



BRIEF



Devotees take part in 'Bhasma' or 'Masan' Holi celebration at the Manikarnika Ghat crematorium, in Varanasi, Thursday.

Re-exam

New Delhi: Citing technical reasons, the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) has decided to conduct a re-examination for recruitment of constables in Central Armed Police Forces, Secretariat Security Force and rifleman in Assam Rifles for 16,185 candidates on March 30. The computer-based exam for constable (general duty) in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), Secretariat Security Force (SSF) and rifleman (general duty) in Assam Rifles examination, 2024 was conducted by the Commission from February 20 to March 7.

Protest

Patna: A large number of students on Thursday staged protests outside the BJP and JD(U) offices here against the Bihar government's decision to discontinue plus-two classes in colleges from April 1. A section of students also blocked the movement of traffic as part of their demonstration on the Beer Chand Patel Marg.

Suicide

Bengaluru: Metro Rail services were briefly disrupted after a 19-year-old college student died by allegedly jumping in front of a moving train that arrived at Attihuppe station here on Thursday, officials said.

Injured

Hazaribag: Four girls and two women, who were out for their routine morning walk, sustained injuries after being struck from behind by a sand-laden truck in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district around 6am on Thursday, police said.

Booked

Thane: Three people were booked for allegedly stealing palladium (rare and lustrous silvery-white metal) worth Rs 2.40 crore in Navi Mumbai, a police official said.

Weather
High 32 Low 19

MARKET
NIFTY 22,011.95 ▲
SENSEX 72,641.19 ▲

BULLION
GOLD 66,546
SILVER 75,480

JOLT TO CENTRE

Apex Court puts Centre's fact-checking unit on hold

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTD):

In a jolt to the Centre, the Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the notification setting up a fact-checking unit under the Press Information Bureau (PIB) to identify fake news about the Union government.

The fact check unit was notified on March 20 under Information Technology Rules, 2021, by the Ministry of Electronics and IT, amid concerns voiced by civil society groups and media outlets about the possibility of its misuse for potential censorship.

A bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud set aside the March 11 order of the Bombay High Court which had refused to grant an interim stay on setting up the FCU under the amended IT Rules to identify fake and false content on digital media about the Union government.

"We are of the considered view that questions before the HC deal with core questions on Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution," the bench said, adding the stay shall operate till the Bombay High Court finally decides the challenge to the IT Amendment Rules, 2023.

"We are of the view that



notification dated March 20, 2024, after rejection of application of interim relief, needs to be stayed. The challenge to the validity of 3(1)(b)(5) (of IT Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules 2021) involves serious constitutional question and the impact of the rule on free speech and expression would need to be analysed by the high court," the bench, also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and the Editors Guild of India challenging the order of the Bombay High Court.

At the outset, senior advocate Darius Khambata, appearing for Kamra, submitted that a fact-checking unit only for the Union government and not for others is arbitrary and it will mean that only the central government's version will be allowed.

Khambata argued as the general elections are round the corner, the fact-checking unit would become a tool for the Union of India to control what information goes out to the voters.

"If the objective is to prevent fake news, then everybody is affected by fake news. It affects individuals more than government. Elections are coming. This is the time when the public should have access to all information relating to Central government and not just filtered facts," he submitted.

Khambata told the apex court that fact-checking unit under PIB was "hastily" notified on March 20 despite the fact that the matter is listed for hearing before the high court on April 15.

He said internet intermediaries are only worried about their commercial interests and they will be happy to take down contents flagged by the fact-checking unit.

Appearing for the Editor's Guild, Advocate Shadan Farasat, contended a government-controlled fact-checking unit attacks the fundamental right of free speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

SC slams TN Governor!

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTD):

Voicing "serious concern" over the conduct of Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi for his refusal to reinduct senior DMK leader K Ponnudurai as a minister in the state cabinet, the Supreme Court on Thursday directed him to decide the issue within 24 hours. It said Ravi was defying the Supreme Court. The governor has refused to re-induct Ponnudurai, whose



RN Ravi

conviction and three-year sentence in a disproportionate assets case the apex court stayed recently, despite Chief Minister M K Stalin's recommendation.

MAHADEV APP 'SCAM'

'Baghel mustn't be afraid of probe if he is innocent'

Tikeshwar Patel

Raipur, Mar 21 (PTI): Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said his predecessor and senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel must not be afraid of an investigation against him in the alleged Mahadev betting app scam if he is innocent.

In an interview with PTI as his government completed 100 days in power on Thursday, Sai exuded confidence the BJP would win all 11 Lok Sabha seats in the state as people are eager to see Narendra Modi as prime minister for a third term.

He, however, added his party is not overconfident and does not consider the opposition weak.

Asked about Baghel claiming he was being implicated in the Mahadev



Vishnu Deo Sai

online betting app case, Sai said the former CM should not be scared at all if he is innocent.

The state Economic Offence Wing (EOW) earlier this month registered a case against Baghel and 18 others in the betting app "scam" on a report submitted by the ED, which has been probing the alleged money laundering part.

Asked about alleged selective action against Baghel, Sai said "an accused never admits his/her offence."

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EXCISE SCAM

No interim relief for Kejriwal from HC

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI):

The Delhi High Court on Thursday refused to grant Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal any protection from coercive action in an excise policy-linked money laundering case.

A bench of Justices Suresh Kumar Kait and Manoj Jain listed the AAP leader's application seeking protection for further consideration on April 22 when his main petition challenging the summons is fixed for hearing.

"We have heard both sides and we are not inclined at this stage (to grant protection). The respondent is at liberty to file reply," the bench said.

The application for interim relief forms part of Kejriwal's petition challenging the Enforcement Directorate's summonses issued to him for questioning.

SBI provides 'all details' of electoral bonds to EC

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTD):

The State Bank of India told the Supreme Court on Thursday it has provided all details of the electoral bonds in its possession to the Election Commission.

In a compliance affidavit filed in the apex court, the SBI chairman said the complete bank account numbers and KYC details of the political parties have not being made public "as it may compromise the security of the account (cyber security)".

EC publishes electoral bond details

The Election Commission on Thursday made public a fresh data set of electoral bonds, including their alpha-numeric numbers that can help match their purchasers with the political parties that received the funds. Two separate lists of the donors and the recipients were published by the poll panel on its website after the details were submitted to it by the State Bank of India earlier in the day as per a Supreme Court order. The Election Commission said it has uploaded the data on electoral bonds on its website as received from SBI on "as is where is basis".

"Similarly, KYC details of purchasers are also not being made public for security reasons, apart from the fact that such information is not fed/collated in

the system. However, they are not necessary for identifying the political parties," the affidavit filed by bank chairperson Dinesh Kumar Khara said.

Govt issues fresh categorisation of LWE-hit areas

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTD):

The Home Ministry has issued a fresh categorisation of the districts affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) across 10 states after their number came down by almost half in the past nine years, officials said on Thursday.

Sharing the list with the director generals of police concerned, the officials said a total of 38 districts across these 10 states are categorised as LWE-affected

ed with effect from April 1, 2024 compared to 75 in 2015.

The categorisation of the LWE-affected districts in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana and West Bengal provide the basis for deployment of resources under the National Policy and Action Plan, approved in 2015, to combat LWE holistically.

MODEL CODE

EC asks govt to stop sending 'Viksit Bharat' messages

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTD):

The Election Commission Thursday directed the Centre to immediately stop delivering bulk WhatsApp messages to people under the "Viksit Bharat Sampark" initiative to highlight the government's achievements. The direction was issued to the Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, after the Commission received complaints about the matter.

FISSURES IN CONG

Anand Sharma differs with Cong over caste census

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI):

Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma has written to party president Mallikarjun Kharge saying a caste census cannot be a panacea nor a solution for unemployment and inequalities in society.

Sharma's letter comes at a time the Congress has intensified its demand for a nationwide caste census and promised to carry out the exercise if elected to power in the Lok Sabha elections. In his letter to Kharge, Sharma said the Congress has never en-



gaged in nor endorsed identity politics and the departure from the historic position of the party is a matter of concern for many.

He also said that the articulation of party posi-

tion should be balanced and should eschew the radical posturing of regional and caste-based organisations.

It needs mention that the last census to enumerate caste differentiation was in 1931 during the British colonial regime, he wrote.

After independence, a conscious policy decision was made by the government not to canvass caste-related questions in the census, except for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which is collected by the states.

"All Census Commissioners, after independence, have recorded their reasons and disapproval of a National Caste Census citing overlap, duplication, data lacking in accuracy and doubtful authenticity.

"In my considered view, a caste census cannot be a panacea nor a solution for unemployment and prevailing inequalities. A fundamental departure from time honoured policy on this critical and sensitive subject has major long-term national implications," Sharma said.

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Drunken truck driver tries to run over cops

Bhilai, Mar 21:

The Highway Patrolling of Durg Traffic Police chased a heavy vehicle, which was being driven by a drunken driver and intercepted the vehicle at Khursipar Chowk. The truck driver was trying to escape after hitting a car. On the way, he tried to run over the cops at Nehru Nagar Square. When checked with a breath analyser, the driver was found to have consumed alcohol. The truck was confiscated, a hefty fine was imposed and the Traffic Police has sent a recommendation to the Transport Department for cancellation of driver's license.

Under the direction of SP Jitendra Shukla and leadership of DSP (Traffic) Satish Thakur



and Sandanand Vidhyaraj, four vehicles of Highway Patrolling are being operated round the clock on the 40 km stretch of National Highway from Anjora to Kumhari.

Late evening on Tuesday, a heavy vehicle was seen moving rashly near Gurudwara Triangle on Durg to Raipur route. At Nehru Nagar Square,

the driver of vehicle number RJ11 GB 0329, hit a car and thereafter tried to run over Head Constable Dhanshyam Dubey and Constable Vinod. The cops saved their lives by moving aside swiftly. They communicated information to Assistant Sub Inspector Rajkumar Dubey, who tipped off Highway Patrolling #02

and instructed them to chase the truck. Constable Jitendra Markandey and Narendra Yadav chased the truck and managed to intercept it near Khursipar Chowk. The driver was identified as Lavkush of Firozabad. He was driving under the influence of alcohol and when checked with a breath analyzer, he was found to have consumed a huge amount of alcohol. The analyser displayed a reading of 215 mg alcohol. Taking immediate action under Section 185 of the Motor Vehicle Act, the vehicle was seized. The case was produced before the court. The court punished the accused driver with a fine of Rs 10500 and directed the Transport Department to suspend the driving license.

Man killed in accident; kin stage chakkajam

Bhilai, Mar 21:

A scooterist was killed and the pillion rider was fatally injured in a road accident which occurred near Sadbhavna Chowk in Bhilai late evening on Wednesday. They were hit by a rashly moving pickup truck. Kin of the deceased staged a chakkajam at Rani Avanti Bai Square in Kohka demanding compensation. With sustained efforts, cops managed to diffuse the tension and clear the traffic movement after about two hours.

According to information, the deceased was Mani Ram Sahu (46) a resident of Camp-1, Power House. He was involved in the business of catering. On Wednesday evening, he was moving towards Supela Gada Square on his scooter (CG07-LM-0844) with his friend Roopram Sahu (48). A rashly moving



pickup truck (CG07-CJ-9359) hit their scooter near Sadbhavna Square. Mani Ram suffered fatal head injury in this head on collision while Roopram also suffered serious injuries. Mani Ram succumbed on the spot while Roopram was admitted to BM Shah Hospital. His condition was stated to be critical.

On Thursday morning, the body of Mani Ram was handed over to the family after conducting an autopsy. The family and friends carried the body in an ambulance to Rani Avanti Bai Square and staged a chakkajam. The ambulance with the dead body was parked in the middle of the road.

On information, a team of Supela Police Station, CSP (Bhilai) and Tehsildar reached the spot. They tried to negotiate with the kin and friends of the deceased. The family was demanding a compensation of Rs 20 lakh and compassionate appointment for the daughter of the deceased. The administrative officers tried to explain that permanent government jobs cannot be provided in such cases. They assured to arrange a job as daily wage for one of the dependents of the deceased after withdrawal of Model Election Code. Tehsildar provided a cheque of Rs 25000 as immediate monetary aid to the bereaved family. After about two hours, the demonstrators were convinced to remove the road blockade. Thereafter, the body was taken for the last rites.

Food Department inspects sweets shops and groceries stores

Inedible items found during inspection destroyed on the spot

Bhilai, Mar 21:

As per the instructions of Collector Richa Prakash Chaudhary and under the guidance of Chief Medical and Health Officer, ex-officio Deputy Director Food and Drug Administration, District Durg, Dr JP Meshram, the food safety officers posted in the district inspected the eateries and sweets shops and vendors to check the quality of the sweets in view of the festive season.

According to the information received from the Food Safety Officer, from



March 15 to 21, food items Mawa and Bundi Laddu from M/s Agrawal Sweet Store Durg and gram flour and flour from M/s Shiva Grocery Kumhari, gram flour laddu from M/s

Backology Bakers and Sweets Kohka Bhilai, samples of Mathura Peda and Kesar Tikki from Trupti Sweets, Hatari Bazar Durg and Hareli Rice Bran Oil from M/s Totamal

Jethamal Grocery Bhilai-03 have been collected and sent to the food testing laboratory.

Surprise inspection was conducted in the wholesale grocery stores operating in Indira Market including M/s Ashok Trading Company, Kishan Lal & Sons, Bakliwal Enterprises, Janata Kirana Stores, S h a m s h u d d i n Mohammad, JK Provision Stores, Sadani Provision Stores, Pankaj Traders, Nemichand Pankaj Kumar Jain, Lalchand Kirana Stores and Jai Mata Di Traders. The team also conducted checks in Power House Market at the wholesale merchants including M/s Kantilal Kirana, Jyoti

Enterprises, Shivshakti Traders, Anmol Traders, Haryana Traders, Uttam Kirana, as well as in Risali at Popular Grocery, Om Grocery and General Stores, Parakh Super Bazaar Risali, Shiv Grocery and Kirtan Grocery Kumhari.

Inedible color found during inspection was destroyed on the spot and instructions were given not to sell the inedible color in future on the pretext of Jalebi Rang. Through the mobile food testing laboratory run by the department, action is being taken continuously to ensure that businessmen and consumers do not use newsprint and inedible colors while serving various food items and snacks etc.

Rajendra Sahu getting support in Ward Chalo Campaign

Bhilai, Mar 21:

Under the leadership of Sheher Zilla Mahila Congress President Kanya Dhimar, Block President Bhumika Deshmukh, Vice President (Sheher) Kiran Deshmukh, ward-wise meetings are being held regularly to energize the voters in the wards. A meeting was held in ward number 5 Marar Para. In this meeting, Manju Arun Vora, Radhika Rajendra Sahu, Mahila Congress City District President Kanya Dhimar, Councillor Vijayant Patel, Meena Sahu, Ratna Naramdev, Thamin Sahu were especially present. A large number of residents of the ward were present. The meeting unanimously resolved to make Congress



candidate Rajendra Sahu win in the Lok Sabha election with huge votes. It was stated that it is necessary to form Congress government at the Center for the progress and prosperity of the country. The Mahila Morcha has geared up to make Congress candidate Rajendra Sahu victorious from Durg for which they are interacting with the people in the wards and

giving details about the Congress manifesto. State spokesperson Hema Sahu, Ratna Naramdev and Veena Sahu presented Congress's manifesto to the women, explained about the schemes and appealed to vote in favour of Rajendra Sahu. The meeting program was conducted by Dr Ashwani Jangde Media In-charge.

Admin urges to ensure social harmony during festivals

District level peace committee meeting held

Bhilai, Mar 21:

A meeting of the District Level Peace Committee was held on Thursday in the District Collectorate. Additional Collector Arvind Ekka chaired the meeting. In the meeting, a unanimous decision was taken to celebrate Holi festival safely and peacefully.

Additional Collector Ekka said that it should be ensured that social harmony is maintained in the district during the upcoming Holi festival and other festivals. Law and order has to be maintained during the festivals. Praising the contribution of the Peace Committee, he said that due to the contribution of all the members, there has been a glorious tradition of social harmony, mutual love and brotherhood in



the district. This tradition has to be continued. He instructed them to follow the decisions taken in the meeting. He urged them to celebrate all festivals and celebrations with respect for each other's religious sentiments and stressed on cooperation to maintain law and order.

In view of Holi, instructions were given to police to arrange fire brigade vehicles at important places, ensure that holika dahan is not conducted near electrical equipment wires and transformers, and to take

strict action against those who damage street lights and public properties. In the meeting, instructions were given to the medical department to ensure the presence of doctors in primary health centres, arrangements for ambulances along with duty of doctors and staff during Holi festival.

In the meeting, Additional Superintendent of Police Abhishek Jha said that they are going to take strict action against those who drive under the influence of alcohol, those

who use obscene and scary horns instead of the normal horns in vehicles, those who roam around in scary masks, those who drive carelessly, those who ride with two pillion riders and those who roam on the roads. On the occasion of Holi, police parties will continuously patrol across the district.

The committee members also gave their suggestions in the meeting. Deputy Collector Mukesh Raote, Deepak Nikunj, Mahesh Rajput, Lavkesh Dhruv, Municipal Corporation Durg Commissioner Lokesh Chandrakar, ASP Sukhnanand Rathore, DSP Satish Thakur, committee members and other officials of the district administration were present in the meeting.

Vehicle rally taken out in Bhilai for voter awareness

Bhilai, Mar 21:

As per the instructions of Collector and District Election Officer Richa Prakash Chaudhary, Municipal Corporation Bhilai organized a vehicle rally under the SVEEP program and a voter awareness campaign was conducted to ensure 100 percent voting in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections polling scheduled on 7th May. People were administered an oath to exercise their franchise. Hundreds of vehicles were parked in the shape of the letter SVEEP at S a n t o s h i p a r a Baikunthdham ground in Bhilai Corporation area. Nodal officer of SVEEP in the district administration, District Panchayat CEO Ashwani Dewangan, Municipal Corporation Bhilai Commissioner



Devesh Kumar Dhruv, Additional Collector Yogita Dewangan and Additional Commissioner Ashok Dwivedi flagged off the rally.

The vehicle rally toured Nandini Road, Chhawani, Khursipar, Power House, the entire sector area and reached Sector 7 school ground, where the vehicles were parked in the shape written on 7th May. Officers and employees of the Corporation, District Administration,

Education Department, National Urban Livelihood Mission were present there. The youth of Mahila College and Medical College were administered an oath to vote impartially and without discrimination. After this, the vehicle rally was flagged off for Nehru Nagar Mall Road, Supela Ramnagar, 18 Road Camp area. The vehicle rally covered about 30 km from Vaishalinagar and Bhilainagar assembly con-

stituencies. The vehicle rally, decorated with banners and posters, appealed for voter awareness. The rally concluded at GE Road near Saksharta Chowk.

SVEEP Assistant Nodal Officer Dr Pushpa Purushottam, Amit Ghosh, Sanjay Bagde, Amitabh Sharma, Yesha Lahere, Sunil Chaudhary, Dipti Sahu, Himanshu Deshmukh, Ajay Gaur, Vineeta Verma, Sweta Verma, Dharmendra, Mishra, Srinivas Rao, Ajay Shukla, Rita Chaturvedi, Purushottam Sahu, Shashi Bhushan Mohanty, Jaikumar Jain, Anil Meshram, Anil Mishra, VK Samuel, Aman Patle, Ekta Sharma, Tanwari Akil, college teachers, youth students and people from social service organizations were present.

FST, SST teams instructed to work with transparency



Bhilai, Mar 21:

A meeting of Flying Squad Teams (FST), Static Surveillance Teams (SST) and Video Surveillance Teams (VST) of Assembly Constituency 66 Vaishalinagar was organized in the District Collectorate on Thursday. Joint Collector Harvansh Miri chaired the meeting. He said that during the Lok Sabha election process, the teams have been formed to keep an eye on excessive campaign expenses, distribution of bribe items in cash or in kind, movement of illegal weapons, liquor or anti-social elements etc in the con-

stituencies. They should work with complete transparency. If any complaint is received, take action impartially without any pressure. He also asked the FST and SST teams to make regular entries in the register of time of arrival and departure from the workplace. They should keep a strict vigil on the movement of huge amounts of cash, illicit liquor, any suspicious item or weapons etc in their area. Also, take action as per rules by getting videography of suspicious items done. On this occasion, Deputy Collector Lavkesh Dhruv along with concerned officers and all the members of FST, SST and VST were present.

Story Writing Competition - 2024 results announced

Storytellers from all over the country participated in the competition

Storytellers expressed SAIL's connection with the country and society through their stories.

Bhilai, Mar 21:

Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) announced the results of SAIL Story Writing Competition -2024 on Friday. SAIL had launched this story writing competition in Hindi and English languages on January 2, 2024, in which storytellers from across the country participated enthusiastically. The theme of this competition was "You, Me and SAIL". Through their stories, the participants not only showcased their creativity but also highlighted SAIL's connection with the country and society.



The list of winners in this competition in Hindi and English languages is as follows: List of Hindi Language Winners: 1st Prize winner: Poonam Yadav from Burnpur, West Bengal; 2nd Prize winner:

Sharad Kumar Verma from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh; 3rd Prize winner: Binita Kumari from Bokaro, Jharkhand; Consolation prize winners: Ruma Bharti from Ranchi, Jharkhand and Dr



Nirupama Kumari from Bokaro, Jharkhand. List of English Language Winners: 1st Prize winner: Advay Sahai from Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh; 2nd Prize winners: Milind Sengupta from Burnpur,

West Bengal; 3rd Prize winners: Vijoy Chandra Tiwari from Bokaro, Jharkhand and Chinta Siva Santosh Dharma Kowshik from Burnpur, West Bengal; Consolation prize winners: . Krishan

Shetty from Bengaluru, Karnataka, Prita from Bokaro, Jharkhand and Arvind Yadav from Burnpur, West Bengal.

The SAIL Story Writing Competition - 2024 was aimed at inspiring people of all ages to unleash their imaginations, sharpen their writing skills and also to make people aware of SAIL's contribution towards Nation's development and society. This competition also encouraged budding writers and storytellers to use their imagination and creativity to create stories.

The company will provide attractive prizes and certificates to the winners of this competition. Along with this, The award winning stories will also be published in SAIL's in-house magazine "SAIL News".

IT team raids real estate businessmen and finance brokers

In Raipur and Rajnandgaon

Raipur, Mar 21:

Income Tax's investigation wing has conducted raids against few establishments of real estate and finance related businessmen in Raipur and Rajnandgaon here on Thursday morning. It is learnt that the raid has been conducted against real estate businessman Chandu Dau in Raipur. In the last Congress government Chandu Dau was having access to many a powerful in the government. Sources informed that some ex-bureaucrats close to those in power and having links of investment with businessmen, that the IT team conducts these raids.

In addition to this, IT team raided Finance broker Prakash Lulia's estab-



lishments and the raids were also conducted at the establishments of Sundara Construction.

A team of 17 IT sleuths are involved in these raids and this include Central team and IT Zonal team from Bhopal. The raid lasted for about six hours in different establishments of

the above group. Sources informed that the IT has collected important documents of investment and stocks from these firms and also checking computer hard-disk and investments made and it is on cross-checking the IT return filed and profit earned by these compa-



nies that information about tax evasion, if any, would be known.

On the other hand from Rajnandgaon it is learnt that the IT team raided at different establishments of real estate agent Sanjay Sharma and it was in progress till the writing of these lines.

'Freezing Cong bank accounts at election time is violation of model code'

Raipur, Mar 21: Freezing Congress's bank accounts at the time of elections is a violation of the model code of conduct and unconstitutional, and the poll panel should prevent such a move to save democracy, party leader Sachin Pilot said on Thursday.

Talking to reporters at the Swami Vivekananda Airport in Raipur, he said bank accounts of the BJP, and not the Congress, should be frozen as the saffron party has received "huge money" through electoral bonds "scam".

At a press conference in New Delhi, senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi alleged a systematic effort is underway by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cripple the party financially as the opposition outfit stepped up its demand for access to its bank accounts to ensure a level playing field in the run up

to the Lok Sabha polls. Pilot, the Congress in-charge for Chhattisgarh, arrived here on a two-day visit to the state in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. "It is well known how the Centre is treating the main opposition Congress. The acts of sealing Congress' bank accounts, seizing cash from them and deliberately not giving a level playing field to the Congress are all violations of the model code of conduct, morality and the Constitution," he said.

"I request the Election Commission of India to immediately take steps and prevent such acts. The biggest festival of democracy is elections. Amid elections, sealing bank accounts of the AICC, Youth Congress and NSUI, and acting with vendetta amounts to weakening democracy," maintained the former Rajasthan



deputy CM. The entire country is watching how the Centre has been trying to weaken the Congress, especially during elections, said Pilot. The Congress leader accused the BJP-led Centre of being "egoistic" and indulging in aggressive politics and warned if such acts continue then elections would no longer be independent and fair.

"It is the responsibility of the EC, which is an independent constitutional body to prevent such acts," said the former Union minister: On a question on elec-

toral bonds, Pilot said, "The Supreme Court has declared electoral bonds as unconstitutional. A scam worth thousands of crores of rupees has happened through it. Rahul ji (Congress MP Rahul Gandhi) has said it had become an extortion mechanism. For the first time in the world, such a kind of scam was witnessed wherein government institutions like CBI, ED, IT were used." Pilot said Congress candidates for the remaining five Lok Sabha seats in Chhattisgarh will be declared soon. A fortnight ago, the opposition party named six candidates, including former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel (Rajnandgaon), in Chhattisgarh, which has 11 Lok Sabha seats. Chhattisgarh will vote in three phases on April 19, April 26 and May 7.

Three accused nabbed in chain snatching incidents

Raipur, Mar 21: The capital police on checking all CCTV footages, details of vehicle used in the crime and other issues in chain-snatching incidents in city, the team nabbed one Suvesh Dubey and who in turn disclosed the names of other two accused viz. KK Meshram and Kailash Yadav who were involved in chain snatching and produced them in the Court. During interrogation, the accused informed that they stay in Gobranavapara and used to snatch the gold chain with proper planning. First the three had stolen



three motorbikes from different places in Raipur and then they installed fake registration plates in their bikes and used to come to Raipur from Gobranavapara daily and keeping their face covered with masks, used to in-

duge in chain snatching. It is succeeding in chain snatching they used to return to Gobranavapara. KK Meshram kept the gold chain as mortgaged in the Muthoot Gold Finance and obtain loan from it. The Police is checking

● Gold chains, gold rings and stolen bikes worth Rs 10.16 lakh seized

Muthoot Finance for taking up gold chain as mortgage for taking loan from unknown persons without valid documents.

The accused Survesh Dubey is a history-sheeter and involved in 6 crimes in Thana Pandri, Devendra Nagar and Tikrapara in Raipur, and at Habibganj and Govindpura of Bhopal (MP) and was jailed as well. The other accused Kailash Yadav was also involved in thefts in Gobranavapara and had

been jailed in various IPC sections including clashes, thefts, fire-incidents, damages, beating and causing hindrance in government works, Arms Act and others. The police has seized total of 5 gold chains, 2 pieces of gold rings weighing 10.07 gms worth Rs 7,16,900 and the three stolen bikes including Pulsar, Activa and Access worth Rs 3.0 lakh and entire total stolen amount worth Rs 10.16 lakh. A case under section 392, 379, 356, has been filed against all three in different thanas of capital city and all three have been taken into arrest and sent to jail.

Central Chronicle News

Raipur, Mar 21: A large number of Congress leaders including former MLA Kesharimal from Dhamtari and former Secretary of Congress Rajendra Lunkad on Thursday joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the party headquarters situated at Kushabhau Thakre premises. State BJP Co in-charge Nitin Nabin, Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao, Raipur Parliamentarian Sunil Soni and other senior leaders were present on the occasion. Speaking on the occasion, the BJP Co in-charge Nitin Nabin said that people are getting associated with the party as it works to ensure public welfare scheme



■ Promises delivered to people are attracting towards BJP: Sao

reaches weaker section of society as well as to keep the cultural heritage of nation intact. Addressing the new joinis, the

DCM Arun Sao claimed that people have realized that India has registered growth during the last ten years under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and added that the Chhattisgarh Government has delivered the promises it had made to people within 100 days which has increased confidence of people on the party.

Cash of Rs 6.78 lakh seized from a car



Raipur, Mar 21: During checking by the Mandir Hasoud police and anti-crime and Cyber unit at Mandir Hasoud toll plaza, a cash of Rs 6.78 lakh was seized. It is notable here that in view of LS polls, IT team is checking all the vehicles and during one of the checking this cash amount was found in a car. The team on asking the members about transportation of cash in such large quantity failed to produce any valid documents in support of it. On this the team seized cash of Rs 6,78,580 and seized the car and sent the case to the Committee formed by the Election Commission to investigate the same.

Students are becoming sensitive towards mental health

● In the clinic of Psychology Study Centre, Pt. Ravi Shankar Shukla University

Raipur, Mar 21: Counseling Clinic is being run by the School of Psychology of Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla University for all the students of the University. Under the new education policy, this centralized counseling clinic is being formed and operated by the Department of Psychology. Recently, a mental health awareness program was organized by this clinic for all the students of all 28 schools of the university. Head of Department, Prof. Prabhavati Shukla told that awareness program was organized for all the departments of the University from March 1 to March 16 in which lecture sessions were organized under the able guidance of the Head of the Department and the direction of Dr. Roli Tiwari. The objective behind organizing these lectures was to sensitize the university students about



the important role of mental health. She informed that during these lectures, answers to many questions of the students like overthinking, low self-confidence, inferiority complex due to comparison with others, inability to wake up in the morning, time management etc. were given on the spot. Prof. Shukla said that on behalf of the department, these lectures were given by Assistant Professor Dr. Roli Tiwari, Mamta Sahu (researcher), Tikeswar Sahu, Dr. Jeeta Behera, Muralidhar Yadav and Anushka Gupta (student, M.A. final, Clinical Psychology). Dr.

Roli and his team reported that many students were unable to control themselves and started crying in the middle of these lecture sessions. After which, their problems were immediately pacified by using some psychological techniques. The students who did not want to share their feelings in the group or were not able to do so for some reason, they had noted down their name and contact number to the M.A. volunteer group for counselling. After which they were being called to the clinic and is being counselled. On the basis of this type of event, there is a plan to conduct tests related to mental health of these students in future, on the basis of which, how is the mental health of the students studying in the oldest university of Chhattisgarh state and what kind of improvement is needed in it in which the research should also be done. On the basis of which important contribution can be made in establishing the foundation of a healthy society.

SPORTS ROUND-UP

Manish-Pankaj win silver medal in Masters Badminton tournament



Central Chronicle News

Raipur, Mar 21: Pair of Manish Gupta and Pankaj Nathani from Chhattisgarh won silver medal in the Under 35 age category of the 46th Indian Masters National Badminton Tournament being held at Panchkula in Haryana recently. They won the semi-final match against the pair of Mayank and Anuj from Punjab with the score of

21-14, 21-16 to enter into the final. However, they lost the final match against Yuvraj and Subramaniam from Pondicherry with the score of 12-21, 13-21 to settle with silver medal in the tournament. Providing the above information, the Badminton Association spokesperson Anurag Dikshit said that Manish Gupta represents Raipur District Badminton Association in Chhattisgarh.

'Body Building is not only physical sport but helps in increasing mental strength'

Inter Regional Power Lifting tournament inaugurated

Central Chronicle News

Raipur, Mar 21: Two-day Inter Regional Power Lifting & Body Building Tournament was inaugurated at Chhattisgarh State Power Company here on Thursday. Speaking on



the occasion as Chief

Guest of the inaugural ceremony, the Executive Director MS Chouhan who is also the General Secretary of Central Sports & Arts Council, said that the sports of Body Building and Weightlifting not only is a physical sport but helps in increasing the mental strength.

Similarly, the Executive Director KS Manothia said a person is youth with the mental strength but not just the physical health. Organising in-charge Manoj Verma welcomed the players. Secretary of Regional Sports & Arts Council Vinay Chandrakar said that 57 players from 8 Region are participating in the event.

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NTPC Sipat honored with CII ITC Sustainability Award

For the third consecutive year

Bilaspur, Mar 21:

NTPC Sipat has been awarded the prestigious CII ITC Sustainability Award 2023 for the third consecutive time. This recognition reflects NTPC Sipat's standards of excellence in corporate excellence. This prestigious award ceremony was held on 19 March 2024 at Hotel Taj Mahal, New Delhi. Where Shri Sanjeev Puri, Chairman & Managing Director, ITC and President Designate CII presented this prestigious



trophy and certificate to Shri Surojit Sinha, General Manager (Operations) NTPC Sipat. CII-ITC Sustainability Awards is the most credible to recognize and ac-

knowledge sustainability efforts in the country, it aims to reward businesses committed to eco-friendly technology and inclusive practices. Companies are selected

for the award in two stages. The first is Desk Assessment in which a jury evaluates the applications by team and makes selections based on the sustainability parameters/data given in the application document. The second site assessment is led by a team of four assessors from different industries deputied by CII. The site assessment team visited NTPC Sipat from 9 to 12 October 2023 to conduct the assessment. Receiving the CII ITC Sustainability Award 2023 is a very proud moment and underlines the unwavering commitment of NTPC Sipat.

Biranchi Das takes charge as Director (Personnel) SECL

Korba, Mar 21:

Biranchi Das has assumed charge as Director (Personnel) of SECL. Das reached SECL headquarters on March 21, where SECL CMD Dr. Prem Sagar Mishra, Functional Directors, CVO, SECL Steering Committee members, Company Welfare Board members, various heads of departments, officers, and employees extended a warm welcome, congratulated and conveyed their best wishes to him.

Biranchi Das, an Alumni of PMIR Dept., Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, and he started his career as a



Welfare Officer (Tr) at Deulbera Colliery, Talcher Area, MCL in the Year 1994 and rendered more than 29 years of services in different managerial capacities in HR discipline.

He played a key role in the formulation of House Allotment Committee Rules for Non-Executives in MCL & the drafting of Certified Standing Orders, MCL.

During his time at the IR Department at MCL HQ, he played a pivotal role in maintaining healthy Industrial Relations at the Corporate Level. He has versatile knowledge in Labour Legislation, Contract Labour Management, and handling IR issues. Known for his Interpersonal skills he is a firm believer in teamwork and possesses excellent Technical expertise in the SAP - HCM Module. After the retirement of the then Director (Personnel), CMD SECL Dr Prem Sagar Mishra was given the additional charge of SECL Director (Personnel).

Cervical Cancer awareness programme organized at SRU

Raipur, Mar 20:

On March 21, the cervical cancer awareness program was organized at Shri Rawatpura Sarkar University and the topic of the programme was "Cervical Cancer Early Detection Best Protection". The main objective of organising the awareness programme about the cancer was providing the basic reasons, symptoms, precautions and treatment of the cancer to the female staff members and students for deep understanding the knowledge of the cervical cancer.



Today the main speakers of the particular topic Dr. Rajesh Kumar Agrawal (M.D Pathology) and Dr. Shalini Jain Agrawal (MD-OBGY, FICOG, FMAS, ACLS) share the important aspects of the cervical cancer including vaccination, screening, and causes of the cervical cancer.

In the programme, by describing about the cervical cancer Dr. Rajesh Agrawal asserted that in India more than 3.4 lakhs women get diagnosed with Cervical Cancer and it is

the fourth most common cancer in women globally as per the report and the main reason of the increasing the cases was lack of basic awareness and he shared the about the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) which is necessary cause of cervical cancer and the virus mainly transmit to bacco smoking, radiation and sexual contacts. Dr. Rajesh also shared the strategies towards the elimination of cervical cancer as a global public health problem by increasing coverage of HPV Vaccination, coverage of diagnosis, screening and treatment of pre-cancer lesions and palliative care. Dr. Shalini Jain Agrawal said the cervical cancer that begins on the cervix, which is the mouth of the uterus and most of the time, HPV infection disappears without treatment; sometimes, however, HPV stays in the cells for years and, in some women, eventually causes cervical cancer. The maximum effected the age group female between 20-24 years during first sexu-

al intercourse. She share the symptoms of the cancer as, vaginal spotting and bleeding after sexual intercourse, foul-smelling discharge and for its treatment surgery, radiation and chemotherapy are the best solution to decrease and eliminate the disease from the human body. The Vice-Chancellor of the university, Professor. S.K Sing, Chief PRO Rajesh Tiwari and Deputy Registrar M.K Singh were present during the awareness programme and the Chief PRO also proposed that the University will provide platform for our students and female staff to get free screening of the cancer and inject particular vaccine for the prevention from cancer in future.

Brijmohan elected President of Bal Kalyan Parishad

Chandresh Shah and Indira Jain elected GS and Treasurer

Central Chronicle News

Raipur, Mar 21: Cabinet Minister Brijmohan Agrawal has been unanimously elected President of Chhattisgarh Bal Kalyan Parishad (CBKP) at the Annual General Body meeting held here on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, he informed that the state government has given approval to open Speech & Hearing Therapy Centre in Naya Raipur, for which 30 Acres of land has been allotted. He further added that Budgetary provision



too have been made for the construction of building. Speech Therapy Centre would be established at Sapre School premises whereas services would be extended at Mana Juvenile Centre soon. Chandresh Shah and Mrs Indira Jain have been unanimously elected General Secretary and Treasurer whereas Dr

Ashok Tripathi would be Vice President and Minister for Women & Child Development Laxmi Rajwade would be senior Vice President of the Council. Decision has also been taken to increase the strength of Executive body from existing 10 members to 25 members.

Two minors run away with Thar vehicle asking employees to shoot their video

One minor nabbed, other is still absconding, in an attempt to steal Thar vehicle from Mahindra Showroom

Jagdalpur, Mar 21:



A case of attempted theft of Mahindra Thar vehicle on the pretext of test drive has come to light from Mahindra showroom under Parpa police station area of the district. In the name of taking the Thar vehicle for a test drive from the Mahindra showroom, two minor youths ran away with the vehicle, the employees of the Mahindra showroom immediately informed the Parpa police about this incident. On receiving the information, Parpa police station immediately cordoned off the vehicle and located the Mahindra Thar

vehicle within an hour. But after seeing the police, both the minors fled from the spot. Later the police caught one minor and the police is searching for the other minor. According to the information received from the police, two minor criminals tried to steal the new vehicle in a filmy style. Mahindra showroom employees were asked to make a video while driving the vehicle. The employees kept making videos and the minor ran away with

Farmers asked to give information about crop loss

Due to hailstorm to agricultural insurance company

Bemetara, Mar 21:

All the horticulture farmers who have suffered loss of crops due to two consecutive days of rain in the district, can inform about their loss by calling the designated toll free number of Indian Agricultural Insurance Company 1800-419-0344. In this, farmer information can be registered by giving the name of the farmer, name of the crop, name of the district and village, Khasra number and area etc. According to the infor-

mation received from Hitendra Kumar Meshram, Assistant Director of Horticulture Department, the risk of hailstorm and cyclonic winds has been included as a local disaster under the AEON cover under the scheme. In case of local disaster, farmers should inform about it within 72 hours of the incident directly on the toll free number of Agriculture Insurance Company Limited or in writing to the insurance company, concerned bank, local horticulture department officials/employees, details of the insured crop, extent of damage. And inform along with the reason for the damage.

Medical camp set up in Naxal stronghold Lakhapal

CRPF 74th Battalion distributes essential items

Sukma/Konta, Mar 21:

Keeping in view the sensitivity of the security forces area in Lakhapal of highly Naxal affected Chintalnarpolice station area of Sukma district, a new camp was set up by the security forces in Lakhapal so that the area can get protection from Naxal incidents and development work can be done. Along with the establishment of the camp, keeping in view the needs of the villagers, a Civic Action Program was organized by CRPF 74th battalion in which essential items were distributed to the villagers of Lakhapal and Keralapenda. This program was organized on the occasion of CRPF Foundation Day on the



instructions of CRPF 74th Battalion Commandant Himanshu Pandey. Along with this, a medical camp was organized in which the villagers were treated by Doctor Santosh and they were given free medicines. During this, a two-year-old girl who was suffering from malaria was rescued by the soldiers and taken to Chintalnarpolice station. Commandant Himanshu Pandey said that Lakhapal of the district is a highly sensitive area falling under Chintalnarpolice station area. Keeping this

in view, a camp has been set up here. So that development work can be done in these areas far from development and essential facilities like electricity, road, water, and health can reach the interior areas. After the establishment of the camp, a civic action program and medical camp have been organized on CRPF Foundation Day to establish better coordination and trust with the villagers. Hundreds of villagers of Lakhapal and Keralapenda benefited from it. The villagers also participated enthusiastically.

'PS Chandel to maintain spirit of selfless service'

After death of his father for distribution of medicines to epilepsy patients on the day of Holi every year

Masturi, Mar 21:



In the nearby village Risda, Ajay Singh Chandel was giving free medicines to epilepsy patients every year on the day of Holi in a spirit of selfless service. Now after his death, the medicine is given by his elder son Pradeep Singh Chandel. Like every year, this year too on the day of Holi on March 25, Pradeep Singh Chandel has made full preparations to give medicines to the epilepsy patients. Thousands of patients have benefited from the health benefits of the tradition of giving medicines that has been going on for many years. Patients have to take this medicine continuously for 3 years. From the very first day of Holi, thousands of patient's family members come to take this medicine which is famous far and wide. And on the day of Holi, the chain of giving the medicine starts from 6:30 in

the morning and ends in the afternoon. It lasts only till 1 pm. Arrangements are maintained by setting up pandals to accommodate the patients and their families coming from far away places. To take the medicine, the patient has to bring only a coconut, incense sticks and some jaggery, so that the medicine can be given by mixing the coconut and jaggery, this medicine is completely free. Village Risda is located on National Highway No. 49. It is situated on Bilaspur-Shivrinarayn main road at a distance of 23 kilometers from Bilaspur and it can be searched on Risda-Masturi in Google

Map. Rules:- 1/ The medicine is given only to the patient at the medicine site, hence bring the victim along with you. 2/ The patient has to remain on an empty stomach before taking the medicine, hence on this day the patient has to remain on an empty stomach till the medicine is taken. 3/ It is mandatory to give medicine continuously for 03 years, after giving medicine for one year, do not gap for the second year. 4/ People coming from far away and staying overnight should bring their belongings (sheets, blankets) and essential items with them. 5/ Free food is arranged for those staying the night. This service is completely free, if any person demands money from you in the name of medicine or in the name of arrangement, then please do not give money to any person, this is a selfless service, and you can inform this to the members as follows. You can give on the given numbers. Also for any kind of information you can call on the numbers below: One can contact on 9993043172, 9589873544, 7000842885, 9109306649, 7898603591, 7354191277, 7898436679, 9893832710.

More than 80000 soldiers will conduct LS elections peacefully in Bastar: IG Sundarraaj

Jagdalpur, Mar 21:

Naxalites are not able to commit any crime in the camp area even if they want to



After the announcement of Lok Sabha elections, the conduct of elections in Bastar division is no less than a war. On one hand, the order of Naxalites to boycott elections in Naxal affected areas and on the other hand, making the hope of development in villages successful through elections is a big challenge for the administration and security forces. On the other hand, to maintain their terror in Bastar, the Naxalites keep waiting for an opportunity to commit a major crime before or during the elections or to target a big face, this has been the nature of the Naxalites. There is always a fear of Naxalite incidents during elections, which has a direct impact on the elections. In discussion with Bastar IG Sundarraaj P regarding the preparations being made for smooth conduct of Lok Sabha elections in Naxal affected

Bastar division, he said that 75 new security forces camps will be established in Bastar during the five years after the last Lok Sabha elections. During the Lok Sabha elections, more than 80000 soldiers will be deployed throughout Bastar who will conduct the elections peacefully. The advantage of the opening of new camps is that the construction of roads to the interior Naxal affected areas has almost been completed, electricity and

water have reached the villages. Apart from this, due to the establishment of camps, a large area is under the control of the force. Naxalites are not able to commit any major crime in the camp area even if they want to. One advantage of the opening of camps is that now during voting, villagers will be able to cast their votes in the polling booth of their own village. Their booth will not have to be shifted to another location due to security reasons.

He told that a camp has also been opened in Tekalgudam, the former village of Naxalite commander Hidma and the stronghold of battalion number one. For the first time, the villagers here will be able to vote in their village itself due to these camps. Currently, new camps have been opened in areas like Minpa of Sukma district, Tarrem of Bijapur district, Kohkameta of Narayanpur district. During the elections, a large number of soldiers will be deployed in Naxal operations, additional forces will be deployed in Naxal affected areas of Bastar. Along with Chhattisgarh Police, personnel of security forces like BSF, CRPF, ITBP will be engaged in security during the elections. Apart from this, additional forces are also being sent from the Center for the elections, which will start reaching different places in Bastar in a day or two.

BRIEF

Sawing of banned 'Arjun' trees going on



Anwari, Mar 21: The sawing of banned 'Kouha' (Arjun) tree in the saw mill in Bhakhara area is going on in full swing. In this even after sealing of many saw mills, this work is still going on openly. From other places also the 'Kouha' (Arjun) tree is being cut and sent to the saw mill for sawing. It is notable here that in Gram Joratarai of Bhakhara area, there is huge stock of banned 'Kouha' (Arjun) tree in the saw mill. Here in the name of licence, there is lot of sawing of 'Arjun' trees. Similarly the saw mill owners are also carrying out illegal cutting of banned trees and the officers from the Forest department are not even concerned about it and despite having information in this regard, are not taking any firm action against it.

Rains brought into open the stark reality



Anwari, Mar 21: The light to medium showers over the last two days have brought into open the tall claims of clogged drains in Gram Panchayat Kodeboda and all the waste and stale water from drains has come to the streets. This has exposed the stark reality of tall claims about 'swachhata' in Gram Kodeboda. Set aside the cleaning of drains is a distant reality and the people are falling prey to accidents and the member representatives of Gram Panchayat are least bothered about it. Due to lack of cleaning of drains, they are full clogged and it is posing threat to spreading of water-borne and other diseases during this season and the people are left with no option, but to wait for some action only.

DEO conducts surprise inspection



Mungeli, Mar 21: The District Education officer (DEO) Mungeli Chandrakumar Dhritlahre conducted surprise inspection of examination centre of Swamy Atmanand Govt English Medium School (SAGEMS) in Daupara for High School Certificate Exam 2024 by CGBSE here on Wednesday. The Centre head Dr IP Yadav informed that a total of 116 students out of total 119 are appearing in the exam of Sanskrit of Class 10th from this Centre and the exam is being conducted peacefully and all the arrangements were found to be just perfect. The inspection team comprised of Vikram Singh Thakur, Ramkrishna Vaishnav as assistants.

Seven days NSS camp held in SAGEMS Daupara



Mungeli, Mar 21: The NSS unit of BRSM Agriculture Engineering College (BRSMAC) carried out special 7 days NSS camp in Gram Chalan from March 15-21. Programme officer Anurag Shrivastava gave information about different programmes of the camp. On the fourth day of the Camp i.e on March 18 blood donation camp was organised. Gajdra Sahu, Sunil Sahu, Vikas Bunkar from Sewa Bharti of Mungeli and the officers and employees of the College and District Hospital were present in large number.

Farmers demand compensation for Rabi crop loss

Bazar-Atria, Mar 21:

The Rabi crops have been completely destroyed due to unseasonal rain and hailstorm in the area for the last three days, which includes both harvested and non harvested standing crops. The villagers of the area, facing the brunt of crop loss approached the Collector and MLA and have sought for compensation by submitting a memorandum.

The farmers have opined that they take up farming by taking loans from moneylenders or banks and further loss due to natural calamities is a big blow to them, and their loss should be compensated fast. Villages Khaprikalar,



Kesla, Devaribhat, Dokrabhat, Ragara, Bhimpuri, Madanpur and Bhorampur Kala, Madanpur, Joratarai, Singhori, Chingli, Madora, Bafra, Kusmi, Bhimpuri, Badgada, Carpentola, Khapri, Keshala and Chhuikhadan are the worst affected. During the submission of the said

memorandum, the MLA was mainly accompanied by Motilal Janghel, Nilambar Verma, Girwar Janghel, Ramkumar Patel, Ashok Janghel, Kailash Verma, Ghasia Verma, Subodh Pandey, Hukum Verma, Likhan Verma, Rinku Gupta, Dhanshu Santosh Yadu, Kedar Janghel and others.

Dwarkani's family throw 'Nyota Bhoj'

Arang, Mar 21:

The senior retired teacher PD Dwarkani under the PM Poshan Shakti Nirman Aahar Yojana (PMPNAY) organised 'Nyota Bhoj' for school childrens of Govt Primary School Panghi on his 81st birthday here on Wednesday. On this occasion the students greeted him with birthday wishes and he became sentimental saying that the gathering of children is what gives him true happiness.

On this occasion PD Dwarkani extended best wishes to the students and asked them to be more successful and follow the instructions of the teachers and become good citizens.

In this 'Nyota Bhoj' programme, a total of 190 students of Balwadi, Primary, Middle and Anganbadi took part and enjoyed 'laddus', 'halwa', 'namkeen', banana, oranges and biscuits. The school children enjoying the social harmony took the food with lot of happiness.



On this occasion from the family of Prahlad Das Dwarkani, Ghanshyam Das Dwarkani, Anand Dwarkani, Suman Dwarkani, Sushma Dwarkani, Karnika Dewarkani, Pratham Dwarkani, Gopal Sarada, Govind Sarada, daughter Purva, and Primary School's head master Umendra Kumar Chandrakar, Middle in-charge Pramila Chandrakar, teachers Salik Ram Lahar, Ramnath Banjare, Archana Bhagat, Shradhanjali Sahu, Irfan Khan, Jageshwar Chandrakar, Vishram Banjare, Ashrita Pradhan, Sankul co-ordinator Amit Agrawal and all other members of the School, Anganbadi workers and noted villagers were present.

BLOs recognized for dedication to electoral process

Human chain to promote 100% voting

Dongargaon, Mar 21:

In a vibrant display of civic engagement and electoral enthusiasm, the Election Commission of India orchestrated a Special Voter Enrollment and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) program at Priyadarshini Bhawan, Dongargaon. Under the dynamic leadership of District Panchayat CEO and SDM Dongargaon, Manoj Kumar Markam, the event served as a rallying point for fostering voter awareness and commitment to democratic participation ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

A highlight of the event was the felicitation of 10 Booth Level Officers



(BLOs) for their unwavering dedication and tireless efforts in ensuring the smooth conduct of elections. Among the honorees were Jayanti Vaishnav Asra, Rayman Markandey Hardi, Balram Raote, Subhash Sahu Sambalpur, Meshwari Rivagahan, Bhuvaneshwari Raipayali, Purnima Dewangan Badgaon Charbhantha, and Meena Manju Manikpuri Kaviraj Tolagaon, whose exempl-

One nabbed with 31 quarter bottles of country liquor



Dhamtari, Mar 21:

As per instructions by the senior police officers to take action against illicit sale of liquor, 'satta' and other anti-social activities, the TI Magarod and Cyber cell in-charge got tip from an informer that a person is trying to sell illicit liquor. The police staff left for Gram Charbhata and on nabbing inquired him and he disclosed his name as Lalit Kumar Mahanand, S/o Shyamal Mahanand (22), R/o Gram Charbhata. The police on conducting inspection found a white bag with 16 quarter bottles of 'Masala' country liquor

Peace and law and order committee meeting concluded

Sukma, Mar 21:

As per the instructions of Collector Haris S., Additional Collector Gajendra Singh Thakur a meeting of the Peace and Law and Order Committee was held along with representatives of all religion. The Collector said that the festival of Holi should be celebrated in a peaceful and harmonious environment in Sukma district and Holika Dahan in Sukma city is mainly done near Mini Stadium, Maheshwari Para, Weekly Bazar Para and Patnampara Daiwi Chowk, therefore law and order situation should be maintained without fail.

The meeting also has agreed upon not to destroy green trees under Gaurav Path/NH-30 road. District Panchayat CEO Laxman Tiwari along with local public representatives, social organization officials,



officials and journalists were present in the meeting. The meeting asked to make adequate police arrangements to maintain peace and law and order on the day of Holika Dahan and Color Utsav and instructions were given to impose police duty in the district hospital.

District Commander, City Army, Sukma were asked to ensure deployment of city police team near Shabari River Dhobi Ghat, Pavaras Ghat and Shabari Nagar CRPF

Camp. In view of arson or any other incident, District Commander, City Army Sukma gave instructions to ensure presence of fire brigade vehicle, vehicle driver and eastern team in Police Control Room Sukma. Ambulance arrangements should be ensured to the Chief Medical and Health Officer with doctors on duty 24 hours a day. Also, in case of emergency, citizens can contact on telephone numbers 078642-99281, 62679-77932 and 108.



Peace Committee meeting concluded

Appeal for active participation in maintaining law and order

Korea, Mar 21:

In connection with the peaceful celebration of the upcoming Holi and Eid-ul-Fitr festival, a meeting of the Peace Committee was held under the chairmanship of Collector Vinay Kumar Langeh in the Collectorate meeting room.

On this occasion the Collector has appealed to the committee members, people of all communities and youth to take active participation in maintaining peace and proper law and

order. Besides imposing a complete ban on DJs, he has asked to celebrate Holi and Eid-ul-Fitr festivals peacefully.

In the meeting, the Collector gave instructions to the concerned officers to ensure traffic arrangements and well-organized celebrations of the festival in a dignified and cordial manner. On this occasion, Superintendent of Police Suraj Singh Parihar said that police will deploy forces to maintain law and order and he also said that immediate action will be taken against people found in an intoxicated state on Holi festival.

DEO conducts surprise inspection in remote Semaria school

Arang, Mar 21:

In a commendable initiative aimed at fostering educational development in remote rural areas, Raipur District Education Officer, Dr. Vijay Kumar Khandelwal, conducted a surprise inspection of Government Higher Secondary School Semaria (Samoda), situated in the hinterlands of the Arang development block.

During the surprise visit, Dr. Khandelwal meticulously assessed the school premises and classrooms, ensuring adherence to quality standards. Interacting with the students, he imparted invaluable advice, emphasizing the importance of focusing on Mathematics and English subjects. Students were encouraged to engage in repetitive practice for mathematics problem-solving and to prioritize correct spelling in English.

The inspection marks a significant milestone, as it represents one of the few district-level offi-



cer visits to the remote rural area of Semaria in recent times. Dr. Vijay Kumar Khandelwal, within days of assuming the role of District Education Officer, reaffirmed his commitment to prioritize rural education, pledging continued visits to such remote areas. Following the inspection of Semaria School, the DEO expressed satisfaction with the arrangements and functioning of the institution, further motivating the staff and students to uphold educational excellence. Present during the inspection were school principal and Sankul in-charge Shiram Nishad, Sankul coordinator Hariram Sahu, along with dedicated teachers and enthusiastic students.

Work impartially and carefully on the guidelines of the EC: Collector

Lok Sabha Elections 2024

Korea, Mar 21:

The District Election Office here organized a training session for District Level Master Trainers on EVM/VVPAT and Polling Day Management for the preparation of the upcoming Lok Sabha General Elections 2024. Collector and District Election Officer Vinay Kumar Langeh explained the objective of the training is to train the polling officers and equip them with their skills to successfully conduct free and fair elections. He gave information on the role and responsi-



bilities of Presiding Officers, First, Second and Third Polling Officer, polling day activities, mock poll, control units and sealing of VVPATs. Apart from this, voters register, voting process, voter verification, dealing with special circumstances during elections, polling closing and transportation were also discussed. The

Collector said that we all will have to work only on the guidelines of the Commission, therefore on any issue he advised the employees to lease seek guidance from their superiors. District Panchayat CEO Dr Ashutosh Chaturvedi told the trainees that the code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 has come into

force, in such a situation, all employees have to follow the guidelines strictly.

Master trainers Omkar Sai and Shailendra Gupta gave training to the officers and employees of the team in the presence of District Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Dr. Ashutosh Chaturvedi and Deputy District Election Officer Ms. Deepika

Netam. It was told in the training that the static investigation teams will be working in the check posts established on the main roads and borders of the district and will prevent the movement of illegal liquor, bribe items or huge amount of cash, arms and ammunition and anti-social elements in their area.

The flying squad will take action on all matters related to violations of the Model Code of Conduct and whenever any complaint is received regarding cash or liquor or any other items of bribe or anti-social elements or bringing and carrying of arms and ammunition, the flying squad team will immediately reach the

spot and take action and video of the proceedings will be made. DIO of NIC Sukhdev Patel said that the officers and employees of the static and flying squad were given detailed information regarding the entries to be made in C-VIGIL and ESMS app. He said that the entire investigation process by static surveillance teams will be done in the presence of the Executive Magistrate and it will be videographed. The entry will be made in the ESMS app by the Magistrate and the information will be received by the concerned nodal officer. Action will be taken as per rules by the nodal officer of the concerned department, he said.

Dozens of Rohingya refugees rescued after night on hull of capsized boat

Meulaboh, Mar 21 (AP):

An Indonesian search and rescue ship on Thursday located a capsized wooden boat that had been carrying dozens of Rohingya Muslim refugees, and began pulling survivors who had been standing on its hull to safety.

An AP photographer aboard the rescue ship said 10 people had been taken aboard local fishing boats and another 59 were being saved by the Indonesian coast.

Men, women and children, weak and soaked from the night's rain, wept as the rescue operation got underway and people were taken aboard a rubber dinghy to the rescue boat.

It was unclear how many refugees were aboard the small craft



when it capsized off of Indonesia's northernmost coast on Wednesday, with six survivors initially rescued by local fishermen estimating between 60 and 100 people.

It was unclear whether all managed to cling to the capsized craft overnight or whether some had drowned. Indonesia's search and rescue team

only left Banda Aceh city in the evening Wednesday, many hours after the capsizing, and initially had difficulty locating the boat in the choppy waters off the coast.

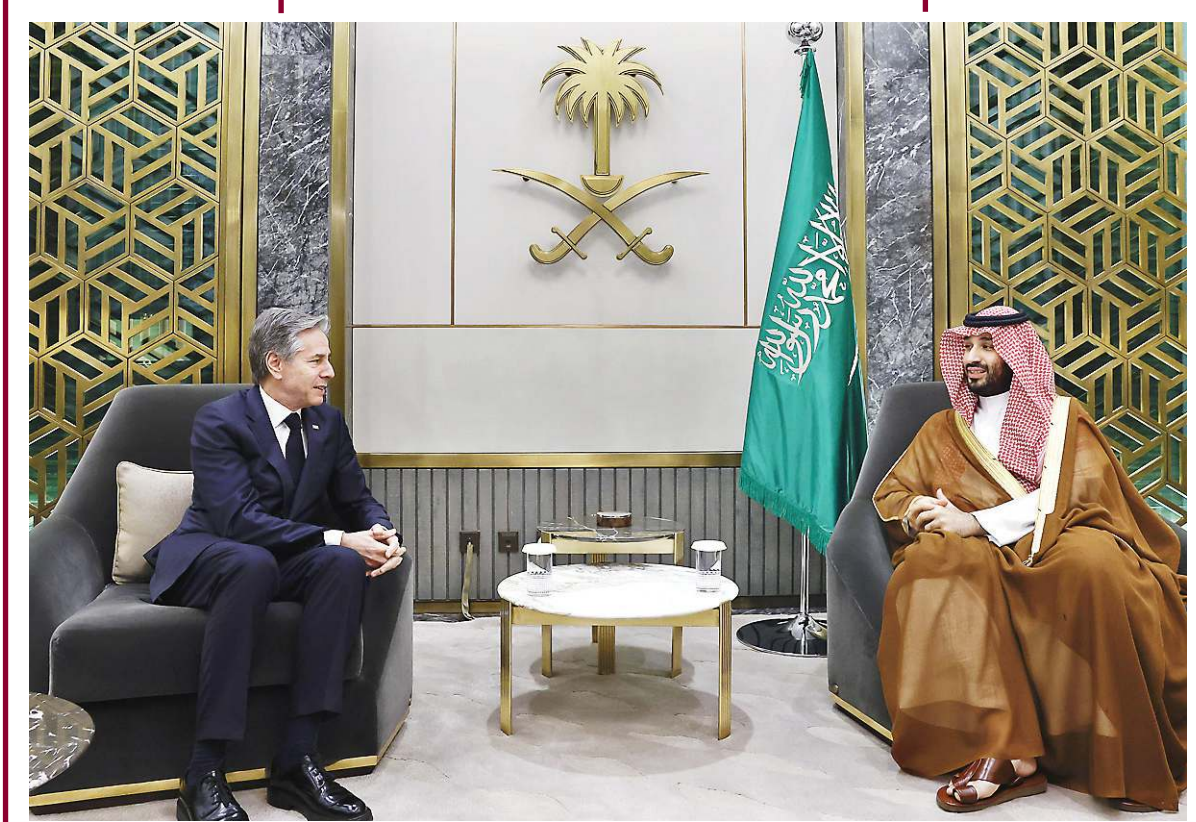
It finally found the boat and the survivors about midday on Thursday. Amiruddin, a tribal fishing community leader in Aceh Barat district, said

those rescued indicated that the boat was sailing east when it started leaking and then strong currents pushed it toward the west of Aceh. The six said others were still trying to survive on the capsized craft.

About 7,40,000 Rohingya were resettled in Bangladesh to escape the brutal counterinsurgency campaign by security forces in their homeland of Myanmar.

Thousands have been trying to flee overcrowded camps in Bangladesh to neighbouring countries with Indonesia seeing a spike in refugee numbers since November which prompted it to call on the international community for help. Rohingya arriving in Aceh face some hostility from some fellow Muslims.

BLINKEN MEETS SAUDI CROWN PRINCE



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

New Zealand slips into its second recession in 18 months as economy contracts

Wellington, Mar 21 (AP):

New Zealand has entered its second recession in 18 months after the latest round of GDP figures confirmed its economy contracted in the last quarter of 2023.

The country's economy shrank by 0.1 per cent in the quarter to December, and 0.7 per cent in per capita terms, the New Zealand's official statistics agency, Stats NZ, announced on Thursday.

The latest slip follows a 0.3 per cent contraction in the September quarter, which fulfils the technical definition of a recession.

It is New Zealand's second recession event

in the past 18 months. Stats NZ said the country New Zealand had returned negative GDP figures in four of the last five quarters, and had a stagnant annual growth rate of just 0.6 per cent.

The slump was largely expected with New Zealand's central bank forecasting a flat figure, while bank economists suggested a range of results between a narrow contraction and fractional growth.

The data made for worse reading in a per capita context with the last five quarters all retreating by an average of 0.8 per cent.

Helping to prop up the south Pacific island na-

tion's economy has been a record migration intake, which hit a record peak of 141,000 new arrivals in 2023.

Without that population growth stimulating an otherwise stagnant economy, New Zealand's economic position would be slipping at an even faster rate.

Regulation Minister David Seymour said the current economic conditions would lead to cuts in the country's forthcoming budget, including cutting the number of government workers.

"We're in a slump, but that won't be news to you, because you've already been living in it," Seymour said.

UN will vote on its first resolution on artificial intelligence

United Nations (AP): The General Assembly is set to vote Thursday on what would be the first United Nations resolution on artificial intelligence, aimed at ensuring the powerful new technology benefits all nations, respects human rights and is "safe, secure and trustworthy."

The United States, which sponsored the resolution, has said it hopes the world body will adopt it by consensus, meaning it would have the support of all 193 UN member nations. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that if the resolution is adopted it will be a "historic step forward" in fostering the safe use of AI. The resolution "would represent global support for a baseline set of principles for the development and use of AI and would lay out a path to

leverage AI systems for good while managing the risks," he said in a statement to The Associated Press earlier in March. The draft resolution aims to close the digital divide between rich developed countries and poorer developing countries and make sure they are all at the table in discussions on AI. It also aims to make sure that developing countries have the technology and capabilities to take advantage of AI's benefits, including detecting diseases, predicting floods, helping farmers, and training the next generation of workers. The draft recognises the rapid acceleration of AI development and use and stresses "the urgency of achieving global consensus on safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems."

US recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory: Official

Washington, Mar 21 (PTI):

The United States recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and strongly opposes any unilateral attempts by China to advance its territorial claims across the Line of Actual Control, a senior Biden administration official has said, days after the Chinese military reiterated its claim over the state following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit there. Earlier this week, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang said that the southern part of Xizang (the Chinese name for Tibet) is an inherent part of China's territory, and Beijing "never acknowledges and firmly opposes" the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh illegally established by

India". China, which claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, routinely objects to Indian leaders' visits to the state to highlight its claims. Beijing has also named the area Zangnan.

On March 9, Prime Minister Modi dedicated to the nation the Sela Tunnel built at an altitude of 13,000 feet in Arunachal Pradesh that will provide all-weather connectivity to strategically located Tawang and is expected to ensure better movement of troops along the frontier region.

Speaking at his daily press conference on Wednesday, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said, "The United States recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and we strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to

advance territorial claims by incursions or encroachments, military or civilian, across the Line of Actual Control."

India has repeatedly rejected China's territorial claims over Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that the state is an integral part of the country. New Delhi has also dismissed Beijing's move to assign "invented" names to the area, saying it did not alter the reality.

The Ministry of External Affairs on Tuesday said it has noted the latest comments made by the spokesperson of the Chinese Defence Ministry "advancing absurd claims" over the territory of Arunachal Pradesh and asserted that the state "was, is and will always be" an integral and inalienable part of India.

EU SUMMIT IN BRUSSELS



European Council President Charles Michel, left, speaks with United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres during a round table meeting at an EU Summit in Brussels, Thursday, March 21.

India-US relationship stronger than it has ever been: Pentagon officials

Washington, Mar 21 (PTI):

The relationship between India and the United States has been growing and is stronger than it has ever been, America's top Defence Department officials have told lawmakers with an influential Congressman noting that New Delhi is a swing vote because of its ties with Russia.

Assistant Secretary of Defence for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely S. Ratner told members of the House Subcommittee on Indo-Pacific on Wednesday that the US has been strengthening its relationship with India across a number of areas.

"I would describe the US-India relationship as

growing and stronger than it has ever been and absolutely essential to our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"We have been strengthening a number of areas across the relationship including in co-production, where we've made some major strides on jet engines, some new projects on armoured vehicles to integrate our defence industrial base, which is one important way to make those bonds all the stronger," Ratner said in response to a question from Ranking Member Adam Smith.

"I see them as a crucial, I wouldn't partner certainly, but also a little bit of a swing vote in that they have a relationship, certainly with Russia. They have relationships,

across the world with many of our adversaries. Getting them to work with us more going forward I think is crucial to meeting our needs," Smith said.

He asked Ratner how he would describe the US' relationship with India and what was needed to strengthen it.

"We've been working at the department to strengthen the relationships between our private sectors, particularly in defence technologies, and we have some really important new initiatives to be doing that. Admiral Aquilino has been leading a number of important exercises and operations with the Indians that are enhancing our operational coordination," Ratner said.

Australia and UK sign defence and security treaty

Sydney, Mar 21 (AP): Australia and the United Kingdom signed a new defence and security cooperation agreement with the defence ministers of both countries saying it was required to meet 'contemporary challenges' to maintain a global rules-based order.

The treaty was signed by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and his UK counterpart Grant Shapps following annual bilateral ministerial defence talks at Parliament House in Canberra on Thursday, as part of the Australia-UK Ministerial (AUKMIN) meeting, which was first held in 2006.

"Australia's relationship with the UK is dynamic and enduring," Marles said in a written statement on Thursday.

IMF reaches staff-level agreement with Sri Lanka for \$337 mn bailout

Colombo, Mar 21 (PTI):

The IMF on Thursday said it has reached a staff-level agreement with Sri Lanka for the next phase that would enable it access to USD 337 million from the nearly USD 3 billion bailout approved in 2023 for the cash-strapped country. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also praised Colombo as it said macroeconomic policy reforms are starting to bear fruit.

Starting March 7, the IMF team comprising Senior Mission Chief Peter Breuer and Deputy Mission Chief Katsiaryna Sviryzdenka were conducting, in Colombo, a two-week-long second review of the March 2023 bailout of USD 2.9 billion

spanning over four years. Two tranches of USD 330 million each were released in March and December 2023.

"The IMF team reached staff-level agreement with the Sri Lankan authorities on the second review under the economic reform programme supported by a 4-year Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement and concluded the 2024 Article IV Consultation discussions," a statement from the global lender said in Washington. The EFF arrangement was approved by the IMF Executive Board for a total amount of SDR 2.3 billion (about USD 3 billion) on March 20, 2023. "Upon completion of the Executive Board review,

Sri Lanka would have access to SDR 254 million (about USD 337 million), bringing the total IMF financial support disbursed under the arrangement to SDR 762 million (about USD 1 billion), the IMF statement said. Once the review is approved by IMF Management and completed by the IMF Executive Board, Sri Lanka will have access to SDR 254 million (about USD 337 million) in financing. In April 2022, Sri Lanka declared its first-ever sovereign default since gaining independence from Britain in 1948.

The unprecedented financial crisis led President Ranil Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to quit office in 2022.

Pakistan does not want 'armed conflict' with Afghanistan: Khawaja Asif

Islamabad, Mar 21 (PTI):

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has said that Islamabad does not want an "armed conflict" with Afghanistan, days after Pakistani air force jets carried out air strikes against terrorists in the border regions of Khost and Paktika inside the neighbouring country.

"Force is the last resort. We do not want to have an armed conflict with Afghanistan," he said, warning that Pakistan could block the corridor it provided to Afghanistan for trade with India.

"A message needed to be sent that this [cross-border terrorism] has grown too much," Asif said in an interview with Voice of America published on Wednesday, according to



the Dawn newspaper.

Pakistan wanted to convey to the Afghan interim government in Kabul that "we cannot continue like this," he said while commenting on the Pakistani airstrikes.

On Monday, Pakistan carried out intelligence-based operations targeting Tehreek-e-Taliban's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group which is responsible for the March 16 attack in Mir Ali, North Waziristan and multiple other terrorist attacks in the country.

MEA team appreciates remarkable progress of India-backed infra projects in Maldives

Male, Mar 21 (PTI):

A team from India's Ministry of External Affairs on Thursday reviewed the progress of important infrastructure development projects, including the redevelopment of the Hanimadhoo International Airport, being carried out under the Indian concessional Line of Credit. The projects are being carried out by the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of the Ministry of External Affairs which seeks "Strengthening Friendship through Developmental Partnerships." Over several decades, India has helped the Maldives in developing multiple infrastructure projects. The MEA team is led by Suja K Menon, who

is the joint secretary at the DPA in the External Affairs Ministry.

"As part of 4th India-Maldives LOC Review Meeting, team led by JS @dpa_mea appreciated the remarkable progress under the Hanimadhoo International Airport Redevelopment Project & Water and Sanitation projects in Baarah and Kelaa islands implemented under Indian concessional Line of Credit," the Indian Mission in Maldives posted on X after the DPA team visited several of the project sites. Earlier on Tuesday, the DPA team visited other project sites, including Gan International Airport Redevelopment project. "Fostering Partnership in Development! Site visits to Addu City Development

Project- Roads & Reclamation and Gan International Airport Redevelopment by Ms Suja K Menon JS (DPA I) @dpa_mea to review the project progress as part of 4th India-Maldives LOC Review Meeting," the Indian Mission said in a post on X after the visits along with photos from the site. Before the site visits, India and Maldives had conducted bilateral review meetings in connection with the LOC projects.

On Monday, the India-Maldives LOC review meeting saw "useful interaction with stakeholders across Ministries," the Indian Mission said, "to take stock of ongoing projects and further streamline their implementation for effective delivery"

BRIEF

Appointment



New Delhi: Nissan Motor India on Thursday said it has appointed Saurabh Vatsa as Managing Director effective April 1, 2024. Vatsa was appointed as the company's Deputy Managing Director on January 15 this year. Vatsa will report to Frank Torres, President of Nissan India Operations and Region Divisional Vice President of Business Transformation (AMIEO), the automaker said in a statement.

Elected Chairman

Mumbai: Central Bank of India managing director and chief executive officer MV Rao was on Thursday elected as the chairman of the The Indian Banks' Association (IBA). The managing committee of the IBA at its meeting held on Thursday also elected State Bank of India Chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara, Indian Bank Managing Director and Chief Executive S L Jain, and City Union Bank Managing Director and Chief Executive N Kamakodi as vice-chairmen of the lobby group.

Assumes charge



New Delhi: Naveen Jindal, Chairman of Jindal Steel and Power on Thursday assumed the charge as the President of Indian Steel Association with immediate effect. In a statement, the Indian Steel Association (ISA) said that Naveen Jindal assumed the role of President, succeeding Dilip Oommen, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of AMNS India, effective March 21. Naveen Jindal, Chairman, Jindal Steel and Power (JSP) has been unanimously elected as the President of the ISA by the Apex Committee, the governing body of ISA, according to the statement. Steel industry along with its upstream and downstream manufacturing value chains will have to grow in tandem for India to realise its development goals.

Startup forum

New Delhi: The fifth meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation startup forum will be held in January next year; the commerce and industry ministry said on Thursday. The initiative is aimed at promoting startup interactions among the SCO member states, fostering an environment conducive to innovation, and inspiring young talent to develop innovative solutions. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is an eight-member multilateral organisation, established on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China.

Finance underpins everything, says COP29 President Designate

New Delhi, Mar 21:



Negotiations on the new climate finance goal at the next UN climate conference in Azerbaijan will be an opportunity to unlock funds and rebuild trust between the parties, COP29 president designate Mukhtar Babayev said on Thursday.

Addressing the opening segment of the two-day Copenhagen Climate Ministerial, he said COP29 comes at a deeply complex moment when the world has seen the first one-year period of global average temperature 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial reference period (1850-1990). "Despite all the progress at COP28, we're still not on a pathway to 1.5 (degrees Celsius). Vulnerable communities are facing one crisis after

another due to the rising temperatures. These communities must be front and centre of our mind when we meet in Baku," he said. "Finance underpins everything and is a critical enabler of climate action," Babayev said. He said many are losing trust in the UNFCCC process due to the "growing gap in their needs and what's available" and urged all to work tirelessly to mobilise resources. "Finance is at the heart of climate diplomacy this year. The negotiations on a New Collective

Quantified Goal on climate finance are an opportunity to set a new path, unlock funds and rebuild trust between the parties," Babayev said. Other sources of finance, such as taxation and fossil fuel subsidy reform, are on the table to bridge the gap. In 2022, public financial support for fossil fuels hit a record high of USD 1.7 trillion globally, according to research by the global think tank International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

All parties will be empowered to raise their ambitions if a clear and strong signal is sent, that more public and private finance will be allocated to climate targets, Babayev said. "Countries need to find ambitious, achievable and fair solutions that scale up accessible fi-

nance, lower the cost of capital, develop new green financial instruments, deepen green capital markets, and simplify access to climate funds," he said.

This is needed to ensure that the developing world is not forced to choose the carbon-intensive development pathways that the developed world took, Babayev said, requesting parties to put in place the finance to enable a just and orderly transition. In parallel with mitigation, countries need urgent progress to adapt to the escalating impacts of climate change, but implementation depends on finance, he said.

The Azerbaijani minister of ecology said all countries need to ensure they have national adaptation plans and policies by 2025.

Kia India to hike vehicle prices by up to 3 pc from April 1



New Delhi, Mar 21:

Kia India on Thursday said it will increase prices of its range of vehicles by up to 3 per cent from April 1, 2024. The decision is attributed to the escalation in commodity prices and supply chain-related inputs, the automaker, which sells models like Seltos, Sonet and Carens, said in a statement.

It marks the first price adjustment by the company this year, Kia India said. Commenting on the development, Kia India National Head Sales and Marketing Hardeep Singh Brar said the company consistently strives to deliver premium and technologically advanced products to customers.

Robust regulatory frameworks must check risks arising from digitalisation: Swaminathan

New Delhi, Mar 21:



Robust regulatory frameworks are needed to protect customers from misuse and fraud resulting from rapid digitalisation in financial services and proliferation of fintech platforms, RBI deputy governor Swaminathan J said while speaking at an event in Paris. Addressing the Global Money Week 2024 earlier this week, the deputy governor said the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalisation in financial services, prompting a swift transition to online mode by service providers and customers, according to an RBI statement. Accompanying this surge in digitalisation was also the proliferation of fintech platforms, he said.

Often operating outside the regulatory envelope and unconstrained by legacy systems that typically

encumber traditional banks, fintech companies exhibit remarkable agility and adaptability in offering customised financial products, Swaminathan added. "These developments are indeed welcome. However, while they offer immense benefits such as accessibility and hyper-personalization, they also heighten the risk of misuse and fraud. They can expose consumers to risk of cyberattacks, data breaches, and often times, some financial harm," he said.

Bansuri Swaraj calls on Sitharaman

New Delhi, Mar 21:



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with BJP leader Bansuri Swaraj during a meeting, in New Delhi, Thursday, March 21.

BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from New Delhi constituency Bansuri Swaraj on Thursday called on Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Swaraj, the youngest BJP Lok Sabha candidate in Delhi, is the daughter of late BJP leader and former external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj. "Smt @ Bansuri Swaraj, Secretary @BJP4Delhi, calls on Smt @nsitharaman," Nirmala Sitharaman's Office said in a post on X. Swaraj has been fielded from the New Delhi parliamentary constituency, which for the last 10 years was represented by BJP's Meenakshi Lekhi. She would be contesting the Lok Sabha elections for

the first time. All the seven constituencies in Delhi will go to polls on May 25.

In the last elections in 2019, BJP won all the 7 Lok Sabha seats in Delhi.

NMDC reduces iron ore lump rate by Rs 200 per tonne

New Delhi, Mar 21:

State-owned NMDC on Thursday said it has slashed prices of iron ore and fines by Rs 200 per tonne and Rs 250 per tonne, respectively. The rates of lump ore have been revised to Rs 5,800 per tonne and that of fines to Rs 5,060 per tonne, NMDC said in an exchange filing. The prices are effective from Thursday and exclude royalty, District Mineral Fund (DMF), National Mineral Exploration Trust (DMET), cess, forest permit fee, and other taxes, the company said. In the last price revision announced on January 24, the company had fixed the rates of lump ore at Rs 6,000 per tonne and of fines at Rs 5,310 a tonne. Lump ore or high-grade iron ore contains 65.53 per cent Fe (iron), while fines are inferior grade ore with 64 per cent and less Fe content.

Stopping illegal mining high priority for govt: Coal secretary

Kolkata, Mar 21:



The coal ministry has reaffirmed its commitment to curbing illegal mining, designating it a top priority for the government, an official said.

Coal secretary Amrit Lal Meena said the identification process for permanently closing 69 mines has been finalised and will be executed promptly. Addressing the 17th Indian Coal Markets Conference here, Meena highlighted that out of the 225 mines that have ceased production, efforts are being made to repurpose them for alternative uses, such as renewable energy projects like solar parks

and pump storage ventures. "Stopping illegal mining is a high priority for the government. We have taken stock and conducted surveys of closed and abandoned mines. We are trying to offer these closed mines to the private sector where resources are available. However, where this is not possible, the mines will be

permanently closed," said Meena. In terms of logistical support, Meena mentioned that the government will provide assistance to all coal mines, whether public or commercial, through railway connections under PM Gati Shakti. Approximately 38 projects have been identified for railway evacuation connectivity and are currently at various stages of development, he said. On coal production, the official said India is poised to achieve one billion tonnes by 2025-26 and surpass 1.5 billion tonnes by 2030, although the coal's share in the energy demand basket may decline over time.

Indian airlines to operate 24,275 weekly domestic flights in summer schedule

New Delhi, Mar 21:

Indian airlines will operate a total of 24,275 weekly domestic flights during the summer schedule starting from March 31, a nearly 6 per cent increase compared to the year-ago period. The number of weekly departures is just 2.30 per cent higher as against 23,732 flights being operated by the scheduled carriers in the ongoing winter schedule that ends on March 30, according to aviation regulator DGCA. IndiGo, Air India and Vistara will operate more flights while SpiceJet will reduce departures during the 2024 summer schedule that spans from March 31 to October 26. In the summer schedule,

Indian carriers will connect 37 countries, including the US, the UK, Uzbekistan, Maldives, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The international flights will be operated from 27 domestic airports. Domestic carriers will be operating 1,922 weekly international flights, a rise of 5.1 per cent compared to the 2023 summer schedule.

In comparison to the ongoing winter schedule where the count of international weekly flights is 1,892, the increase is only 1.6 per cent. Akasa Air, which is set to commence its overseas operations on March 28, is yet to file its schedule for international flights with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

Airtel Payments Bank ties up with Neij and Mastercard

Mumbai, Mar 21:



Airtel Payments Bank has collaborated with India's leading smartwatch brand Nige and MasterCard to introduce a new way to make payments. The three entities have come together to launch Airtel Payments Bank Smart Watch and aim to revolutionize contactless payments by making contactless payments easier and making them accessible to the masses. By bringing the power of

Tap & Pay to every individual's wrist, this initiative aims to harness the full potential of smart wearables and bring convenient financial solutions to all, so users can be at the forefront of the future of payments, contactless payments.

In this regard, Ganesh Ananthanarayanan, COO, Airtel Payments Bank said, "Our partnership with Nige and Mastercard has provided digital customers in cities with a simple solution for on-the-go digital payments. Airtel Payments Bank Smart Watch is revolutionizing contactless payments while providing unparalleled convenience to customers. This innovation is enabling customers to

make payments conveniently without having to carry the card with them or use the phone for small payments. Our collaboration with Neij demonstrates our commitment to meet the growing needs of the city's digital consumers.

By embedding contactless payment capabilities in wearable technology, we have provided customers with greater freedom and flexibility in conducting daily transactions. This smart watch is the first wearable device launched by the bank. The Bank will continue to introduce more options and innovative payment solutions to enhance the convenience and security of its valued customers and enhance their digital banking experience.

Markets rally makes investors richer by Rs 5.72 lakh crore

New Delhi, Mar 21:

Investors' wealth jumped Rs 5.72 lakh crore on Thursday as markets soared nearly 1 per cent in tandem with a rally in global equities after the US Fed projected three rate cuts this year. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 539.50 points or 0.75 per cent to settle at 72,641.19. During the day, it zoomed 780.77 points or 1.08 per cent to 72,882.46. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms went up by Rs 5,72,752.79 crore to Rs 3,79,85,669.12 crore (USD 4.57 trillion).

"Markets witnessed a relief rally on the back of firm global cues after the US Fed's comments indicated that interest rate cut could happen towards the later part of the current year," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research) at

Mehta Equities Ltd, said. From the Sensex basket, NTPC, Power Grid, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were the biggest gainers. Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Maruti and Asian Paints were the laggards.

"Indian markets responded favourably to the positive global sentiment, spurred by the outcome of the FOMC (Federal Open Market Committee) meeting, which bolstered hopes for three rate cuts. All sectors in the domestic market were in positive territory," Vikram Kasat, Head - Advisory at Prabhudas Lilladher, said. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, and Hong Kong settled significantly higher while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading in positive territory.

LAKME FASHION WEEK



Bollywood actor Madhuri Dixit Nene with models presents a creation by designer Ranna Gill during Lakme Fashion Week x FDCI, in Mumbai.

All PSBs in India saw decrease in NPAs over last 6 months: Survey

New Delhi, Mar 21:

All public sector banks in India showed a reduction in non-performing asset levels over the last six months while only 67 per cent of private sector banks reported a decline during the period, said a FICCI-IBA Bankers' survey released on Thursday. The survey revealed that 77 per cent of the respondent banks reported a decrease in the NPA levels in the last six months, with public sector banks reporting better asset quality as compared to their private sector counterparts. The 18th round

of the FICCI-IBA Bankers' survey was carried out for the period July to December 2023. A total of 23 banks, including public sector, private sector and foreign banks, participated in the survey. These banks together represent about 77 per cent of the banking industry, as classified by asset size.

Over half of the banks covered in the FICCI-IBA Bankers' unveiled on Thursday believe that gross non-performing assets would be in the range of 3-3.5 per cent over the next six months. "All responding public sector banks (PSBs) have cited a

reduction in NPA levels while amongst participating private sector banks, 67 per cent of banks have cited a decrease. None of the respondent PSBs and foreign banks have stated an increase in NPA levels over the last six months while 22 per cent of private banks reported an increase," the survey highlighted. Amongst the sectors that continue to show a high level of NPAs, most of the participating bankers identified sectors such as Food Processing, Textiles, and Infrastructure. The survey also suggests that the outlook for non-food in-

dustry credit over the next six months is optimistic with 41 per cent of the participating banks expecting non-food industry credit growth to be above 12 per cent while 18 per cent feel that non-food industry credit growth would be in the range of 10-12 per cent. Moreover, 36 per cent of the respondents are of the view that non-food industry credit growth would be in the range of 8-10 per cent. "Over half of the respondent banks in the current round believe that Gross NPAs would be in the range of 3-3.5 per cent over the next six months.

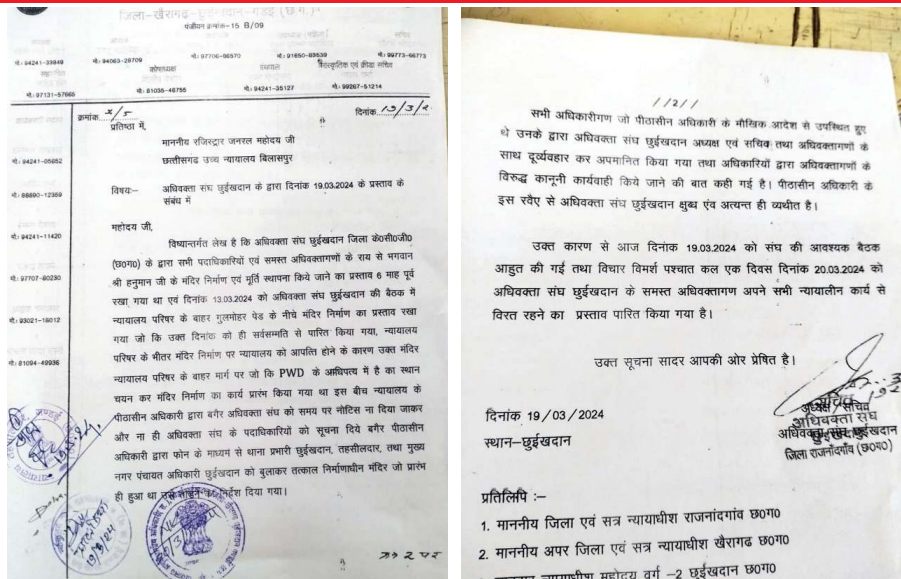
Chhuikhadan Advocates Association on pen-strike

Angered by stoppage of temple construction

Central Chronicle News

Khairagarh, Mar 21: Angered by the halt in construction of a temple, the advocates went on strike on Wednesday and stopped their work in the court. Chhuikhadan Advocates Association has sent a letter to the Registrar General of the High Court and sent information regarding abstaining from work on Wednesday.

According to the information, the proposal for construction of the temple and installation of the idol of Lord Hanuman was made 6 months ago by the Advocates Association Chhuikhadan with the opinion of all the officials and all the advocates. On March 13, in the meeting of Advocates Association Chhuikhadan, a proposal was made to construct a



temple under the Gulmohar tree outside the court premises, which was passed unanimously by the association on the same date.

Due to the court objection to the construction of a temple inside the court premises, the work of construction of the temple was started by selecting a

place on the road outside the court premises which is under the control of PWD.

Officials of the association said that in the mean-

time, neither without giving timely notice to the Advocates Association by the Presiding Officer of the court nor without informing the officials of the Advocates Association, the Presiding Officer, through phone, informed the police station in-charge Chhuikhadan, Tehsildar and Chief Nagar Panchayat.

Officer Chhuikhadan was called and instructions were immediately given to demolish the temple under construction which had just started. Angered by this incident, all the advocates protested on Wednesday and went on strike with their pens closed for a day. Meanwhile people who reached the court had to face problems due to suspension of work by the advocates on Wednesday.

Collector honours Mohan on World Sparrow Day



Central Chronicle News

Kurud, Mar 21: District Collector Namrata Gandhi here on the occasion of World Sparrow Day, felicitated 24-year-old Mohan Sahu, a resident of Mandrod, also a young environmental activist who has a special attachment to the sparrow birds of vil-

lage Mandrod of Kurud and is ready to make every possible effort for their conservation.

Sahu for sparrow conservation has made 2500 wooden nests and tin sheds himself and distributed them free of cost since 2018 and lately he has done the same in the Collector premises which

has taken praises from every section of the society.

It may be noted that the Indian Sparrow, a native of Asia and Indian sub-continent has gone on the edge of extinction due to overuse of pesticides and pollution of different types effecting its marginal population.

Voter awareness program organized in Govt College Barpali



Central Chronicle News

Korba, Mar 21: As per the instructions of Collector and District Election Officer Ajit Vasant and in coordination with District Sweep Nodal Officer and CEO District Panchayat Sambit Mishra, during the Lok

Sabha Elections 2024, many programs are being conducted to make voters aware of their rights, mainly in schools and colleges.

In this series, a SVEEP program was organized today by the students of Government College, Barpali. College students

participated enthusiastically in the program and made everyone aware about voting through competitions like slogan writing speech and essay. Besides, the principal of the college read out the affidavit and administered the oath of 100% voting to all the students.

Unseasonal rains ravage crops, farmers seek relief

● Agriculture department extends support to mitigate damage

Central Chronicle News

Korea, Mar 21: In the wake of extensive crop damage caused by unseasonal rains and hailstorms in the district, the Agriculture Department has stepped in to alleviate the plight of affected farmers, offering crucial support and relief measures.

Expressing concern over the adverse effects of the inclement weather on crops such as wheat, gram, linseed, and rye mustard, the Agriculture Department has issued a plea to farmers, urging them to report any losses promptly. Farmers who have insured their crops under the Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme are encouraged to reach out to Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company

via toll-free number 18002095959, Farmmitra app, or WhatsApp number 7030053232 within 72 hours of crop damage. Additionally, they can lodge complaints about crop damage on the Government of India's grievance redressal toll-free number 14447. To expedite the compensation process, farmers are advised to have essential documentation ready, including crop-related information, farmer application ID, account number, Aadhaar number, land details, and contact information.

For those farmers who have not availed crop insurance, the Agriculture Department has outlined an alternative avenue for seeking assistance. By reporting crop damage to the Revenue Department through the local Patwari, farmers can apply for compensation under RBC 6-4, ensuring that no farmer is left unsupported in the face of adversity.

Collector and SP conduct surprise inspection of sensitive areas

Central Chronicle News

Bijapur, Mar 21: Collector and District Election Officer Anurag Pandey and Superintendent of Police Dr. Jitendra Yadav visited the sensitive and remote areas of Bhairamgarh block of Bijapur district, Kutru Bedre and Farsegarh and did a surprise inspection of various polling stations and took information about the basic facilities.

After inspecting Government Primary School and Boys Ashram Bedre, Girls Ashram Farsegarh, Adarsh Ashram Mukaveli, taking information about education, mid-day meal and other basic facilities from the students studying in schools and ashrams, they were encouraged to study



diligently. Instructions were given to improve the quality of mid-day meal and to use food items on the basis of menu. While taking information about electricity, water, toilet and other basic facilities available to the students, the students studying in the institution were advised to maintain personal hygiene and use mosquito nets regularly.

Collector and SP also inspected the strong room at Farsegarh, high level

bridge under construction in Bedre and gave instructions to speed up the work. It may be noted that with the construction of the said bridge under construction across the Indravati River, Bijapur will be directly connected to Maharashtra and the transportation facilities towards Narayanpur district and Maharashtra will increase. Around 10 villages of Bijapur district are situated on the other side of Indravati River.

Sarpanch's bullock cart wedding procession surprises onlookers

● MLA Janak Dhruv joins also in bullock cart

Central Chronicle News

Gariaband, Mar 21: In a charming display of cultural heritage, the wedding procession of a young sarpanch unfolded with traditional flair as it journeyed through the streets in bullock cart, drawing admiration from all corners. Amidst the festive atmosphere, MLA Janak Dhruv also chose to embrace tradition, opting for a bullock cart to partake in the joyous occasion alongside the Sarpanch.



tion reached new heights as word spread, prompting a congregation of excited onlookers eager to witness the spectacle.

Ravindra Kumar Dhruv, the esteemed Sarpanch of Gram Panchayat Kas, led the procession from Gangaipuri to Kokadi, adhering to time-honoured customs by forgoing lav-

ish vehicles in favor of the humble bullock cart.

As the procession embarked on its journey on Wednesday, the Sarpanch's commitment to tradition became evident, with the groom seated proudly in the bullock cart, symbolizing a connection to the roots of the community.

MLA Janak Dhruv's presence alongside him in bullock cart further underscored the significance of unity and camaraderie within the community.

The procession, spanning approximately five kilometers, captivated the attention of all who witnessed it, serving as a poignant reminder of the enduring allure of tradition in the face of modernity. The Sarpanch's decision to eschew extravagant luxuries in favor of the simplicity of the bullock cart resonated deeply with the people of the area, garnering widespread admiration and appreciation for his steadfast commitment to preserving cultural heritage.

Ensure basic facilities in all polling stations: Collector

Meeting cum training of sector officers organized in presence of District Election Officer

Sukma, Mar 21: In a bid to uphold the integrity of the electoral process, Collector and District Election Officer Haris. S has taken impressive measures to ensure basic facilities in all polling stations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

In a meeting cum training session organized at the Collectorate meeting hall, Collector instructed sector officers appointed for the elections to meticulously inspect polling stations and conduct physical verifications.

He asked all the sector officers to inspect the polling stations allotted to



them and verify the basic facilities - electricity, water, toilets, ramps, net connectivity etc. and submit a report if there is a need for repairs or improvements.

During the training session, master trainers elab-

orated on the responsibilities and duties of sector officers, covering tasks to be executed before, during, and after voting. Special attention was given to ensuring the proper handling and transportation of EVM machines, assist-

ing polling teams, and disseminating information about voting procedures to the electorate. Moreover, sector officers were briefed on the importance of creating awareness among voters about EVMS and VVPATs, as well as arranging for webcasting in selected polling stations.

The meeting saw the presence of Additional Collector Gajendra Thakur, Joint Collector Suraj Kashyap, and all sector officers, who were briefed comprehensively on their roles, including the necessity for taking special precautions in sensitive polling stations.

Joyous Holi celebrations at Anurag Mental Development Center

Central Chronicle News

Rajim, Mar 21: The vibrant hues of Holi came alive at the Anurag Mental Development Center in Rajim, managed by the Shanti Maitri Rural Development Institute, as children immersed themselves in the festivities with enthusiasm and joy. Under the nurturing guidance of their teachers, all the children at the center came together to celebrate Holi, adorning each other with vibrant gulal and colors. Laughter and merriment filled the air as sweets were exchanged, sweetening the bonds between the children and their teachers.

tendent of the center, took the opportunity to impart valuable lessons about the significance of Holi, emphasizing its role in fostering unity and strengthening social bonds. She highlighted how Holi

tural significance of Holi, Tikeshwari Sahu shared that the festival marks the arrival of spring and symbolizes the victory of good over evil. It is a time when people come together to celebrate the devotion of Prahlad, a devotee of Lord Vishnu, by lighting bonfires and worshipping Holika.

The tradition of applying Abir-Gulal symbolizes harmony and goodwill towards others. Teacher Neelam Sahu, along with Bhagwati Nishad, Vedika Baghel, Devika Nishad, Yogita Nishad, and Rukhmani Patel, joined in the celebrations, further enriching the festive atmosphere with their presence.



transcends religious boundaries, uniting people from all walks of life in a spirit of camaraderie and brotherhood. Explaining the cul-

Central Chronicle News

Mungeli, Mar 21: Residents of Mungeli have been grappling with the adverse effects of bad roads, particularly along the National Highway connecting the district headquarters to Pandariya Road. The recent rainfall has exacerbated the situation, causing traffic standstills and disruptions in transportation. Clayey mud on the under-construction road has rendered the route impassable, leaving hundreds of vehicles stranded and inconveniencing students appearing for board and college examinations.

Adding to the woes, road construction activities along the Bilaspur to Podi Kawardha National Highway have been



causing distress for several months. Dust clouds from the dug-up and soil-filled roads have affected residents' clothing and health, while rainfall has halted vehicular movement. The sluggish progress of construction work, coupled with the absence of oversight from public representatives and officials, has led

to prolonged disruptions and frustrations among travellers. Due to the sluggish pace of work by the contractor, commuters on this route encounter daily disruptions. The recent heavy rainfall over the past two days has rendered the road impassable for buses, large vehicles, and two-wheelers. Hundreds of vehicles remain stranded in the mire created by the wet mud. Despite repeated pleas, public representatives have shown apathy, leaving officials to conduct operations haphazardly. Notably, National Highway officials are conspicuously absent from the field, failing to oversee the ongoing work. Attempts to reach the concerned executive officer via mobile have proven futile, exacerbating the communication breakdown. Furthermore, the absence of construction-related signage further complicates matters, leaving the public in the dark about crucial details such as road dimensions, material composition, and project timelines. In the absence of effective communication channels with departmental officers, the com-

munity remains uninformed and unable to address their concerns. Instances of construction irregularities go unchecked, empowering contractors to operate with impunity. Regrettably, responsible departments and agencies remain confined to their offices, neglecting their duty to monitor construction progress adequately.

We have been informed about the traffic disruptions caused by the recent rainfall on the Mungeli-Setganga road. Prompt action will be taken by the relevant authorities to address this issue.
- Nishtha Pandey Tiwari, Additional Collector Mungeli

CSK eye positive start against RCB in IPL opener

Chennai, Mar 21 (PTI):

A high-stakes match between cross-city rivals Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore here on Friday will usher in IPL 2024, but, beyond the grandeur around it, the two protagonists will have to find early answers to some deep questions as they attempt to enter a rarefied territory.

The Super Kings are five-time and defending champions, and a sixth title will put them in a space where no team has entered so far, not even Mumbai Indians, who also have five IPL trophies.

On the other hand, the Royal Challengers, who recently grabbed their maiden title through Women's Premier League, will be eager to add a first IPL title to their shelf. However, they have their own challenges to master.

The Super Kings have been the torch-bearers of success in the IPL under MS Dhoni, who has shown no sign of slowing down even at 42.

While his cricketing brain is still immune to advancing years, the passing summers have caught up with his reflexes as a batsman. So, the younger names will have to step up. The CSK have placed enormous faith in new recruit Rachin Ravindra in the absence of



Dhoni 'hands over' CSK captaincy to Gaikwad day before IPL opener

Chennai: The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Thursday "handed" over the Chennai Super Kings captaincy to opener Ruturaj Gaikwad on the eve of the IPL opener here, a stunning decision that is bound to send speculation swirling on his playing future with the franchise. In a post on X, the Indian Premier League made the announcement a day before CSK take on Royal Challengers Bangalore. The five-time champions issued a brief statement soon after. "MS



Dhoni has handed over Chennai Super Kings' captaincy to Ruturaj Gaikwad ahead of the start of TATA IPL 2024. Ruturaj has been an integral part of Chennai Super Kings since 2019 and has played 52 matches in IPL during this period. The team looks forward to the upcoming season," said CSK. There is speculation that Dhoni will retire at the end of the season and therefore the franchise felt the need for a smooth transition in the stalwart's presence as a player.

Devon Conway, who will miss the initial part of IPL due to a thumb injury.

In batting, they can also look to bank on the experience of Ajinkya Rahane and youthful exuberance of opener Ruturaj Gaikwad, who is entering the IPL after top-scoring for

Maharashtra in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

pitch to the hilt.

The likes of Ravindra Jadeja, Mitchell Santner, Moeen Ali, Ravindra, Maheesh Theekshana can make even the best dance to their tunes here. The CSK also have two wily domestic campaigners in pacers Deepak Chahar and Shardul Thakur.

But those little scratches on the CSK machine do not make the task of RCB any easier. To understand it better, RCB have not beaten CSK at this venue since 2008.

Skipper Faf du Plessis and star batter Virat Kohli, who is returning to competitive cricket after a two-month break, will once again have to shoulder the batting responsibility.

They are set to open together, but this time the addition of Cameron Green might act as a protection plan if one of them or both of them fail to get going. Green can also chip in as a bowler.

Then there is always Glenn Maxwell, whose high-return outings in last year's World Cup might not have been forgotten.

They have a mix of extreme pace and skills in the fast bowling unit through Mohammed Siraj, Lockie Ferguson, Alzarri Joseph, Akash Deep and Reece Topley, but none of them are particularly good in death over situations.

Smriti Mandhana, Richa Ghosh only Indians picked in Hundred draft

**London, Mar 21 (PTI):**

Women's Premier League-winning captain Smriti Mandhana and wicketkeeper batter Richa Ghosh were the only Indian players who found takers during the Hundred Draft here. Mandhana, who led the Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a WPL title last Sunday, was drafted in by Southern Brave Women's while her teammate Richa found a new home at Birmingham Phoenix Women's. The left-handed Mandhana had a good run

in the WPL, scoring 300 runs from 10 matches with two fifties, while Richa, who often did the role of a finisher, made 257 runs from 10 matches with two half-centuries and a strike-rate of 142. Mandhana has already been a part of the Brave dressing room, and notably, she worked alongside Luke Williams here before he joined RCB as the coach during the WPL 2024.

The Phoenix is Richa's second team in the Hundred as she had earlier donned the jersey of the London Spirit.

However, some other players like Harmanpreet Kaur, Deepti Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Shreyanka Patil, who were among the 17 Indian players registered for the draft, could not find bidders during the draft.

Shreyanka, who played for RCB, was the highest wicket-taker during this season's WPL with 13 wickets from eight matches. But they still have a chance to enter the Hundred as the teams can rope in one more overseas player each through the Vitality Wild Cards.

Powerlifters Ashok, Parmjeet qualify for Paris Paralympics

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI):

Asian Games bronze medallist Ashok and Parmjeet Kumar qualified for the Paris Paralympics by winning a silver medal each at the Para Powerlifting World Cup in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt on Thursday. Competing in the 41kg category, Manpreet Kaur earned a bronze medal

after lifting 86kg. In a display of sheer strength and determination, Ashok lifted an impressive 192kg and 196kg respectively, which gave him the silver medal. After his second attempt was declared a 'no lift', he cleared 196kg in his third. In the fiercely-contested 49kg category, Parmjeet lifted 160kg and 166kg in his first two attempts and narrowly missed out on the gold.

Want to see aggressive start from SRH: Captain Cummins

**Hyderabad, Mar 21 (PTI):**

Newly-appointed Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper Pat Cummins hopes his team can make an aggressive start in the IPL this season and gain some early grounds.

Cummins was acquired for a whopping Rs 20.50 crore by Sunrisers during the last year's player auction, and the Australian has replaced South African Aiden Markram as their captain.

"A bit of planning to go and then just want to get off to a really good start. T20s are hard. Kolkata's a good team, but I just want to see a really aggressive start to the season," said Cummins in a video posted by the SRH on their 'X' account. The Hyderabad outfit will begin its IPL campaign with a match against the Kolkata Knight Riders, the former team of Cummins, at the Eden Garden on March 23.

The pacer said he wanted to work closely with the players and coaching staff to get the maximum results during the tournament. "I mean, the plans are, you know, I work really closely with the guys that I don't know too well... get to know them.

"Get to know what they need from me out in the middle. And then work with coaches and what they want to see out of me as well as a player," said Cummins.

World Aquatics boss in India, Swimming Federation top brass clueless

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI):

India has huge potential but the lack of leadership and proper infrastructure is impeding the country's swimmers from achieving Olympic glory, said World Aquatics (WA) president Husain Al Musallam on Thursday.

Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) interim chief Randhir Singh also criticised the swimming scenario in the country, saying as a sport it has lagged behind other Olympic disciplines.

The comments were made at an event where no high-ranking Swimming Federation of India (SFI) official was present, leaving SFI secretary-general Monal Chokshi "very surprised". "I am very surprised (by the development)," Chokshi, when asked if he was invited for the meet, told PTI.



Pointing out several deficiencies in India's aquatics system, Al Musallam, who also met Indian Olympic Association (IOA) chief PT Usha here, said, "From the sport I come from as Water Aquatics president, I believe India has a huge potential to be at the podium at the Olympic Games and the World Championships (in swimming).

"But (they) need a lot to work on, not just the infrastructure but to change the methods of training, taking care of athletes, high-level competition, or-

Andy Murray beats weary Matteo Berrettini to advance

**Miami Gardens, Mar 21 (AP):**

Andy Murray won another lengthy match with Matteo Berrettini, who appeared weary and leaned on his racket to keep his balance during Murray's 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory at the Miami Open.

Playing his first match on the ATP Tour this season, Berrettini was serving with Murray leading 5-2 in the second set when he seemed to become dizzy, resting his racket on the court to hold himself up.

■ At Miami Open

He was visited by a medical attendant, who checked his blood pressure before play continued. Berrettini left the court after dropping that set but was able to finish the match, which last 2 hours, 49 minutes. It was a rematch of Murray's 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 6-7 (7), 7-6 (10-6) victory that lasted more than 4 1/2 hours in the first round of the 2023 Australian Open. "It was obviously a great win for me," Murray said. "Started off a little bit slow but then I did think I played pretty well across then end of the first set through to the end of the match. Created a lot of opportunities and he was struggling for a little bit end of the second and beginning of the third, and I capitalized on that and got off to a quick start in the third and served it out well at the end."

Sindhu, Lakshya progress to second round of Swiss Open

**Basel, Mar 21 (PTI):**

Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu, in-form Lakshya Sen and Kidambi Srikanth produced impressive performances to progress to the second round of the Swiss Open super 300 badminton tournament here.

Sindhu, who had claimed the title in 2022, beat Thailand's Pornpicha Choeikeewong 21-12 21-13 to set up a meeting with Japan's Tomoka Miyazaki in the second round. Sen,

who had reached back-to-back semifinals at French Open and All England Championships in the last two weeks, outlasted Malaysia's Leong Jun Hao 21-19 15-21 21-11 in 62 minutes and will next face Chinese Taipei's Chia Hao Lee.

Srikanth, the former world no. 1, who had clinched the title in 2015, outwitted world no. 24 Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei 21-17 21-18 in a 43-minute contest. It was his sixth win in seven meet-

ings against his opponent. Srikanth, a 2011 world championships silver medallist, will next face a tough opponent in Malaysia's top seed Lee Zii Jia. In women's doubles, Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, seeded sixth, overcame Indonesia's Meilyssa Trias Puspitarsari and Rachel Allesya Rose 21-18 12-21 21-19 in a thrilling opener. The world no. 20 Indian pair will face Japan's Rui Hirokami and Yuna Kato next.

Celebrating Mumbai's cricket legacy

In a heartfelt gesture, Professor Vasisht, renowned cricket historian from Kerala, unveiled a commemorative banner titled 'Mumbai: The Champions of Indian Cricket.'

The banner serves as a tribute to Mumbai, celebrating their remarkable victory in the 2024 Ranji Trophy, marking their 42nd title in the prestigious tournament.

Drawing inspiration from the rich legacy of Indian cricket, the banner honours Mumbai's storied journey from being the inaugural champions of the Ranji Trophy in 1934, under the moniker Bombay, to their recent triumph in 2024. Mumbai's enduring dominance in Indian cricket history is encapsulated in this symbolic gesture, reflecting their unwavering commitment to excellence on the



cricketing field. Professor Vasisht's initiative underscores the deep-rooted passion and admiration for cricket across the country, transcending regional boundaries. Mumbai's latest Ranji Trophy conquest stands as a testament to their unparalleled legacy and contribution to the sport, inspiring generations of cricketers nationwide. As cricket enthusiasts across the nation unite in applauding Mumbai's achievement, the banner stands as a beacon of pride and reverence for the champions of Indian cricket.

I was lost in the debut of all these boys: Rohit Sharma

New Delhi, Mar 20 (PTI):

Skipper Rohit Sharma said he revelled in the company of his young "mischievous" teammates and was overwhelmed by emotions as they made their debuts during India's monumental 4-1 Test series triumph over England.

In absence of some big stars including Virat Kohli, the five-Test home series saw five youngsters - Rajat Patidar, Dhruv Jurel, Sarfaraz Khan, Akash Deep and Devdutt Padikkal - make their debut as India showed resilience to fight back after losing the opening Test in Hyderabad.

"Personally, mujhe inke saath kaam karke bahut maza aya. Jithe bhi young ladke the... sabkaafi chulube the. (I really loved playing with them. All of them are very mischievous)," Rohit said on his Instagram handle "Team Ro". "I knew most of them



well and what their strengths are and how they want to play the game. It was just for me to

give them the comfort by talking about how good they are and the good things they have done in the past. The way they responded to me and Rahul bhai (coach Rahul Dravid) was superb."

Moved by the youngster's stories and the emotions surrounding it, Rohit said he was "lost in their debuts".

"I was lost in the debut of all these boys. Their parents were also there, there were a lot of emotions. I really enjoyed seeing their debuts."

The India skipper cited the example of Sarfaraz Khan, saying he had seen his journey, having played against his father as a youngster. "I was just lost in their debuts. I was enjoying their debuts so much because their parents were there. There was so much emotion. I have played with Sarfaraz's father in Kanga League when I was very young.

Cong moves EC against 'Modi Parivaar', other ads

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI):

Alleging misuse of state resources for the poll campaign of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Congress on Thursday complained to the Election Commission against "Modi Parivaar" and "Modi ki Guarantee" advertisements and sought their immediate removal and action against those behind it.

A delegation of Congress leaders comprising Mukul Wasnik, Salman Khurshid and Supriya Shrinete met the Election Commission and handed over a set of complaints about alleged violations of the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha polls and demanded immediate action.

The Congress delegation also lodged a complaint against the BJP's "false advertisements" invoking the 2G allocation issue and alleged that the party was pursuing a



Congress leaders Salman Khurshid, Mukul Wasnik, Supriya Shrinete and others come out after meeting the Election Commissioners at Nirvachan Sadan, in New Delhi, Thursday.

decade-old narrative that had been thoroughly discredited through a comprehensive judicial process. The party prayed for removal of the advertisement and action against its authors and publishers. In another complaint, the Congress sought removal of 'Modi Parivaar' advertisement, alleging that it highlights how state resources are

being misused for a veiled campaign advertisement.

"The brazen use of the armed forces violates multiple directives of the ECI. The fact that the Ministry of I&B is being compelled to produce and broadcast the same also needs to be addressed. We seek the removal of the advertisement and action against the guilty parties," the Congress memorandum

read. In a separate complaint, the Congress demanded a probe into an unsolicited letter being circulated on social media purportedly from the prime minister himself and asked how the official letterhead of the PMO can be used for what is an obvious campaigning material.

"We demand an inquiry into the group circulating the same and the take-down of the material along with other appropriate action," the memorandum said.

The Congress also sought action against the BJP's advertisements on the Delhi Metro with the tagline "Modi ki Guarantee" and removal of such advertisements.

The party also sought the removal of all images of the prime minister from government bodies, offices, petrol pumps for the duration of the elections as the same violates multiple safeguards iterated in election law.

'NAVROZ' CELEBRATIONS



Parsi community members visit a fire temple on the occasion of 'Navroz', the Parsi New Year, at Kappawala Agiary in Mumbai, Thursday.

PIL IN HC

'Captive elephants in Kerala illegally captured'

Seeks their release

Kochi, Mar 21 (PTI):

A PIL has been filed in the High Court of Kerala here alleging that the elephants in captivity in Kerala were illegally captured and sought a ban on their training, trading, parading and possession.

The petition by animal rights activist Angels Nair also urges the court to order the release of the captive elephants into the wild in accordance with guidelines issued by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Central Zoo Authority of India.

In addition, he has also urged the court to order a probe by the CBI or any other external agency into the illegal training, trading, transportation and possession of captive elephants.

Besides that, the plea also seeks the quashing of the Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024 framed by the central government.

Nair said it has always been illegal to capture wild elephants for private use in captivity, but there was no law or rules in place prohibiting it prior to 1977.

Alibi for its imminent defeat: BJP on Cong's bank account freezing charges

New Delhi, Mar 21

(PTI):

The BJP Thursday accused the Congress of insulting the country by dubbing the I-T department action on its bank accounts as "freezing of Indian democracy" and dismissed the opposition party's attack on the government as a "desperate" attempt to create an alibi for its imminent defeat in the Lok Sabha polls.

BJP leader and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad charged former Congress president Rahul Gandhi with lying and also targeted Sonia Gandhi, saying



BJP leaders Ravi Shankar Prasad and Sambit Patra address a press conference at party headquarters, in New Delhi, Thursday.

both of them shamed Indian democracy globally with their "utterly irresponsible and shameful" comments. Rahul Gandhi should apologise for "castigating" institutions like

courts and the Election Commission over the freezing of bank accounts of the Congress, Prasad told reporters here.

His caustic remarks came after senior

Congress leaders including party president Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi addressed a press conference and slammed the government over IT action.

"There is no democracy in India today and the idea that India is the world's largest democracy is a complete lie," Rahul Gandhi said, terming the freezing of accounts a criminal action against the Congress by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. "There are institutions that are supposed to protect the democratic framework but nothing is happening."

BUDAUN DOUBLE MURDER CASE

Kids stabbed 24 times, reveals autopsy report

Budaun/Bareilly (UP), Mar 21 (PTI): The brother of the main accused in the chilling murder of a neighbour's two children in Budaun surrendered at a police post in Bareilly, police said on Thursday.

The postmortem report of the slain children has revealed that the assailant stabbed the elder brother 13 times and his sibling 11 times, officials said, adding injury marks have been found on the neck, chest and other parts of bodies of the two children.

Javed, who had been absconding since the murders in Baba Colony on Tuesday, surrendered at Satellite police outpost of Baradari police station in neighbouring Bareilly dis-

Second accused arrested

trict, Budaun Senior Superintendent of Police Alok Priyadarshi said.

"Javed, the brother of main accused Sajid, was arrested by a police team in nearby Bareilly district. He is being brought to Budaun for further questioning," the SSP said.

A video clip that surfaced online purportedly showed Javed pleading with a group of people confronting him to take him to the police.

In the video, Javed says that he fled to Delhi after the incident and returned to Bareilly to surrender before the police. The



Javed, the brother of the main accused in the Budaun double murder case, following his arrest, on Thursday.

video was apparently shot at an autorickshaw stand close to the police post.

"I have nothing to do with the incident. He (Sajid) was my elder broth-

er. He did that but I have nothing to do with the incident," Javed is heard saying in the video.

Bareilly SSP Dhule Sushil Chandrabhan told PTI that the district police handed over Javed to the Budaun police after completing formalities.

The Budaun police have taken Javed to places associated with the crime. Sources said that he would be produced in the court later.

Sajid, who had recently opened a barber shop in the locality, entered the house of the family known to him on Tuesday and allegedly attacked Ayush (12), Ahaan alias Honey (8) and Yuvraj (10) with a knife.

ALL SET FOR HOLI



A vendor sells Modi-masks and water guns for the festival of Holi at Lohar Gali, in Agra, Thursday.

'India's fertility rate down from 6.2 to under 2 since 1950'

LANCET STUDY

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI): India's fertility rate dropped from nearly 6.2 in 1950 to just under 2 in 2021, and is projected to fall further to 1.29 and 1.04 in 2050 and 2100, respectively, according to a new global research published in The Lancet journal.

These numbers were found to be in line with global trends, where the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was over 4.8 children per woman in 1950 and fell to 2.2 children per woman in 2021. These figures have been projected to fall to 1.8 and 1.6 in 2050 and 2100, respectively.

The study found that there were 12.9 crore livebirths the world over in 2021 -- an increase from roughly 9.3 crore in 1950, but a decline from the peak of 14.2 crore in 2016. In India, there were more than 1.6 crore and

● Will fall to 1.3 in 2050

over 2.2 crore livebirths in 1950 and 2021. The number is projected to fall to 1.3 crore in 2050. However, even as much of the planet contends with the challenges of low fertility, many low-income countries will still be facing high fertility issues during the 21st century, said the researchers from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2021 Fertility and Forecasting Collaborators. The high fertility in these low-income regions, particularly in some countries and territories in western and eastern sub-Saharan Africa, will result in a demographically divided world, they said.

The majority of children will be born in some of the poorest regions in the world, with low-income countries' share in the

global livebirths almost doubling from 18 per cent to 35 per cent from 2021 to 2100, the researchers projected. Further, with the worsening climate change, many of these high-fertility low-income countries are expected to also experience more frequent floods, droughts and extreme heat, all of which threaten food, water and resource security, along with dramatically raising the risk of heat-related illnesses and death, they said.

As population across the globe ages, the researchers' latest findings on fertility will have profound effects on economies, geopolitics, food security, health, and the environment, with a "clear demographic divide" between the effects experienced by middle-to-high-income versus low-income regions, they said.

'Karti Chidambaram took Rs 50L bribe through close aide'

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI): The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday alleged that Congress MP Karti Chidambaram took a Rs 50 lakh bribe through a close aide for getting sanction of the Union home ministry for reuse of visas for Chinese personnel by a company that was establishing a power plant in Punjab.

It also claimed that this alleged bribe was pumped into a company, of which Karti had control, through a "fictitious" cash transaction. The 52-year-old MP represents the Sivaganga Lok Sabha seat in Tamil Nadu and the agency has recorded his statement in the case multiple times. He told PTI that his lawyers

will respond to these charges in the court during trial. The federal agency made these allegations in a charge sheet filed against Karti, a company alleged to be promoted by him-- Advantage Strategic Consulting Private Limited, his alleged close aide and accountant S Bhaskararaman, the company where Chinese workers were deployed -- Talwandi Sabo Power Limited -- and others.

The special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi took cognisance of the prosecution complaint on March 19. It has summoned all the accused listed in the charge sheet, including Karti, to appear before it on April 15. The other accused in-

clude Padam Dugar, Vikas Makharia, Mansoor Siddiqi and Dugar Housing Ltd.

Probe found that "Karti P Chidambaram took illegal gratification of Rs 50 lakh through his close aide S Bhaskararaman for getting the approval for reuse of Chinese visas by the company named Talwandi Sabo Power Limited, which was establishing a power project at Mansa in Punjab."

"Officials of the company approached Karti P Chidambaram for getting the approval for reuse of visas from the Ministry of Home Affairs wherein his father was Home Minister (senior Congress leader P Chidambaram)," the ED alleged in a statement.

The purported modus operandi adopted in the case was that the company paid Rs 50 lakh through cheque to an entry operator in the garb of fictitious services, it claimed.

"The entry operator in turn paid Rs 50 lakh cash to S Bhaskararaman, a close associate of Karti Chidambaram and the latter subsequently invested this cash of Rs 50 lakh in Advantage Strategic Consulting Private Limited, a company controlled by Karti P Chidambaram," the agency alleged.

The ED claimed that the value of Rs 50 lakh so invested increased to Rs 1.59 crore over a period of time which is the "proceeds of crime" as per provisions of the PMLA.

The MP earlier has said that the ED probe in this case was a "fishing and

roving" enquiry and that he has submitted all documents to the agency.

He had called the case "most bogus", asserting he was "certain that he never facilitated even a single Chinese national in their visa process, let alone 250."

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