

GOOD MORNING ANDHRA

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Budget to give new momentum to efforts of women-led development: PM Modi

New Delhi, Mar 10: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that this year's budget will give a new momentum to the efforts of women-led development.

Addressing a post-budget webinar on "Economic Empowerment of Women", he said that the "country is seeing this year's budget as an auspicious beginning for achieving the target of a developed nation by 2047".

"The results of efforts for women empowerment are visible and we are feeling a revolutionary change in the social life of the country."

The Prime Minister informed girls' enrolment in science, technology, engineering and maths is at 43 per cent today, which he claimed was more than countries like the US, UK and Germany.

Referring to the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Modi



said that the scheme has given women a new voice in economic decisions of the household.

The Prime Minister reit-

erated that in the last nine years, the country has moved with a vision of women-led development.

He added that India has

taken these efforts to the global stage as it is figuring prominently in the G20 meeting presided over by India.

Lokesh promises completion of all irrigation projects in Rayalaseema

Chittoor, Mar 10: Chief Minister, Jagan Mohan Reddy, is more interested in looting the State than development, particularly the Rayalaseema region, observed TDP general secretary, Nara Lokesh, on Thursday. The farmers from Chinna Tippasamudram and Kothavaripalli, met Lokesh at the Pulavandlapalli campsite during his Yuva Galam pada yatra and told him that they are facing several problems due to non-availability of water for irrigation. If the Chinna Tippasamudram pond is linked with the Handri Neeva project, they will get sufficient water for irrigation which will solve all their problems.

The pond is spread over 500 acres which can supply irrigation water for over 1,000 acres, they said. If the pond is linked to Handri Neeva they can cultivate two crops in a year and this will solve



all their issues, the farmers told Mr Lokesh and made an appeal to him to take up the works once the TDP is into power again. Responding to the farmers, Lokesh said that Jagan Mohan Reddy is interested only in minting money by looting the State. Observing that 80 per cent of the works of Handri Neeva

were completed during Chandrababu Naidu regime and Jagan did not bother to complete the remaining 20 per cent works. "This clearly indicates that he is not interested in the farmers' welfare. I am assuring you that when we are back into government, which is not far, all the pending projects will be

completed, including the Handri Neeva project. Also, the pond of Chinna Tippasamudram too will be linked with the Handri Neeva," Lokesh told the farmers. Earlier, representatives of the Chittoor district Brahmin Seva Samakhyia met Lokesh and told him that the Government has scrapped all the welfare schemes for Brahmins. They appealed to Lokesh to revive all the schemes when the TDP government was formed again. Lokesh said that the TDP government has allocated huge amounts of funds for the Brahmin Corporation and also introduced several schemes to help those who are from middle and lower middle class. "We have complete understanding about the problems being faced by the community," Lokesh said and made an appeal to them to do their best to bring back the TDP into power.

Actor-turned-MP Sumalatha to join BJP in K'taka

Mandya, Mar 10: Mandya MP (independent) Sumalatha is all set to join BJP, the actor-turned-politician said here on Friday.

"I support the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," she told reporters.

Sumalatha, wife of popular actor and politician late Ambareesh, an iconic figure of Vokkaliga community, stated that she thought about her move for a year. "Many leaders from BJP have invited me and I have decided to join the party," she said.



Her move has come as a much-needed succor to the ruling BJP which is trying to strengthen its roots in south Karnataka. Two ministers of the ruling BJP are keeping themselves away from party activities and are rumoured to be joining Congress.

BJP MLC Puttanna had joined Congress. The four-

time MLC who won from Bengaluru Teachers' Constituency has resigned even as his term was pending for four years. The developments proved to be a setback for the party. With the declaration of Sumalatha, the saffron party has heaved a sigh of relief.

"This is not about my

future. It is a question of development of Mandya district. My decision has been influenced by the union government. My decision might upset some people. I don't have any fear of my political future and I won't forget my voters." Sumalatha said that she won't practice hate politics. She also charged JD(S)

(without naming the leaders) that she faced humiliations and attacks by certain people.

Sumalatha had defeated former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda's grandson in the parliamentary elections from Mandya. BJP then had supported Sumalatha's candidature.

Should Jagan resign if Avinash Reddy is arrested?

Guntur, Mar 10: Kadapa MP Avinash Reddy will report to the CBI questioning once again today in Hyderabad. Sensing a possible arrest, Avinash also approached the Telangana High Court to give orders to CBI preventing any extreme action (arrest). CBI claims to have credible evidence that Avinash Reddy has prior information about the murder and also tried to erase the evidence.

We will have to see what the court decides. But if Avinash Reddy is arrested, should Jagan Resign taking the moral responsibility? Right from the day one, there are several doubts about the case.

Even though Viveka is seen in a pool of blood with marks of hit with an axe on forehead, we have seen leaders like Vijayasai Reddy saying he died of heart attack. Jagan tried to derive politi-



cal mileage by alleging TDP's role in the murder.

He did not refer the case to the CBI and Viveka's daughter met herself alleged the case getting diluted in Jagan's rule.

In the state assembly,

Jagan supported Avinash Reddy saying why would an eye damage another eye? We have seen some one like Sajjala making allegations on Viveka's daughter herself and even assassinate Viveka's character by refer-

ring to his second marriage etc. After all this, if CBI is arrested, there will be demands that Jagan should resign for trying to save Avinash in this case. But we all know that will not happen.

AP Govt employees to go on protest

Guntur, Mar 10: The AP government employees have decided to go ahead with the action plan for the protest. They said that they would continue to wear black badges and attend to duties from March 10 to April 5. The employees had initially planned the black badge protest from March 9 but differed so as to discuss the issue with the executive committee meeting of the joint action committee.

The JAC had asked the

state government to give minutes of the March 7 meeting in writing. The cabinet subcommittee and the officials met the employees representatives on March 7 and agreed to clear the arrears amounting to Rs 3,000 crore by end of March.

The employees have asked the officials to give those minutes in writing. However, the employees alleged that there was ambiguity in the minutes given in writing and hence they have

decided to continue their black badge agitation. JAC chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu told media persons that the government had not honoured the 50-page memorandum given to chief secretary K S Jawahar Reddy on February 13. Bopparaju said that there was no clarity from the government on the demands raised by the employees. Stating that the ministers and officials were accepting the demands during the talks

but were not admitting them in writing.

The employees said that they have another round of meetings with the chief secretary on March 16.

They would continue to hold the black badges and wait for the government to respond, while attending the talks. They further said that they would also attend the talks convened by the cabinet subcommittee, but felt that it was not worth meeting.

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EDITORIAL

Saturday 11, March 2023

The Importance of Nutrition in Building the Human Capital

Undernutrition is a major public health problem leading to adverse health consequences and also affecting the economy. Undernutrition leads to 3.1 million child deaths annually, which accounts for 45 percent of all child deaths. Increased investment in human capital brings about economic growth by improved knowledge and skills in people. Healthy women and children are pillars of a flourishing society. Evidence suggests investing in the well-being of women and children as an effective strategy for improved outcomes for children. The human capital is the wealth of nations and is dependent on the health, nutrition, skills and knowledge of people. India ranks 116 out of 174 countries as per the Human Capital Index, with a score of 0.49 that indicates a child born in India will be 49 percent productive if provided with complete education and good health. Evidence suggests that every additional dollar invested in quality early childhood programmes yields a return of between US\$6 and US\$17. Early stimulation in infants is known to increase their future earnings by 25 percent. Stunting in childhood leads to impaired brain development, lower cognitive skills and education, leading to lower incomes in the future. It is often associated with adverse outcomes for life in terms of non-communicable diseases, leading to increased health care costs.

According to the Global Burden of Disease study, out of ten risk factors for disability adjusted life years in India, six were linked to nutrition. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5, India has unacceptably high levels of stunting (35.5 percent), despite marginal improvement over the years. According to the World Bank, "A 1 percent loss in adult height due to childhood stunting is associated with a 1.4 percent loss in economic productivity", having a lasting effect on future generations. According to estimates, children who are stunted earn 20 percent less as adults than children who are not stunted. Another compounding factor is anaemia among young women, at 57 percent, which has lasting effects on their future pregnancies and childbirth. The situation further worsens when infants are fed inadequate diets, and there is inadequate sanitation and hygiene. Evidence suggest that two-third of India's current workforce is stunted which has enormous economic costs in terms of decrease in the per capita income. The average reduction in per capita income for developing countries is at 7 percent with a high of 13 percent for India due to the high rates of stunting. The economic losses incurred by India due to wasting is estimated at more than US \$48 billion in terms of lifetime lost productivity.

According to the Global Nutrition Report, preventing malnutrition delivers \$16 in returns on investment for every \$1 spent, making clear the need for investing in nutrition. India's Economic Survey 2016 acknowledged that while there are intrinsic reasons to invest in maternal and early-life nutrition, nutrition related programmes also offer very high returns on investment. Nutrition-sensitive interventions like water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) focus on the underlying determinants as poor sanitation can lead to stunting. Evidence suggest both short term and long term reductions in diarrhoea episodes (3-50 percent) through an integrated water and sanitation improvement program in rural India. WASH can bring significant gains in tackling childhood undernutrition and are important determinants of stunting (Cumming et al, 2016). Education to children plays a pivotal role in amassing of human capital, improving productivity, and economic development. It has been advocated to target on the 1000 days' period from conception to two years of age for improving birth and nutrition outcomes. Children learn faster as maximum brain development happens during this period and investing in this critical phase has far more advantages in economic terms.

Studies suggest long term benefits on adult human capital and health by improving the nutrition of pregnant women and young children. The first 1000 days of life is the time for rapid growth and development and lack of good nutrition can lead to lifelong adverse consequences. This period is a critical window of opportunity as stunting sets in during this period and aggravates by age of two years. Data (NFHS 5) reveals that India has more stunted children in rural areas as compared to urban areas, possibly due to socio-economic variance.

Stunting prevalence varies depending on mother's education and household income. There is wide variation among regions, with high rates of stunting in states of Meghalaya (46.5 percent) and Bihar (42.9 percent) while states like Sikkim and Puducherry have lowest at 22.3 percent and 20 percent respectively. There are notable inter-state and inter-district variation in terms of stunting prevalence. The need for investing more and more in the human capital including good education, nutrition and healthcare to India's children is more real now than ever. There is a need to couple nutrition-specific interventions with nutrition-sensitive programmes that tackle undernutrition. In order to produce and maintain a healthy, highly skilled workforce, India must make cost-effective investments to improve child health, nutrition, and education. Investing in healthcare facilities helps create a human capital pool that is both physically and psychologically healthy, which is crucial for enhancing productivity, economic growth, and security.

Imran Khan's 'Rampage' with a Little Help from his 'Friends'

New Delhi, Mar 10:

There's one thing about Pakistan. It never ceases to entertain. Even as the economy slides into default, its political establishment is busy with the usual theatrics, this time with former Prime Minister Imran Khan playing 'catch me if you can' as the authorities — apparently — are trying to arrest him. All of this would be hilarious if it were not for the fact that other schisms are also apparent, as a suicide bomber killed nine policemen in Balochistan, while a radical student group of the Jamaat-e-Islami attacked students celebrating Holi at Punjab University. Worse things followed, such as the Lahore authorities refusing permission to hold a women's march because the Jamiatists objected. That's another disaster.

Here's the immediate issue. In a manner typical of South Asia, Imran Khan has had multiple accusations thrown at him, including a charge that he had rifled gifts given to him as prime minister. The 'Toshakhana Reference' by the Election Commission of Pakistan. A four-member bench then declared Imran's National Assembly seat vacant since he 'misled' officials about the gifts he received from foreign dignitaries during his tenure as the prime minister. Apparently, neither did his office deign to provide details when he was in the seat, claiming it would jeopardise international relations, a statement that verges of the ridiculous.

The trouble is that the people, at large, are hardly likely to worry about the EC's charges of 'offence of corrupt practices', for a few expensive trifles, when compared to the loot that was (again allegedly) grabbed by Nawaz Sharif and his family. Remember that he had to pay \$10.6 million in just fines on a few corruption charges that held, and that accounts of unimaginable wealth — in-



cluding expensive apartments in London — were trailed before the tired eyes of Pakistanis on television. With the Sharifs still in political play, what is evident is despite extensive digging, the state has been unable to find anything else, other than a few gifts — which include watches sold illegally for \$36 million — to incarcerate him.

Not that the entire state seems to be willing. The Islamabad High Court has been virtually apologetic about its role in the proceedings, declaring that Khan at least be asked to present himself in court for the charges to be framed. Khan's lawyers then state that their client is under threat whereupon the judge wails "What can I do? Just give me a date..." Finally, the court — which had earlier sent a police team to arrest him — suspends the non-bailable warrants till March 13. The attempted 'arrest' was another fallacy. Even while thousands of Khan supporters surrounded his house in Zaman Park, the Islamabad police seem to have requested his presence, thereafter accepting without question that he was not in

the house. After a while, the police and everyone else would have seen Khan addressing his supporters just outside the house. That is police and judicial magnanimity of a high order, with respected commentators noting other such indulgences such as quick bail, and the orders on holding elections in the two provinces where Khan forced a dissolution. It seems Khan has support in hidden places. Also, all of this has only increased his support. Now #ZamanPark is trending on Twitter, with calls to reach his residence in droves.

The thing is that the respected courts usually follow the winds from Rawalpindi. Now that doesn't seem likely at all. After all, Khan has single-handedly wrecked more havoc on the Army than any leader, living or dead. His discrediting of a sitting Army chief and his intelligence head, by insinuating that he had been removed on their orders, and worse still, at the behest of a foreign power — the United States — has appealed to conspiracy theorists everywhere. That allegation has been countered

by the DG ISPR appearing publicly for the first time ever, last year, to energetically maintain that the Army was being used as a scapegoat by Khan, who accused them by day and begged for support at night.

That hardly worked, especially since much of the press briefing was taken up by denials of ISI involvement in the killing of Arshad Sharif in Kenya in October 2022. That was followed by picking up of other journalists. Rumours, however, persisted that a section of the Army was with Khan, particularly after senior retired Army officers voiced strong displeasure about the manner of Khan's ouster. Now, there are reports of a 'house arrest' of Khan's favourite man in khaki, Lt Gen. Faiz Hameed. That may or may not happen, but it certainly shows the extent of fear within the political circles, of those within the Army, who may be supporting Khan quietly. This, in turn, means his lordships of the court are again on the right side of the wind in gauging the support for Khan from within the corridors of power. General Bajwa was after all, not the

most respected to Army chief. Others are also scenting the wind. Political leaders are already moving into a defensive pose, in preparation for elections. Bilawal Bhutto is already in election mode, with his party retaining its distance from harsh economic measures. In Sindh, he declared that his party was unhappy with 'unkept promises' of the Sharif government. Bilawal is the front-runner for Army approval — especially after his tirade against Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the United Nations. One would imagine that no one in their right senses would want to take power at this time in Pakistan's history. The economy has never been in a worse state in Pakistani history. The government's total debt stock rose to 55 trillion rupees by January end, 2023, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), an increase of 15 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year. Simply put, it's beyond Islamabad's capability to pay. Then there's the fact of increasing intrusiveness by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) before they agree

to release any more funds. And that state of affairs is set to continue, with the lending agency likely to have a finger in every pie. In other words, the ripping off by the elites is going to be reduced, and so will the defence budget.

Then there's China's commitment to send \$700 million to Pakistan, to shore up its foreign exchange reserves. That means more debt to China, already at unsustainable levels, and far higher than what Pakistan owes the IMF. Then there's the fact that a meeting was held between the new Army Chief General Asim Munir and top businessmen. Even more interesting, the meeting was requested by the business people; Foreign Minister Dar was also 'invited'. Reigning business heads always know the ropes.

So here's the bottom line. Whoever becomes the next PM has to take decisions that are going to be highly unpopular, contend with dramatic climate disasters (look ahead to possible floods as a result of severe upcoming summer), have an Army chief deciding everything, and have a Chinese stranglehold, on top of everything else. Khan apparently has the additional burden of having someone quite literally gunning for him. The top job is simply not worth having. But look at it this way. The top job was never the top anyway, and the elite of Pakistan have never — so far — been much affected as the country slips steadily down the drain. But this time it's different. Things could go wrong. One more failed harvest, or another botched operation — for instance, the police brutality against the PTI march which lead to the death of at least one, or its equally violent handling of the 'Aurat march' — could result in untoward escalation. That's what Imran Khan wants. Looks like he's going to get it.

India's G20 Presidency Can Act as 'Setu' to Health Resilience After Covid Pandemic

New Delhi, Mar 10:

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic engulfed every aspect of our lives, we had witnessed a series of health emergencies in past years such as H1N1 pandemic, bird flu, Zika virus infection, Ebola virus disease (EVD), monkeypox, SARS, MERS infection — much of these limited to specific geographies but all giving us an opportunity to understand vulnerabilities and gaps in global public health detection, surveillance, prevention and response to infectious disease threats.

It is only when the Covid-19 outbreak happened that it provided an opportunity to understand that multiple dialogues and reviews conducted in managing public health emergencies, efforts for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (PPR) remain insufficient. PPR, thus, emerged as a non-negotiable agenda before world leaders.

The pandemic exacerbated and brought to fore issues of inequitable access, availability and affordability of quality medical countermeasures — vaccines, thera-

peutics and diagnostics (VTDs) — in different parts of the world, particularly in low and middle income countries (LMIC).

India's G20 presidency has emerged as a frontrunner in prioritising the agenda on PPR along with access to quality medical countermeasures. The current presidency will work towards continuation of Italian and Indonesian presidencies' agenda on creation of regional research and development as well as manufacturing networks for medical countermeasures, along with a collaborative research network for VTDs.

To reduce the impact of another health crisis, it is critical that to recognise gaps in pharmaceutical industries within countries, particularly in LMICs, greater resilience with enhanced local-level capacities in research as well as manufacturing should be developed. India being a developing country has been able to set an example before the world and, in particular, before the Global South that has similar issues. It supplied more than 250 million

vaccine doses to over 100 countries as part of 'Vaccine Maitri'. India also demonstrated its digital prowess to create and support vaccination access, facilities and analyse data through its online platform CoWIN. The success stories of India can further help shape G20 discussions on PPR.

The rapid development of Covid-19 vaccine has not been met with the assurance of an effective and equitable global distribution mechanism. Low-income countries are especially at risk, with the price of vaccines and supply shortages limiting their ability to procure and distribute them. The G20 forum can propel governments to prioritise equitable distribution to the most at-risk in all nations, while low-income countries should bolster their logistical capacity in preparation for mass vaccination campaigns.

Underscoring gaps in data surveillance, especially in resource-constrained settings, it is essential to fur-

ther invest in data-sharing systems at a community level, which is customised as per local needs and capabilities. A robust surveillance network can effectively pick up infections at an initial stage so that the emergence

of a new infection is curtailed, action framework is put in place and infection is prevented from spreading across the border and taking the shape of a pandemic.

Data sharing is critical to manage large-scale health emergencies. For instance, during the Nipah virus disease (NiV) outbreak in 2018 in Kerala, a rapid response team was put in place and were supported with a containment plan by international organisations.

Therefore, the need of the hour is to invest more in public health functions — robust surveillance, laboratories, information systems, digital health, information, education and communica-

tion, research and development — to strengthen both emergency preparedness and response.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is an urgent global public health threat that is driven at large by injudicious antimicrobial use across human, animal and plant health sectors, which is a silent pandemic. There is a concern that it may further worsen ongoing pandemics of Covid-19 and monkeypox globally, leading to increased inappropriate use of antibiotics, in many instances people were self-prescribing medicines. World over, many antibiotics such as azithromycin were used indiscriminately.

Though the global action plan on AMR exists, yet all eyes are set on the G20 presidency to further provide the required impetus and further the ongoing agenda and efforts building on from the previous presidencies. It is important that national action plans (NAP) for countries are comprehensive, focusing on key elements of intersectoral convergence among all stakeholders like

farmers, agriculturists, clinicians and individuals. More attention is needed for governance, funding, implementation and monitoring of NAPs.

Strengthening global health architecture is critical to prevent, prepare and manage future pandemics and outbreaks. Reformed global health architecture requires cross-cutting convergence among different health institutions at national, regional and global levels. It is important that we do not lose the momentum, stay vigilant and develop sustainable solutions built upon the existing lessons in front of us. This century has been one of health outbreaks; Covid-19 is not the last pandemic that we will see, so I believe that international cooperation will offer a 'setu', or bridge, for health resilience against future pandemics. It's about time that we look at repurposing health infrastructure, plan policies, strengthen research and development, and leverage existing strengths in a way so that our global response to a health emergency next time leaves no room for regrets.



'Drunk' university student urinated on fellow passenger on Delhi-bound flight; Delhi Police to take legal action



EMS News Agency, March

An inebriated Indian student in an American Airlines flight from New York to Delhi allegedly urinated and soiled a male co-passenger on March 4, with the Delhi Police saying necessary legal action is being taken on the basis of a complaint from the airline. The airline has submitted a report about the incident to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The airline seems to have handled the situation professionally and have taken all appropriate action, a senior official at the regulator told. The incident happened in flight AA292 which landed at the Delhi airport at 9.50 p.m. on Saturday. When contacted, American Airlines in a statement on Sunday said the flight was "met by local enforcement upon arrival in Delhi due to a disruptive customer" but did not provide specific details about the incident. Delhi airport DCP Devesh Kumar Mahla on Sunday said a complaint of urination on a co-passenger has been received from American Airlines against one person, who is a student in the U.S.. The person is a resident of Defence Colony in the national capital. "We are taking necessary legal action," he said.

"The accused is a student in a U.S. university. He was in a state of inebriation and urinated while he was asleep. It somehow leaked and fell on a fellow passenger who complained to the crew," a source at the airport said. According to the source, the male victim was not

keen on reporting the matter to the police after the student apologised as it might put his career in jeopardy. However, the airline took it seriously and reported it to the Air Traffic Control (ATC) at the airport. After the crew came to know about the incident on board, they informed the pilot who reported the matter to the ATC, which further alerted the CISF personnel who handed over the accused passenger to the Delhi police. "The airline's own security team, along with the CISF, came into action after the incident came to light. The accused was immediately taken into custody once the flight landed. Police are recording the statements of the persons concerned," another source at the airport told PTI. In a statement, American Airlines said its flight 292 with service from John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) to Indira Gandhi International Airport was met by local law enforcement upon arrival in Delhi due to a disruptive customer. "The flight landed safely at 9:50 p.m.. We're grateful to our crew members who are consistently dedicated to the safety and care of our customers and handled the circumstances with the utmost professionalism," the airline said. According to the Civil Aviation Rules, if a passenger is found guilty of unruly behaviour, besides action under criminal law, he will be banned from flying for a particular time period, depending on the level of the offence. This is the second such incident in the last few months where a flyer relieved himself on a fellow passenger in an inebriated state.

On November 26, an almost similar incident took place on a New York-Delhi Air India flight, in which a man named Shankar Mishra had allegedly urinated in a drunken state on an elderly woman. That incident came to light almost a month later through a media report, after which an FIR was lodged and Mr. Mishra was arrested. He was released on bail after spending nearly a month in jail. The DGCA imposed a fine of ₹30 lakh on Air India for not reporting the matter within 12 hours of the incident in accordance with the norm. While the Delhi Police is investigating the matter, Mr. Mishra has been banned from flying for four months.

Starting with Bengaluru, Apple takes up projects for improved water management in India

EMS News Agency, March

Tech giant Apple, in partnership with the NGO Frank Water, scaled up efforts to improve water, hygiene and sanitation in India by launching a pilot project at Anekal taluk on the outskirts of Bengaluru. According to an official release, Frank Water is surveying households in the area and analysing various data sources to map how water is used there. "To do this, the organisation uses hydrological modeling and is developing a state-of-the-art decision support process, which puts tools in the hands of the community", the release stated. The release also said the multinational company is working along with Applied Environment Research Foundation (AERF), to preserve mangroves along India's coast.

Since 2021, local villages have signed conservation agreements that helped more than 200 marginal fishing community members across Roha, Pen, and Alibaug blocks in the Raigad district of Maharashtra, it added. "Under the agreements, village members receive sustained support in exchange for conserving privately owned mangrove forests", the release said. Apple said it



is already carbon neutral for its global corporate operations and aims to replicate the success in its global supply chain by 2030. "By supporting innovative, community-based approaches in India and around the world, Apple is making progress toward our global climate goals while doing our part to help people improve their lives", Lisa Jackson, Apple's vice president of Environment, Policy, and Social Initiatives, was quoted as saying.

After reports of 'attack' on migrants, Jharkhand officials say 'everything is calm' in Tamil Nadu workers' camps



EMS News Agency, March

A team of Jharkhand government officials Saturday visited a few construction sites in Tamil Nadu and found workers from their state were "safe and had no complaints" after the news of an alleged assault on a migrant worker in Chennai went viral. Authorities in Tamil Nadu have denied any such attack and warned about the rumour mongering. According to a source who is part of the visiting delegation, migrant workers want to return to their home towns during Holi. "However, non-availability of train tickets and apparent denial of permission from employers is further fanning the issue. All deputy commissioners in Jharkhand have been informed to keep a track on all calls from migrant workers and we are telling everyone that everything is calm in Tamil Nadu," the source said.

The source said one of the Jharkhand workers in Chennai had also made a 'false video'. "We visited the site from where we had received a video complaint. A worker had asked for leaves for Holi and was sanctioned, however, two days back he got drunk and started making videos of sleeping workers that had been severely beaten... All are safe." The source said the rumours started after a group of workers from Bihar clashed with a group of workers from another state. "Dispute began because a worker was smoking and deliberately puffing smoke on another worker's face. This incident was filmed and made viral through social media that locals are beating migrant workers," added the source. Three days ago family members of a frantic Sanjay Sharma appealed to Garhwa district administration in Jharkhand for their son's safe return home after the news of an alleged assault on a migrant worker in Chennai went viral. Sharma and his six friends, who worked in civil construction, said they wanted to come back as they did not feel 'safe'. They are going back via train and will reach Jharkhand on Sunday.

Speaking from the train, Sharma told The Indian Express: "Nothing happened with us, but there is a certain fear that people are attacking workers from Bihar and Jharkhand. That is why we appealed to the district administration and we are on our way back." Sources in the Jharkhand government said Chief Minister Hemant Soren received four messages, including a voice note, from migrant workers pleading to return to Jharkhand. The plea triggered a response from the state government

to send a team to Tamil Nadu to take stock of the situation. Jharkhand Labour Department Secretary Rajesh Kumar Sharma in a letter to Tamil Nadu's Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Labour, Welfare and Skill Development, on March 3, requested the official's support in facilitating a delegation's visits to work sites. "...this is to inform that a delegation consisting of the officials of the Department of Labour representative of Safe and Responsible Migration Initiative (SRMI) will be visiting TN to review the situation of migrant workers in view of the recent series of events reported through various media sources and complaint received from the migrant workers... The officials will be visiting worksites and districts from where the complaints of stranded migrant workers are being reported by State Migrant Control Room of Jharkhand," Sharma said.

NIA attaches 5 properties linked to gangsters in Delhi, Haryana

EMS News Agency, March

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday attached five properties as part of its ongoing action against gangsters active in organised crime, including that of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala. "The properties attached include a house of Asif Khan in Delhi, a house and agricultural land at three different locations belonging to Surrender Singh alias Chiku in Mahendragarh district of Haryana," an NIA spokesperson said. These attachments and seizures come in the wake of the searches in February at 76 locations linked to gangsters and their associates in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi-NCR. The action pertains to cases registered by the NIA against three major organised crime syndicates under UAPA in August 2022. "These syndicates had spread mafia-style criminal networks in northern states and were involved in many sensational crimes, including murder of Moosewala and large-scale extortions from businessmen and professionals..." the spokesperson said. "Asif Khan was providing weapons and logistics support to the gangsters," spokesperson said. Surrender alias Chiku is a close associate of Naresh Sethi, Anil Chhippi and Raju Basodi, who were earlier arrested by NIA. "Surrender had been involved in multiple cases of murder, kidnaping and extortion. He was instrumental in investing the proceeds of crime in real estate and other businesses," the probe agency alleged. The NIA has found in their probe that gangsters based in Canada, Punjab and even inside jails are allegedly threatening Punjabi singers to release exclusive songs on YouTube channels run by their associates.

Faced with glut, potato farmers say: Distribute aloo instead of wheat through PDS



EMS News Agency, March

"Gehoon nahi toh aloo hi sahi (if there's no wheat, why not give potatoes)?," asks Mohammad Alamgir, making a case for supplying the tuber through the public distribution system amid a harvest-time price crash. The general secretary of the Aloo Utpadak Kisan Samiti, a potato growers' body in Agra, points out that government agencies procure wheat and paddy at minimum support prices, of Rs 2,125 and Rs 2,040 per quintal respectively. "They can buy potatoes from us at half that price and give it out free just like rice and wheat. It will reduce their worry over low wheat stocks and falling production due to high temperatures. Poor consumers won't mind getting aloo, which is as good and nutritious as wheat," says Alamgir. Doongar Singh Chaudhary (centre) at his cold store in Khandauli near Agra with potato farmer Jeevan Singh (right). Potato is wholesaling at Rs 400-450 per quintal in Agra. Even this price is only for the 'chatta' or larger table potatoes. The smaller-sized gulla (seed-grade) and kirri (baby) tubers are fetching "no rate", claims Doongar Singh Chaudhary, owner of a cold store, Vaidyaji Sheethgrah Pvt. Ltd, at Khandauli near Agra: "Forget Reliance, Mother Dairy or BigBasket, nobody is purchasing and stocking up potatoes. Sab nadarad hain (all have vanished)". He attributes the lack of buying interest to two factors.

The first is a bumper crop from newer potato varieties, yielding more in lesser number of days. Farmers in Uttar Pradesh's Agra-Aligarh belt - also covering Mathura, Firozabad, Mainpuri, Hathras, Etah and Kasganj districts - traditionally grow Kufri Bahar, a variety from the Shimla-based Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI) that gives 24-36 tonnes per hectare over 110-120 days duration. The new varieties - CPRI's Kufri Sangam, Kufri Mohan and Kufri Khyati, besides privately-bred hybrids such as 302, S-1 and Super 6 - yield 36-42 tonnes/hectare in just 60 days and up to 48-60 tonnes/hectare in 90 days. Chaudhary estimates the share of area grown under these varieties at 30-35% this season, from 15% in 2021-22 and zero about four years back. "Kufri Bahar is sown during mid-to-late October and harvested by February-end. These you can sow through November and still harvest by February," he says. While the new varieties aren't storable beyond 3-4 months - unlike Kufri Bahar, which has thick skin and can stay in cold stores at 2-4 degrees Celsius for 9-10 months - the higher production from them is what's flooding the markets now. A second reason Chaudhary cites is the huge carryover stocks from

last year's harvest. Potato farmers usually sell 15-20% of their crop immediately after harvesting from mid-February to mid-March. The remaining produce they keep in cold stores, which prevent sprouting and enable staggered sales till November-end. This time, the cold stores were carrying stocks even up to January-end. These, along with the new crop's arrival from February (especially the high-yielding varieties), have depressed the market: "Only farmers are bringing their produce to us. Big traders and retailers aren't stocking, as they believe that there is enough aloo to meet their demand in the coming months".

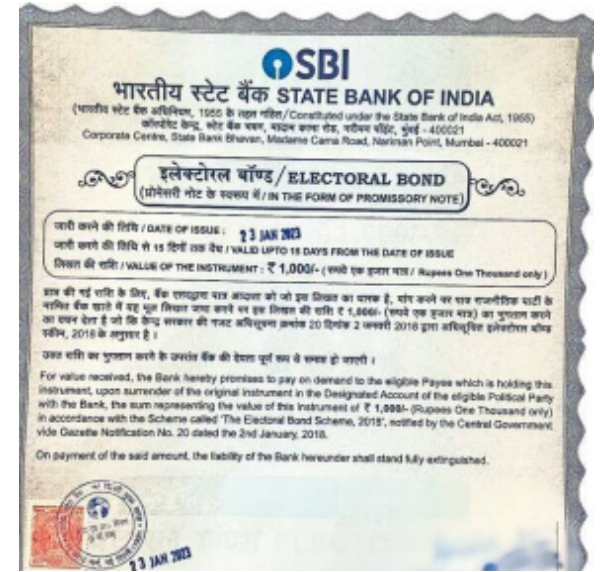
Prices of gulla aloo collapsed to Rs 200-250 and kirri to Rs 60 per quintal in December-January. "Since kirri aloo was selling at 60 paise per kg from cold stores, the gaushalas (cow shelters) were feeding it to their animals, instead of bhusa (wheat straw) that cost Rs 15/kg," adds Chaudhary. Low prices of these seed-grade potatoes also induced farmers to sow more area under the tuber this year. According to Abdul Rashid of Rashid Bhai & Co, a Kanpur-based trader, many garlic growers in Mainpuri-Etah, and even parts of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, have switched to potato this time: "They did so because garlic realisations weren't good in the last 2-3 years and cheap seed was available. But that has only increased aloo acreage and production". For Jeevan Singh, a farmer from Gukhrauli village in Hathras district's Sadabad tehsil, the only hope is that prices would recover: "The current rates will not cover even my basic cultivation cost of Rs 800/quintal. If I add another Rs 200 for harvesting, grading, bagging, loading and transport, plus Rs 230 towards cold store rental, my total cost comes to nearly Rs 1,250/quintal". Singh has grown potato on 40, wheat on 8 and mustard on 7 out of his total 55-bigha (4.6 hectares; one hectare=12 bigha) holding. "The cost of khudai (harvesting) alone has doubled, from Rs 900-1,000 to Rs 1,750-2,000 per bigha, in the last three years. Everything has gone up, except our prices," complains Lal Singh Jurel, a 125-bigha grower from Kanjauli village in Sadabad tehsil. He, like Singh, deposits his entire harvested tubers at Chaudhary's cold storage that can stock up to 12,750 tonnes. The latter charges a rental of Rs 230/quintal for the whole season from February 15 to November 30; they can sell from the store anytime during this period. Cold store owners, apart from earning rent, also finance traders. "If they put in, say Rs 400-600 per quintal, we lend an equivalent amount at 12-18% annual interest to fund their purchase and stocking. But at today's prices, neither are they willing to put money on aloo and nor can we extend beyond Rs 200-300/quintal," explains Chaudhary. UP, incidentally, has India's largest number (2,406 out of 8,186) as well as capacity (147.14 lakh out of 374.25 lakh tonnes) of cold stores. The maximum number of stores are in the aloo belt districts of Agra (457), Firozabad (235), Etawah (129), Aligarh (120), Hathras (118) and Kannauj (112). "Government agencies don't need to go to the mandis. They can procure and distribute directly from the cold stores. By guaranteeing a minimum price, both farmers and the industry will be saved," adds Alamgir.

What it takes to buy an electoral bond

EMS News Agency, March

There is no signage indicating where exactly Electoral Bonds (EBs) are available in the large complex that houses the State Bank of India's New Delhi main branch on Parliament Street. A security guard tries to help, pointing to the sixth floor of the building that houses "government business". On the sixth floor, where the NRI section is marked, there is again no sign indicating where EBs are sold in the open-plan office. Employees point to the desk of the official authorised to issue EBs. The SBI's New Delhi main branch is one of the 29 branches of the bank across the country authorised to sell EBs - five years ago, the sale window for the first tranche opened in March 2018. So when the bank announced the sale of the 25th tranche of EBs from January 19 to January 28 this year, I decided to buy a bond of Rs 1,000 - the smallest denomination available under the government's Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018 - on January 23. Total number of electoral bonds sold since first tranche opened in March 2018. According to a Right to Information (RTI) reply by the SBI to The Indian Express on February 15, my EB was among the 97 bonds of Rs 1,000 denomination sold so far. A total of 21,171 bonds have been purchased since the first tranche was sold on March 1, 2018, and the scheme has facilitated the donation of over Rs 12,008.59 crore to political parties through anonymous donors.

RTI replies on the denominations of the bonds sold said the largest denomination available, Rs 1 crore, was by far the most popular. Since the scheme does not allow disclosure of the identity of buyers, one can only assume that the "most popular" bond is being bought by wealthy individuals or large companies. At the bank, the official asked for a list of documents necessary to successfully apply for an EB - the completed application form and pay-in slip downloaded from the SBI's website, proof of online payment of the amount in the form of a bank statement with my name on it, Aadhaar card and PAN card. The payment is made through SBI's website (onlinesbi.sbi) under the remittance section on the electoral bond tab. After feeding the name of the branch, bond amount and mobile number, an OTP is generated. Using that OTP, a virtual account number (VAN) is generated, along with an Indian Financial System Code (IFSC). The VAN and



IFSC are used to make the transfer from one's own online banking portal or app. Once the payment is made, a "TB reference number" is generated and one has to print a receipt from the SBI site. Now, ideally this process should be completed before reaching the branch. However, this was not explained on the SBI website, including in the document checklist for buyers. At the branch, the official concerned explained these steps and left me to complete the process using mobile banking. The official remarked that most buyers are repeat visitors and familiar with the process, so they don't have to wait. With the SBI site timing out several times, it took about an hour to complete the payment of Rs 1,000. That done, I was asked to move to a separate room at the back of the main floor dedicated to EB sales. The official said this was to maintain the secrecy of the buyer, even from other officials at the bank. The scheme allows any Indian citizen, company, partnership firm, trust or unincorporated association or body of individuals to buy an EB to donate anonymously to political parties. It is believed that most EBs are purchased by large corporations.

(Tax) scrutiny not nice... will deal with it cooperatively, professionally: BBC

EMS News Agency, March

REFERRING TO the Income Tax department's surveys at its offices in Mumbai and Delhi last month, BBC's Deputy CEO and Director of News Jonathan Munro has said that while such scrutiny is "not nice", the British broadcaster will "deal cooperatively and professionally with any aftermath". Speaking to The Indian Express on Friday, Munro said: "It's not nice for any organisation to have that sort of scrutiny, uninvited as it were. But everybody knows that we've got a responsibility to obey the law and that's what we'll do... We are here to obey the law and comply with all the regulations and cooperate with anything that needs to be dealt with." In a statement after the surveys on February 14-16, the BBC had said: "We will continue to cooperate with the authorities and hope matters are resolved as soon as possible... The BBC is a trusted, independent media organisation and we stand by our colleagues and journalists who will continue to

report without fear or favour." Munro, who is in India for the fourth edition of the BBC Sportsman of the Year Award, said, "That day, our primary concern was, is everybody okay, and everybody was okay." The primary concern was to retain all output and get back on air unaffected, he said. While having people in the office asking questions is disruptive, he said: "They were legally entitled to do it. They were very polite and it was all very dignified." After the surveys, the Income Tax department had said it had found "several discrepancies and inconsistencies with regard to transfer pricing documentation" and the income and profits shown by various BBC group entities were "not commensurate with the scale of operations" in India. The tax department's action came weeks after the British broadcaster had, on January 17, released a documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots. On January 20, the central government ordered YouTube and Twitter to take down links sharing the documentary.

Odisha CM announces establishment of health university to improve medical education



EMS News Agency, March

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on March 5 announced the establishment of a health university in the State on the occasion of the 107th birth anniversary of legendary politician Biju Patnaik. All the medical and allied health science colleges and institutions will stand

affiliated to the Odisha University of Health Sciences from the 2023-24 academic session, a notification issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department said. The announcement comes on the birth anniversary of Biju Patnaik who served as Odisha Chief Minister twice. He was also a Union Minister.

His son Naveen Patnaik founded the Biju Janata Dal following Biju Patnaik's death in 1997 and has been the Odisha Chief Minister since 2000. "All colleges offering undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses in health sciences, including modern medicine, ayurveda, homoeopathy, nursing, pharmacy, and physiotherapy, will now come under the ambit of the varsity from the 2023-24 academic session," an official said. "The Odisha government had earlier decided to set up the health university to streamline the medical education system as many such institutions have been coming up in the State," he said. The Odisha University of Health Sciences Act was passed in the Assembly in October 2021 and notified by the government on August 14, 2022. "The establishment of the health university will enhance the quality of medical education, patient care and research in the State," the official added.

'Goa govt daydreaming': Congress on target of 100% renewable energy usage by 2050

EMS News Agency, March

The Opposition Congress in Goa on March 5 mocked the State Government's target of achieving 100% renewable energy usage by 2050, saying the dismal past record shows that it is daydreaming. While addressing the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) conference on Clean Renewable Energy 2023, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had on March 3 said that Goa aims to ensure 100% renewable energy usage across all sectors by 2050.

Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemão, in a statement, termed the Chief Minister's announcement as "daydreaming." "With a dismal past record, better not speak about achieving 100% renewable energy target with 15,000 jobs by 2050. The failed BJP government is daydreaming, when Goans are facing nightmares of frequent power cuts and proposed hike in power tariffs," Mr. Alemão said. Citing a reply to a question tabled in the state Legislative Assembly, the Congress leader said, "The reply revealed that Goa generated only 33,344 MW of solar energy till November 30, 2022 against the target of 358 MW set to achieve national cumulative target of 175



GW." "The Chief Minister has set a new target of 150 MW in the next two years with 500 jobs, which is completely unrealistic, he said. Yuri Alemão further alleged that the State Government had deliberately opted for a "go slow" approach on solar and renewable energy to facilitate the destructive Tamnar project. "If the government invests even half the money on renewable energy generation in Goa, it will meet the power needs of the entire state," he said.

Adani investment has come in, we are not panicking about projects: Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry

EMS News Agency, March

Sri Lanka's economic recovery, trade, investment and the development partnership were at the top of the agenda as Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Delhi on March 4. Speaking to The Hindu earlier, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister said that his government's focus is on the IMF bailout package expected to be decided at the Spring Session in April, for which China's written assurances are still needed. He also said that despite the company's recent troubles, he is confident that the Adani group will complete its projects in Sri Lanka, which were negotiated as "government to government" deals. You last dealt with New Delhi as Finance Minister. How much has your focus shifted as Foreign Minister, and what [was] on the agenda for talks with EAM Jaishankar?

It is still a mix of both, as I still have to carry out some of the responsibilities in [debt] restructuring and economic diplomacy, because the President is the finance minister, and naturally, he cannot travel as often as we would like. With India, we have had very good discussions during the last two years. Of course, we have been traditionally very good friends, but during the last year or so, India had really come to our rescue, India had provided us a lifeline which allowed us to stay afloat during a very difficult time. We can now see some resurgence in our economy — inflation is down, the rupee has stabilised more tourists are coming back and more remittances are coming in. We are not out of the woods, but stabilised right now, and what we are looking at next is recovery, for which we need investment. So right now, what we are interested in with India is how to collaborate and how to integrate the Indian economy, particularly with South India, in terms of investment, people to people connection, more tourists coming in. So that's the kind of thing is it's a win win situation for all. Before we discuss projects, I wanted to ask about the debt situation. China has not yet given those written assurances required for the IMF to take the next step on Sri Lanka's [\$2.9 billion] bailout package, is that something that is going to become a problem — we're just a month away from the IMF's spring session? Yes, we have been in discussion with the IMF [about the package]. The Chinese Government and has, in principle told the IMF that they would like Sri Lanka to get the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and move on with it, but that is not compatible with the IMF requirements. So we are trying to narrow that gap. And hopefully, they will also come around and we are very hopeful during the month of March, we should be able to unlock the EFF from IMF. The moment the IMF Fund comes in, it brings a lot of credit worthiness to the entire system and confidence. It's not as if the \$2.9 billion per se, given out by the IMF in two to three years time that makes a huge difference on its own. But the fact that Sri Lanka is able to engage IMF and receive the offer means a lot in terms of bringing confidence back to the situation. A lot of other agencies like World Bank, AIIB, ADB, have lined up funds to come in, and Institutes like JICA, the Japanese agency is there. So IMF is very, very central for us to get the confidence back on track. And then probably, if we have thereafter, if we have a good, understandable debt restructuring session, then our debt becomes more sustainable. And with that, we will probably have access to the capital market once again. That's the plan. So that will now we have stabilising the economy. We have prevented a catastrophic dive which some other countries have seen, and I think we have managed inflation pretty well from 95% now down to 50%. So that's a good achievement comparatively what we were in last year, but for growth to take place, and for recovery to take place, confidence needs to be built and for that the IMF bailout, is very, very central for us. Are India's projects in Trincomalee, that have been pending since 2018 when the then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had first

signed an MoU, now been given an impetus?

Yes, I think there has been impetus all round. We have seen that Indian tourists are coming investors are coming, some of the big Indian companies have already started their projects on renewable energy, wind power as well as the port development. With the Trinco projects, those are in the pipeline and we do know that this is the time we have to materialise this promise given a long, long period of time ago. One of those big Indian companies is the Adani group. Are you confident that the Adani companies involved in the Colombo port terminal project and Northern SL Wind power project can complete these projects, given the troubles they've been in over the past month? We are very, very confident that they will do it and we also understand they do have footholds in their airports and ports, both in India and outside, in railways, in renewable energy, and they are seen as a big company. This speculation on the stock market is not a new thing, this happens all over the world. So, we are not panicking at all. And we are very, very confident they will be able to complete the project. And this will become a precursor for much more investment to come from so many diverse investment institutions in India. So we are definitely not worried. One of the allegations was that it was the pressure from the Prime Minister's Office in India that actually led to the wind power project being given to Adani group. Do you think the Adani group comes with the confidence, the [backing] of the Prime Minister's office and that's why it gets these projects?

Not really. In our case, of course, we were keen on an Indian investor to come in, so who the Indian investor was for the Indian government and the authorities to decide and choose and send it to us. And then we will have our own feasibility and fact finding, and if we are happy, we will take it. So that's how it happens all over the world. So we are happy. And we have no complaint, so far, because they have been investing, they're going on with the project. And they have been successful both in India and in the region. So why not? A big name like that comes in. And there are a lot of other countries and other companies could be envious of them. For us, there is absolutely nothing to worry, because it is a transparent process and a government to government kind of a project. And then of course G2G doesn't mean that the government gets involved and is doing business, it means the government identifies the entities. So that is the process which had been followed in the Adani's coming into Sri Lanka.

So it's seen as a government approved project. Even though they have lost \$140 billion in market capitalisation, are you convinced these projects will be completed on time?

Yeah, no, the problem is that the stock market is a very vulnerable thing. Companies go up and down — Facebook has lost market capitalisation, the big timers, particularly in the tech industry have lost. It goes up and down but doesn't mean that the project is in trouble. They have the capital, they have the foundation, these projects are ongoing. So people can have their own valuation, on speculation, on growth potential and all those things.... Merely because stock market goes down doesn't mean that your project on the ground will get wiped out all of a sudden. That investment has come in. That's what I heard from my investment ministers.

Last year India protested quite vocally about the docking of a Chinese naval ship in Hambantota Port — has Sri Lanka given India assurances that this kind of controversy will not recur?

I think it's a complex relationship. Sri Lanka has been a very close friend of India and doesn't want to do anything which hurts the Indian legitimate sentiments on security concerns. But in the meantime, one also needs to understand that we need to work with everybody.

Congress has no moral right to speak about corruption: Union Minister Pralhad Joshi



EMS News Agency, March

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi lashed out at the Congress, saying the party had no moral right to speak about corruption. He was reacting to the Congress party's demand for Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai's resignation over the arrest of BJP MLA Madal Virupakshappa's son by the Lokayukta. "The Congress has no moral right to speak about corruption.

They are the Raktabeejasuras of corruption in the country. From the days of Jawaharlal Nehru to Manmohan Singh, the party has engaged in many corrupt deals," he said. BJP strengthened Lokayukta

In fact, Joshi said, the State government should be appreciated for the Lokayukta raids. "Being in power both at the Centre and State, we could have avoided the raids. However, we did not. Whoever commits a wrong should face punishment. The inquiry is going on," he said. The Congress, he said, scuttled the powers of the Lokayukta. Meanwhile, the BJP government strengthened the hands of Lokayukta as a result of the police conducting raids, he said. Further, he said the BJP had been receiving a good response to its Vijay Sankalpa Yatras. PM's upcoming visit Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be taking part in the inauguration of the highway connecting Mysuru and Bengaluru on March 12. He would be addressing a public meeting at Maddur, as well. Later, he will inaugurate the IIT campus at Dharwad and address another public meeting. Mr. Joshi is in Balehonnur to take part in the Renukacharya Jayanti programme at Rambhapuri Mut.

'Will go by mandate given to us': CRPF on its role in counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir

EMS News Agency, March

"The CRPF is fully equipped and capable of taking the lead role in counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir in case the paramilitary force is tasked to do so", a senior officer of the force has said. He said that though the security situation has drastically improved in the Valley in the past three years, the force was alert and keeping a watch on delinquent elements. "The CRPF has the potential, ability, training, and technology to operate effectively in such (counter-insurgency) scenarios that is all I can say on this issue," IG CRPF (He was responding to a question about a report in a national daily in February which claimed that the Central Government was actively considering to withdraw the Army from hinterland operations in Kashmir in a phased manner. "This is a policy issue which is decided at the highest level. And we will go by whatever mandate is given to us. Right now also, we are actively involved in operations along with the Army and the J&K Police," Mr. Bhatia said. The CRPF had replaced the BSF in counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir in 2005, amid scepticism that the former might not be able to keep up the high standards of the frontier guards. IG CRPF (Kashmir Operations) M.S. Bhatia said there has been a "big change" in the situation in the Valley post the abrogation of Article 370. "If we talk of a situation that prevailed pre-abrogation and the situation now, it has improved drastically in the last two-three years. That is remarkable," he said. However, the IG CRPF was quick to add, "We are not claiming we have totally wiped out militancy or terrorism but from what it used to be, the numbers have shrunk, the recruitment has shrunk, the shelf life of a terrorist has come down. May be a few misguided



youths join the ranks but they are also getting eliminated very fast." Mr. Bhatia said the intelligence network was "very good", which helps in keeping an eye on delinquent persons. "The number of new recruits that are attracted or lured to this sort of rhetoric has definitely gone down. Even in the public, we feel that the support for such kind of elements has gone down," he said. Mr. Bhatia said the law and order situation has improved drastically, while stone pelting has come down to zero. "So, there are a lot of positives that we can look at. Of course, now and then you hear some terrorists here and there but by and large if you look at the larger picture, I would say the situation has drastically changed," he said. The CRPF has modernised its weapons and equipment inventory to effectively deal with anti-national elements. Bullet-proof vehicles, wall-through radars and drones are some of the new gadgets inducted by the force into its counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir, leading to precision-based actions against terrorists.

Judiciary dealt with attempts at interference appropriately to ensure its independence: Former CJI Lalit

EMS News Agency, March

Former Chief Justice of India U.U. Lalit said the judiciary has faced instances of challenge and attempts at interference but dealt with these appropriately to ensure its independence. He said in order to have a thriving democracy, one must have an independent judiciary because it is through dispute resolution that society is assured of governance by the rule of law. "There are various challenges that the judiciary has to face today," he said, asserting, "therefore, we have to be strong as a judicial fraternity... We must bear every kind of pressure, onslaught or any kind of interference." Speaking at a symposium on 'Independent judiciary: Critical for a vibrant democracy' held by the Bharat Chamber of Commerce in Kolkata on Saturday evening, he said there have been instances of court decisions subjected to executive interference, but these have been appropriately dealt with ensuring the independence of the judiciary.

The former CJI said attributes of independence of the judiciary are impartiality, fairness in action, reasonableness and complete integrity for the purpose of dispute resolution. Noting that the "citadel never falls except from within", the former CJI said this is the expression with which the district judiciary is to be protected. Mr. Lalit said the district judiciary is not under the control of anybody except the high court in the State. "All their postings, promotions, appointments and even transfers are supposed to be only at the recommendation of the high courts," he said. Holding there should be no outside interference with the functioning of the judiciary, he said a number of articles in the Constitution ensure there is no interference in the functioning of every individual judge or the judiciary in general. "One way to ensure the independence of the judiciary is to have an atmosphere where



the people responsible for discharging judicial functions must have a sense of complete freedom and lack of interference from any agency," he said. The ex-CJI said the shoulders of the judiciary are quite strong to deal with any kind of external onslaught from any force. Supreme Court judge Justice Hima Kohli said the independence of the judiciary is not just a principle but a moral imperative. "The relevance of an independent judiciary cannot be overstated, especially in a country like ours which is not just a democratic republic; it has been described in the Constitution as a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic," she said. Justice Kohli said to discharge constitutional duties, the judiciary must be independent and impartial. "It must be free from any external and internal influence," she said, maintaining that judicial independence is not just a facet of the fundamental rights of citizens but also an essential condition for maintaining a vibrant and democratic social order. She said the independence of the judiciary has been upheld by the Supreme Court in a host of landmark cases.

'Will go by mandate given to us': CRPF on its role in counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir

EMS News Agency, March

"The CRPF is fully equipped and capable of taking the lead role in counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir in case the paramilitary force is tasked to do so", a senior officer of the force has said. He said that though the security situation has drastically improved in the Valley in the past three years, the force was alert and keeping a watch on delinquent elements. "The CRPF has the potential, ability, training, and technology to operate effectively in such (counter-insurgency) scenarios that is all I can say on this issue," IG CRPF (Kashmir Operations) M.S. Bhatia told PTI. He was responding to a question about a report in a national daily in February which claimed that the Central Government was actively considering to withdraw the Army from hinterland operations in Kashmir in a phased manner. "This is a policy issue which is decided at the highest level. And we will go by whatever mandate is given to us. Right now also, we are actively involved in operations along with the Army and the J&K Police," Mr. Bhatia said. The CRPF had replaced the BSF in counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir in 2005, amid scepticism that the former might not be able to keep up the high standards of the frontier guards. IG

CRPF (Kashmir Operations) M.S. Bhatia said there has been a "big change" in the situation in the Valley post the abrogation of Article 370. "If we talk of a situation that prevailed pre-abrogation and the situation now, it has improved drastically in the last two-three years. That is remarkable," he said. However, the IG CRPF was quick to add, "We are not claiming we have totally wiped out militancy or terrorism but from what it used to be, the numbers have shrunk, the recruitment has shrunk, the shelf life of a terrorist has come down. May be a few misguided youths join the ranks but they are also getting eliminated very fast." Mr. Bhatia said the intelligence network was "very good", which helps in keeping an eye on delinquent persons. "The number of new recruits that are attracted or lured to this sort of rhetoric has definitely gone down. Even in the public, we feel that the support for such kind of elements has gone down," he said. Mr. Bhatia said the law and order situation has improved drastically, while stone pelting has come down to zero. "So, there are a lot of positives that we can look at. Of course, now and then you hear some terrorists here and there but by and large if you look at the larger picture, I would say the situation has drastically changed," he said.

Secular religions of race, sex and climate have put U.S. in chokehold: Vivek Ramaswamy



EMS News Agency, March

Three secular religions — race, sex and climate — have put the U.S. in a chokehold today, Republican presidential aspirant Vivek Ramaswamy has said. Addressing his fellow conservative Republicans, Mr. Ramaswamy also proposed disruptive ideas of dismantling the Department of Education along with the FBI and banning American companies from doing business with China if he is elected as the president of the country in 2024. "The Declaration of Independence of today is our declaration of independence from China. If Thomas Jefferson were alive today, that is the Declaration of Independence he would sign. That is the Declaration of Independence I will sign if I am elected as your next president," Mr. Ramaswamy, 37, said. Jefferson was an American statesman, diplomat, lawyer, architect, philosopher, and one of the Founding Fathers of the U.S. He served as the third president of the U.S. from 1801 to 1809 and was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence. Mr. Ramaswamy, who announced his decision to enter the 2024 race to the White House last week, noted that he was inspired by former president Donald Trump, 76, and his "America first" vision. It is time to identify the issues and work aggressively towards them, Mr. Ramaswamy said during his address to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) — the top annual event of the Republican Party and its support base — on Saturday. It was his first major address from the national stage of the CPAC. In his 18-minute speech, Mr. Ramaswamy said "three secular religions have America in a chokehold today". The first of them is this "woke racial religion" that says someone's identity is based on his skin colour. "That if you are black, you are inherently disadvantaged. That if you are white, you are inherently privileged no matter your economic background or your upbringing. That your race determines who you are and what you can achieve in life," Mr. Ramaswamy said. This has created "this new culture of fear in America", combined with the "second secular religion" that says the "sex of the person you are attracted to has to be hardwired on the day you were born" but your "own biological sex is completely fluid over the course of your lifetime".

"It makes no sense unless it is a religion. It does not match up to reason, it matches up to religion. And then it makes the same move as the first religion," Mr. Ramaswamy said. The third one is the climate religion in America that says that "we have to fight carbon emissions at all costs in the United States while we shift those same carbon emissions to places like China," the Indian-American entrepreneur said. "...Even if you believe in this religion, you would have embraced nuclear energy, which is the best form of carbon-free energy production known to mankind." And yet these people oppose nuclear energy. What is really going on is that the climate religion

has about as much to do with the climate as the Spanish Inquisition had to do with Christ, which is to say nothing at all. It is about power, dominion, control, punishment and apologising for what we have achieved in this country and the modern West as we know it," Mr. Ramaswamy said amidst applause from the audience. The U.S., he said is in the middle of a national identity crisis. "Take it from me. I am 37 years old. I am a millennial. I was born in 1985. I will tell you this, my generation, really every generation of Americans today, we are so hungry for a cause. "We are hungry for purpose and meaning and identity at a point in our national history when the things that used to fill our hunger for purpose, faith, patriotism, hard work, family — these things have disappeared," Mr. Ramaswamy said. He said this is an opportunity for the Republican Party and for the conservative movement to rise to the occasion and fill that void with a vision of American national identity that runs so deep that it dilutes woke "poison" to "irrelevance." Mr. Ramaswamy said he is all in on the "America first" agenda. "Believe me, I am an 'America first' conservative. I will not apologise for it. But to put America first, we now need to rediscover what America is. And that is why last week I announced my run for US president to deliver a national identity that we are missing in this country," Mr. Ramaswamy said. "This means that you believe in merit, that you get ahead in this country, not on the colour of your skin, but on the content of your character and your contributions. And that is why as the US president, I have pledged to get rid of affirmative action in this country once and for all. It is national cancer on our soul," Mr. Ramaswamy said. "Ban U.S. companies from doing business in China." Mr. Ramaswamy said he would ban U.S. companies from doing business in China. "I think it is important to be honest. If we want to declare independence from China, that means we got to be willing to ban most U.S. businesses from doing business in China until the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) falls or until the CCP radically reforms itself. Because there is no easy way out other than taking that band-aid and ripping it right off," Mr. Ramaswamy said. "I am sorry Henry Kissinger. We are done with your experiment. In America, it is the only way out. We got to start thinking on the time scales of history, not the time scales of electoral cycles," Mr. Ramaswamy said. Kissinger served as U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor under the presidential administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. "We do not need (Arthur Neville) Chamberlain, we need a little bit of (Winston) Churchill in this country. If you are willing to make a sacrifice, the chances are you will never have to make it because the other side will fall first," Mr. Ramaswamy asserted. Dismantling Department of Education In his speech, Mr. Ramaswamy also called for dismantling the Department of Education and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). "I have already said last week, the first agency we will shut down and need to shut down in the United States is the U.S. Department of Education. It has no reason to exist. Never should have existed. And today, I am ready to announce the second government agency that I will shut down in this country we should have done this at least 60 years ago," Mr. Ramaswamy said. It has hurt Republicans and Democrats alike, he added. "We are going to get it done as finally, it is time to shut down the FBI in America and create something new to take its place because we are done with the J. Edgar Hoover legacy to let this be a self-governing nation again," Mr. Ramaswamy said, referring to the American law-enforcement administrator who served as the first Director of the FBI.

Iran makes sweeping pledge of cooperation to IAEA before board meeting

EMS News Agency, March

Iran has given sweeping assurances to the U.N. nuclear watchdog that it will finally assist a long-stalled investigation into uranium particles found at undeclared sites and even re-install removed monitoring equipment, the watchdog said. The International Atomic Energy Agency and Iran issued a joint statement on IAEA chief Rafael Grossi's return from a trip to Tehran just two days before a quarterly meeting of the agency's 35-nation Board of Governors. The statement went into little detail but the possibility of a marked improvement in relations between the two is likely to stave off a Western push for another resolution ordering Iran to cooperate, diplomats said. Iran has, however, made similar promises before that have yielded little or nothing.

"Iran expressed its readiness to... provide further information and access to address the outstanding safeguards issues," the joint statement said. A confidential IAEA report to member states seen by Reuters said Mr. Grossi "looks forward to... prompt and full implementation of the joint statement". Iran is supposed to provide access to information, locations, and people, Mr. Grossi told a news conference at Vienna airport soon after landing, suggesting a vast improvement after years of Iranian stonewalling. Iran would also allow the re-installation of extra monitoring equipment that had been put in place under the 2015 nuclear deal, but then removed last year as the deal unravelled in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal



from the deal in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump. Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation spokesperson Behrouz Kamalvandi, however, said Tehran had not agreed to give access to people. "During the two days that Mr. Grossi was in Iran, the issue of access to individuals was never raised," Mr. Kamalvandi told state news agency IRNA, adding there also has been no deal regarding putting new cameras in Iran's nuclear facilities. Follow-up talks in Iran between IAEA and Iranian officials aimed at hammering out the details would happen "very, very soon", Mr. Grossi said. Asked if all that monitoring equipment would be re-installed, Mr. Grossi replied "Yes". When asked where it would be re-installed, however, he said only that it would be at a number of locations.

China sets economic growth target of 'around 5%' for 2023, lowest in decades

EMS News Agency, March

China on Sunday set an economic growth target of "around 5%" for 2023, one of the lowest in decades, as its annual National People's Congress opened in Beijing. The target was announced in a work report delivered by outgoing Premier Li Keqiang as the rubber-stamp parliament opened at the capital's Great Hall of the People. The figure was slightly lower than the average of forecasts of economists surveyed by AFP, who predicted a goal of around 5.3%.

Mr. Li said China would aim to add "around 12 million new urban jobs" this year and bring the urban unemployment rate to around 5.5%. He said Beijing would also target a rise in the consumer price index of around three percent. "China's economy is staging a steady recovery and demonstrating vast potential and momentum for further growth," said Mr. Li in an hour-long speech punctuated by ripples of applause from thousands of delegates. But he warned that "uncertainties in the external environment are on the rise", noting high global inflation. Mr. Li also said "external attempts to suppress

and contain China are escalating". China posted just 3% growth last year, missing its stated target of around 5.5% by a wide margin as the economy strained under the impact of strict COVID-19 containment policies and a property crisis. Mr. Li said Beijing "should give priority to the recovery and expansion of consumption" and "place a higher priority on promoting the employment of young people, particularly college graduates". But he was bullish on the slowdown, saying that "under the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee, we carried out COVID-19 response and pursued economic and social development in an effective and well-coordinated way". "Overcoming great difficulties and challenges, we succeeded in maintaining overall stable economic performance," he said. "Such achievements are a testament to the tremendous resilience of China's economy." Zhiwei Zhang from Pinpoint Asset Management said: "The growth target came in at the low end of the market expectation. But it should be taken as a floor of growth the government is willing to tolerate. Indeed given the very low base of economic activities last year, it is unlikely to see growth drop below 5%."

20 cars of Norfolk Southern cargo train derail in Ohio, 2nd incident in a month



EMS News Agency, March

About 20 cars of a Norfolk Southern cargo train derailed near Springfield on March 4, the second derailment of the company's trains in Ohio in a month, officials said. But unlike the February 3 derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, a company spokesperson said there were no hazardous materials aboard the train. The Columbus Dispatch reported. The train, which did not have passengers, derailed around 5 p.m. on March 4 by State Route 41, near the Clark County Fairgrounds, the Dispatch reported. Springfield is about 46 miles (74 km) west of the State capital of Columbus, Ohio. The 20 cars of the 212-car train derailed while travelling south, the Norfolk Southern spokesperson said. Multiple cars of a Norfolk Southern cargo train lie toppled on one another after derailling at a train crossing in Ohio on March 4, 2023.

Shawn Heaton told the Springfield News-Sun that he was waiting at the intersection as the train crossed the intersection and captured the start of the derailment on video. "I was right there and I was playing on my phone and then I heard a loud bang. And when I heard the loud bang, I started recording," Mr. Heaton said. "When I heard the bang, there was all kinds of debris and metal shoot out from under the cars and that's when I started recording and you could see them start jumping off the tracks." Multiple cars of a Norfolk Southern cargo train lie toppled on one another after derailling at a train crossing in Ohio on March 4, 2023.

Multiple cars of a Norfolk Southern cargo train lie toppled on one another after derailling at a train crossing in Ohio. The Clark County Emergency Management Agency has asked residents within 1,000 feet of the derailment to shelter in place, but the agency said it has not issued formal evacuation orders. In an update at 8:50 p.m. EDT, the agency said officials are working to make sure that no hazardous materials were involved. On February 3, 38 cars of a Norfolk Southern freight train in East Palestine, in northeast Ohio near Pennsylvania, derailed and several of the train's cars carrying hazardous materials burned. Though no one was injured, nearby neighbourhoods in both States were imperilled. The crash prompted an evacuation of about half the town's roughly 5,000 residents, an ongoing multi-governmental emergency response and lingering worries among villagers of long-term health impacts.

China increases military spending in face of 'escalating' threats

EMS News Agency, March

China said on Sunday that its military spending would rise at the fastest pace in four years, warning of "escalating" threats from abroad at a meeting of its rubber-stamp parliament that will hand Xi Jinping a third term as president. The increase in the world's second-largest defence budget came as Beijing announced an economic growth goal of around 5% for this year — one of its lowest in decades. The country's planned budgets for the year put defence spending at 1.55 trillion yuan (\$225 billion), a 7.2% rise and the quickest rate of increase since 2019. It officially rose 7.1% last year. Outgoing Premier Li Keqiang told delegates to the National People's Congress (NPC) that "external attempts to suppress and contain China are escalating".

"The armed forces should intensify military training and preparedness across the board," he said as he presented the government's annual work report to thousands of amassed delegates in Beijing's Great Hall of the People. The military must "devote greater energy to training under combat conditions, and... strengthen military work in all directions and domains", he added. China's defence spending still pales in comparison with the United States, which has allotted over \$800 billion for its military this year. But analysts have said Beijing spends much more money than the officially announced sums. The ramped-up spending comes during a low point in relations between China and the United States. Beijing and Washington have butted heads in recent years over trade, human rights and other issues, but relations soured even further last month when the U.S. shot down a Chinese balloon it said was being used for surveillance — a claim strenuously denied by Beijing.

Top American officials have also repeatedly warned that China may invade Taiwan in the coming years, pointing to Beijing's increasingly assertive military moves around the self-ruled island, which it sees as its own territory and has vowed to bring under its control. Niklas Swanstrom, director of the Stockholm-based nonprofit Institute for Security and Development Policy, said Beijing appeared to be "investing in its capacity to take over Taiwan and keep the US out of the region". But James Char, an expert on China's military at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University pointed out that several countries across Asia were boosting their defence spending, in part due to "their respective threat perceptions of the regional security landscape". "Steady recovery" Experts expect few surprises at this week's carefully choreographed NPC, with thousands of politicians coming from across China to vote on laws and personnel changes pre-approved by the ruling Communist Party (CCP). Sunday's conservative economic goals followed China posting just three percent growth last year, widely



missing its 5.5-percent target as the economy strained under the impact of strict Covid-19 containment policies and a property crisis. "The growth target came in at the low end of the market expectation. But it should be taken as a floor of growth the government is willing to tolerate," said Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. "Given the very low base of economic activities last year, it is unlikely to see growth drop below five percent." Li struck a bullish tone in his speech, saying China's economy "is staging a steady recovery and demonstrating vast potential and momentum for further growth". He lauded Beijing's growth-suppressing Covid curbs — abruptly abandoned late last year — and "effective and well-coordinated" economic and social development. The sustained growth in defence spending despite sagging economic expectations showed that "security is now much more important for the national leadership" than before, said Alfred Muluan Wu, an associate professor at the University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. "It is even, to some extent, more important than economic growth," he told AFP. Xi Jinping's dominance. Also top of the NPC's agenda will be Friday's norm-busting reappointment of Xi as president, after he locked in another five years as head of the party and the military — the two most significant leadership positions in Chinese politics — at an October congress. Since then, the 69-year-old Xi's leadership has faced unexpected challenges and scrutiny, with protests over his zero-Covid policy and a deadly coronavirus surge after it was subsequently dropped. But those issues are almost certain to be avoided at this week's Beijing conclave, which will also see the unveiling of Xi's confidant and former Shanghai party chief Li Qiang as the new premier. Delegates to the NPC — and to the concurrent "political consultative conference" (CPPCC) that began on Saturday — will also discuss issues ranging from the economic recovery to improved sex education in schools, according to state media reports. The meetings serve as a forum for attendees to present pet projects, but they have little say in broader questions of how China is run.

Suspect killed, 3 arrested in killing of Philippine governor

EMS News Agency, March

Police man a checkpoint between the border of Tanjay City and Pamplona town in the Philippine Province of Negros Oriental on March 4, 2023, hours after the provincial governor Roel Degamo and five others were killed by unknown gunmen. Police man a checkpoint between the border of Tanjay City and Pamplona town in the Philippine Province of Negros Oriental on March 4, 2023, hours after the provincial governor Roel Degamo and five others were killed by unknown gunmen. Police have killed one suspect and arrested three others in the brazen shootings that killed a central Philippine provincial governor and five others, including poor villagers seeking aid from the political leader, officials said Sunday.

The killing of Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo at his home on Saturday by at least six men armed with assault rifles and wearing military-like camouflage uniforms and bullet-resistant vests was the deadliest in a series of attacks on politicians in recent weeks in the country. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. condemned the killing of Degamo, who backed him in the presidential election last year, and said his "government will not rest until we have brought the perpetrators of this dastardly and heinous crime to justice." Degamo was meeting poor villagers who were seeking medical and other help when the armed men walked calmly into his residential compound in Pamplona town and opened fire. They fled in three SUVs, which were later abandoned in a nearby town and from which about 10 men were seen fleeing, according to police reports. At least 17 others, including a doctor and two army soldiers, were wounded, police said. Police quickly set up road checkpoints and later Saturday arrested three suspects, including two former army soldiers, and killed one in a clash as they chased



the gunmen. A number of rifles and a pistol were recovered from the suspects, police said without elaborating or disclosing if they have determined a motive for the attack. Degamo, a longtime politician, initially lost the race for Negros Oriental's governorship in last year's elections but was later installed governor after filing a court petition. He said a few years ago without elaborating that he had received death threats in the province, which has a history of bloody political conflicts and communist insurgency-related violence. Degamo's killing underscores that even local politicians are not immune from high-profile gun violence that has persisted despite the government's pledge to combat it. Last month, Gov. Mamintal Alonto Adiong Jr. of southern Lanao del Sur province was wounded and four of his bodyguards killed in an attack on their convoy. Police said they killed one of the suspects in a clash and have identified others who were to be charged for the bloody attack soon. In a separate recent attack, unidentified men reportedly wearing police uniforms fired at the van of northern Aparri town Vice Mayor Rommel Alameda, killing him and five companions in northern Nueva Vizcaya province. The suspects remain at large. Crimes, decades-long Muslim

Government to come up with 58 quality control orders in next 6 months to stop imports of sub-standard goods



The government will come up with as many as 58 quality control orders (QCOs) for products such as aluminum, copper items, and household electrical appliances in the next six months, in a move aimed at containing import of the sub-standard goods and boost domestic industry, a senior government official said. The government will come up with as many as 58 quality control orders (QCOs) for products such as aluminum, copper items, and household electrical appliances in the next six months, in a move aimed at containing import of the sub-standard goods and boost domestic industry, a senior government official said. | Photo Credit: MUSTAFAH. K.K. The government will come up with as many as 58 quality control orders (QCOs) for products such as aluminum, copper items, and household electrical appliances in the next six months, in a move aimed at containing import of the sub-standard goods and boost domestic industry, a senior government official said.

The department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) is working hard to promote manufacturing of high quality products in the country. "Since 1987, only 34 QCOs have been issued. But now we are coming up with 58 QCOs in the next six months. The main objective is to stop the import of sub-standard goods. These mandatory norms will be for domestic and foreign players," Joint Secretary in the DPIIT Sanjiv told PTI. There will be 315 product standards under these orders. The items, under these orders, cannot be produced, sold/traded, imported and stocked unless they bear the BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards) mark. "These QCOs will be notified within a year after following due process," he added. He said that the move would also help in providing global

markets for domestic goods. In order to facilitate smooth implementation of these orders, particularly for micro and small industries, provisions for additional time periods to get BIS licences and upgrade their testing facilities are being contemplated, he added. Similarly, an exemption to very micro units (investment in plant and machinery up to ₹25 lakh) is being contemplated on a case to case basis. "With the notification of CCOs, manufacturing, storing, and sale of non-BIS certified products are prohibited as per the BIS Act 2016," the official said. The violation of the law can attract a penalty of up to two years of imprisonment or a fine of at least ₹2 lakh for the first offence which increases to ₹5 lakh minimum for the second and subsequent offences.

Recently, BIS has confiscated 18,600 non-BIS certified toys during raids on several retailers including Hamleys, Wh Smith, Archies and Kids Zone in malls, airports and markets. These orders are issued by the department in consonance with the WTO (World Trade Organisation) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) for industries falling under its domain. The agreement recognizes that no country should be prevented from taking measures necessary to ensure the quality of its exports or for the protection of human, animal, or plant life or health, of the environment, or for the prevention of deceptive practices. As a policy, the standards formulation of BIS has been harmonized as far as possible with the relevant standards as laid down by the International Organisation for Standardisation/International Electrotechnical Commission. The standard issued for any product is for voluntary compliance unless it is notified by the central government to make it mandatory through the issuance of technical regulations primarily through notification of QCOs and compulsory registration order (CRO) of BIS conformity assessment regulations, 2018. As on March 1 this year, BIS has issued about 22,228 standards, out of which 9,774 are product standards. Till date, only 404 standards have been made mandatory through notification of QCO/CRO. Sanjiv said that QCO for toys has changed the face of that sector. Due to the quality norms for toys, imports of toys have reduced significantly and exports have jumped. The country's toy exports have touched ₹1,017 crore during the April-December period this fiscal, according to government data. In 2021-22, the exports stood at ₹2,601 crore. During April-December 2013-14, the shipments were at ₹167 crore.

Combining social welfare and capital markets through SSE

The story so far: On February 22, the National Stock Exchange of India received the final approval from the markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to set up a Social Stock Exchange (SSE). Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, presenting the Union Budget back in 2019, had proposed to initiate steps for creating a stock exchange under the market regulator's ambit. She had argued that it was time "to take our capital markets closer to the masses and meet various social welfare objectives to inclusive growth and financial inclusion." The proposal was cleared in September 2021.

What is a Social Stock Exchange?

The SSE would function as a separate segment within the existing stock exchange and help social enterprises raise funds from the public through its mechanism. It would serve as a medium for enterprises to seek finance for their social initiatives, acquire visibility and provide increased transparency about fund mobilisation and utilisation. Retail investors can only invest in securities offered by for-profit social enterprises (SEs) under the Main Board. In all other cases, only institutional investors and non-institutional investors can invest in securities issued by SEs.

What about eligibility?

Any non-profit organisation (NPO) or for-profit social enterprise (FPSEs) that establishes the primacy of social intent would be recognised as a social enterprise (SE), which will make it eligible to be registered or listed on the SSE. The seventeen plausible criteria as listed under Regulations 292E of SEBI's ICDR (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2018 entail that enterprises must be serving to eradicate either hunger, poverty, malnutrition and inequality; promoting education, employability, equality, empowerment of women and LGBTQIA+ communities; working towards environmental sustainability; protection of national heritage and art or bridging the digital divide, among other things. At least 67% of their activities must be directed towards attaining the stated objective. This is to be established by enumerating that, in the immediately preceding three-year period, either 67% of its average revenue came from the eligible activities, expenditure (in the same proportion) was incurred towards attaining the objective or the target population constitute 67% of the overall beneficiary base. Corporate foundations, political or religious organisations or activities, professional or trade associations, infrastructure and housing companies (except affordable housing) would not be identified as an SE. Additionally, NPOs would be deemed ineligible should it be dependent on corporates for more than 50% of its funding.

How do NPOs raise money?

NPOs can raise money either through issuance of Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) Instruments from private placement or public issue, or donations from mutual funds. SEBI had earlier recognised that NPOs by their very nature have primacy of social impact and are non-revenue generating. Thus, there was a need to provide NPOs a direct access to securities market for raising funds. ZCZP bonds differ from conventional bonds in the sense that it entails zero coupon and no principal payment at maturity. The latter provisions a fixed interest (or repayment) on the funds raised through varied contractual agreement, whereas ZCZP would not provision any such return instead promising a social return. It is mandatory that the NPO is registered with the SSE for facilitating the issuance. The instrument must have a specific tenure and can only be issued for a specific project or activity that is to be completed within a specified duration as mentioned in the fund-raising document (to be submitted to the SSE). It must also demonstrate the requisite expertise through their performance in similar projects in the past, thus, acquiring investor confidence and tackle concerns about potential default. The minimum issue size is presently prescribed as Rs 1 crore and minimum application size for subscription at Rs 2 lakhs for ZCZP issuance. The NPO may choose to register on the SSE and not raise funds through it but via other means. However, they would have to make necessary disclosures about the same.

What about completion of projects?

Another structured finance product available for

NPOs is the Development Impact Bonds. Upon the completion of a project and having delivered on pre-agreed social metrics at pre-agreed costs/rates, a grant is made to the NPO. The donor who makes the grant upon achieving the social metrics would be referred to as 'Outcome Funders'. Since the payment above is on post facto basis, the NPOs would have to also raise money to finance their operations. This is done by a 'Risk Funder' who alongside enabling the financing of operations on a pre-payment basis, also bears the associated risk with non-delivery of social metrics. S/he typically earns a small return if the metrics are delivered.

How do FPOs raise money?

For-Profit Enterprises (FPEs) need not register with social stock exchanges before it raises funds through SSE. However, it must comply with all provisions of the ICDR Regulations when raising through the SSE. It can raise money through issue of equity shares (on main board, SME platform or innovators growth platform of the stock exchange) or issuing equity shares to an Alternative Investment Fund including Social Impact Fund or issue of debt instruments.

What disclosures need to be made?

SEBI's regulations state that a social enterprise should submit an annual impact report in a prescribed format. The report must be audited by a social audit firm and has to be submitted within 90 days from the end of the financial year. Listed NPOs, on a quarterly basis, are specifically required to furnish details about the money they have raised category-wise, how they have been utilised and the unutilised balance amount. The latter needs to be furnished until the proceeds are fully utilised or the purpose has been achieved. On February 22, the National Stock Exchange of India received the final approval from the markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to set up a Social Stock Exchange (SSE). Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, presenting the Union Budget back in 2019, had proposed to initiate steps for creating a stock exchange under the market regulator's ambit. The SSE would function as a separate segment within the existing stock exchange and help social enterprises raise funds from the public through its mechanism. SEBI's regulations state that a social enterprise should submit an annual impact report in a prescribed format. The report must be audited by a social audit firm and has to be submitted within 90 days from the end of the financial year.

GST collections grow 12.4% to surpass 1.49 lakh crore; cess inflows hit a record

India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues grew 12.4% in February 2023 to over ₹1.49 lakh crore, with tax receipts from goods imports rising 6% and domestic transactions along with services imports yielding 15% more, compared to a year ago. The ₹1,49,577 crore gross GST kitty collected in February marks the 12th successive month that monthly revenues have been over ₹1.4 lakh crore, although it was 5.06% lower than January's ₹1,57,554 crore receipts. However, the year-on-year growth in January was a tad lower than February at 11.75%. Central GST (CGST) collections were at ₹27,662 crore in February, while State GST (SGST) accounted for ₹34,915 crore. Integrated GST (IGST) inflows stood at ₹75,069 crore

US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez being probed for 'tax the rich' dress at Met Gala 2021



At the Met Gala 2021, US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ruffled quite a few feathers as she marked her debut in a white strapless gown by Brother Vellies, which featured the slogan 'tax the rich' written on the back in red colour. The 31-year-old accessorised this head-turning ensemble with a purse which also read 'tax the rich'. While at the time, her bold look earned her praise from the netizens, AOC has now run into trouble with the US House ethics panel. The congressional watchdog review, which centres on the payments for the dress she rented to attend the charity fashion gala, found "substantial reason to believe that she accepted impermissible gifts" related to Met Gala, BBC reported.

In a report released recently, the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) said that Cortez was provided with the dress, a handbag, shoes, and jewellery for the event, along with hair, makeup, and transportation services. She was also provided with the use of a hotel room for the event. The lawmaker, however, has denied any wrongdoing on her part. "While Rep. Ocasio-Cortez appears to have now paid for the rental value of the attire she wore to the Met Gala and for the goods and services she and her

partner received in connection with this September 2021 event, payment for these goods and services did not occur until after the OCE contacted her in connection with this review," the OCE report said. It added: "If Rep. Ocasio-Cortez accepted impermissible gifts, then she may have violated House rules, standards of conduct, and federal law." The BBC report further stated that the OCE board first recommended in June 2022 that the House review the allegation against the Democratic politician. Not revealing the subject of its inquiry, the House Ethics Committee said that it was investigating her in December. While speaking to investigators, AOC said that she was unaware of unpaid expenses related to her Met Gala look. "I just never, ever, ever would have allowed that to happen knowing what I have learned. But I wasn't privy to the invoices, wasn't privy to the ones that had been sent. And it is just a deeply regrettable situation. I feel terrible for especially the small businesses that were impacted," she was quoted as saying by Fox News. One of Cortez's staffers, who no longer works for the congresswoman, went on to take responsibility for the unpaid dues. "I think the delay there for me was I didn't have access to her personal credit card at that moment," the staff member told the investigators. This isn't the first time that Cortez's 'tax the rich' outfit for Met Gala has invited trouble. While her dress was designed by Aurora James, founder of Brother Vellies, a California-based designer who goes by the name 'The Velvet Bandit' claimed that AOC's outfit is "hella similar to my design". Sharing glimpses of her own work — featuring the slogan on a mask — alongside Cortez's gown, she wrote, "All of my paste-ups are handpainted, and after my Tax the Rich I put up in Sausalito went viral on Tiktok, I began selling stickers and shirts. And lo and behold, this dress bears the same likeness as my handwriting."

Big Soda's alcohol drinks worry health experts

The soda was originally uncolored and lemon-lime flavored, and its inventors used it as a mixer with bourbon. "Mountain dew" is also a nickname for moonshine, which farmers sometimes processed from leftover crops. Labels on early soda bottles promised it was "specially blended in the traditional hillbilly style." It wasn't until after PepsiCo bought the company in 1964 and eventually built a global youth-oriented brand, one marketed by extreme-sports athletes, that the soft drink left its Appalachian roots behind. In a way, Mountain Dew came full circle last year when PepsiCo turned the brand toward a new alcoholic beverage: Hard Mtn Dew. At a One Stop Wines & Spirits frequented by students from Eastern Tennessee State University, the new 24-ounce cans are prominently displayed. Although the brew bears little resemblance to its ancestor, its alcoholic content is "exactly what Mountain Dew is all about," said Charles Gordon Jr., owner of Tri-City Beverage. Hard Mtn Dew reflects a major change in the alcohol industry, which for the past century mainly produced drinks categorized as beer, wine or spirits. In recent years, those lines have blurred, and a fourth category of ready-to-drink beverages has emerged — hard seltzers and other flavored malt beverages, wine coolers and canned cocktails. Although these products differ in primary ingredients and how the alcohol is processed, all are typically flavored and packaged for casual consumption. Chuck Gordon Jr., president and owner of Tri-City Beverage, in Johnson City, Tenn., on Feb. 3, 2023. The new product's boozy content was "exactly what Mountain Dew is all about," said Gordon Jr., president and owner of Tri-City Beverage, which still makes Dr. Enuf soda but which sold Mountain Dew to PepsiCo in 1964. (Mike Belleme/The New York Times)

This isn't the first time a new type of alcoholic beverage exploded in popularity, but some earlier fads were associated with single products like Zima, Smirnoff Ice or Four Loko. "It's only really in the last three to four years that it's become a major category," said Nadine Sarwat, a beverage analyst at Bernstein Research. Sales of hard seltzers and ready-to-drink canned cocktails were valued at nearly \$10 billion in 2021 by the Grand View Research firm, which expects them to grow by double digits in coming years. And in a major shift, PepsiCo and Coca-Cola have debuted alcoholic products in the U.S. market. In February, Monster Beverage, a maker of energy drinks, began rolling out its first line of alcoholic drinks, called the Beast Unleashed. But as alcohol-related deaths in America reach record highs, regulators and public health experts are voicing concern that the new class of drinks and the expanding industry could alter how people buy and drink alcohol. Some also expressed worry that the convenience of the new products could reverse the long-term decline in alcohol consumption by young people. And recent studies show that consuming even one alcoholic drink a day increases a person's risk of cancer and heart disease.

Coca-Cola and Monster Beverage declined repeated requests for comment, and PepsiCo referred questions about products bearing its brands to the independent companies that it had licensed to manufacture and market them. Pamela Trangenstein, a scientist with the alcohol research group at the Public Health Institute in California, recently supervised a study at college football games. She described a sea of empty White Claw hard seltzer cans covering the floor of a student section at one stadium. Cans of Hard Mountain Dew at a One Stop Wines and Spirits store in Johnson City, Tenn., on Feb. 3, 2023. Experts believe the new beverage types may represent an industry effort to boost drinking among young people, a group whose alcohol consumption has been falling for decades. (Mike Belleme/The New York Times) "The carbonation and sugar content can make it taste like you aren't drinking alcohol," she said. A Tantalizing Opportunity: Americans' drinking habits have been shifting over time. The popular practice of avoiding calories and carbs has been driving down beer's market share for years, said Bonnie Herzog, a Goldman Sachs managing director who analyzes the beverage industry. At the same time, alcohol companies are vying to win back people under 30, who are consuming less alcohol than did previous generations at that age. And the coronavirus pandemic supercharged sales of portable products as consumers sought beverages they could drink at home.

"Health and wellness, variety, convenience — that's the appeal," Herzog said. Hard Mtn Dew exemplifies these trends. It is sugar- and caffeine-free, and taps into consumers' connection to a brand they've known for years. Although the new product is 5% alcohol by volume, a 24-ounce can contains the equivalent of two standard drinks. Fans who got an early taste seemed to like it. "I drank Hard Mountain Dew and felt like I was staring at God," an



online reviewer wrote. Major alcohol producers such as Anheuser-Busch InBev and Diageo have invested heavily in this category, but the moment has also presented traditional soda makers with a tantalizing new market, Herzog said. In addition, manufacturers and distributors make a higher profit per case of alcoholic beverages than for non-alcoholic drinks, according to Kevin Asato, a beverage industry consultant. In 2018, Coca-Cola dipped a toe in the market when it introduced Lemon-Dou in Japan, the first hard drink among its brands since the 1980s. In 2020, the company paired with Molson Coors Brewing Co. to make Topo Chico Hard Seltzers, and last year, Coca-Cola entered into agreements to produce Fresca Mixed cocktails, Simply Spiked Lemonade and a canned Jack & Coke. On an earnings call on Feb. 14, James Quincey, CEO of Coca-Cola, cited its "early alcohol experiments" like Jack & Coke, scheduled for sale in California at the end of next month, as a way for the company to be "a total beverage company — everywhere."

A placard that tells the story of Mountain Dew being founded in Johnson City, Tenn., on Feb. 3, 2023. PepsiCo and Coca-Cola enter hard soda markets, causing concerns among regulators and researchers. (Mike Belleme/The New York Times) By licensing its soft drink brands to established alcohol makers for sale through existing distributors, Coca-Cola kept within the lanes of the regulatory firewalls that separate alcohol producers, distributors and retailers. This three-tier system has characterized the U.S. alcohol industry since the repeal of Prohibition and is intended to prevent a single company from vertically integrating and suppressing its competitors. PepsiCo, in contrast, has attached fewer of its brands to new alcoholic drinks — just Hard Mtn Dew and Lipton Hard Iced Tea, so far — but has shown greater willingness to disrupt the status quo.

The company established a wholly owned subsidiary, Blue Cloud Distribution, to keep more control over sales and marketing, and a greater share of the profits. The venture involved hiring more than 250 employees and obtaining individual state licenses to distribute alcohol and a fleet of trucks. To comply with the three-tier system, PepsiCo licensed Mountain Dew's brand to the Boston Beer Co. and provided it with Mountain Dew flavoring. That way, PepsiCo is independent from production and can instead control distribution. Not all states have approved of the arrangement. Last spring, regulators in Kentucky and Georgia denied Blue Cloud distributor licenses, ruling that Blue Cloud had blurred the lines between manufacturer and distributor. Indiana regulators denied Blue Cloud a comparable license last month. Jeff Birnbaum, a spokesperson for Blue Cloud, pointed out that Hard Mtn Dew and Lipton Hard Iced Tea are manufactured and marketed by separate companies, in accordance with the three-tier system. Local beer distributors have also tried to block the new competition. In October, beer wholesalers in Nevada and Virginia filed complaints with regulators asking them to revoke Blue Cloud's licenses. And in December, independent beer distributors appealed to federal regulators, calling on the Treasury Department's alcohol and tobacco tax bureau to investigate whether retailers were giving soft drink companies more favorable treatment of their alcoholic products. Soda companies routinely pay retailers so-called slotting fees for prominent placement of their products, but doing so for alcoholic beverages would violate the three-tier system, the distributors argued. They also provided photographs of what they called "inappropriate placement" of Hard Mtn Dew in stores, shown next to children's juice boxes and toy cars.

Birnbaum, a spokesperson for Blue Cloud, said the company did not dictate to retailers how to display its drinks but urged them to avoid confusing alcoholic and nonalcoholic products and to correct improper placement. He also noted Hard Mtn Dew was priced and packaged in line with other malt-based, ready-to-drink alcoholic beverages and "boldly says on its label that it is for individuals 21 and older."

Why is everyone talking about SVB? Here's all that you need to know

New Delhi, Mar 10: The startup world was thrown into chaos Thursday when a lender little-known outside of Silicon Valley sparked a wave of panic in tech circles that dragged down banking shares around the world.

Events snowballed after Silicon Valley Bank announced a share sale to shore up its finances, following a significant loss on its portfolio. After that, things went rapidly downhill. So what does SVB bank do and why has it sparked panic? Here's everything we know right now — and what could happen next:

What's happening at SVB?

Santa Clara-based SVB's ordeal began after its parent company, SVB Financial Group, announced that it sold \$21 billion of securities from its portfolio and said it was holding a \$2.25 billion share sale to shore up finances. The move was prompted by high deposit outflows at the bank due to a broader downturn in the startup industry, analysts say. SVB also forecast a sharper decline in net interest income.

All of that spooked a number of prominent venture capitalists, including Peter Thiel's Founders Fund, Coatue Management and Union Square Ventures, who, according to sources, instructed portfolio businesses to limit exposure and pull their cash from the bank. Other VC firms have asked portfolio companies to at



least shift some of their cash away from the bank, while a number have indicated they will stand by SVB.

What effect has it had on SVB?

SVB's stock plunged 60% Thursday and its bonds posted record declines. SVB Chief Executive Officer Greg Becker held a conference call with the bank's clients, including venture capital investors, urging them to "stay calm" in a bid to avoid a run on the bank.

How did SVB's woes spread?

SVB's problems coincided with the abrupt shutdown of Silvergate Capital Corp., with the twin shocks sending ripples through the banking industry and pushing stocks lower. The KBW Bank Index — a benchmark of banking stocks — sank

7.7%, the most in nearly three years.

Major US banks including Bank of America Corp., Wells Fargo & Co. and JPMorgan Chase & Co. all slid at least 5%, while shares of Asian banks later followed their Wall Street peers lower.

Who are the SVB's clients?

SVB is deeply embedded in the US startup scene, as the only publicly-traded bank focused on Silicon Valley and tech startups. According to its website, it does business with nearly half of all US venture capital-backed startups, and 44% of US venture-backed tech and health-care companies that went public last year.

It lists Pinterest Inc., Shopify Inc. and cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike Holdings Inc. among the bigger house-

hold names it has served.

What could happen next?

Startups withdrawing funds are on the lookout for other lenders where they can park their cash, while investors in financial firms are closely watching other banks that may also be affected by malaise. It's unclear what will happen when US markets reopen. Pershing Square Holdings Ltd. founder Bill Ackman has proposed a US government bailout to save SVB.

What's the worst-case scenario?

The worst-case scenario for any bank is that it ends up with too little cash to operate or suffers enough losses to erode its capital, prompting regulators to sell the bank to a stronger rival or wind it down. But SVB's stock sale should help to prevent that. Time will tell.

Tata Tech IPO: After 2 decades a Tata group firm will test public markets

Mumbai, Mar 10: Tata Motors subsidiary Tata Technologies is heading for an initial public offering (IPO), almost two decades after IT bellwether Tata Consultancy Services became the last Tata group firm to test Indian public markets in 2004.

Pune-based Tata Technologies' IPO consists of an offer for sale up to 95.71 million shares, representing up to 23.60 per cent of its paid-up share capital.

The offer for sale comprises up to 81.13 million equity shares by Tata Motors, 9.71 million shares by Alpha TC Holdings Pte. Ltd. and up to 4.86 million shares by Tata Capital Growth Fund I, each representing up to 20 per cent, 2.40 per cent and 1.20 per cent, respectively of Tata Technologies paid-up share capital.

Tata Technologies provides global clients engineering services that include product development and digital assistance. Some key sectors which it serves are automobiles, original equipment manufacturers, aero-



space, transport, and construction.

The company's revenue from operations for the nine-month period ended December 31, 2022 and December 31, 2021 was Rs 3011.79 crore and Rs 2607.3 crore. Its employee count (both full time and contracted personnel) grew from 8,620 as of March 31, 2020 to 11,081 in December 31, 2022.

Tata Technologies,

which is headed by Warren Harris, operates in the engineering and product development space.

Its global engineering research and development (ER&D) spend for 2021 was approximately \$1.64 trillion: the expenditure is expected to grow to \$2.28-2.33 trillion by 2025.

The ER&D spend outsourced to third-party service providers was \$85-

\$90 billion in 2021 and is expected to grow at a 10-12 per cent CAGR between 2021 and 2025, according to a Zinnov report cited in the firm's draft red herring prospectus (DRHP).

Key growth drivers in the ER&D market include outsourcing, regulatory interventions for safe products, shrinking product innovation and new product technologies.

How Apple, Foxconn's efforts led to landmark reforms in India's labour laws

New York, Mar 10: Apple and its supplier Foxconn were among the companies that lobbied for a landmark liberalisation of labour laws in the southern Indian state of Karnataka earlier this month, the Financial Times reported, citing three people familiar with the matter.

The legislation led to introduction of laws that now allows 12-hour shifts, as well as night-time work for women, similar to company practices in China, the report said. Apple has been shift-

ing production away from China after the country's strict Covid-related restrictions disrupted the manufacturing of new iPhones and other devices in the country and also to avoid a big hit to its business from tensions between Beijing and Washington. The report comes a week after the Karnataka government said that Apple Inc's iPhones would soon be assembled in the state and that a total of 300 acres have been set aside for a factory.



Bharti-backed OneWeb confirms deploying 40 satellites after SpaceX launch

Chennai, Mar 10: Bharti-backed OneWeb on Friday confirmed successfully deploying 40 satellites put up by a SpaceX rocket that took off from a launch station in Florida.

This launch is OneWeb's 17th to-date and the penultimate mission, setting up the company set to complete its first-generation (Gen 1) low earth orbit (LEO) satellite constellation and enable global coverage in 2023. With 582 satellites now in orbit, OneWeb will complete a global footprint of its Gen 1 constellation with a launch set to take place later this month with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

The latest lift-off took place on Thursday at 2:13pm at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida and OneWeb's satellites separated successfully from the rocket and were dispensed using three separation groups over a period of 40 minutes. Signal acquisition on all 40 satellites has been confirmed. The launch en-



ables OneWeb to continue expanding its connectivity as it grows its fleet of satellites and seeks to initiate services for more partners around the world. OneWeb already has connectivity solutions in key geographies across the globe and is bringing new areas online by partnering with leading providers including VEON, Orange, Galaxy Broadband,

Paratus, Telespazio, and more. OneWeb and its partners are focused on the mission to bridge the digital divide and provide internet connectivity to a greater number of unconnected and under-served rural and remote communities and businesses. "Today's launch is an exciting milestone as we are now just one mission away from completing our

Gen 1 constellation, which will activate global service in 2023. Now more than ever, OneWeb is dedicated to continuing the momentum we have garnered from the past 17 successful launches, to innovate alongside our trusted partners and deliver connectivity solutions at scale," said Neil Masterson, chief executive officer of OneWeb.

Self-regulation useful tool for setting rules for fintechs: RBI's M K Jain

Mumbai, Mar 10: The country's fintech sector should attempt to organise itself under a self-regulatory organisation (SRO) that monitors the conduct of member fintech entities. This approach can help protect consumer interest and improve governance standards in fintech entities, said M K Jain, Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India, on Friday.

"From the fintech sector perspective, self-regulation can be a useful tool for setting and enforcing rules," he said at the International Research Conference on FinTech: Innovation, Inclusion, and Regulation at IIM Ahmedabad.

"The role of an SRO can include setting the standards for conduct as well as acting as a bridge between the sector and the regulators. Regulation is merely a guard rail to keep the sector on the right path," Jain said.

The RBI had, in its digital lending guidelines, mooted the idea of setting up an SRO covering regulated entities and digital lending applications (DLAs)/loan service providers (LSPs) in framing a code of conduct for recovery and a model standardised LSP agreement for balance sheet lenders, among other things. Currently, there are two bodies — Digital Lenders Association of India (DLAI) and Fintech Association for Consumer Empowerment (FACE) — that are eyeing the SRO tag in this segment.

India has the world's third largest fintech ecosystem. So far, RBI has taken a balanced approach on regulating the fintech sector. It has endeavoured to find a



middle ground trying to balance between the innovation brought by fintechs while addressing the unique risk they introduce.

Any approach to regulate the fintech sector will invariably be based on five fundamental objectives — financial stability, consumer protection, financial system integrity, competition, and orderly development, Jain said.

According to Jain, at one end of the spectrum, there is the hands-off approach that advocates allowing the sector to develop freely and develop without any regulatory intervention. While this harnesses innovation, it risks the possibility of failing to protect the financial system and customers from adverse outcomes.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is a status quo approach that aims to maintain the existing framework, without any relaxations to cater for new developments. Under this approach, fintech products and ser-

vices are regulated in the same way as traditional financial products or services. From the perspective of controlling risks, it may appear to be the best approach as it applies tried and tested regulation.

However, the benefits of innovation may be lost.

Jain said, from a regulatory perspective for fintechs, there are risks associated with financial stability, market integrity, and customer protection.

For example, fintechs operating on the lending side have spurred the availability of unsecured loans globally. Such loans are often driven by machine learning models. However, effectiveness of these models for delinquencies has not been fully established, especially during an economic downturn. Any significant failure of these models will not only be limited to new entrants but will also impact regulated entities with exposure to them, he said.

According to Jain, use of

models also brings the question of fair treatment in the extension of credit. It is necessary that highly aggravated fintech business models for decision making take care of the requirement of fairness through additional procedures, controls, and safeguards both in the development and deployment of models and also in the final decision making.

Jain said that fintechs need to be conscious with customer protection and that is where RBI is finding gaps in the Indian operating space. Mis-selling, frauds, or misconduct by fintechs may harm the very consumers they wish to serve. The careful management of this risk is crucial for the sustainable development of the fintech sector.

While regulators are always worried about customer protection, fintechs should even be more aware, vigilant, and proactive in ensuring that the bedrock of their business remains protected, he said.

Govt invites applications for 17 posts at CCI on deputation basis

New Delhi, Mar 10: The government has invited applications for 17 posts, including Additional Director General and Deputy Director General, at the Competition Commission of India (CCI) on a deputation basis.

The CCI, which comes under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), keeps

a tab on anti-competitive practices in the marketplace and also works towards promoting fair trade practices.

Applications have been sought for the posts of Additional Director General, Joint Director General and Deputy Director General, among others, according to a notice.

Applicants must be employees of central or state governments, government companies or autonomous bodies or regulatory authorities or universities or judicial institutions of central/state governments.

The appointment will be made on deputation on a foreign service terms basis ini-

tially for a period of three years, which can be extended for a period not exceeding seven years.

"Applications in the prescribed proforma, together with all necessary documents may be forwarded through proper channel, latest by April 24 2023," the notice dated March 10, said.

India's inflation seen easing slightly in Feb, still above RBI target: Poll

Bengaluru, Mar 10: Retail inflation in India likely eased a bit last month but stayed above the Reserve Bank of India's upper threshold for a second straight month, keeping the central bank on course for further policy tightening, a Reuters poll found.

Rises in food prices, which account for nearly half of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket, likely moderated last month. However, the bulk of the slowdown probably came from easing



international prices and the government's efforts to provide additional supplies of wheat.

Despite those temporary measures, lower crop yields because of warmer-than-usual temperatures last year and this year were likely to keep inflation elevated in the near-term period.

The March 2-9 Reuters poll of 43 economists showed inflation, as measured by the CPI, likely fell to an annual 6.35% in February from 6.52% in January.

Only one economist expected inflation to fall below the 6.00% mark, the upper limit of the RBI's tolerance band. Forecasts ranged from 5.89% to 6.70% for the data, which are due to be released at 1200 GMT on March 13.

"With vegetable prices normalising, inflation has started to harden as the inherent price pressures have barely shown any meaning-

ful signs of moderation. In fact, food inflation ex-pulses and vegetables has now reached a nine-and-a-half-year high," wrote Kunal Kundu, India economist at Societe Generale.

"While we do not expect a sharp rise in inflation over the next few quarters, the pace of easing would be much slower than expected, especially given the likely impact of El Nino weather condition on food prices. We cannot rule out (a) further upside surprise to inflation."

An El Nino weather pattern usually results in below-average rainfall, cutting yields and pushing up food prices. A weaker rupee, which fell around 10% last year and is expected to recover only some of those losses in the coming months, is also adding to upward price pressures.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and en-

ergy components, was also expected to remain sticky.

While data for core inflation is not released by the government, some economists said it likely remained above 6.0% in February.

Minutes from the RBI's latest meeting showed the central bank was concerned about persistently high core inflation, leaving the door open for more policy tightening. "For the RBI, it's a close call at its next meeting - we see the balance of risks between 'hold' and 'hike' as even. If next week's news on inflation in February disappoints, the RBI could easily be swayed into another hike," wrote Alexandra Hermann, lead economist at Oxford Economics.

A separate Reuters poll showed inflation would not reach the RBI's medium-term inflation target of 4% by the end of next year.

India's February fuel demand hit at least 24-year high, shows data

New Delhi, Mar 10: India's fuel demand hit its highest level in at least 24 years in February, data showed on Thursday, with industrial activity in Asia's third biggest economy boosted by cheap Russian oil.

Consumption of fuel, a proxy for oil demand, rose by more than 5% to 4.82 million barrels per day (18.5 million tonnes) in February, its 15th consecutive year-on-year rise, data showed.

Demand was the highest recorded in data compiled by the Indian Oil Ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) going back to 1998.

The strength highlights a combination of profitable

refining from record Russian crude imports in February, total utilization for primary distillation across India and still-robust domestic consumption, said Viktor Katona, lead crude analyst at Kpler.

Katona forecasts demand in March at 5.17 million barrels per day (bpd) and the seasonal monsoon-driven slowdown will lead to it to drop to 5 million bpd in April-May.

Sales of gasoline, or petrol, rose 8.9% year-on-year to 2.8 million tonnes in February, while diesel consumption climbed 7.5% to 6.98 million tonnes.

Sales of jet fuel jumped more than 43% to 0.62 million tonnes, the data showed.

"For 2023, the strongest

Bombay HC relief for GST assessee amid non-existence of tribunal

New Delhi, Mar 10: Taxpayers will get relief from recovery if they file a declaration of their intent to appeal against the order of lower authorities, even as the GST Appellate Tribunal is yet to be constituted, ruled the Bombay High Court.

Once the declaration is put on record, there would be no recovery, the court ordered. In case the assessee fails to file such a declaration within the stipulated time, officers wishing to initiate recovery proceedings must first give him 15 days to do so, the court said.

The court interpreted the content of a circular issued by the state authorities in this regard.

Abhishek Jain, Partner-indirect tax at KPMG India, said, "This order will help

demand growth rate is projected to be in jet fuel, followed by gasoline and then diesel/gas oil," said Alan Gelder, VP Refining, Chemicals and Oil Markets at Wood Mackenzie.

While fuel sales data showed total volumes of both gasoline (motor spirit) and diesel (HSD) fell in February relative to January, they grew strongly on a daily consumption basis as February is a short month, Gelder noted.

Cooking gas, or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), sales slipped by 0.1% to 2.39 million tonnes.

Sales of bitumen, which is used for building roads, jumped 21.5% month-on-month, while fuel oil use declined slightly more than 5% in February, compared with January.

A federal judge on Thursday, in a 17-page ruling, denied the motion by Balwani to remain free until his appeal to a higher court is resolved, the CBS News channel reported.

US District Judge Edward Davila held a nearly two-hour hearing on Balwani's motion in mid-February but delayed ruling until six days before the convict must report to prison.

Balwani, 57, was sentenced in December last year in California to 12 years and 11 months in federal prison for fraud that risked patient health by misrepresenting the accuracy of Therasanos blood analysis technology

Flipkart co-founder Binny Bansal planning to invest \$100-150 mn in PhonePe

New Delhi, Mar 10: Binny Bansal, the co-founder of Flipkart, is considering investing \$100-150 million in the online payment platform PhonePe. The development has come to light as the digital payments company is conducting a financing round, according to a report in The Economic Times (ET). If successful, the investment will be among the largest individual investments in a new-age company.

Quoting a person familiar with the matter, the report said, "The amount that he (Binny Bansal) is investing is yet to be finalised. The talks have been on and are likely to close soon."

PhonePe has already raised about \$450 million in primary capital from General Atlantic, Tiger Global, Ribbit Capital, etc. With a stake of close to 70 per cent in the company, Walmart continues to be the largest investor in PhonePe. PhonePe has a formidable market presence in the Indian digital pay-



ments space. The app leverages the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) like its other peers. According to President and CEO of Walmart, Judith McKenna, the platform registers around four billion transactions monthly. The report added, PhonePe's total payment volume (TPV) reached \$950 billion.

PhonePe competes with Google Pay, Paytm, Amazon Pay, and WhatsApp Pay, among others. In a statement released in December, 2022, PhonePe claimed to have a 50.2 per cent market share in the UPI payment space in India.

Bansal played a key role in Flipkart acquiring ownership of PhonePe in 2016. He continues to be on the board of PhonePe and maintains close associations with the company's co-founders, Sameer Nigam and Rahul Chari, the report said.

The deal is significant given the fact that the technology space is facing a capital crunch.

China's Parliament endorses Xi's leadership for rare 3rd five-year term

Beijing, Mar 10: China's Parliament on Friday unanimously endorsed an unprecedented third five-year term for President Xi Jinping.

Xi, 69, was re-elected by the once-in-a-five-year Congress of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) as its leader in October last year, becoming the first Chinese leader after the party founder Mao Zedong to continue in power beyond the two five-year terms.

China's legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC) often described as the rubber stamp Parliament, for its mechanical and routine endorsement of the decisions of the CPC on Friday voted on the expected lines ratifying Xi's third term.

Xi is widely expected to continue in power for life.

He has already been elected as the General Secretary of the CPC during its last October Congress, which also elected a new leadership for all its top



policy bodies.

This year's annual session of the NPC is regarded significant as it heralds a once-in-a-ten-year change of leadership of the Chinese government, including the Premier who presides over the State Council, the central Cabinet.

The term of the present Premier Li Keqiang will end with this year's NPC session. His successor, widely expected to be Li Qiang, who is a close associate of Xi, is likely to be elected by the NPC on Saturday.

All the names of the new leadership have been approved by the Plenum of the CPC headed by Xi a few weeks ago.

The NPC approval is a routine formality.

The new Premier will address the annual press conference on Mar 13, the last day of this year's annual NPC session.

Ex-Theranos executive Balwani loses bid to stay prison-free during appeal

New York, Mar 10: Ram esh Sunny Balwani, the Indian-origin former chief operating officer of a US-based failed blood-testing start-up, Theranos, has lost his bid to remain free while he appeals his conviction on fraud charges that prosecutors said risked patient health and defrauded the firm's investors of millions of dollars, according to a media report.

A federal judge on Thursday, in a 17-page ruling, denied the motion by Balwani to remain free until his appeal to a higher court is resolved, the CBS News channel reported.

US District Judge Edward Davila held a nearly two-hour hearing on Balwani's motion in mid-February but delayed ruling until six days before the convict must report to prison.

Balwani, 57, was sentenced in December last year in California to 12 years and 11 months in federal prison for fraud that risked patient health by misrepresenting the accuracy of Therasanos blood analysis technology

and that defrauded the blood-testing company's investors of millions of dollars.

In addition to the 155-month prison term, District Judge Davila sentenced Balwani to three years of supervision following his release from jail. Balwani was ordered to surrender on March 15, 2023, to begin serving his prison sentence.

In the order issued late Thursday, District Judge Davila wrote that although Balwani "is not likely to flee or pose" a danger to the community, the most important requirement for staying free while the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals looks at the case was not met, the report said.

The convict did not show that there was a "substantial" error in the trial that would "likely result in a reversal or new trial, the report added. Balwani was employed from September 2009 through July 2016 at the Palo Alto-based blood-testing company founded in 2003 by his former girlfriend, Elizabeth Holmes, who was once touted as Silicon Valley's rising star.

Balwani and Holmes, who was the firm's chairperson and CEO, claimed Theranos developed a revolutionary blood analyser that could run any blood test run by conventional labs using only a minor blood sample drawn via a fingerstick rather than the traditional draw from a vein, US Attorney Stephanie Hinds said in a statement at the time of the trial.

The duo asserted that the Theranos proprietary analyser produced results that were cheaper, more reliable and less variable than the existing methods and

obtained results faster than ever possible before.

However, proof from last year's trial demonstrated that Balwani and Holmes knew that the analyser performed only a few basic tests and was slower than existing devices. According to the statement, The duo repeatedly used conventional machines to obtain the blood test results that the Theranos analyser was supposed to perform. They led investors and the public to believe that Theranos was conducting all its tests using only its analyser.

SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
 Follow us on @SCRRailwaysIndia
 Details of the Tender Notices of S.C. Railway can be seen on our website : www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

T. Notice No. DRM/Works/ BZA/06/2023 dt.09.03.2023

For and on behalf of the President of India, the undersigned invites E-Tenders for the following works up to 15-00 hours and the date mentioned against each.

S.No.: 1 Tender No.: E-09-East-BZA-2023 Name of work: Standardization of height gauges at LC between Shimavaram and Moloru stations & 2Nos between bulb and bulb & D cabin at Vijayawada. **Tender value (₹):** 1,78,82,717/- **E.M.D (₹):** 2,39,300/- **Period of completion :** 6 (Six) months **Date of closing:** 31-03-2023

S.No.: 2 Tender No.: E-10-East-BZA-2023 Name of work: Vijayawada: Proposed construction of RPF Barracks of 60 beds.(RVNL funds). **Tender value (₹):** 77,92,146/- **E.M.D (₹):** 1,55,900/- **Period of completion :** 9 (Nine) months **Date of closing:** 22-03-2023

S.No.: 3 Tender No.: E-11-East-BZA-2023 Name of work: Vijayawada Division: Carrying out ancillary works in connection with rail/weld/SE/J Switch testing by Ultra flaw detection equipment in Vijayawada Division for two years. **Tender value (₹):** 4,77,22,297/- **E.M.D (₹):** 3,88,600/- **Period of completion :** 24 (Twenty four) months **Date of closing:** 22-03-2023

S.No.: 4 Tender No.: E-12-East-BZA-2023 Name of work: Vijayawada: Repairs to gutters at LL Bay, HL Bay, ML Bay at ELS/BZA in SSE/Works/BZA section. **Tender value (₹):** 35,54,663/- **E.M.D (₹):** 71,100/- **Period of completion :** 6 (Six) months **Date of closing:** 22-03-2023

S.No.: 5 Tender No.: E-04-Central-BZA-2023 Name of work: SW-I) BZA division: TRR(P)-1.67km on UP line from Km 341.28-342.95 in SSE/P.Way/BPP section in ADEN/BPP sub-division of DEN/Central/BZA jurisdiction. SW-II) BZA division: TRR(P)-1.71km on UP line from Km 343-344.71 in SSE/P.Way/BPP section in ADEN/BPP sub-division of DEN/Central/BZA jurisdiction. SW-III) BZA division: TRR(P)-1.363 km on Major Bridges - 8UP, 25UP, 95UP,57UP,147DN in ADEN/EE sub-division of DEN/Central/BZA jurisdiction. **Tender value (₹):** 57,19,562/- **E.M.D (₹):** 1,14,400/- **Period of completion :** 6 (Six) months **Date of closing:** 28-03-2023

S.No.: 6 Tender No.: E-04-Central-BZA-2023 Name of work: Rehabilitation of weak formation for a length of 6.622 km (TFR with blanketing material in continuous stretch by diversion of traffic in tripling/doubling section (complete/in progress) GDR-BZA (DN)=6.622Kms at various locations in ADEN/OGL Sub division in Sr.DEN/South/BZA Jurisdiction. **Tender value (₹):** 7,86,86,286/- **E.M.D (₹):** 5,43,400/- **Period of completion :** 12 (Twelve) months **Date of closing:** 31-03-2023

S.No.: 7 Tender No.: E-05-South-BZA-2023 Name of work: SW-I : TRR(P)-1.600 Kms at various locations of bridges and yard lines in Sr.DEN/South/BZA Jurisdiction. SW-II : TRR(P)-1.921 Kms in SSE/P.Way/OGL section in Sr.DEN/South/BZA Jurisdiction. SW-III : TFR : 3.063km (All Fittings) in DN line in SSE/P.Way/NLR Section in ADEN/NLR Sub - division. SW-IV : Renewal of Glued joint 75 Nos. in SSE/P.Way/KVZ and SSE/P.Way/BTR of ADEN/OGL & ADEN/NLR Sub-Division. SW-V : Strengthening of bridge approaches at SSE/P.Way/NLR/BTR sections in Sr.DEN/South/BZA Jurisdiction. **Tender value (₹):** 1,15,27,958/- **E.M.D (₹):** 2,07,600/- **Period of completion :** 6 (Six) months **Date of closing:** 31-03-2023

S.No.: 8 Tender No.: E-06-South-BZA-2023 Name of work: Rehabilitation of weak formation for a length of 6.866 km (TFR with blanketing material in continuous stretch by diversion of traffic in tripling/doubling section (complete/in progress) GDR-BZA (DN)=6.866Kms at various locations in ADEN/OGL Sub division in Sr.DEN/South/BZA Jurisdiction. **Tender value (₹):** 9,76,94,767/- **E.M.D (₹):** 6,38,500/- **Period of completion :** 12 (Twelve) months **Date of closing:** 31-03-2023

S.No.: 9 Tender No.: E-07-South-BZA-2023 Name of work: BZA - GDR section - OGL Sub-division: Supply of potable (Soft) Drinking Water to station and colonies at OGL station in SSE/W/OGL Section for Period of 24 months in Sr.DEN/South/BZA Jurisdiction **Tender value (₹):** 1,87,16,750/- **E.M.D (₹):** 2,43,600/- **Period of completion :** 24 (Twenty four) months **Date of closing:** 31-03-2023

1) The prospective tenderers are advised to visit website "www.ireps.gov.in" before the date of tender closing to note any changes/corrigenda for any tender.

Divisional Railway Manager (Works), Vijayawada

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER (through https://ireps.gov.in)

CAO (Construction), S.C.Railway, Secunderabad invites e-tender on behalf of the President of India for the following work:

S.No.: 1 NIT No.: 03-CAO-C-SC-2023 Date: 03/03/2023 Name of work: SCR Construction organization-Conducting Preliminary Engineering Cum Traffic Survey (PETS) for New Railway Line on Route Vishakhapatnam-Vijayawada-Shamshabad and Vishakhapatnam-Vijayawada-Kurnool Town for Combined Length of 942 Km (speed potential upto 220 kmph) **Estimated Cost (₹):** 2,70,73,080.00 **EMD (₹):** 2,85,400.00 **Completion Period :** 06(Six)Months **Date of Opening:** 27/03/2023 15:00hrs.

1) For bid document and other details, please login to website <https://ireps.gov.in>.

2) Tenderers can submit their offers online during tender submission period which is the Fifteen days period prior to closing of tender.

3) Tenderers should watch for any corrigenda (issued online only) up to the date of commencement of the tender submission period.

Chief Administrative Officer/ A0340 Const./Secunderabad

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at <https://www.ireps.gov.in> or www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

IndoStar Home Finance Private Limited

Regd. Office: - Unit No. 305, 3rd Floor, Wing 2/E, Corporate Avenue, Andheri- Ghatkoper Link Road, Chakala, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400093
 CIN : U65990MH2016PTC271587 Tel: +91 22 45107701
 Email: contact@indostarhf.com Website: www.indostarhf.com

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given in terms of paragraph 93 of the Master Direction- Non-Banking Financial Company - Housing Finance Company (Reserve Bank) Directions, 2021, that the branch office of the Company located at **D-NO-19-1-39, 1st Floor, IDREES Complex, OPP CSI SCHOOL, GUN BAZAR, ELURU-534005, GST No.-37AAEC10095E1ZQ** will be closed with effect from close of business hours of 11th June 2023 as operations are being shifted to a nearby branch office located at **D.No. 20D-15-4, 1st Floor, R.R Peta, Near Venkataramana Theater, Eluru, Eluru Mandal, Eluru-district, Andhra Pradesh - 534002 GST No.-37AAEC10095E1ZQ**. In case any assistance is required, you may contact the nearest branch office as mentioned above or send an email to contact@indostarhf.com. This notice may be accessed on the Company's website (www.indostarhf.com).

For IndoStar Home Finance Private Limited
 Sd/-
Nidhi Sadani
 Company Secretary

Date : 10-03-2023