme, handed it over to the Election Commission of India on the orders of the court would indicate that the scheme not only facilitated violation of an enabling provision of the Constitution but also criminal and anti-corruption laws on governance in this country.

It was legally mandated that no information on the donors and the recipients of the bonds be kept by the bank but the information the SBI has passed on to the ECI indicates that there is documentation of their details. This gives the lie to the basic argument of the proponents of the scheme that it was designed in such a way to offer total anonymity, so that it would enable corporates to fund elections without fearing reprisals from the government in power. It now transpires that the bank had indeed held on to the information, and it is common knowledge that the government of the day can get access to such information.

The date of arrest of an industrialist in the Delhi excise policy case, his turning an approver and his availing bail have all links to the purchase of electoral bonds by the firm of which he is a director

There are allegations of quid pro quo in the purchase and donation of the bonds. Reports of the links between companies buying the bonds and getting huge government contracts have already appeared. Interestingly, they are not limited to one party or government. There are also reports of companies in certain sectors of the economy buying them as a cartel to propitiate the powers that be. The possibility of them either getting favours or escaping government action cannot be ruled out.

The more serious allegations about the electoral bonds scheme is that it has been used, along with the investigating agencies, by the BJP that runs the Union government as a tool for extortion of money from corporate houses. Reports say a good share of the companies which made most purchase of the bonds, was being investigated by the agencies, including the income tax department, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). It has also been reported that the date of arrest of an industrialist in the Delhi excise policy case, his turning approver and his being enlarged on bail have all links to the purchase of electoral bonds by the company of which he is a director. It is interesting to note that the Supreme Court, while hearing the bail application of former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, had pointed out that all that the ED, which had arrested Mr Sisodia, had against the accused were statements of approvers and nothing else.

The information that throws light on the possible murky deals behind a scheme which was claimed to be making political funding transparent has come out in the open only after the Supreme Court put it its foot down and ordered the SBI to comply with its order. The information so revealed points to a web of undesirable and even illegal practices that could have a devastating impact on the right to self-determination of the people of this republic. The demand of the Congress, the principal Opposition party, for a court-monitored investigation to see if there is truth in the allegations of quid pro quo and extortion in the operation of the scheme, therefore, has merit in it.

Will Gaza ceasefire call work?

UN Security Council resolution has called for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Top Israeli officials have indicated that they will not implement it now, thus further widening the rift between the US and Israel caused by the US allowing the resolution to go through by abstaining and not using its veto power as it did on three previous occasions.

A silver lining was spotted when Hamas initially expressed a commitment to the conditions, including a swap of Palestinian prisoners in Israel for Israeli hostages held in Gaza, before falling back on old conditions like a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

If missiles are not launched and guns are silent in the remainder of the month of Ramzan, peace might just be given the chance it deserves. The scenario will, however, be determined only by Mr Benjamin Netanyahu whose hold on the Prime Minister's post is guaranteed only so long as war operations against Hamas last.

The script could change if all the hostages are released and he can face angry and anxious Israeli citizens again, but that is wishful thinking as much as Hamas' belief that all Israeli troops will withdraw from Gaza and it can fill the power and administrative vacuum again.

There is a suggestion in the changed US stance that Mr Joe Biden may be under pressure from the looming presidential elections because one set of people has been turning against him after seeing the grave humanitarian crisis that has the Gaza Strip, including Rafah, in its grip. Starving children are being admitted to hospital so they could get something to eat even as the refugees seeking shelter in Rafah are bracing for the operations of Israeli forces against Hamas.

There is no question the war must first end so the horrors can stop. A smidgen of pragmatism is seen in countries putting behind the savagery of the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and the disproportionate response in Israeli bombing half of Gaza to rubble when they voted in the UN calling for the ceasefire that has a legal binding which Israel may, however, ignore.

The release of the first hostage might well signal the start of a ceasefire. However fragile it may prove to be, it is the only hope that humanity can see the end of this five-month catastrophic conflict that has seen over 30,000 Palestinian deaths after 1,200 Israelis were killed in the Hamas strike and another 200 died during the ensuing war.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.
Published and Printed on behalf of and for
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.
London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



India's Himalayan embrace: Thimphu ties get enhanced



Wasbir Hussain

On Saturday, March 23, Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded a very meaningful 24-hour visit to Bhutan that signalled a deepening of the traditional bond of friendship between the two neighbours. The embrace with which Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay greeted Mr Modi as he alighted from his aircraft at Paro, to people dressed in traditional weaves lining up the entire 50-km distance to Thimphu, the capital, and waving the Indian tricolour indicated the level of excitement in the tiny Himalayan nation of 800,000 people over the Indian PM's visit. Once at his hotel, even before he entered his suite, Mr Modi was treated to Dandiya by local Bhutanese performers. Mr Modi was seen smiling and clapping in admiration.

It is rare for an Indian PM to undertake a foreign visit after parliamentary elections are announced and Mr Modi was already in the middle of poll campaigning across the country. But when it is Bhutan calling, things become different. In 2014, when he became PM for the first time, Bhutan was Mr Modi's first foreign visit. He visited the nation again in 2019. Now, as he is about to complete his second term and a decade as PM and is seeking re-election, Mr Modi accepted King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk's invitation and landed in Bhutan to a rousing reception. Prime Minister Modi assured Bhutan's top leadership that India will stand with the Himalayan nation in fulfilling its development goals and that the extraordinary bilateral ties the two nations have would create opportunities for greater cooperation in infrastructure, connectivity, trade, energy and space sectors. Mr Modi also announced India's commitment to providing ₹10,000 crores in support to Bhutan over the next five years. For Bhutan's 12th five-year plan, India had allocated ₹5,000 crores. This means New Delhi has decided to double its plan assistance to Thimphu. The two nations signed multiple agreements in these areas that would enhance cooperation. Assistance and commitments aside, there have been many firsts during this visit of Prime Minister Modi to Bhutan. Mr Modi is the first foreign dignitary to have been conferred Bhutan's highest civilian award, Order of the Druk Gyalpo. Besides, he has been the only Indian PM to have been hosted by the King and the Queen of Bhutan at their official abode, the Lingkha Palace, for a private dinner. And breaking protocol, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk was at Paro airport to see off Prime Minister Modi. These are unmissable signals of the bond of friendship between the two nations. Of course, during the cultural function, apart from the traditional Bhutanese dances, local artists performed to the tune of 'Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram'.

Did New Delhi attempt to send out other messages out of Mr Modi's visit to Bhutan? Well, this visit came as Thimphu has been engaged in a tricky dialogue with Beijing to resolve the Bhutan-China boundary dispute with Doklam being one of the stretches. The 477-km border that Bhutan shares with China's Tibet region is of considerable significance to New Delhi as it touches two tripoints with India, Bhutan and China. In the west is Doklam (the site of the 2017 India-China standoff), and in the east is the eastern terminus of the McMahon Line, which indicates the India-China

India is maintaining a close watch on the Bhutan-China border talks. The Chinese would definitely like to start diplomatic relations with Bhutan, perhaps by having a diplomatic mission in Thimphu, but that is not happening for now.

border in the region. New Delhi considers Doklam to be Bhutanese territory and is worried over the possible ceding of a stretch close to it to China, in which case it could be a threat to the strategic and narrow 21-km wide Siliguri Corridor that links northeastern India to the mainland. India, therefore, is maintaining a close watch on the Bhutan-China border talks. The Chinese, on their part, would definitely like to start diplomatic relations with Bhutan, perhaps by having a diplomatic mission in Thimphu, but that is not happening for now.

Bhutan could be wary too about Beijing's motive. This is where the trust with India comes into play as New Delhi and Thimphu have been locked in time-tested friendship and understanding, demonstrated loud and clear yet again by this latest visit of Prime Minister Modi to Bhutan.

Besides, Mr Modi's visit to Bhutan came just two weeks after he inaugurated the Sela Tunnel, the world's longest twin-lane tunnel, in Arunachal Pradesh. This tunnel has been hailed as an engineering marvel — blasted through the Himalayas at an elevation of some 13,000 feet — and providing the Indian military and civilians an all-weather, faster road to the border with China. As usual, Beijing protested against the building of the tunnel and called it an attempt by New Delhi to undermine peace along the border, a charge India promptly rejected, saying the area is an "integral and inalienable part of India". The US state department backed India's position, angering Beijing further. Against these backdrops, Mr Modi's Bhutan visit gave out a clear message

that India was committed and capable of assisting Bhutan to achieve its goals of progress and development. Now, Prime Minister Modi has also given his government's commitment of assisting in ensuring the fruition of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk's dream project — the "Mindfulness City" that is coming up at Gelephu, along the border with Assam. This is a mega smart city that is being built in the plains of Gelephu, just about 50 km from Kokrajhar in western Assam, and will showcase Bhutan's traditional architecture and culture.

King Wangchuk paid a historic visit to Assam in November last year, becoming the first Bhutanese monarch to visit one of the Himalayan nation's closest neighbours. Later, he flew to New Delhi and met Prime Minister Modi on the Gelephu project. Thereafter, the King met top Indian business leaders in Mumbai and received assurances from many of them on investments in the "Mindfulness City". Prime Minister Modi publicly pledged support to the Gelephu city project during his latest visit to Bhutan and promised to build and improve rail and road connectivity through Assam to Gelephu.

Prime Minister Modi talked of B2B and P2P relations between the two countries during his address after receiving Bhutan's highest civilian award on Friday, March 22. B2B meaning Bharat to Bhutan and P2P meaning people to people. This was also something which King Wangchuk had told Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma during his visit in November. "We are family", the King was reported to have told Mr Sarma, referring to Bhutan-Assam people-to-people relations. And it is not surprising to see that Bhutan has extended an official invitation to the Assam chief minister to visit the Himalayan nation.

Wasbir Hussain, author and political commentator, is editor-in-chief of Northeast Live, Northeast India's only satellite English and Hindi news channel

LETTERS

QUEEN'S CORNER

Life has come full circle for Kangana Ranaut. From essaying the role of J. Jayalalithaa on the screen, she is now embarking on a political career off-screen as well. The Tanu Weds Manu star will be contesting Lok Sabha elections in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi for the BJP this year. The BJP's culture is one of cooperating with one another. Ms Ranaut hinted at entering electoral politics when she offered prayers at Gujarat's Dwarkadhish temple in November. A vocal proponent of right-wing politics, she will now face her moment of truth.

M.R. Jayanthi
Navi Mumbai

METHANE PRODUCER

THE WMO's most recent data show that the Earth's temperature has been above average during the last decade. The temperature is anticipated to rise further in 2024. While the environment is changing, we humans are unable to modify our behaviour and attitudes. Perhaps we are incapable of understanding that the weather does not respect the boundaries we set for it. Weather warnings apply to the entire planet. We now need to quickly reset our carbon emission targets and objectives. Not just carbon emissions, but also methane and nitride oxide, pose significant difficulties. After China, India produces the most methane.

Abhijit Roy
Jamshedpur

SHOT IN THE ARM

KALYANA RAJYA Pragathi Paksha MLA G. Janardhana Reddy's decision to rejoin the BJP along with his wife and other followers must be a shot in the arm for the saffron party. The mining baron declared the merger would have no conditions and that he would serve as an ordinary worker. Reddy played a crucial role in the BJP's rise to power in 2008. His homecoming will help the party in and around Ballari, his home district.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



Kejriwal's arrest comes amidst BJP's distrust of federal principle

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest just before the Lok Sabha elections will be seen as an attack on democracy, which it is without doubt. It is also of a piece with the BJP's distrust of federalism. Down the years, but especially after the linguistic states were formed, the party wanted federalism and the entire edifice of states in India to be abandoned in favour of a single legislature and, given that we were in a parliamentary system, a single leader.

M.S. Golwalkar, the then head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, wrote an essay in 1956, that is reproduced in his book Bunch of Thoughts. He writes: "Then came our present Constitution converting our country into a number of almost distinct units each with a 'state' of its own and all 'federated' into one 'Union'... When one pauses to think of the conditions in which the makers of this Constitution lived when they framed this Constitution, one sees that the atmosphere then was extremely congenial to the formation and evolution of a unitary state — One Country, One Legislature, One Executive Centre running the administration throughout the country — an expression of one homogeneous solid nation in Bharat or what remained of it then. But the mind and reason of the leaders were conditioned by the obsession of a 'federation of states' where each linguistic group enjoyed a 'wide autonomy' as 'one people' with its own separate language and culture."

He continues under the subhead "There Is a Remedy".

"Towards this end the most important and effective step will be to bury deep for good all talk of a federal structure of our country's Constitution, to sweep away the existence of all 'autonomous' or semi-autonomous 'states' within the one State, viz, Bharat and proclaim 'One Country, One State, One Legislature, One Executive', with no trace of fragmentational, regional, sectarian, linguistic or other types of pride being given a scope for playing havoc with our integrated harmony. Let the Constitution be re-examined and re-drafted, so as to establish this unitary form of government".

The second source we have for the hostility to federalism and Article 1 of the Constitution is from Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. Article 3 of the BJP constitution says the Integral Humanism shall be the basic philosophy of the party.

Integral Humanism is the name given to a set of four lectures which Upadhyaya gave in Mumbai (then Bombay) between April 22 and April 25, 1965.

What follows is a quotation from the third lecture. It is headlined "Constitution Cannot Be Arbitrary".

Upadhyaya writes: "Is the Constitution too not subject to some principles of a more fundamental nature? We have a written Constitution, but even this written Constitution cannot go contrary to

the traditions of this country. In as much as it does go contrary to our traditions, it is not fulfilling dharma. That Constitution which sustains the nation is in tune with dharma.

"There is no recognition of the idea of Bharat Mata, our sacred motherland, as enshrined in the hearts of our people. According to the first para of the Constitution 'India that is Bharat will be a Federation of States', i.e. Bihar Mata, Banga Mata, Punjab Mata, Kannada Mata, Tamil Mata, are all put together to make Bharat Mata. This is ridiculous. We have thought of the provinces as limbs of Bharat Mata and not as individual mothers. Therefore, our Constitution should be unitary instead of federal."

With such hostility to the provinces, even if it has gone mostly unnoticed, it should not surprise us that the chief ministers are not seen as legitimate even if they are elected. The BJP can hold on to the position, at least justifying it to itself, that we are a democracy and that elected chief ministers can be jailed without conviction.

After 2014, this ideological attack on federalism has manifested itself in several ways.

The use of Union government agencies to intrude into "law and order", ostensibly a state subject.

The ending of states' right to tax with GST and their total dependence on the Union's largesse.

The call for "one nation, one election", which privileges the Union one over all the rest.

The Union government's attack on Opposition state governments and leaderships in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Telangana and Delhi. Whether through arrests, denial of allocated funds, through constant intrusion and through interference.

This is untenable in democracy and we can see the tension having built to bursting point. This is the background to the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and other ministers before that, and of the chief minister of Jharkhand, Hemant Soren, last month and the jailing of Telangana's BRS leader K. Kavitha this month. It shows the utter contempt that the Central government has for the Opposition and for democracy, the disregard it has for the judiciary and the extent to which it can go to secure its own interests over those of the country.

The question is: What is to be done to resist the twin thrusts of the BJP's ideology, majoritarian and a strong centripetal instinct against federalism?

The internal mechanisms of opposing authoritarianism have never worked well in India, including during the 1975-77 Emergency. Jayaprakash Narayan was an exception, but one wonders what he might have achieved in an era of the ED and CBI.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

SHORT TAKES

CHINA FILES WTO PLAINT AGAINST U.S.

Beijing: China filed a World Trade Organisation (WTO) complaint against the U.S. on Tuesday over what it says are discriminatory requirements for electric vehicles subsidies. Starting this year, U.S. car buyers are not eligible for tax credits of \$3,750 to \$7,500 if critical minerals or other battery components were made by Chinese, Russian, North Korean or Iranian companies. The credits are part of U.S. President Joe Bidens signature climate legislation, named the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. China is the dominant player in batteries for electric vehicles.

SC HEARS PLEA ON USE OF ABORTION PILLS IN U.S.

Washington: The Supreme Court was hearing arguments on Tuesday in its first abortion case since conservative justices overturned the constitutional right to an abortion two years ago. At stake is ease of access to a medication that was used in nearly two-thirds of all abortions in the U.S. last year.

Abortion opponents are asking the justices to ratify a ruling from a conservative federal appeals court that would limit access to mifepristone, one of two drugs used in medication abortions.

FOREST FIRES BURN NEARLY HALF OF MEXICO

Nogales, Mexico: Forest fires were burning in nearly half of Mexicos drought-stricken states fueled by strong winds.

The National Forestry Commission reported 58 active fires in 15 states, including in protected nature reserves in Morelos, Veracruz and Mexico states. A preliminary estimate of the affected area reached more than 3,500 acres (1,421 hectares), the commission wrote on the social platform X. Authorities had reported no injuries, but at least some homes were burned at a wild-fire in Nogales.

TAIWAN CONDUCTS AIR DRILLS POST CHINA ‘INTRUSION’

Yilan: Taiwan conducted an air defence test on Tuesday deploying US-made Patriot missiles and its anti-aircraft artillery systems, saying it will ramp up training in the face of Chinese military “intrusions” around the self-ruled island.

Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory and said it will not rule out using force to bring the island under its control.

Taiwan’s Air Force Command said it conducted an exercise between 5:00 and 7:00 am (2100-2300 GMT Monday) that included the island’s domestically made Sky Bow and US-made Patriot surface-to-air missiles along with army and navy units.

TURKEY DETAINS 147 I.S. SUSPECTS IN MASSIVE RAID

Istanbul: Turkish authorities rounded up scores of suspects with alleged links to Islamic State group in nationwide raids, a government minister said on Tuesday.

During simultaneous raids carried out in 30 cities across the country, 147 suspects were detained, interior minister Ali Yerlikaya announced on social media.

LANKA CUTS KEY INTEREST RATES, SEEKS CHINA DEAL

Colombo: Sri Lanka’s central bank cut interest rates on Tuesday as the prime minister visited China seeking a debt restructuring deal crucial to maintaining an IMF bailout.

Transport minister and government spokesman Bandula Gunawardana said Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardana was in Beijing, the island’s biggest bilateral creditor. “We are in the final stages of restructuring our foreign debt and the prime minister is in China for this purpose,” Gunawardana told reporters in Colombo.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said the economy was rebounding since the second quarter of last year, helping it to reduce the benchmark lending rate from 10 per cent to 9.5 per cent. The deposit rate was also reduced by 50 basis points to 8.5 per cent, the first reduction in four months.

The bank said it would boost “the ongoing revival of economic activity.”

Baltimore bridge collapses as cargo ship plows into pylon

Ship reported power issue, traffic flow on bridge halted; Cops rule out terror



DALI, THE SHIP THAT BROUGHT DOWN BALTIMORE BRIDGE: FLIES UNDER SINGAPORE’S FLAG

CONSTRUCTED: Korean Hyundai shipyard
YEAR: 2015

BUILT: 300 metres long (985 feet), 48 metres wide and 24.8 metres tall

WEIGHT: Gross Tonnage of 95,000 Tonnes

FUEL CAPACITY: 8,344 cubic metres (2.2 million gallons)
BELONGS TO: Singapore-based Grace Ocean Pte Ltd

COLLAPSE SPARKS BASELESS ATTACK THEORIES

CONSPIRACY THEORISTS SAID that the Baltimore bridge collapse resulted from an intentional attack -- despite officials quickly saying there was no evidence of foul play. Hours after a container ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge, users across X and other platforms blamed everything from terrorists to Israel.



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

AUTHORITIES HAVE CLOSED the port “until further notice” and traffic is being diverted away from the bridge as the rescue effort continues.

A LIST OF NOTABLE DISASTERS INVOLVING SHIPS

- Popp’s Ferry Bridge (March 20, 2009)
- Interstate 40 Bridge (May 26, 2002) 14 DEAD
- Queen Isabella Causeway (Sept. 15, 2001) 8 DEAD
- Eads Bridge (April 14, 1998) 50 INJURED
- Big Bayou Canot (Sept. 22, 1993) 47 DEAD
- Seeber Bridge (May 28, 1993) 1 DEAD
- Sunshine Skyway Bridge (May 9, 1980) 35 DEAD

“It’s my intention that the federal government will pay for the entire cost of reconstructing that bridge and I expect the congress to support my effort.

— JOE BIDEN, U.S. President

All 22 crew on ship were Indians: Firm

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

All 22 crew members who were aboard the container ship “Dali” that crashed into Baltimore’s Key Bridge in the United States are Indians, the charter management company Syner-

gy Marine Group stated, according to media reports.

The charter company was quoted as saying, “All crew members including the two pilots are safe with no injuries or pollution reported. All Indian, 22 in total.”

to end, had experienced a momentary loss of propulsion and dropped anchors as part of emergency procedures before impact, its management company, Synergy Marine Pte Ltd reported, according to the Singapore Port Authority.

The Dali, owned by Grace Ocean Pte Ltd, collided with one of the pillars of the bridge, according to manager Synergy. All 22 crew members aboard the Singapore-flagged vessel were accounted for, it said.

The U.S. Coast Guard reported the collapse at 1:27 a.m. (0627 GMT) and it deployed crews for an active search and rescue mission after the Singapore-flagged container ship forced the trelis-like bridge up into a mangled mass of metal.

President Joe Biden was being briefed on the collision, the White House said. He pledged that the federal government will pay the full cost to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

— REUTERS

‘N Korean to reject contact with Japan’

Seoul, March 26: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s powerful sister said on Tuesday Pyongyang would reject “any contact or negotiations” with Japan, just a day after she said Tokyo’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida had requested a summit with her brother.

Relations between the two countries are historically strained, including by a long-running kidnapping dispute and North Korea’s banned weapons programmes, but Kishida has recently expressed a desire to improve ties, which Pyongyang has hinted it is not opposed to.

Last year, Kishida said he was willing to meet Kim “without any conditions”, saying Tokyo was willing to resolve all issues, including the abduction by North Korean agents of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, which remains an



Kim Yo Jong

emotive issue in Japan.

Kim Yo Jong — who is one of the regime’s key spokespeople — said on Monday that Kishida had requested a summit with Pyongyang’s leader, adding a meeting was unlikely without a policy shift by Tokyo.

But on Tuesday, citing Tokyo’s lack of “courage” for “new” North Korea-Japan relations, including over its stance on the abduction issue and North Korea’s military programmes, Kim Yo Jong said Pyongyang would reject any contact with Japan.

— AFP

Kremlin: Zelenskyy is ‘peculiar kind of Jew’

Moscow, March 26: The Kremlin on Tuesday called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a “peculiar kind of Jew”, when asked how he could be linked to an attack in Moscow claimed by Islamic jihadists.

Russian officials continue to allege Kyiv was somehow involved in Friday’s attack on a Moscow concert hall that killed at least 139 people, an assertion Zelenskyy has denounced as absurd.

“Well, there is a peculiar kind of Jew over there,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in response to a question about how Zelensky, who is Jewish, may be linked to the attack.

“A Jew who in many



Russian emergency ministry cadets lay flowers at a makeshift memorial in front of the burnt-out Crocus City Hall concert venue, in Krasnogorsk, outside Moscow.

— AFP

ways shows sympathy and inclination to the nationalist spirit that has permeated the leadership of the Kyiv regime,” he continued.

He declined to elaborate, citing an ongoing investigation into the concert hall attack.

— AFP

5 Chinese nationals killed in Pak suicide bomb attack

Islamabad, March 26: At least five Chinese nationals were among the six persons killed on Tuesday when an explosives-packed vehicle rammed into their bus in Pakistan’s troubled province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, officials said, in the second suicide attack on the personnel working on the China-backed hydropower project since 2021.

The Chinese were working on the Dasu hydropower project, which is about 300 km to the north of Islamabad. The 4,320 MW project is being constructed by the China Gezhouba with funding from the World Bank.

The Chinese Embassy here announced taking all measures to protect the Chinese citizens, institutions and projects in Pakistan.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and interior minister Mohsin Naqvi rushed to the Chinese embassy here and met Chinese ambassador Jiang Zaidong.

— PTI



Security officials inspect the wreckage of a vehicle which was carrying Chinese nationals after a suicide attack near Besham city on Tuesday.

— AFP

PAKISTANI FORCES KILL 4 MILITANTS, FOIL ATTACK ON KEY NAVAL AIR BASE

Karachi, March 26: Armed Baloch militants tried to infiltrate one of the main naval air bases in Pakistan’s restive Balochistan province, but security forces foiled the attack and killed all four terrorists. The attack on Monday night took place in Turbat, a turbulent district in the sparsely populated province.

Makran commissioner

Saeed Ahmed Umrani said that security forces had foiled an armed terrorist attack at the PNS Siddique Naval Air Base which is among the biggest naval air stations in the country.

“Armed men attacked from three sides of the airport boundary, but security forces responded immediately and foiled their attempt to infiltrate the premises,” he said.

— PTI

Ceasefire vote: Bibi calls off envoys’ US visit

Jerusalem, March 26: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has canceled a high-level delegation’s planned visit to Washington after the U.S. decided not to use its veto power and instead abstained from Monday’s U.N. Security Council demand for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza during the .

The U.S. has previously vetoed three resolutions calling for a Gaza ceasefire. The resolution, which passed 14-0, calls for a ceasefire during the ongoing Muslim holy month of Ramadan. It also demands the release of all hostages taken captive during Hamas October 7 surprise attack in southern Israel. However, the measure does not link that demand to its call for a cease-fire.

Meanwhile, White House national security spokesman John Kirby said the response by Israel to the U.N. resolution was surprising. Were kind of perplexed by this, he said. The Israelis were choosing to create a perception of daylight here when they don’t need to do that, he added.

According to a U.S. official with direct knowledge of the talks, American officials were in touch with Israel throughout the weekend to make the U.S. position known on the Security Council resolution, and to articulate that it was not a change in policy or in support for Israel.

Netanyahu did not talk to Biden before he canceled the delegations trip, and Biden doesn’t have any immediate plans to phone Netanyahu, the official said.

— AP

U.S. OBJECTS TO MAJOR GROUND OPS IN RAFAH

Washington, March 26: Secretary of State Antony Blinken raised US opposition to a major ground operation in Rafah with Israel’s defense minister on Monday, after a delegation to discuss Washington’s concerns was scrapped earlier in the day.

In his meeting with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant in Washington, Blinken reiterated such a move “would further jeopardise the welfare of more than 1.4 million Palestinian civilians sheltering there.

— AFP

UN CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE

Paris, March 26: The UN Security Council on Monday called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza five months into the grinding war, despite Israel’s ally the United States abstaining. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for swift implementation of a ceasefire after Israel voiced anger over the resolution. “Failure would be unforgivable,” he wrote on X.

Meanwhile, Hamas welcomed the resolution to halt fighting in Gaza while saying it was ready to negotiate release of hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

— AFP

Trump trial set for April 15

New York, March 26: Donald Trump will in three weeks become the first former US president to face a criminal trial, a judge ruled hours after an appeals court threw the tycoon a lifeline in his bid to stave off an unrelated, half billion dollar civil fraud judgment.

New York Judge Juan Merchan rejected demands from Trump’s attorneys to further delay his trial on charges of paying hush money to a porn star and ordered jury selection to begin on April 15.

The Republican presidential candidate denounced the upcoming trial and other cases brought against him as “election interference” by Democrat Joe Biden, his likely opponent in the November White House vote.

“I don’t know how you can have a trial that’s going on right in the middle of an election,” he said. “It’s not fair.”

Trump is in prosecutors’ crosshair for a series of alleged crimes, ranging from falsifying business records in the hush money case to trying to overturn the 2020 election, when he became the first president in modern US history to refuse to concede and stoked a mob of supporters to march on Congress.

Asked by reporters if he would take the witness stand, Trump said he “would have no problem testifying.”

— AFP



Donald Trump

TRUMP SOCIAL STARTS TRADING, VALUED AT \$6.8BN

New York, March 26: Shares of Donald Trump’s social media company jumped nearly 50 per cent in the first day of trading on the Nasdaq, boosting the value of Trump’s large holdings in the company as well as the smaller stakes of fans who purchased shares as a show of support for the former president.

Trump Media and Technology Group Corp. was acquired Monday by a blank-check company called Digital World Acquisition Corp. Trump Media, which runs the social media platform Truth Social, has now taken Digital World’s place on the Nasdaq stock exchange.

Before trading began, Trump Media had a market value of about \$6.8 billion, a figure that will rise significantly if the early gains in the shares hold.

— AP

Europe, Africa, Asia in 2020 reported avian flu outbreak

Bird flu keeps egg prices high for Easter

New York, March 26: Egg prices are at near-historic highs in many parts of the world as the spring holidays approach, reflecting a market scrambled by disease, high demand and growing costs for farmers .

Its the second year in a row consumers have faced sticker shock ahead of Easter and Passover, both occasions in which eggs play prominent roles.

While global prices are lower than they were at this time last year, they remain elevated, said Nan-Dirk Mulder, a senior glob-

al specialist with Dutch financial firm RaboBanks RaboResearch food and agribusiness division. Mulder does not expect them to return to 2021 levels.

In the United States, the average price of a dozen eggs was \$2.99 in February, down from \$4.21 last year, according to government data. Still, thats significantly more than the \$1.59 cents per dozen consumers were paying in February 2021.

In Europe, egg prices are 10 per cent to 15 per cent lower than last year but still about double what they



A file photo of eggs cleaned and disinfected at the Sunrise Farms processing plant in Petaluma, California.

— AP

were in 2021, Mulder said. One major culprit is avian flu. Outbreaks of the deadly respiratory dis-

ease were reported in Europe, Africa and Asia in 2020 and spread to North America in 2021. In 2022 alone, more than 131 million poultry worldwide died or were culled on affected farms, according to the World Health Organisation.

Outbreaks are continuing. In December, the U.S. confirmed cases in 45 commercial flocks and 33 backyard flocks, affecting 11.4 million birds, according to the U.S. department of agriculture.

In South Africa, egg prices soared after 40 per cent

of laying hens were killed late last year due to the respiratory disease, Mulder said.

A tray of six eggs cost 25.48 South African rand (\$1.34) last month, up 21 per cent from February 2023.

Even when avian flu dissipates, it can take a long time for the egg market to settle. It takes a farm three to six months to replenish a flock, so during that time, egg supplies are lower and prices rise, said Emily Metz, president of the American Egg Board, a marketing organisation.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	72,470.30	-0.50
Nifty 50	22,004.70	-0.42
S&P 500*	5,231.37	0.25
Dollar (₹)	83.29	0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.39	-0.15
Euro (₹)	90.40	-0.18
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	66,235.213	0.32
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	86.39	-0.41
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.089	0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.236	-0.017

* As of 8:30 PM IST

CCI procures 32.8 lakh bales cotton so far

The cotton corporation of India (CCI) has procured 32.81 lakh bales of cotton so far in the ongoing 2023-24 season with maximum quantity from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. "CCI did not procure cotton last year as prices were ruling above MSP level. However this year, prices started falling from mid-Oct. 2023 onwards due to various factors and CCI began procurement," a CCI official said.



Amazon invested \$1.2 billion, hired 15,000 in 2023

Online marketplace Amazon invested more than \$1.2 billion and hired about 15,000 experts in 2023 to protect the brand, its sellers, and customers from fraud and counterfeit, according to the Amazon 2023 Brand Protection Report. Amazon said that when a customer purchases from the store, they trust they will receive an authentic product, and when businesses choose to sell in the store.

Jakson Group inks pact with Powernsun

Energy and infra firm Jakson Group on Tuesday announced a strategic partnership with Dubai-based Powernsun for exclusive distributorship of solar products in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and across Maharashtra. According to a company statement, Jakson Group will manufacture the products at its facility in Noida. This collaboration aims to significantly bolster Jakson's distribution network.

Squarfeet Group to invest ₹300 cr in housing project

Realty firm Squarefeet Group will invest around ₹300 crore to develop a housing project at Thane in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The company plans to develop about 1,000 flats and is targeting a revenue of ₹750 crore over the next 4-5 years. Sachin Marani, director of Squarefeet Group, said the company has launched 300 apartments in the first phase and out of that 100 units were sold on first day of the launch.

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

India overtakes Beijing, turns thriving wealth creator Mumbai rises as Asia's new billionaire capital

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 26

India's financial capital Mumbai has emerged as Asia's new billionaire capital, surpassing Beijing, according to the latest Hurun Research Institute report released on Tuesday.

The report titled 360 ONE Wealth Hurun India Rich List 2023 said Mumbai now boasts of 92 billionaires, overtaking Beijing's count and solidifying its status as a thriving centre for wealth creation.

India added 94 new billionaires in 2023, taking the country's total to 271 and form a cohort that has a combined wealth of \$1 trillion. On the other hand China added 55 new entrants.

Reliance Industries

● WITH 391 and 199 entrants respectively, Maharashtra and Delhi are the preferred states of residence for individuals in 360 ONE Wealth Hurun India Rich List 2023.

chairman Mukesh Ambani is the only Indian to rank in the top 10 names in the '2024 Hurun Global Rich List', a ranking of US dollar billionaires. Ambani, 66, is placed 10th, dropping one rank despite his wealth rising 40 per cent to \$115 billion in the period the report tracked. He is Asia's richest person. Closely following is Gautam Adani, the founder of the Adani

Group energy conglomerate, with assets valued at \$86 billion, marking a \$33 billion surge in wealth attributed to a rally in his companies' shares.

Mumbai is the preferred city for India's biggest wealth creators as it accommodates 25 per cent of the entrants in the list followed by New Delhi and Bengaluru.

As per the Hurun report, Mumbai registered a net increase of 14 individuals

followed by Hyderabad which registered a net increase of 23.

With 391 and 199 entrants respectively, Maharashtra and Delhi are the preferred states of residence for individuals in 360 ONE Wealth Hurun India Rich List 2023.

The report highlighted the dominance of specific industries in contributing to India's billionaire boom, with the pharmaceutical sector leading the pack with 39 billionaires, followed by the automobile and auto components industry (27), and the chemicals sector (24).

Tesla chief executive Elon Musk, 52, topped the global billionaire list with a total wealth of \$231 billion. He was followed by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, 60, who has a net worth of \$185 billion.

Sales of luxury houses priced ₹50 cr rises 51%: JLL

New Delhi, March 26: Sales of luxury homes, priced ₹50 crore and above, rose 51 per cent in value to ₹4,319 crore during the last calendar year on strong demand, according to JLL India.

During the 2022 calendar year, at least 29 homes valuing ₹2,859 crore were sold in this price category. JLL said that luxury transactions include both bungalows and apartments. It encompasses both primary market and resale transactions. It does not include any gift

transactions and joint ventures.

"Notably, out of the 45 luxury homes sold in 2023, 14 homes were in the price segment of ₹100 crore and above, with majority of them in Mumbai," said Samantak Das, chief economist and head of Research, JLL India.

Mumbai witnessed most transactions, primarily in the Malabar Hill and Worli micro markets. Golf Links and Vasant Vihar were the top performing submarkets in terms of luxury residential sales in

● THE SURGE in demand for ultra-luxury homes in the Indian real estate industry is unprecedented, fuelled by a rise in wealth creation and economic resilience among affluent segments.

Delhi NCR.

"The surge in demand for ultra-luxury homes in the Indian real estate industry is unprecedented, fuelled by a rise in wealth creation and economic resilience among

affluent segments. "This shift is driven by a newfound appreciation for real estate as both an appreciating asset and a source of tangible and intrinsic value," DLF Home Developers Ltd Joint managing director Aakash Ohri said.

The pandemic has transformed the luxury homes narrative into one centred around an overall living experience, with convenience, amenities, and facilities enabling individuals to pursue their passions, he added. —PTI

Nirmala slams charges on Atal Pension Yojana

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said that the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) is designed based on the best practice choice architecture and guarantees a minimum of 8 per cent return.

Her statement comes after the Congress attacked the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government over the Atal Pension Yojana, alleging that it is a "very poorly-designed scheme" and a "paper tiger" that needs officials to hoodwink and coerce people into participating in it.

"Atal Pension Yojana is designed based on best practice choice architecture to automatically continue the premium payment unless the subscriber opts out. This is a deliberate and beneficial feature which is in the best interest of the subscribers," Sitharaman said in post on X, adding that instead of requiring people to decide each year to continue, they have to take a decision to discontinue and this makes



many of them take the right decision and save for their retirement.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that the scheme is a "fitting representation of the Modi government's policy making: headline management, with few benefits actually reaching the people."

Minister said Jairam Ramesh did not bother to check facts on the guaranteed pension scheme. "The minimum return under the APY is guaranteed by GoI to be at least 8 per cent, regardless of prevailing interest rates and returns. This is an guaranteed minimum return. GoI pays a subsidy to PFDA to make up for any shortfall in returns," she said in post on X.

LIC IS STRONGEST INSURANCE BRAND GLOBALLY: REPORT

New Delhi, March 26: Insurance behemoth Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has emerged as the strongest insurance brand globally, according to a report Brand Finance Insurance 100 2024.

The report said that LIC's brand value remains steady at \$9.8 billion, accompanied by a brand strength index score of 88.3 and an associated AAA brand strength rating.

Following LIC, the rankings highlight Cathay Life Insurance as the second strongest brand, experiencing a 9 per cent increase in brand value to \$4.9 billion, according to Brand Finance Insurance.

Notably, Chinese insurance brands maintain dominance in the global rankings, with Ping An leading with a 4 per cent increase in brand value to \$33.6 billion, followed by China Life Insurance and CPIC defending their 3rd and 5th positions, respectively, it said.

LIC India achieved the highest first-year premium collection of ₹39,090 crore in FY23. —PTI

Engg. goods' exports to Russia double

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 26

Engineering goods exports to Russia nearly doubled to \$1.22 billion till February in the current financial year.

Shipments to Russia grew 99 per cent to \$1.22 billion in the first 11 months of FY24 against \$616.68 million in the same period of last year.

Engineering shipments

● SHIPMENTS TO Russia grew 99 per cent to \$1.22 billion in the first 11 months of FY24 against \$616.68 million in the same period of last year.

to UAE and Australia with which India signed a free trade agreement remained positive up to Feb. despite the year being quite

challenging for global trade. While engineering exports to the UAE rose 16 per cent year-on-year to \$5.22 billion, shipments to Australia increased 5 per cent to \$1.30 billion.

"The FTA with UAE and the negotiations with GCC have been quite effective as West Asia and North Africa's share in India's engineering export basket increased from 12 per cent last year to 15 per cent this

year," said Arun Kumar Garodia, chairman of EEPIC India.

Meanwhile shipments to the US dipped 7 per cent. Value of engineering goods exports to the US stood at \$15.95 billion as compared to \$17.1 billion in the same period of the preceding year.

Overall, cumulative engineering exports grew 1.23 per cent to \$98.03 billion against \$96.84 billion.

Govt initiatives creating jobs: CEA



New Delhi, March 26: Various initiatives from the government and growing investment are going to create more job opportunities during the decade, chief economic advisor (CEA) V Anantha Nageswaran said on Tuesday.

The last decade of the century was marked by a decline in capital formation in the economy and moderation in credit growth, he said at an event here.

"Hopefully, those things are a thing of the past. Non food credit growth is now running close to 20

per cent, balance sheets of companies and banks are in good shape and hiring (is showing improvement)," he said.

Quoting 2021-22 data, he said, employment in agriculture declined by 15 lakh, manufacturing and services added 37 lakh

jobs each and the construction sector generated 19 lakh jobs, he said.

"This trend we hope will continue in the future, as indicated by robust gross value added growth in manufacturing and construction sectors," he said.

Talking about various government initiatives for job creation, Nageswaran said, skill development, provision of 12 per cent contribution of employers towards EPFO by the government, new education policy, and important structural reform in human development have been undertaken. —PTI



DAIMLER INDIA SALES RISE 39%, REVENUE UP 21%

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MARCH 26

Daimler India Commercial Vehicles, the subsidiary of Europe's truck maker Daimler AG, said its sales in 2023 have increased 39 per cent and revenue grew by 21 per cent over the previous year. The company does not reveal the actual value since it is not listed in India.

The company's bus sales doubled with 107 per cent growth over 2022. The company will be launch 14 new products in 2024 across three segments.

"This was the best ever year for us - we sold 23,400 trucks registering a growth of 35 per cent. We outgrew the market by 3.5 times in 2023," said Satyakam Arya, managing director and chief executive officer of Daimler India Commercial Vehicles.

The best-ever sales and financial growth, since inception, was spearheaded by excellent demand for its tipper and tractor-trailer product lines which grew 53 per cent and 79 per cent respectively, compared to CY2022.

The company on Tuesday showcased an all-new rigid heavy-duty range which set to launch in April 2024.

Adani arm to acquire 95% in Gopalpur Port

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 26

Adani Port & SEZ announced acquisition of a majority stake in Gopalpur Port in Odisha for an amount of ₹3,080 crore.

"Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone has entered into a definitive agreement to purchase the 56 per cent stake of the SP Group and 39 per cent of Orissa Stevedores Ltd (OSL) in Gopalpur Port Ltd (GPL)," said a statement issued by Adani Port.

"Gopalpur port has the capacity to handle 20 million metric ton per annum. The government of Odisha awarded a 30-year concession to GPL in

2006, with the provision of two extensions of 10 years each," Adani Port said.

Gopalpur handles a mix of dry bulk cargo, including iron ore, coal, limestone, ilmenite, and alumina and caters to mineral-based industries in its hinterland, like iron and steel, alumina and others.

"The acquisition of Gopalpur Port will allow us to deliver more integrated and enhanced solutions to our customers. Its location will allow us unprecedented access to the mining hubs of Odisha and neighbouring states and allow us to expand our hinterland logistics footprint, said Karan Adani, managing director, Adani Port & SEZ.

ORANGE	
Virat Kohli, RCB	98
Sam Curran, PBKS	86
Shivam Dube, CSK	85
PURPLE	
Mustafizur Rahman, CSK	6
Jasprit Bumrah, MI	3
Harpreet Brar, PBKS	3

Short take

LOMROR ACES ‘WEIRD’ ROLE OF IMPACT PLAYER

On a balmy Monday night, Mahipal Lomror gave Royal Challengers Bengaluru two tantalising options — an ‘Impact Player’ who can yank the match away from the opposition and a potential successor to Dinesh Karthik, their designated finisher who is playing his last IPL season.

Lomror, who replaced Yash Dayal during the chase of 177 as Impact sub, made an eight-ball 17 and assisted Karthik (28, 10b) in knocking off 47 runs in 22 balls that powered RCB to a four-wicket win over Punjab Kings.

But his maiden foray into the world of ‘Impact Players’ taught Lomror how ‘weird’ that role could be, particularly because of its hurried nature.

“To be honest, it (being an Impact Player) was quite weird when I went into bat. The Impact Player rule is such that you have to be ready as you can get a call at any time to go in,” said Lomror in the post-match press conference.

However, the 24-year-old said the RCB management had communicated the possibility of him being used as the substitute player against Punjab.

“As the name suggests, you have to make an impact on the game from the word go. The management had discussed it last night. They told me: ‘If we are chasing, we might use you down the order.’ So mentally, I was prepared.”

During the IPL 2023, RCB had availed the ‘Impact Player’ option in 12 matches out of 14, and Anuj Rawat came in twice as the No. 8 finisher, similar to what Lomror did against PBKS at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

On the other 10 occasions, it was either a bowler or a top/middle-order batter who walked in as ‘Impact Player.’

However, Rawat could not make the desired impact as he could score only 16 runs off 27 balls in those two games.

Perhaps, that failed experiment prompted the RCB think-tank to give that duty to the big-hitting Lomror in this IPL.

The Rajasthan-born player, who joined Royal Challengers ahead of IPL 2022 from Rajasthan Royals, was ready for the grind too as it was his best chance to get a place in the eleven.



Rajasthan Royals players Dhruv Jurel (left) and Yashasvi Jaiswal in Indian attire to celebratae Holi.

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002, and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector-III, Noida-201301.

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

SHIVAM, SUNDARAM

Dashing Dube powers CSK to second straight win

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, MARCH 26

The showdown between last year's finalists failed to live up to the expectations as Chennai Super Kings thumped Gujarat Titans by 63 runs in an Indian Premier League match here at the M. A. Chidambaram Stadium on Tuesday. Shivam Dube's quick-fire half-century (51 off 23 balls) was complemented by the pacers as CSK secured their second consecutive victory. The home team's decision to go with just one specialist spinner surprised many, but it worked wonders as all eight Gujarat wickets that fell on the day were taken by fast bowlers.

The chase of 206 looked like a tall order from the beginning as Gujarat not only lost their openers within the Powerplay but also failed to keep pace with the required run-rate. Pacer Deepak Chahar accounted for both the openers — Wriddhiman Saha and Shubman Gill. Local boy Sai Sudharsan, who won the Player of the Match in Gujarat's previous game, held one end for a brief while to make a 31-ball 37. Apart from their disciplined bowling, CSK were outstanding in their fielding as Ajinkya Rahane pulled off yet another spectacular catch in the outfield.

After Rachin Ravindra's scintillating start (46 off 20 balls), Dube decimated the Gujarat attack in the middle overs before IPL debutant Sameer Rizvi, the most expensive uncapped player from last year's auction, finished with a flourish as the Super Kings posted 206 for six in 20 overs.

Left-handed opener Rachin signalled his aggressive intent from the outset, taking on Gujarat's new-ball bowlers Azmatullah Omarzai and Umesh Yadav. Against Umesh, he lofted one over backward square leg and smashed another over mid-on before accumulating 17 runs off Omarzai in the fifth over to set the tone for a formidable total.

The Kiwi batsman looked set to reach his maiden IPL half-century as he welcomed spinner Rashid Khan with a boundary, but was outfoxed the next ball while



Chennai Super Kings batter Shivam Dube plays a shot during the match against Gujarat Titans in Chennai on Tuesday.

venturing down the pitch. Wicket-keeper Saha executed a smart stumping to provide Gujarat with a crucial breakthrough.

The powerplay, however, yielded 69 runs for CSK, and they maintained the momentum throughout. Meanwhile, skipper Rituraj, who was put down on one by Sai Kishore at slip off Omarzai in the opening over, compiled a crucial 36-ball 46.

Dube captivated the capacity crowd with his ability to clear the boundaries. His stylish six-hitting, especially the shots where he went down on one knee to dispatch spinners Kishore and Rashid, was a spectacle to behold. The tall batsman reached his fifty in just 22 balls with a pull to deep square leg. In all, he contributed five of CSK's 11 sixes.

Rizvi, who was snapped up by CSK for 8.4 crore, had a sensational start to his IPL career as he slog swept Rashid over the deep backward square-leg.

SCOREBOARD

Chennai Super Kings: Rituraj Gaikwad c Saha b Johnson 46, Rachin Ravindra st Saha b Rashid Khan 46, Ajinkya Rahane st Saha b Sai Kishore 12, Shivam Dube c Shankar b Rashid Khan 51, Daryl Mitchell not out 24, Sameer Rizvi c Miller b Sharma 14, Ravindra Jadeja run out 7. Extras (lb-1, w-5) 6. **Total (for 6 wickets in 20 overs) 206.**

Fall of wickets: 1-62, 2-104, 3-127, 4-184, 5-199, 6-206.

Bowling: Azmatullah Omarzai 3-0-30-0, Umesh Yadav 2-0-27-0, Rashid Khan 4-0-49-2, Sai Kishore 3-0-28-1, Spencer Johnson 4-0-35-1, Mohit Sharma 4-0-36-1.

Gujarat Titans: Wriddhiman Saha c Deshpande b Chahar 21, Shubman Gill lbw b Chahar 8, Sai Sudharsan c Sameer Rizvi b Pathirana 37, Vijay Shankar c Dhoni b Mitchell 12, David Miller c Rahane b Deshpande 21, Azmatullah Omarzai c Ravindra b Deshpande 11, Rahul Tewatia c Ravindra b Mustafizur Rahman 6, Rashid Khan c Ravindra b Mustafizur Rahman 1, Umesh Yadav not out 10, Spencer Johnson not out 5. Extras (lb-2, w-9) 11. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 143.**

Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-34, 3-55, 4-96, 5-114, 6-118, 7-121, 8-129.

Bowling: Deepak Chahar 4-0-28-2, Mustafizur Rahman 4-0-30-2, Tushar Deshpande 4-0-21-2, Ravindra Jadeja 2-0-15-0, Daryl Mitchell 2-0-18-1, Matheesha Pathirana 4-0-29-1.

● The chase of 206 looked like a tall order from the beginning as Gujarat not only lost their openers within the Powerplay but also failed to keep pace with the required run-rate. Pacer Deepak Chahar accounted for both the openers — Wriddhiman Saha and Shubman Gill.

PIETERSEN HAILS ‘FITNESS FREAK’ KOHLI

New Delhi, March 26: Former England captain Kevin Pietersen on Tuesday said fitness freak Virat Kohli has turned his teammates into “out and out athletes” and called him the man responsible for an incredible turnaround in Indian cricket.

“One of the things that he has done for Indian cricket is he has turned Indian cricketers into athletes, out and out athletes, and while doing so, he's not just talked the talk. He has walked the walk, and you can see that.”

Speaking about his commitment to his team, Pietersen added, “When he is running between the wickets, his full commitment, energy and desire is to be the best and he is the best.”

“That starts before the field, that starts with diet, the energy he puts in the gym, with the sacrifices that he has made to walk the walk because when you talk the talk, you have to walk the walk.”

“That's what all the other players who have played under you are following you, watch you. The turnaround in Indian cricket is because of what he has done.” — PTT

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
CSK	2	2	0	0	4	+1.979
RR	1	1	0	0	2	+1.000
KKR	1	1	0	0	2	+0.200
PBKS	2	1	1	0	2	+0.025
RCB	2	1	1	0	2	-0.180
GT	2	1	1	0	2	-1.425
SRH	1	0	1	0	0	-0.200
MI	1	0	1	0	0	-0.300
DC	1	0	1	0	0	-0.455
LSG	1	0	1	0	0	-1.000

Sunrisers & MI eye first points

MOSES KONDETY
HYDERABAD, MARCH 26

Points. That's on the minds of hosts Sunrisers Hyderabad and heavy-weights Mumbai Indians when they try to pick up the pieces at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium on Wednesday night.

Having come close to winning starts in their openers, both teams will rue the ones that got away, in away games. SRH lost their first match to Kolkata Knight Riders by just four runs. The next day, Mumbai went down to Gujarat Titans in a captains' grudge match by six runs.

However, as MI leader Hardik Pandya said, there's a lot to play for in the long-drawn League and with the first of 13 matches to go for each team coming up, the Blues and Oranges would like to turn in a red hot show at the RGICS and activate the last column on the points table to life.

Hardik has much of the headache it would seem. His team could not crack 48 against the Titans in the last six overs, with seven wickets in hand. The batting order too looked entangled, big time, as they made a mess of the 168-run chase.

Sideline skipper Rohit Sharma did his bit at the top with a 40-plus knock as did substitute Dewald Brevis. Tilak Varma and Naman Dhir contributed quick 20s but that's where

ACTION TODAY



SRH VS MI

FROM 7.30 PM, LIVE ON STAR SPORTS

the batting talk ends. Biggies Hardik and Tim David could only manage 11 each, with the latter pinned down at No. 7 in the line-up.

For Mumbai's Tilak, it will be a home game, having grown up playing extensively on the ground he will take to on Wednesday.

The Sunrisers appear to be in the same boat as Mumbai, batting wise. After fits and starts, they needed some serious hitting from Heinrich Klaasen to run the 208-run chase close before losing it all with just seven required off the last five balls.

On the bowling front, big tag captain Pat Cummins will need to spearhead the SRH attack. Seasoned seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Marco Jansen were not too impressive against KKR even as the promising Natarajan did well.

Mumbai will also think of shuffling their bowling pack. Pushing pace ace Jasprit Bumrah upfront will be high on the list lest they end up being the butt of ridicule, like in their last outing.



Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya (right) and coach Kieron Pollard during a training session at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad on Tuesday, eve of their match against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

HEAD to HEAD				
Matches		21		
MI	11	SRH	9	Tied 1
FOR THE RECORD				
● Mayank Agarwal has scored 419 runs at an average of 27.93 and strike rate of 152.36 in 16 innings of 17 matches against Mumbai Indians in IPL.				
● Rohit Sharma has scored 409 runs at an average of 22.72 and a strike rate of 130.25 in 21 innings of as many matches against Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL.				
LAST YEAR'S MATCHES				
● Mumbai Indians beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by 14 runs at Hyderabad.				
● Mumbai Indians defeated SRH by 8 wickets at Mumbai.				
STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER				