

Rahul Gandhi convicted, sentenced for defamation

SURAT/NEW DELHI, MAR 23

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was on Thursday sentenced to two years in jail by a Surat court in a 2019 criminal defamation case over his "Modi surname" remark, in a setback to the Lok Sabha MP who faces the risk of disqualification.

The court of Chief Judicial Magistrate HH Varma, which held 52-year-old Gandhi guilty under Indian Penal Code(IPC) sections 499 and 500, also granted him bail and suspended the sentence for 30 days to allow him to appeal in a higher court. Gandhi can escape immediate disqualification as a member of parliament if the appellate court suspends the conviction as well as the two-year jail term.

As the conviction ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections set off a political slugfest



and posed another challenge to Gandhi with a bearing on his political future, the Congress said he will file an appeal.

Gandhi could have limited his speech to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Nirav Modi, Vijay Mallya, Mehul Choksi, and Anil Ambani, but he "intentionally" made a statement that hurt individuals carrying the Modi surname, and thereby committed

criminal defamation, the court said in its 168-page order. Gandhi was present in the court when the verdict was pronounced.

Senior Congress leaders went into a huddle at its chief Mallikarjun Kharge's residence in Delhi in the evening to discuss the future strategy and the political fallout for the party in the wake of the verdict. Sources said a petition to challenge the order is being prepared and will be filed in a District and Sessions court.

Gandhi took to Twitter to give his initial reaction by quoting Mahatma Gandhi in a tweet in Hindi about truth and non-violence.

"My religion is based on truth and non-violence. Truth is my God, non-violence the means to get it. -- Mahatma Gandhi." In another tweet, he paid tributes to freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru on their martyrdom day, saying they have learnt fight-

ing fearlessly for the country holding on to truth and courage from these brave sons of Mother India.

A host of Congress leaders including Kharge and general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra attacked the BJP and its government at the Centre.

The BJP on its part asserted that the law has to take its course if Rahul Gandhi abuses people and slammed the Congress over its criticism of his conviction, asking whether the opposition party wants "complete freedom" for him to "abuse" others.

In its order, the court noted that the seriousness of the accused's crime increased because a speech delivered by a member of parliament has a "very wide impact on the public." "And if the accused is given less punishment, then it sends a wrong message to the public and the purpose of defamation is not fulfilled and anybody will easily slander someone." PTI

Congress plans 'extra-judicial' pressure against Rahul conviction

SURAT/NEW DELHI, MAR 23

Apparently to build up "extra-judicial" pressure against Rahul Gandhi's conviction in a defamation case, the Congress on Thursday decided to take to the streets against the conviction and meet the President of India with other parties.

The main opposition party announced a mass agitation immediately after the conviction of Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case and said it will not just fight the case legally but also politically.

In the wake of the verdict, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge convened a meeting of senior party leaders and MPs at his residence where after an hour of deliberations they decided to stage a protest at Vijay Chowk on Friday.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the party will hold a meeting with other opposition leaders in the morning and would stage a protest march from Parliament House to Vijay Chowk.

The opposition parties have also sought time from President Droupadi Murmu in the Friday afternoon to raise the matter with her.

Ramesh said the meeting at Kharge's residence lasted around two hours and it was decided that the Party chief would hold a meeting with all Pradesh Congress chiefs and Congress Legislature Party leaders in the evening and plan agitations in states.

"We will hold protests across Delhi and in other states on Monday on this issue," Ramesh said. The matter is just not a legal issue, but also a serious political issue linked with the future of democracy in the country, he said. PTI

High Commission attack echoes in British Parliament

BY ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, MARCH 23

The vandalism by pro-Khalistan extremists at the Indian High Commission here was on Thursday raised in the House of Commons, with British MPs demanding action against "Khalistani hooligans" and the safety of India's diplomatic staff.

While Conservative Party MP Bob Blackman called for a debate in Parliament to discuss steps to ban groups behind the violence, Opposition Labour

Party MP Gareth Thomas asked the Leader of the House of Commons about the steps being taken to ensure there is "no repeat of such behaviour".

The Cabinet minister addressing the Business of the House, Penny Mordaunt, responded by reiterating Foreign Secretary James Cleverly earlier statement announcing a review of the protection measures around the Indian mission here.

"We strongly condemn the vandalism and violent acts that took place outside the Indian High Commission in London.

It was a completely unacceptable action against the High Commission and its staff," Mordaunt told MPs.

"There is ongoing work with the Metropolitan Police to review the protection measures around the High Commission, and any changes will be made to ensure the safety and security of its staff so that they can go about their business, serving both this country and India," she said.

Blackman pointed out that the attack on Sunday was the sixth time in as many years that the Indian High Commission

has been attacked in a similar way.

"The hooliganism of Khalistani hooligans outside the Indian high commission on Sunday is a disgrace to this country," he said.

"Khalistani militants are operating across the world; Canada, the US and Australia saw similar attacks over the weekend. We are harbouring Khalistani terrorists in this country right now. Can we have a debate in government time on what action we can take to ensure that these terrorists are held to account and banned in this country," he said. PTI

Sad, Navjot Kaur Sidhu diagnosed with cancer

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 23

Dr Navjot Kaur Sidhu, wife of the jailed cricketer turned politician Navjot Singh Sidhu has been diagnosed with stage two cancer for which she has undergone a surgery.

Dr Kaur broke the news on twitter with an emotional note for her jailed husband. Sidhu is in jail after being sentenced to one year imprisonment by the Supreme Court of India in a 1988 road rage case that left one person dead.

He is expected to complete his term next month.

In an emotional message on twitter, Dr Kaur said, while referring to Sidhu, "he is in prison for a crime he has not

committed. Forgive all those involved. Waiting for you each day outside probably suffering more than you. As usual trying to take your pain away, asked for sharing it. Happened to see a small growth, and knew it was bad".

Telling Sidhu that she wanted to wait for him, but could not as it was turning too bad, she wrote, "waited for you, seeing you were denied justice again and again. Truth is so powerful but it takes your tests time and again. KALYUG. Sorry can't wait for you because it's stage 2 invasive cancer. Going under the knife today. No one is to be blamed because it's GOD'S plan: PERFECT".

Wishes started to pour in from across the political spectrum after news of Dr



Navjot Kaur's illness went public.

Former Media Adviser to Parkash Singh Badal, Harcharan Bains wrote on Facebook, "I am shocked to hear about Dr Navjot Kaur Sidhu's ailment and pray from the core of my heart for her speedy recovery back to full health. She is a spirited soul, and political differences apart. Deserves my affection and respect".

All social media platforms were full of prayers for speedy recovery of Dr Navjot Kaur Sidhu. It is probably the most trying and testing time for the family, with husband in jail and wife going treatment for a life threatening disease.

Sidhus have two kids, one son and a daughter.

PUNJAB

Amritpal may have cross border links

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 23

Punjab Police on Thursday flagged a cross-border link and involvement of radical preacher Amritpal Singh in "anti-national" activities as it sounded an alert about the fugitive Khalistan preacher in all the states.

A part of a CCTV footage surfaced on Thursday showing Amritpal wearing a shirt and trousers while holding an umbrella in Haryana's Shahabad to hide from police.

In another development, Haryana Police nabbed a woman for allegedly harbouring Amritpal Singh and his associate Papalpreet Singh at her home in the state's Kurukshetra district.

Punjab Police had earlier arrested a man who was allegedly part of the private security setup of pro-Khalistan preacher Amritpal Singh.

Tejinder Singh Gill, a resident of



Mangewal village in the Khanna area of Ludhiana district, was deputed to the security of Amritpal Singh, said Khanna Deputy Superintendent of Police (Payal) Harsimrat Singh.

Addressing the media here, Punjab Inspector General of Police (Headquarters)

Sukhchain Singh Gill said that in their questioning of Tejinder Singh Gill, police got some sensitive material from him which indicate that they were involved in "anti-national" activities. There is a strong suspicion that Amritpal had a cross-border link too, said the IG.

"At some places, there were videos which show that they were doing firing practice near Jallapur Khera in a firing range. Some footage and pictures show that they have made holograms of Anandpur Khalsa Fauj (AKF). There were some videos of loading and unloading weapons," Gill said.

Gill said that they have circulated photos of Amritpal with police forces across the country. He said some associates close to Amritpal were part of the AKF, which indicates that, though very preliminary, he was trying to build some type of armed force.

Amritpal Singh, a Khalistan sympathizer, has been on the run since March 18, when Punjab Police launched a massive crackdown against him and several of his associates for engaging in violence. "As far as prime accused Amritpal Singh goes, his route is being tracked regularly by the state police," Gill said.

At one place near a gurdwara in Ludhiana, they took a bike and tried to find a boat to cross the river. When they did not find one, they crossed a bridge near Ladhawal and even went near the Ladhawal railway station, he said.

Asked if the Uttarakhand Police have been alerted about Amritpal, Gill said, "As soon as we came to know he has gone out of Punjab, we immediately alerted other states too."

Asked how he managed to flee Punjab, Gill said he has changed his appearance, disguised himself behind shades and used different modes of travel. The IG said so far 207 persons have been detained in the matter, out of whom, 30 are hardcore criminals. The remaining 177 will be released after verification, he said. There are clear instructions that no innocent will be booked in this matter. Action will be taken only against those who were involved in criminal activities, he said. **PTI**

Hussainiwala memorial to get complete facelift

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
FEROZEPUR, MARCH 23

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday announced that the Hussainiwala memorial will be given a complete facelift to perpetuate the legacy of Shaheed Bhagat Singh.

The Chief Minister said that this place is sacred for every countryman as the mortal remains of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Shaheed Rajguru and Shaheed Sukhdev after their martyrdom were cremated unceremoniously by the Britishers here. He said that this place has been inspiring the youth of the country for selfless service towards the nation.

Mann said that the state government is preparing a blueprint for the comprehensive development of this place so as to facilitate thousands of people coming daily to offer their tributes to the martyrs. He said the state government will soon construct a tent city at Hussainiwala for ensuring comfortable stay to people during their visit. Mann said that a complete facelift of the Hussainiwala museum is also in the pipeline and state government will soon finalise it.

The Chief Minister said the Mohali airport has been named as Shaheed Bhagat Singh International Airport and soon a statue of the legendary martyr will be installed. The Chief Minister also announced that Ferozepur will be developed into a major tourist hub as the border town has a lot of potential which has remained untapped.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister also laid the foundation stone of War Memorial to be constructed by BSF at the Joint Check post. He envisioned that this war memorial to be constructed at



TRIBUTES PAID

Khatkar Kalan, March 23: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann here on Thursday paid rich tributes to 'Shaheed-e-Azam' Bhagat Singh who was hanged by the British on this day along with Sukhdev and Rajguru in 1931 in what was known as the Lahore conspiracy case. Mann said that the state government is doing all it can to fulfil the dreams of the freedom fighters and the day is not far when Punjab will emerge as a front-runner state across the country.

The Chief Minister floral tributes to Bhagat Singh here in his native village saying that the day must remind us of the freedom fighter, who sacri-

ficed his life at a young age for the emancipation of the country. He also announced the construction of a heritage street in Bhagat Singh's native village to showcase the glorious contribution of Punjab in the country's freedom struggle.

VARSITY WILL NOT BE MERGED

The Chief Minister announced that the existing Technical University in Ferozepur will not be merged in any other university. He said that it will enable the youth of border district to become active partners in socio-economic growth of the country by getting quality technical education.

a cost of Rs 12 lakh will aptly showcase the glorious tradition of the BSF to safeguard the borders of the country.

Mann also dedicated the souvenir shop at Hussainiwala opened by the district administration.

Curbs on mobile Internet services only in Tarn Taran, Ferozepur

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 23

The Punjab government Thursday extended the suspension of mobile internet and SMS services in Tarn Taran and Ferozepur districts till Friday noon while lifting the curbs in Moga, Sangrur, Ajnala sub-division in Amritsar and a few areas in Mohali.

Mobile internet services in the rest of Punjab resumed on March 21.

According to an order issued on Thursday by the state home affairs department and justice, the curbs on mobile internet services have been extended in Tarn Taran and Ferozepur districts "in the interest of public safety, to prevent any incitement to violence and to prevent any disturbance of peace and public order".

"It is directed that all mobile internet services, all SMS services (excluding banking and mobile recharge) and all dongle services provided on mobile networks,

except the voice calls, in the territorial jurisdiction of Punjab shall continue to remain suspended from March 23 (1200 hours) to March 24 (1200 hours) only in the districts Tarn Taran and Ferozepur in continuation of this office order number 1821 dated March 21," it said.

Broadband services were not suspended so that banking facilities, hospital services and other essential services are not disrupted, said the order.

The Punjab authorities last week suspended Internet and SMS services in the state following the police crackdown against elements of 'Waris Punjab De,' headed by radical preacher Amritpal Singh. The elusive preacher, however, gave the police a slip and escaped their dragnet when his cavalcade was intercepted in the Jalandhar district.

With the Khalistan sympathizer continuing to remain untraceable, police have said that efforts were on to nab the fugitive. **PTI**

6 youths win Shaheed Bhagat Singh Yuva Awards

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
HUSSAINIWALA, MARCH 23

In a landmark initiative aimed at encouraging the youth for selfless service of society, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday bestowed Shaheed Bhagat Singh youth award upon six youths.

The recipients of the awards are Navjot Kaur from Barnala, Manoj Kumar from Mansa, Beant Kaur from Bathinda, Omkar Mohan Singh from Rupnagar, Gurjot Singh Kaler from Mohali, and

Sukhdeep Kaur from Bathinda.

Congratulating these winners, Mann expressed hope that these youths will further play a constructive role in the well-being of the society. He also said that these youth awards have been named after Shaheed Bhagat Singh the great hero who had always inspired youth for selfless service of the nation.

Mann further said that his government has decided to resume Shaheed Bhagat Singh Yuva after 7 years and will now be given every year to youths for their outstanding contribution in several fields.

PUNJAB

AAP 'hatao', Punjab 'bachao': Bajwa

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 23

Senior Congress leader and Punjab's leader of the opposition (LoP) Partap Singh Bajwa on Thursday said the party would soon initiate a campaign in the state with the slogan "AAP Hatao Punjab Bachao".

Bajwa said already a large number of banners and posters have come up in Delhi saying "Kejriwal Hatao Delhi Bachao".

The slogans were also saying "Kejriwal the dictator".

"This is a clear indication that there is a large section of people in Delhi who do not want Kejriwal to continue as the chief minister. All his claims of making a good healthcare system and education system in the national capital over the years have been continuously proving to be contradictory and hollow. Mere propaganda on the basis of advertisements of crores of rupees for self and party's promotion cannot fool the people of Delhi as well as of Punjab," said Bajwa.

"One has to show one's work on the ground and not only in manageable and friendly media," he added.

Kejriwal's two senior most cabinet ministers were already cooling their heels off in the Tihar jail for their alleged involvement in corruption. The CBI and ED had already slapped cases against the two former ministers, Bajwa said, adding that Bhagwant Mann too was closely following the footsteps of his political mentor and master.

"Even a child in Punjab knows that the law-and-order situation has gone from bad to worse. Dreaded gangsters are giving interviews from jails and making ominous threats to movie stars to eliminate them," added Bajwa.

"Even Punjab and Haryana High Court's observations on the law and order situation in the state were worth noticing when it categorically said that not being able to catch hold of 'Waris Punjab De' chief Amritpal Singh was a huge intelligence failure of the state government," Bajwa remarked.

2016 Nabha Jailbreak Case

22 sentenced to varying jail terms

PATIALA, MARCH 23

A Punjab court on Thursday sentenced the 22 convicts in the 2016 Nabha jail break case to terms ranging from 3 years to 20 years in prison. On Tuesday, Patiala Additional Sessions Judge HS Grewal had held them guilty in the jailbreak case. Of the 22, the court has sent 18 to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment.

Two have been sent to 20 years prison term, which includes 10 years under the NDPS Act, which will not run concurrent with the sentencing in the jailbreak case. One of the convicts has been awarded five years in jail and one has been given three years in prison. The convicts included over a dozen gangsters and two terrorists.

A total of 14 gangsters, many of them dressed as policemen, had attacked the jail on November 27, 2016.



File photo

Firing shots indiscriminately, they executed their plan within minutes as the jail officials failed to retaliate. The police filed a chargesheet against 34 accused in the case.

There is no clue about the whereabouts of Khalistan ideologue Kashmir Singh Galwandi, who was among those who

had escaped during the jailbreak. Kashmir Singh, who hails from Galwandi village in Khanna, was one of the four accused in the attack on Harvinder Soni, the general secretary of the Punjab unit of Shiv Sena. He was arrested in April 2015 along with three others and booked for attempt to murder. PTI

Ex-minister's nephew, friend found hanging

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 23

The nephew of former Union Minister Hansraj Ahir and one more person were found hanging in Chandigarh after the two went there from their native Chandrapur in Maharashtra more than a week ago.

Ahir, a former Bharatiya Janata Party Lok Sabha MP from here, is currently chairperson of the National Commission for Backward Classes.

Mahesh Harishchandra Ahir and his friend Harish Dhote, both in their mid-20s, had gone to Chandigarh eight days ago, after which kin could not contact them, an aide of the former Union minister said.

"Family members then filed a missing person complaint at Chandrapur police station on March 15 and Superintendent of Police Ravindrasinh Pardeshi had sent a team to Chandigarh.

On Wednesday evening, Ahir and Dhote were found hanging from trees in Chandigarh," he said.

Relatives of the two deceased have left for Chandigarh to get the bodies back, he added. PTI

Dhaliwal reviews new agriculture policy

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 23

Punjab Agriculture Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal held a high-level review meeting regarding the new agricultural policy of the state at Punjab Bhawan here on Thursday. He discussed all aspects of the new agriculture policy with the team of top officials and experts of the agriculture sector. Eminent agronomist Dr Gurdev Singh Khush and Dr BS Gill also attended the meeting. Dr Khush is an expert in developing rice varieties and Dr Gill has extensive experience in

SUGGESTIONS SOUGHT

Dhaliwal appealed to the people to send their suggestions regarding the new agricultural policy by March 31. He said that any Punjab resident can send their suggestions on WhatsApp number 75080-18998 or phone number 0172-2969340 or email farmer-comm@punjabmail.gov.in. Suggestions can also be sent by letter to the address of Punjab State Farmers Commission, Airport Road, Mohali.

developing wheat varieties and both scientists are renowned globally.

Speaking to reporters, Dhaliwal said that the state government is working diligently on the new agriculture policy to make agriculture profitable. He said that after independence, no government has focused on the welfare of farmers, especially on making agriculture a profitable occupation.

He said that today on the martyrdom day of Bhagat Singh and his companions, they took an oath that no stone will be left unturned to build the Punjab of Bhagat Singh's dreams. He reiterated his commitment to make the state

'Rangla Punjab'.

The Agriculture Minister said that such a system will be created in the state that the youngsters won't migrate to foreign countries. He said that the Punjab government stands with the farmers and it is their responsibility to come up with good, solid and meaningful policies for the agriculture of the state. Dhaliwal hoped that the people of Punjab could get a new agricultural policy by the end of June this year. He said that the new agricultural policy is being prepared keeping in mind the geographical situation of Punjab, soil health, availability of crops and water

Don't repeat tragic blunders of '80s: Badal to govt

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
FARIDKOT, MARCH 23

Five-time Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal today expressed "grave concern and anxiety" over the sequence of recent events in the state and called for an end to the on-going wave or repression against innocents and maximum vigil to preserve the hard-earned atmosphere of peace and communal harmony in the state.

"This is a critical hour and it calls for an exercise of optimum restraint, sagacity and far-sightedness by those in power," he said in a message to Punjabis and the rest of the countrymen.



Badal expressed "anguish" over the prevailing situation and said that this is an outcome directly of an inept handling of a sensitive situation by the present government.

"Their style of governance has posed

BADAL EXPRESSED "ANGUISH" OVER THE PREVAILING SITUATION AND SAID THAT THIS IS AN OUTCOME DIRECTLY OF AN INEPT HANDLING OF A SENSITIVE SITUATION BY THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

a serious challenge to peace, law and order and social harmony in the state. For 15 years, three successive governments led by me not only ensured peace and harmony among Punjabis of all faiths and shades of opinion but also put the

state firmly on a fast-track development mode, visible everywhere even today. But things began to degenerate the moment we left," he said.

Badal, however, said that his party will cooperate with everyone regardless of political differences to bring back peace, harmony and progress to the state. "Peace is beyond and above political divisions. All of us must work together as Punjabis and to salvage our state," he said.

Badal said that discharging constitutional obligations by a government is an extremely serious matter requiring a serious and responsible approach.

Commenting on the recent "police and paramilitary action" of the present gov-

ernment, Badal said that they failed in their primary declared objective and then tried to cover this failure up with massive propaganda and by unleashing a reign of repression against innocent youth who faced no charges prior to this.

Badal said that no innocents should be put to any hardship and those picked up in haste without credible grounds must be released forthwith. "The Sikhs are the guarantors of not only the freedom but also the security of our motherland. The government and the media are doing a grave injustice by painting a brave and patriotic community as separatists. This is a repeat of the Congress ways in the 1980s and '90s. It must stop," he said.

Kashmir on path of development, peace

Activist informs UNHRC with facts, figures

GENEVA, MARCH 23

In what can be seen as dawn of new realization and aspiration of Kashmiri youth for peace and stability, a socio-political activist from the Kashmir Valley has informed the UN about intense development, peace and prevalence of grass-root democracy in India's Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Tasleema Akhtar made these remarks during her intervention during the 52nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. "As Jammu and Kashmir gear up for elections under a new administrative setup, the foundation for development has been laid by its municipal bodies which emerged as propellers of growth and infrastructure".

She added, "Electricity and roads have finally penetrated even the last of the remaining villages in J-K's remote areas. Development works worth USD 700 million are under progress now and Jammu and Kashmir have received



investment applications of an equal amount as well".

Akhtar told the UNHRC that for Kashmiri women too, accessible schemes have made it possible to pursue their educational and professional pursuits without being affected by the patriarchal structures.

This was in tandem with a substantial decline in local recruitments in militant ranks in the valley, which fell by almost 40 per cent compared to the situation in 2021.

Tasleema also threw light on most

important segment- the current security situation in the valley, and substantiated her point at UNHRC with facts and figures. "Police and military casualties reached an all-time low. Civilian casualties, though very unfortunate, were less as well. There were just 24 law and order incidents in 2022 and there were no incidents of stone pelting in the valley. Compared to this, over 400 incidents took place in 2018", she said.

"As the situation looked promising due to selfless efforts by the people and local administration, a new wave of violence was unleashed on the Kashmiris through cross-border infiltration. A series of targeted attacks (with hand grenades, IEDs and machine guns) on migrant labour has disturbed the peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

In the last two years, nine members of the minority Pandit community were shot dead in broad daylight. Overall, fourteen members of the minority community were killed in 2022", she said. (Agencies)

Oppn must unite, give formidable fight to BJP in 2024: Mehbooba

SRINAGAR, MARCH 23

DP chief Mehbooba Mufti has said all opposition parties will have to unite to give a formidable fight to the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections but expressed doubts about such an alliance coming into existence.

In an interview with PTI here, the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said a grand opposition alliance needs to have Congress as its nucleus but the BJP is dividing the opposition camp to ensure that it does not happen. She also questioned the silence of Samajwadi Party leader Akhikesh Yadav and Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati.

"Unless and until opposition parties don't come together, I don't think there is going to be a formidable opposition to the BJP. (But), are they in a position to come together with this ED, NIA and other agencies at their throat? Look at Akhikesh Yadav, Mayawati. They are not saying anything. Why are they silent?" she said.

Mehbooba said the BJP government, which came with such a huge mandate,

could have done wonders, but, "unfortunately, it seems, as (Delhi chief minister) (Arvind) Kejriwal said, they don't have any vision for the country".

"The only thing is it seems to be they are ruling this country like a 'mafia'. If you can't get things done in your own way, then use all crooked ways," she added.

The PDP president said with agencies after various politicians, "I have my own doubts if the opposition parties can come together". "Look at Mamata Banerjee, KCR and Kejriwal on one way. They (BJP) don't want Congress to lead the opposition as Congress is the main nucleus. They want fragments," she said.

In response to a question on the state of minorities, Mehbooba said while the Muslims are allegedly the first target of the BJP-led government, it goes after everyone who opposes them.

"It is not about Muslims anymore. If you look at it, the people who are put in jail this time, they are not Muslims. Sisodia is not Muslim, you have Sharad Pawar's people put behind bars, Sanjay Raut was in jail. Now they are going after Rahul Gandhi. PTI

DPAP launches membership drive

JAMMU, MARCH 23

The Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) on Wednesday launched a membership drive with the aim to expand its political outreach across Jammu and Kashmir.

The drive was launched by founder Ghulam Nabi Azad in presence of hundreds of party workers and senior leaders here. "The aim of launching this mega membership drive is to carry on our political agenda and make people understand about being part of DPAP's political journey," Azad, former chief minister of the erstwhile state, said while

addressing the workers.

He launched his own party in September last year after ending his more than five-decade-long association with the Congress. "Even though we have many regional political parties in Jammu and Kashmir, forming DPAP was the need of time since no other political party could meet the expectations of people.

"When I was visiting Jammu and Kashmir, I could see the frustration of people who were feeling dejected by the political class. They were feeling unheard and helpless. So, I decided to create a political platform in the form of DPAP for these people," Azad said. PTI

KPs resolve to celebrate next Navreh in Kashmir

JAMMU, MARCH 23

Kashmiri Pandits took a solemn pledge at the banks of Suriya Putri Tawi to celebrate the next Navreh in Kashmir. The function was also attended by former Deputy chief minister and senior BJP leader Kavinder Gupta

The Former Deputy CM participated in the 'Sankalp Diwas' organised by Mata Bhadrakali Asthappan Trust at Thalwal Mandal Jammu. He was accompanied by former MLC and BJP spokesperson, Girdhari Lal Raina (Ajay Bharti), Dileep Pandita president MBAT, Rajeev Pandita and scores of prominent people from the Kashmiri Pandit community.

The Sanakalp Diwas is the part of three-day Navreh Mahotsava being celebrated by the Kashmiri Pandit community



throughout the globe.

The programme at Thalwal on the banks of Tawi was a collective oath taking ceremony. A large number of members and devotees of Mata Bhaderkali

along with a huge number of youngsters participated and reaffirmed their resolve to work for peace, tranquility and rehabilitation of the displaced community back in Kashmir Valley.

Kavinder Gupta led the procession from the shrine site to Banks of River Tawi and Badri Ghat and in his brief address appreciated the efforts of the community to preserve the civilizational and traditional ethos of Kashmir. He was particularly happy over the participation of youngsters. He also reassured the community of the continued support in their fight for Justice.

Kavinder Gupta also participated in the Samoohik Aarti. Chairman and general secretary of Mata Bhadrakali Trust Dileep Pandita and Ashok Kaw and prominent members Chand Ji Kaw, Vijay Kumar Bhat were also present.

Jammu finally gets 'Smart Traffic' management

600 cameras installed, trial begins

JAMMU, MARCH 23

Total 600 cameras will be installed as a part of the intelligent traffic management and surveillance system to monitor vehicular traffic and its violations here in Jammu and Kashmir.

ITMSS was made operational in the winter capital during its first phase to conduct efficiency trials. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on March 13

inaugurated Integrated Command & Control Centre (ICCC) as a nerve centre of civic operations and traffic management.

"Six hundred cameras are being installed, mostly PTZ cameras and traffic management cameras for monitoring and managing vehicular traffic and recording traffic violations", Jammu Smart city CEO Rahul Yadav told PTI. He said so far cameras have been installed at 37 junctions.

"The trials have begun. We are receiving feed of traffic flow from 33 junctions. They are operational. On 12 junctions, analytics are fully functioning, under

which we can detect any traffic violations", Yadav said.

Initiated in November 2022, the project will have a chain of 600 cameras mostly pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) cameras watching traffic movement in the city.

The smart system will detect automatic vehicle number plate identification, red light violations, stolen vehicle identification and use of mobile phones while driving among other things, the officials said.

ITMSS, which has been made operational in Jammu partially, is a step that would help authorities better manage the

vehicular flow and catch violators, they said. According to officials, this intelligent traffic management system project is being implemented by a "master systems integrator" firm along with artificial intelligence software providers like Vehant Technologies that provide solutions to make roads safer.

The ITMSS automatically encrypts and transfers data of violation centralised server at the traffic police headquarters, they said. The CEO said, "The phase is under trial and tests are being carried out for any improvements that are needed."

Based on the information data received from these cameras, an adaptive traffic-control system alters traffic signal cycles in real-time to respond to changing traffic conditions.

Once fully operational, the adaptive traffic control system (ATCS) is expected to cut down waiting time at traffic signals by almost half, they said.

They added that the new system, which would automatically detect violators like those jumping a red light and also generate an e-challan, is being implemented under the smart city project. PTI

REGION

Woman who harboured Amritpal in Haryana nabbed: Police

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 23

Haryana Police have arrested a woman who allegedly harboured Amritpal Singh and his associate Papalpreet Singh at her home in Kurukshetra district, an indication that the pro-Khalistan preacher might have fled Punjab.

In another development, Punjab police arrested a man who was allegedly part of the private security setup of pro-Khalistan preacher Amritpal Singh. Tejinder Singh Gill, a resident of Mangewal village in the Khanna area of Ludhiana district, was deputed in the security of Amritpal Singh. Haryana Police said the woman has been nabbed from Shahabad area.

"We have nabbed the woman, Baljit Kaur, who harboured Amritpal and his associate Papalpreet Singh at her home in Shahabad on Sunday. The woman has been handed over to Punjab Police," Kurukshetra Superintendent of Police Surinder Singh Bhoria told PTI over phone. Last month, Amritpal Singh and his supporters, some of them brandishing swords and guns, broke through barricades and barged into the Ajnala Police Station on the outskirts of the Amritsar city, and clashed with police for the release of one of the radical preacher's aides. **PTI**

Water cess on hydro power project doesn't violate any law: Sukhu

SHIMLA, MARCH 23

Water cess levied by the Himachal Pradesh government on hydro power generation projects does not violate any law, state chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said on Thursday.

The remark came amid opposition from neighbouring states, Punjab and Haryana, which said the cess imposed under the HP Water Cess on Hydro Power Generation Act, 2023 is in violation of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.

"No provision of HP Water Cess on Hydro Power Generation Act 2023 violates any Act and objections of neighbouring states are not logical as water cess has already been imposed by Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir governments," the Himachal chief minister said in the state assembly.

Sukhu clarified that the Act implemented by the Himachal Pradesh gov-

SUKHU CLARIFIED THAT THE ACT IMPLEMENTED BY THE HIMACHAL PRADESH GOVERNMENT NEITHER VIOLATES ANY KIND OF INTER-STATE TREATIES NOR THE PROVISIONS OF THE INDUS WATER TREATY.

ernment neither violates any kind of inter-state treaties nor the provisions of the Indus Water Treaty.

He said that the levy does not affect the release of water to the neighbouring states.

Asserting that water cess is logical and under the jurisdiction of the state as about 45,000 hectares land of the state was submerged in the reservoirs of three projects of Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) in Himachal and the state has been facing

the adverse environmental impact for decades, Sukhu said.

"Be it local climate change, adverse changes in agriculture and horticulture, health problems, social and economic changes, reservoirs of these projects have badly affected human life," he added.

These reservoirs have swallowed agricultural and horticultural land, obstructed the means of transport, submerged water sources, religious places and cremation grounds, but the rehabilitation of those displaced 50-60 years ago has not been completed, he said.

He said that the management of BBMB is not controlled by Punjab and Haryana alone and the burden of water cess on the projects of BBMB will be distributed equally among five states including Himachal Pradesh, Sukhu said, adding that the cess is levied on water used by established hydropower projects and not on water flowing across neighbouring state borders. **PTI**

STF to nab drug mafia soon: Himachal CM

SHIMLA, MARCH 23

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Thursday said necessary amendments would be made in the law to take stringent action against drug peddlers with a provision to confiscate their property.

According to a statement issued here, a special task force (STF) would be formed to break the supply chain and take stern action against the drug mafia. An advisory Board under the prevention of illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances act would also be constituted to check the menace.

The chief minister chaired a meeting with senior officers of the Police, Home and Law Departments here late on Wednesday night and stressed the need for initiating strict measures to curb the drug menace in the hill state.

Sukhu said a modern de-addiction centre and rehabilitation centre would be set up which will be equipped with the latest facilities and skilled supportive staff to bring those addicted to such substances back into the mainstream.

He said drugs were weakening the youth and the need of the hour was to nab the culprits at the earliest and book them under the law. **PTI**

Election promises to be fulfilled in 4 years: HP CM

SHIMLA, MARCH 23

The Congress government in Himachal Pradesh will fulfil all its election promises within four years in a phased manner and bring the economy back on track, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu told the Assembly on Thursday.

Replying to a question by the BJP's Vinod Kumar and Prakash Rana regarding the ruling party's promise to give 300 units of free electricity, Sukhu said the "guarantees" were given after deep thought and all of them would be implemented in four years.

He said the facility of 125 units of free electricity given by the previous BJP government is continuing and Rs 1,044 crore has been spent on the scheme till date, of which Rs 300 crore has been given by the Congress government in the past 100 days.

Sukhu said the provision of providing 60 units of free electricity was made by the Virbhadra Singh government which was increased to 125 units by

the previous Jai Ram Thakur government and challenged the opposition to bring a privilege motion if he was wrong.

Intervening in the reply, Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur said people were eagerly waiting for 300 units of free electricity.

Replying to another question by the Congress' Sudhir Sharma and Chetanya Sharma and the BJP's Vipin Singh Parmar and Pawan Kajal, the chief minister said the expansion of the Kangra (Gaggal) airport would cost Rs 10,000 crore and Rs 2,000 crore would be spent on land acquisition.

Expansion of the Kangra airport is important for national security and tourism point of view, and work on a techno-feasibility report is on, he said.

Sukhu said his government has got its social impact assessment report done and a public hearing on it would be held on April 10 and 11. A policy will be brought for rehabilitation of affected people, he added. **PTI**

SC tells Centre to play more 'pro-active role' to resolve dispute

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The Supreme Court on Thursday told the Centre that being the main arbiter in water dispute between two states, it is required to play a more "pro-active role instead of being a mute spectator" and asked the Punjab and Haryana governments to hold discussions to resolve the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal dispute.

During the hearing, the Punjab government told the top court that they have huge scarcity of water with water tables going down in the rivers and there is "no point building canals like a Taj Mahal",

with no water flowing through it.

The Haryana government, on the other hand, told the apex court that its people need water which comes from Punjab, which has to abide by the decree for construction of a canal in its jurisdictional area.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Aravind Kumar said, "We expect the endeavours of the States to sit together to still find a solution is the way forward and we call upon the States to hold meetings, not frequently at the highest political dispensation level so that at least there is some progress in the discussions. We

expect the Union of India also to play a proactive role in the endeavour to bridge the gap." During the hearing, Justice Amanullah told Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, "Mr Attorney, in matters of water dispute between two or more states, the Centre is the main arbiter. Why cannot the Centre play a more pro-active role to resolve the issue, instead of being a mute spectator?"

Venkataramani said the Centre has made all sincere endeavours as directed by the court and both Punjab and Haryana governments held meetings but there was no consensus between both of them with regard to construction of the canal. **PTI**

Web designer arrested for filing fake rape complaint

GURUGRAM, MARCH 23

A 22-year-old woman was arrested Thursday for allegedly falsely accusing two men of gang-raping her and extorting from them Rs 2 lakh for withdrawing her complaint, police said. The woman works as a web designer with a Noida-based private media

Management Company.

She had earlier lodged a similar complaint at Aman Vihar Police Station in Rohini in Delhi, police said, adding she was produced in a city court Thursday and was sent to judicial custody.

"She further demanded from them Rs 4 lakh more. A police team led by Inspector Amit Kumar, SHO of Sector

53 Police Station, arrested her during the investigation of the case," Virender Vij, DCP, east, said. According to police, when the woman was produced in the court for recording her statement under section 164 of CrPC, she retracted her statement. "Later we got the information that she had also filed a similar rape complaint in Delhi earlier. **PTI**

OPINION

The Express India NEWS

‘Your freedom ends, where my nose begins’

As with everything else, Rahul Gandhi's conviction and sentencing in a defamation case has created a vertical divide between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party on one side and the Congress and other opposition parties on the other side. The verdict and sentencing brings into focus how much public figures can take liberty with freedom of speech and reputation of their political opponents. Rahul has been convicted and sentenced after a Gujarat MLA filed a defamation case against him for saying during a speech in Karnataka in 2019, “how come all thieves have the common surname Modi?” The reference was obviously to Prime Minister Narendra Modi by equating him with fugitive businessmen Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi. The case against Rahul was filed by a BJP MLA from Gujarat, Purnesh Modi.

Rahul and other opposition leaders may again cry persecution. An unapologetic Rahul quoted Mahatma Gandhi, saying, “my religion is based on truth and non-violence. Truth is my God, non-violence the means to get it”. His sister Priyanka Gandhi said, “scared rulers are pulling out all stops to suppress the voice of Rahul. My brother has never been afraid, nor will he ever be. He will continue to speak the truth. Will continue to raise the voice of the people of the country. The power of truth and the love of crores of countrymen are with him”.

Moral grandstanding aside, how fair is it to suggest that the country's Prime Minister is a thief, as Rahul's remarks clearly meant. May be the Prime Minister did not take offence but another political leader, an MLA, with a “Modi” surname took offence and rightly so. Why make such generalized and sweeping statements without any proof or evidence? The Surat court's verdict is most appropriate and most welcome. In India it has become fashionable to tarnish the image of political opponents without any evidence or proof. Easiest thing in public discourse is to level all sorts of allegations against public figures.

It is not only the politicians and public figures, even the ordinary people are also subjected to such slanderous campaigns for multiple reasons. Since most of them do not have any resources, they do not pursue the matter in the courts. Eventually the culprits get away with it. Today's judgement against Rahul Gandhi should serve as a lesson and also a deterrent against taking liberties with people's, particularly political opponents', reputations. Reputation and image tarnished once, can never be retrieved. No amount of punishment to the culprit can redeem the lost reputation and a tarnished image.

There, for sure will be people to defend the indefensible. They may even cry victimhood and vendetta. But the matter of the fact is that someone has been found guilty of an offence and sentenced for the same. Although it is quite uncommon in India, libel and defamation suits are quite common in the West where victims get huge compensations. No reason that it should not be done in India also.

Freedom of speech is not an absolute right, as the classic saying goes, “your freedom ends, where my nose begins”.

Can interest rate increase curb inflation?



BY
KBS SIDHU

Increasing interest rates by the US FED or the RBI is not a magic bullet to rein in inflation. It's an important tool but has its own limitations — other factors need to be carefully considered.

March 22, 2023 the US Federal Reserve System (FED), raised the interest rates from 4.75% to 5.0%. Although the hike is lower than the expectation of the markets, the interest rate still remains the highest since the year 2008. The accompanying chart demonstrates the successive decisions made by the FED to increase interest rates, in its bid to curb inflation, not witnessed since before the global meltdown in the year 2008.

What is inflation?

Inflation is a sustained increase in the general price level of goods and services in an economy over time. It is a major macroeconomic challenge faced by governments worldwide. Both the Federal Reserve System (FED) in the United States and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have the responsibility of regulating the monetary policies of their respective countries to control inflation, maintain price stability and achieve economic growth. One of the conventional methods to check inflation is increasing bank rates by the central banks. However, there are certain limitations and unintended consequences of using this method.

Limitations and unintended consequences of Increasing Bank Rates:

Increasing bank rates is an effective way to reduce the amount of money circulating in the economy. When central banks raise interest rates, borrowing becomes more expensive, which reduces consumer spending and business investment. This reduction in spending and investment leads to a decrease in demand for goods and services, which in turn decreases the prices of these goods and services, and eventually reduces inflation. This is the underlying theoretical logic. However, there are limitations to the effectiveness of this method.

First, it takes time for the increased rates to have an impact on the economy. It may take several months or even years for the inflation rate to decrease.

Second, increasing bank rates can lead to a decrease in economic growth. When businesses and consumers have less access to credit, or more costly credit, they are less likely to invest and spend money, which can lead to a slowdown in economic activity.

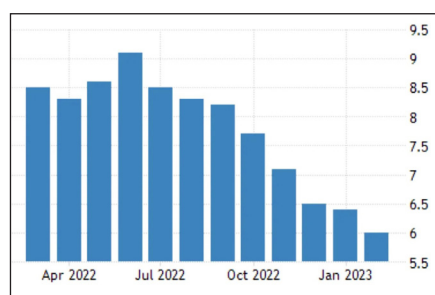
Finally, increasing bank rates can lead to an increase in the value of the currency, which can negatively impact the export sector and increase the trade deficit.

Other Factors that Impact Inflation:

Apart from the monetary policy of central banks, there are several other factors that can also impact inflation. One of the significant factors is the government's fiscal deficit. When the government spends more money than it earns, it has to borrow money from the central bank or from the open market,



Headquarters of the US FED in Washington DC



US Inflation for the past one year: Courtesy Tradingeconomics.com

which increases the money supply in the economy and leads to inflation. This is in addition to the adverse effect of the borrowing by the theoretically more efficient private sector being “crowded out”.

The supply-side constraints can also lead to inflation. When there is a shortage of goods and services, their prices increase due to high demand, leading to inflation. Logistical issues such as those illustrated by the Ukraine War can add another dimension this.

The printing of notes by central banks — often fancily described as monetizing the deficit — can also contribute to inflation by simply increasing the money supply in the economy.

In the United States, the government's fiscal deficit has been a significant factor contributing to inflation. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in government spending, which has resulted in a higher fiscal deficit. The US

The Express India NEWS

Federal Budget deficit is projected to total \$1.4 trillion in 2023, and averages \$2.0 trillion per year from 2024 to 2033, which is 5.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) for the year 2022, although its down from 14.9% in the year 2020 and 12.4% in the year 2021, the two years that were severely impacted by the global pandemic. This increased spending has contributed to the rise in the inflation rate, which is currently estimated to be around 6.0%, down from a recent high of 9.1% in June, 2022. It still, however, remains unacceptably high for the US Treasury as well as the FED.

In India, supply-side constraints have been a significant factor contributing to inflation. The country has been facing a shortage of goods, particularly in the agriculture sector due to supply chain disruptions caused inter alia by the COVID-

19 pandemic and also loss of crops on account of unseasonal rains or deficient monsoons, if not unexpected droughts. This shortage has led to an increase in the prices of essential commodities, contributing to inflation. The prices have not crawled back even after the end of the pandemic, and global prices of food grains are often blamed for this phenomenon.

Additional Measures to Fight Inflation:

Apart from increasing bank rates, there are several other measures that can be taken to fight inflation. One of the measures is to reduce government spending and increase taxes to reduce the fiscal deficit. Where the economy is already teetering on the brink of a recession, increasing taxes may not be a viable alternative. Another available measure is to increase the supply of goods and services to reduce the prices of essential commodities, such as oil products, by foregoing some portion of the government taxes. This will, however, increase the government borrowing and the fiscal deficit.

The government can invest in infrastructure, which can increase the supply of goods and services in the economy, leading to lower prices. This, however, is an inherently slow process and takes time to reflect in the macroeconomic indicators. The central bank can also use other monetary policy tools, such as open market operations and reserve requirements, to control the money supply in the economy. These measures can have a more direct impact on inflation than increasing bank rates.

In the United States, the Federal Reserve has already taken measures to fight inflation by increasing interest rates and tapering its bond-buying program. The Fed has also signaled that it will continue to monitor the economic data and adjust its policies accordingly. The US government is also taking steps to reduce the fiscal deficit by proposing tax increases and reducing spending. In India, the government has taken measures to increase the supply of essential commodities by investing in agriculture and infrastructure. The Reserve Bank of India has also increased interest rates in its bid to control inflation.

In summary, inflation is a macroeconomic challenge faced by governments worldwide. Increasing bank rates is one of the conventional methods used by central banks to control inflation. However, there are limitations and unintended consequences of using this method. Other factors that impact inflation include the government's fiscal deficit, supply-side constraints, and the printing of notes by central banks. To fight inflation, governments can take additional measures such as reducing spending and increasing taxes, increasing the supply of goods and services, and using other monetary policy tools. Both the United States and India are taking steps to fight inflation, and it remains to be seen how effective these measures will be in controlling inflation in the long run. It is crucial for policymakers to carefully monitor economic data and adjust their policies accordingly to achieve price stability and sustainable economic growth and work harmoniously with their respective central banks.

The author superannuated as Special Chief Secretary, Punjab in July, 2021, after nearly 37 years of service in the IAS. He can be reached on kbs.sidhu@gmail.com

STATE OF AGRICULTURE

World, India and Punjab Agriculture Part-II

Who gets the most subsidies?

This is the second in a series of research based articles written by internationally acclaimed Agricultural Scientist, Dr Rachpal Singh Bajwa, analysing the state of agriculture in Punjab and suggesting remedial measures and putting in national and global perspective.



BY RACHHPAL SINGH BAJWA

Who Subsidizes? Everyone does. Who does it most?

The United States has borne the brunt of criticism for its liberal agricultural subsidies worth billions. However, South Korea, Japan, China, Indonesia and the European Union all provide producer support above the global average of 12%, whereas the US, Russia, Mexico and Canada have provided less than 12%. The smaller countries like Norway (57.6%), Iceland (54.6%) and Switzerland (47.4%) are the ones with the most liberal agriculture subsidies. The US does not even make the top 10 countries on this measure. In terms of total spending, China, the EU and USA are the top three. China spends almost 4 times as much as the US and more than the EU, US and Japan combined.

According to OECD report on Total Support of 2019: China doled 186 Billion, EU 101 Billion, USA 49.9 Billion and Japan gave 37.6 Billion in agricultural subsidies. The case of New Zealand is unique with virtually no subsidies since the mid 1980's and it also runs the world's most profitable food - production - systems.

Exactly how and to whom subsidies are dispensed differs widely by the country and so do the goals of subsidized agricultural programs. Agriculture is most subsidized as a % share of GDP (2019)- Philippines 3.1%, Indonesia 2.90%, China 1.60%, India 0.60%, EU-28 0.60%, and US 0.5%. In Argentina (-2.6%) and in Vietnam (-1.20%) these programs are small to non-existent, resulting in negative net support for agriculture.

The Agricultural policy monitoring and evaluation report of OECD (2022)

counted 54 countries (All OECD member countries & European Union members) plus 12 emerging economies provide \$ 708 Billion / year support for agricultural producers, countered by 89 Billion of implicit taxation of farmers, resulting in a net support of \$619 billion for Producers payments, consumer support, infrastructure and institutional support for Research & Development.

Indian farmers receive 7.80% of gross farm receipts as an input subsidy on irrigation water, power and chemicals and another 2% as Market Price Support. If we only take into account the positive support (7.8%+2.0%=9.8%), India is subsidizing agriculture by over US \$ 11 billion. However, this positive support is offset in OECD data by imposition of a series of complex domestic regulations and trade policies to the tune of US \$ 77 billion, resulting in a negative -14.8% hit to the farmers in the terms of farm receipts, amounting to a loss of Rs 43 lakh crore to farmers during the last 25 years. Therefore Argentina and India, were named by OECD as countries where government policy resulted in a taxation of farmers, lowering their incomes by suppressing prices opposite the world market.

The global agricultural subsidies are harming the natural resources of the planet. FAO, UNDP and UNEP are arguing for a mass restructuring / repurposing of farm subsidies so that this monetary support helps create a food - system that restores ecosystems - systems producing fewer emissions, less pollution, improves livelihoods of farmers and increases sound global nutrition for global populations.

India's Agriculture

India is the second most populous country and seventh largest country in the world with an area of 3,288 square meters (FAO). It has top fertile lands located in its eastern Gangetic delta and southern Deccan plateau.

● India is the world's largest producer of milk, pulses and jute, and ranks as the second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruits and cotton. It is also one of the leading producers of spices, fish, poultry, live-stock and plantation crops.



Food production (Million Metric Tons) Table-2

Identity	World	India	Punjab
All Grains	2,750	316	31
Nutri-cereals	31	12	320 metric ton
Coarse-Cereals	1,459	50	-
Corn / Maize	1,151	33	2500 mt ton
Pulses	89	27	36,500 mt ton
Oilseeds	632	37	0.26
Sugarcane	1,950	410	8
Fruits	910	103	1.75
Vegetables	1,115	200	5.57
Milk	545(cow)	210	13.0
Meat (All Kind)	345	8.8	0.30
Eggs	1,176 Billion	122 Billion	6.60 Billion

Table-3

Type Farmer	Numbers in Lakh	% ages of Total	Average Hectares	Total Lakh Hect	% age of Total
Marginal	2.04	18.3%	0.6 H	1.26 LH	3%
Small	1.83	16.70%	1.38 H	2.52LH	6%
Semi-Med	3.25	30.16%	2.70 H	8.75 LH	21%
Medium	3.11	28.24%	5.83 H	18.13 LH	43%
Large	0.70	6.60%	16.20	11.34 LH	27%
5.	10.93 LH	100%	—	42.0 LH	100%

● During 2021-2, India exported \$ 49.6 billion of agricultural products. Rice, Sugar, Spices and Buffalo meat are the largest exported products and contributed 19%, 9%, 8%, and 7%, respectively to the agriculture exports. The following Table-1 explains the sector wise contribution in GVA and employment.

India has the highest ~ 50% of its workforce employed in agriculture sector, followed by China ~24% and US ~10.5%. The Total GDP or GVA of India from all sectors for the year 2021 was ~ Rs 180 lakh crore. The total workforce of India employed in all sectors was 47.7 crore. The above Table illustrates the sector wise contribution towards GDP or GVA in Indian Rupees and the share of employment of the workforce in

Agriculture, Industry and Service Sector.

India's agricultural sector India's agricultural sector's contribution of 20% GDP is much higher than the world's average of 6.4%, but the dependence of ~50% of the Indian workforce on agriculture, makes farmers live a life of subsistence and poverty. The contribution by industry is 26% and contribution by the service sector is 54% which is lower than the world's average of 30% for industry and 63% for the service sector, respectively. Majority of Indian states fit into the national scenarios of less income for farmers and living a life of subsistence and poverty.

The table 2 compares the food production of the world with that of India and Punjab.

The Punjab Agriculture

The state lies in a fertile alluvial plain with many rivers and an extensive canal system with a total geographical area of 50.36 lakh hectares or 1.20 crore acres or 1.60% area of India. The area under forest cover is 2.93 lakh hectares. The state has 23 Districts, 82 Tehsils, 147 Blocks, 12,550 villages and panchayats, 2.80 crore population, 1.73 crore (63%) Rural and 1.07 crore (37%) Urban. Total workforce is ~ 91 lakh and agriculture employs ~35.5 lakh of it. There are 10.93 farming households, owning ~42 lakh hectares of cultivable cropland owned by 5 types of farmers depending upon their land holdings as shown in The Following Table-3:

The agriculture sector has a net cultivable cropland area of ~42 lakh hectares or ~1.08 acres or 84% of the total area of the state. The net area sown in 2013 -2014 was 41.45 lakh hectares and 37.03 lakh hectares were sown more than once hence increasing the total cropped area to 78.48 lakh hectares with the cropping intensity of ~189% ((Highest is 232% in Netherlands). The net irrigated area is 40.19 lakh hectares, 73% by tube-wells, 23% by canals and 4% by other means including rain. The gross irrigated area comes to 74.42 lakh hectares (96%) by taking into account the cropping intensity of 189%. Two main groups of crops grown are :

“Kharif Crops “ -maize, cotton, rice, sugarcane, pulses, (except gram), bajra, jowar, and summer vegetables. “Rabi Crops “ - Barley, gram, wheat, fodder crops, oilseeds, potatoes, and winter vegetables. Punjab also grows many kinds of fruits and kinnow is the major fruit grown in excess. The total area under vegetables and fruits is ~4.50 lakh hectares, however the total production is small as to its domestic consumption.

If there are 5.3% members per farm household (Refer table above) then 35% marginal and small farmers with just 9% of land resources support 20.35 lakh family members, whereas 30% semi-medium farmers with 21% of land resources support 17.22 lakh family members and 35% of medium and large farmers with 70% land resources support 20.01 family members. The 20.35 lakh family members of marginal and small farmers have just 9% land resources whereas 37.23 lakh family members of semi-medium, medium and large farmers have 91% of land resources.

(Dr Bajwa is ex-founder member, Board of Management & Technical Advisor, GADVASU, Ludhiana. Now a TV talk contributor, on JUS TV, New York and California on Agriculture and Environment, presently resides in Chicago (USA)

GVA and employment: Table-1

Sector	GVA(India Rs) lakh Crore	GVA %	Labor in crore	Labor %
Agriculture	36.4	20%	19.5	41%
Industry	46.4	26%	12.5	26%
Service	97.2	54%	15.7	33%
All SECTORS	180 lakh crore	100%	47.7	100%

SPECIAL

Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance

Eyes and ears to achieve strategic and tactical decision advantage



BY MAJ GEN
HARVIJAY SINGH
(RETD, SM)

Late in Aug 2020, a provocative military movement by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was blocked by Indian Army troops who moved in quickly to occupy dominating heights on the South Bank of Pangong Tso. This was a consequence of effective Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance inputs indicating that PLA was attempting to move in to occupy the same area.

Surveillance and Reconnaissance methods range from Visual Observation, Electronic means, Satellites, Airborne platforms, Ship borne platforms and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (including swarms of Nano Drones).

To be able to monitor its belligerent neighbours, India must keep its eyes and ears open and attentive; state of the art ISR capability is an inescapable necessity. Some essentials integrated processes that need to be developed/strengthened/enforced by India are:

- ISR Training and Education incl Strategic Thinking and Freedom from Information Overload for Senior Leadership.

- Refining of Tactical Procedures based on enhanced Situational Awareness at Tactical Levels.

- Doctrine, procedures, and formats to enhance interoperability, security and reliability in sharing of information.

- Integrated, secure and scalable networks for sharing of data and applications. Simply stated, ISR today is a Network enabled capability and India like all advanced militaries will have to make the transition from a platform-centric to a more integrated network-centric force structure.

ISR capability complements weapon

- India has 15107 Km of land border and a coastline of 7517 Km. India also has a total of 197 islands accounting for 2094 Km of additional coastline. 50% of these land borders are hostile (LOC and IB with Pakistan - 3323 Kms, LAC and IB with China - 3488 Kms). These borders comprise a vast variety of terrain encompassing deserts, plains, riverine deltas, hills, mountains, high altitude, and glaciated regions. Many of the borders are very porous due to the terrain and ethnic affinities of population on both sides of the borders.

- Unlike most other modern armies, Indian

very desperate and successful attempts in the recent past to counter India's natural hegemony in the region. India must build a fool proof ISR capability to monitor and dominate the Indian Ocean Region.

- Asia has the biggest density of missiles and nuclear powers compared to other continents. To add fuel to fire, these nations share land borders and have adversarial relationship. India and Pakistan are the only nuclear armed nations in eyeball-to-eyeball contact that have an armed face off nearly every day; tactical uncertainty reigns supreme

- ISR makes the Sensor to Shooter response sharper. (Sensor to Shooter response is the time it takes from when an enemy target is detected by a sensor to when it is attacked). This involves quick target discovery, identification, profiling, and accurate location tagging thereby increasing flexibility, agility, and cooperative engagement in the battlefield.

- Enhanced Situational Awareness, a consequence of ISR ensures freedom of activity at the tactical level wherein units and subunits can operate autonomously, seek opportunities, and reinforce success.

- ISR provides sharp and actionable intelligence and counter-intelligence complimenting anti-terrorist operations and minimising collateral damage.

- India's Northern Borders consist of exceedingly difficult high altitude and harsh weather areas. Patrolling and defence of these areas is a serious challenge. Aerial and electronic surveillance of the LOC and LAC can reduce troop involvement and still ensure security.

- Enhanced ISR capabilities will improve the Indian Navy's blue water capability and Maritime Domain Awareness to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

In the final count, ISR capabilities in the modern era help build analytically-driven military plans. The Indian Armed Forces must employ all available ISR means in an integrated manner to retain an edge over potential adversaries.



systems in being effective at the right time and right place on the right target. When credible information about a mission is available, the operational task is performed more efficiently; e.g the air strike on the terrorist camp in Balakote by the Indian Airforce. To be operationally effective, ISR must be persistent, accurate, flexible, and stealthy.

The ISR needs of India also increase due to its unique geostrategic challenges and opportunities.

Armed Forces are more likely to launch their battles from the security of their own soil. This enables the establishment and maintenance of a well-coordinated ISR Network riding on secure and easily scalable high-capacity data communication networks with plug and play services.

- Strategically, India is placed at a very dominating position in the Indian Ocean, it will not be wrong to say that the Indian Ocean lies in the backyard of the Indian Peninsula. However, China has made some

along the very volatile LOC.

The enormity of its geostrategic challenges will require India to be always organised and prepared to meet challenges of uncertainty, and, what better than a modern state of the art ISR to overcome this uncertainty since:

- ISR strengthens the OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide and Act) loop of a commander helping him to make decisions in the face of uncertainty. This applies to all Ops of War and terrains.

Glaciers retreat to reduce Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra flow

UNITED NATIONS

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that major Himalayan rivers like the Indus, the Ganges and Brahmaputra, all hugely important for India, could see reductions in their flows as glaciers and ice sheets recede over the coming decades due to global warming.

"Glaciers are critical to all life on earth. Over centuries, they carved out the landmasses we call home. Today, they cover 10 per cent of our world. Glaciers are also the world's water towers," Guterres said in his remarks to an event on the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation Wednesday.

Guterres voiced concern that human activity is driving the planet's temperature to dangerous new levels and "melting glaciers are the canary in the coalmine".

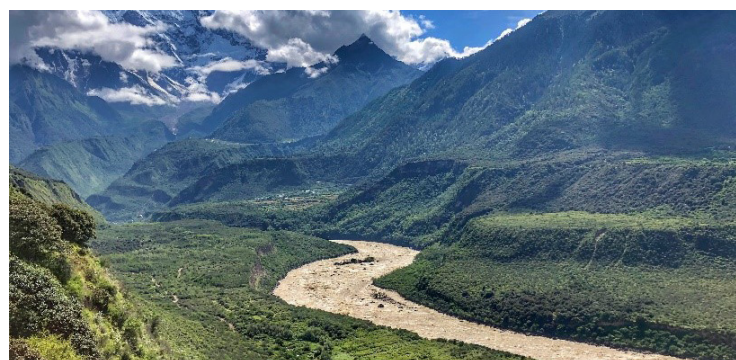
Antarctica is losing an average of 150 billion tons of ice mass every year while the Greenland ice cap is melting even faster — losing 270 billion tonnes per year.

In Asia, 10 major rivers originate in the Himalaya region, supplying freshwater to 1.3 billion people living in its watershed. "As glaciers and ice sheets continue to recede over the coming decades, major Himalayan rivers like the Indus, the Ganges and Brahmaputra will feel the impact — seeing their flows reduced," Guterres said, adding the world has already witnessed how Himalayan melts have worsened flooding in Pakistan.

He added that rising sea levels combined with saltwater intrusion will decimate large parts of these huge deltas.

The event was held on the margins of the UN 2023 Water Conference — formally known as the 2023 Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of Implementation of the UN Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation (2018-2028) — currently underway at UN Headquarters.

Co-hosted by Tajikistan and the Netherlands, the March 22-24 conference will result in a summary of proceedings from the UNGA President that will feed into the 2023 session of the UN High-



level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

"The first UN water conference in a generation, the UN 2023 Water Conference, co-hosted by the Governments of Tajikistan and the Netherlands will be a watershed moment to mobilize Member States, the UN system and stakeholders alike to take action and bring successful solutions to a global scale," the UN has said.

Guterres cited data by the World Meteorological Organization that warned

that global average sea levels have already risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in the last 3,000 years.

"Unless we reverse this trend, the consequences will be catastrophic. Low-lying communities and entire countries could be erased forever. We would witness mass movements of entire populations — and fierce competition for water and land," he said adding that disasters would accelerate worldwide — including floods, droughts and landslides.

Guterres called on all countries to act

as one to protect people and communities alike, emphasizing the urgent need to limit global warming to 1.5 degree rise to avert the worst impacts of climate change.

"We urgently need to reduce emissions, enhance adaptation measures, and ensure climate justice. And developing countries must have the resources to adapt and build resilience against climate disaster," he said.

He urged the international community to invest in climate-resilient buildings, infrastructure, and water pipelines, as well as policies that conserve precious water resources and their ecosystems for the future.

He stressed the need to build institutional capacities and integrate risk reduction measures to ensure that every person in the world is protected by lifesaving early warning systems against hazardous climate or weather events by 2027.

In his remarks to the opening of the conference Wednesday, Guterres lamented that "we've broken the water cycle, destroyed ecosystems and contaminated groundwater".

PTI

IN FOCUS

BY KBS SIDHU

“So foul and fair a day I have not seen”,
—William Shakespeare in the ‘Macbeth’

Thursday’s conviction and sentencing of the Congress leader and Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi to a 2-year imprisonment in a criminal defamation case by a Judicial Court in Surat, Gujarat has suddenly brought the law of defamation in India into the spotlight. The case, filed against Gandhi by a BJP MLA for his alleged “Modi surname” remarks, has triggered a cacophonous debate on the scope and application of criminal defamation in India. While Gandhi got an interim bail, pending his appeal, furor in the political arena has already begun with the opposition, led by the Congress Party, alleging it to be an abuse of the process of law to stifle free speech and dissent.

In most countries, defamation is a civil wrong that involves the publication of a statement that harms the reputation of an individual or entity. In India, however, defamation is both a civil and criminal offence. The law of defamation is primarily governed by the Indian Penal Code, which provides for criminal sanctions against individuals who make allegedly defamatory statements.

Under the Indian Penal Code, defamation is defined as the act of making a statement that harms the reputation of another person, and is punishable with imprisonment and/or a fine. Criminal defamation is a non-cognizable offence, which means that the police cannot arrest a person without a warrant, and it is also bailable, which means that the accused person is normally entitled to be released on bail, during the trial.

Supreme Court on Defamation

The Supreme Court of India has delivered several landmark judgments in cases of criminal defamation. One such landmark judgment is Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India, (2016) 7 SCC 221.

In this case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of criminal defamation in India and held that it was a valid restriction on the Right to Free Speech and Expression under Article 19(2) of the Constitution. The Apex Court also held that the right to reputation was a Fundamental Right under Article 21 of the Constitution, and that criminal defamation was a necessary and proportionate means of protecting this right.

The Court also clarified that criminal defamation would only be made out if the defamatory statement was made with the intention to harm the reputation of the person, and that the defense of truth was available to the accused.

Furthermore, the Court held that a person who is accused of criminal defamation has the right to defend himself and to put forward his case, including by cross-examining the witnesses presented by the prosecution. This judgment has been widely cited in subsequent cases of criminal defamation in India and has provided guidance on the scope and application of the law in this area.

In India, civil damages or penalties for defamation are governed by the law of torts, and specifically, the law of defamation. A person who has been defamed can file a civil suit for damages against the

Defamation Law in India; Rahul conviction, sentencing

person who made the defamatory statement. The purpose of a civil suit for defamation is to compensate the person for the harm caused to his reputation and not to punish the person who made the statement.

Simultaneous Civil and Criminal Proceedings

Civil and criminal proceedings for defamation can go on simultaneously in India. The person who has been defamed can file a criminal complaint against the person who made the defamatory statement, and also file a civil suit for damages. The two proceedings are independent of each other, and the outcome of one does not affect the other. However, it is important to note that the remedies available in civil and criminal proceedings for defamation are different. In a criminal case, the person who made the defamatory statement may be punished with imprisonment and/or a fine, whereas in a civil case, the person may be ordered to pay compensation to the person who was defamed.

It is also important to note that while the law of defamation provides for both civil and criminal remedies, the standards of proof required in each are different. In a criminal case, the burden of proof is on the prosecution to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the statement was defamatory, whereas in a civil case, the burden of proof is on the plaintiff to prove on a balance of probabilities that the statement was defamatory.

What is “defamation”? Comprehensive definition

Although the British-era section 500 IPC has been criticized on various grounds, from strictly a perspective of drafting clarity, it is really a perfect example of what the statute should be like. It elucidates the offence with numerous explanations, illustrations and exceptions. Nothing better than a leisurely but careful reading of these bare provisions, given below, to understand the the intention of the legislature.

499. Defamation.—Whoever, by words either spoken or intended to be read, or by signs or by visible representations, makes or publishes any imputation concerning any person intending to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe that such imputation will harm, the reputation of such person, is said, except in the cases hereinafter excepted, to defame that person.

Explanation 1.—It may amount to defamation to impute anything to a deceased person, if the imputation would harm the reputation of that person if liv-



IN MOST COUNTRIES, DEFAMATION IS A CIVIL WRONG THAT INVOLVES THE PUBLICATION OF A STATEMENT THAT HARMS THE REPUTATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL OR ENTITY. IN INDIA, HOWEVER, DEFAMATION IS BOTH A CIVIL AND CRIMINAL OFFENCE. THE LAW OF DEFAMATION IS PRIMARILY GOVERNED BY THE INDIAN PENAL CODE, WHICH PROVIDES FOR CRIMINAL SANCTIONS AGAINST INDIVIDUALS WHO MAKE ALLEGEDLY DEFAMATORY STATEMENTS.

ing, and is intended to be hurtful to the feelings of his family or other near relatives.

Explanation 2.—It may amount to defamation to make an imputation concerning a company or an association or collection of persons as such.

Explanation 3.—An imputation in the form of an alternative or expressed ironically, may amount to defamation.

Explanation 4.—No imputation is said to harm a person’s reputation, unless that imputation directly or indirectly, in the estimation of others, lowers the moral or intellectual character of that person, or lowers the character of that person in respect of his caste or of his calling, or lowers the credit of that person, or causes it to be believed that the body of that person is in a loathsome state, or in a state generally considered as disgraceful.

Exceptions

First Exception.—Imputation of truth which public good requires to be made

or published.—It is not defamation to impute anything which is true concerning any person, if it be for the public good that the imputation should be made or published. Whether or not it is for the public good is a question of fact.

Second Exception.—Public conduct of public servants.—It is not defamation to express in good faith any opinion whatever respecting the conduct of a public servant in the discharge of his public functions, or respecting his character, so far as his character appears in that conduct, and no further.

Third Exception.—Conduct of any person touching any public question.—It is not defamation to express in good faith any opinion whatever respecting the conduct of any person touching any public question, and respecting his character, so far as his character appears in that conduct, and no further.

Fourth Exception.—Publication of reports of proceedings of courts.—It is not defamation to publish substantially true report of the proceedings of a Court of Justice, or of the result of any such proceedings.

Fifth Exception.—Merits of case decided in Court or conduct of witnesses and others concerned.—It is not defamation to express in good faith any opinion whatever respecting the merits of any case, civil or criminal, which has been decided by a Court of Justice, or respecting the conduct of any person as a party, witness or agent, in any such case, or respecting the character of such person, as far as his character appears in that conduct, and no further.

Sixth Exception.—Merits of public performance.—It is not defamation to express in good faith any opinion respecting the merits of any performance which its author has submitted to the judgment of the public, or respecting the character of the author so far as his character appears in such performance, and no further.

Explanation.—A performance may be submitted to the judgment of the public expressly or by acts on the part of the author which imply such submission to the judgment of the public.

Seventh Exception.—Censure passed in good faith by person having lawful authority over another.—It is not defamation in a person having over another any authority, either conferred by law or 110 arising out of a lawful contract made with that other, to pass in good faith any censure on the conduct of that other in matters to which such lawful authority relates.

Eighth Exception.—Accusation preferred in good faith to authorised person.—It is not defamation to prefer in

good faith an accusation against any person to any of those who have lawful authority over that person with respect to the subject-matter of accusation.

Ninth Exception.—Imputation made in good faith by person for protection of his or other’s interests.—It is not defamation to make an imputation on the character of another provided that the imputation be made in good faith for the protection of the interests of the person making it, or of any other person, or for the public good.

Tenth Exception.—Caution intended for good of person to whom conveyed or for public good.—It is not defamation to convey a caution, in good faith, to one person against another, provided that such caution be intended for the good of the person to whom it is conveyed, or of some person in whom that person is interested, or for the public good.

500. Punishment for Defamation.—Whoever defames another shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

Filtering out the noise and the way forward.

The politics in the aftermath of this judgment will surely play out and the political parties will be locked in fierce public and TV debates in a totally partisan manner, but as a Nation we need to use this event to dispassionately and objectively review the criminal law of defamation in the country. The law of criminal defamation is a complex and sensitive issue and it requires a very careful consideration. While it is important to protect the reputation of individuals and entities, it is equally important to ensure that the right to freedom of speech and expression is not unduly restricted. There is a pressing need to strike a balance between protecting the right to reputation and upholding the right to free speech.

It is also important to shift the focus to exemplary and stiff civil penalties, and to make the civil procedure more expeditious. Civil penalties, such as compensation and damages, can be an effective way to provide relief to individuals who have been defamed. The current civil procedure in India can be time-consuming and expensive, which can discourage individuals from pursuing civil remedies.

Both the government and the courts have a role to play in addressing these issues. The government can take steps to review and amend the laws governing defamation and civil penalties, in order to strike a balance between protecting the right to reputation and upholding the right to free speech. The courts, on the other hand, can play a proactive role in ensuring that civil cases are expedited, and that individuals are able to obtain timely and effective relief.

In conclusion, it is important to ensure that the law of defamation in India comes to be in sync with the international practices in democracies across the world. It is an arduous, if not a tortuous path but we should at least begin. There are plenty of other issues to play politics with.

(The author superannuated as Special Chief Secretary, Punjab in July, 2021, after nearly 37 years of service in the IAS).

NATION

Kejriwal supports Rahul in defamation case

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday voiced his support for Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who was recently sentenced to two years in jail in a defamation case. Kejriwal alleged that a conspiracy was being hatched to "eliminate" non-BJP leaders and parties by prosecuting them.

This marks a shift in stance as both Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have previously avoided taking each other's side on various issues. The Congress did not support AAP when Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia was arrested by the CBI in connection with alleged irregularities in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy for 2021-22.

However, Kejriwal's support for Gandhi comes at a time when he is attempting to forge an alliance of "like-minded" parties ahead of the Lok Sabha polls next year. Earlier this month, he had



invited chief ministers of eight non-BJP, non-Congress ruled states for dinner and discussion over political issues.

On Thursday, the Aam Aadmi Party indicated a softening in its stance towards Congress after a court in Gujarat's Surat

held Gandhi guilty of defamation for his 2019 "Modi surname" remark.

"A conspiracy is being hatched to eliminate non-BJP leaders and parties by prosecuting them. We have differences with the Congress, but it is not right to implicate Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case like this," Kejriwal said in a tweet in Hindi.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha echoed similar views and said that opposition forms the core of democracy and dissent should not be stifled. "Respectfully disagree with the court verdict against Rahul Gandhi. Opposition forms the core of democracy. Dissent should not be stifled. India has a strong tradition of critique. Attempt to reduce this to the viewpoint of one ideology, one party, one leader is unconstitutional and undemocratic," he tweeted. The Surat court has granted Gandhi bail and suspended the sentence for 30 days to allow him to appeal in a higher court. The Congress has said that Gandhi will file an appeal against the verdict. **PTI**

Chhattisgarh CM orders probe into Pro-Khalistan rally

MARCH 23, RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has ordered a police probe into a rally allegedly held in support of wanted pro-Khalistan preacher Amritpal Singh in the state capital Raipur on Wednesday. Speaking in the Assembly on Thursday, Baghel stated that any anti-national activities would not be tolerated in the state and directed police to examine the video footage of the rally and take appropriate action.

During the Zero Hour, the opposition BJP alleged that the law-and-order situation in the state was deteriorating under Baghel's leadership. The BJP legislators, Ajay Chandrakar and Brijmohan Agrawal, also criticized the police for intelligence failure over the rally being held. The BJP legislators sought a discussion in the House on the law and order situation, while state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ravindra

Choubey countered them, asserting that anyone engaging in anti-national activities will not be spared.

After the Chair rejected the opposition's demand for a discussion, BJP members started sloganeering, leading to the adjournment of proceedings for five minutes. After the proceedings resumed, BJP legislators again raised the issue, following which Minister Choubey stated that the CM would give a statement on the rally later in the House. Congress MLA Kuldeep Juneja, who hails from the Sikh community, denied that the rally was taken out in support of Khalistan. Later, delivering his statement in the House, CM Baghel stated that around 30-35 people took out a foot march raising slogans from Telibandha area on Wednesday and directed police to examine the video footage of it. The CM added that action will be taken against anyone found raising anti-national slogans in the footage. **PTI**

Par panel recommends new law to define power, functions of CBI

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The existing law governing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, has "many limitations," according to a report by the department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice. The report highlights the withdrawal of general consent for CBI probes by nine states and recommends enacting new legislation to define the agency's status, functions, and powers, as well as laying down safeguards to ensure objectivity and impartiality in its functioning.

Established in 1963, the CBI investigates cases of bribery and corruption involving purchases and supplies, and its operations are regulated by the DSPE Act. The committee noted that according to the provisions of the Act, the consent of the state government is a prerequisite for any CBI investigation, and with nine states having withdrawn general consent, the need for a new law is more pressing than ever.

The report also drew attention to the vacancies in the CBI, which are not being filled at the required pace, with 1,709 posts vacant against a sanctioned strength of 7,295. The panel recommends that the Director of CBI should monitor progress in filling vacancies on

ESTABLISHED IN 1963, THE CBI INVESTIGATES CASES OF BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION INVOLVING PURCHASES AND SUPPLIES, AND ITS OPERATIONS ARE REGULATED BY THE DSPE ACT.

a quarterly basis and take necessary measures to ensure the organization is sufficiently staffed. The committee also reiterated its previous recommendation that the CBI reduce its dependence on deputationists and strive to recruit permanent staff in the ranks of inspector of police and deputy superintendent of police. The committee further suggested that details of cases registered with the CBI, the progress made in their investigation, and the final outcome be made available to the public domain. It noted that the annual report of the CBI is also not accessible to the general public and recommended that the agency publish case statistics and annual reports on its website. Additionally, the committee reiterated its recommendation that the CBI maintain a case management system that would be a centralized database containing details of cases registered with it and the progress made in their disposal. **PTI**

Oppn protest continues in Parl complex

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Opposition parties, including the Congress, on Thursday took to the streets inside the Parliament complex to demand a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) investigation into the Adani group issue. Holding placards and banners, the leaders of various parties gathered at Parliament House gate number 1 and raised slogans against the government, calling for a probe. The opposition MPs then staged a protest march from Parliament gate to the Ambedkar statue inside the Parliament complex, where they again raised slogans and asked why the government was not ordering a JPC probe into the Adani issue.

Congress President Mallikarjun

Kharge, who led the protest march, thanked the leaders of various parties for extending support and said they would continue their protest until their demand was met. Kharge alleged that the BJP does not want the Parliament records to reflect anything on the Adani issue and that they do not want transparency, which is why they want to finish democratic institutions and the Constitution.

While the opposition is raising the pitch over the demand for a JPC into the Adani issue, the BJP has raised the heat on Rahul Gandhi over his 'democracy under threat' remarks made in London recently and has demanded his apology, alleging he has defamed and insulted India and its institutions and has sought foreign intervention.

Both houses of Parliament have failed to transact any significant business for the last two weeks since it met for the second leg of the budget session on March 13. Opposition leaders also met Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and attended a meeting of floor leaders of various parties convened by him to help break the logjam in the upper house. The meeting remained inconclusive as opposition leaders raised their demand for a JPC and said that there was no question of going back on their demand.

The US-based Hindenburg Research in a report has accused the Adani group of financial irregularities and stock manipulation. The Adani group has denied the allegations and said no wrongdoing has been done by it. **PTI**

NIA raids three states in Bihar's 'Ghazwa-e-Hind' case

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

On Thursday, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted raids in three states as part of its ongoing investigation into the Ghazwa-e-Hind terror module that was dismantled in Bihar last year. The NIA searched the homes of eight suspects located in Nagpur in Maharashtra, Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, and Valsad, Surat, and Botad districts in Gujarat. The federal agency stated that they seized

incriminating materials, including digital devices such as mobile phones and memory cards, and documents during the operation.

The case arose from an FIR registered in July 2022 by the Bihar Police at the Phulwari Sharif police station in Patna against members of the Ghazwa-e-Hind module that was being "operated and controlled" from Pakistan.

The NIA had already arrested Marghoob Ahmad Danish, also known as Tahir, the administrator of the Ghazwa-

e-Hind WhatsApp group launched by a Pakistani national. The agency filed a chargesheet against him in January.

According to the NIA, Danish created Ghazwa-e-Hind groups on various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, and BiP Messenger.

He also created a separate WhatsApp group for Bangladeshi nationals, entitled "BDGhazwa E Hind," and added several people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Yemen to these groups. **PTI**

NATION

HM to oversee destruction of drugs worth 1235 Cr

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is set to oversee the destruction of 9,298 kilograms of seized drugs valued at Rs 1,235 crore in Bengaluru on Friday, as part of the Modi government's unyielding policy against narcotics.

According to an official statement, the drugs will be destroyed on the sidelines of a regional conference on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security' in Karnataka's capital. A target to destroy 75,000 kg of drugs was set during a 75-day campaign beginning on June 1, 2022, but the statement said that over-achieving the target, a total of 5,94,620 kg of drugs, valued at Rs 8,409 crore, has been destroyed so far.

Out of the total drugs destroyed, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) alone has destroyed 1,29,363 kg of seized drugs valued at Rs 3,138 crore while the rest of the narcotics were seized by other agencies and state police forces.

Chairing the conference, Shah will be accompanied by representatives from five southern states and three Union territories. **PTI**

PM Modi, HM Shah on back-to-back visits to poll-bound K'taka

BENGALURU, MARCH 23

Back-to-back visits by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to poll-bound Karnataka are set to raise the election fever in the state, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) relying on the two senior leaders to give fresh impetus to its campaign. Shah is scheduled to arrive in Bengaluru on Thursday night and will have a breakfast meeting with Karnataka BJP strongman and former chief minister B S Yediyurappa at his residence on Friday. He will then attend the Regional Conference with Southern States and Union Territories on Smuggling of Narcotics and National Security.

As part of his itinerary, Shah, who also holds the cooperation portfolio, will visit Kommaghatta village on the outskirts of Bengaluru, where he will lay the foundation stone of the 'Sahakara Samruddhi Soudha' and

MODI WILL PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMMES ORGANISED IN CHIKKABALLAPURA, BENGALURU, AND DAVANGERE DISTRICTS.

inaugurate various development works of the Cooperative Ministry. According to BJP sources, he will visit the state again on March 26.

The Assembly elections in Karnataka are due by May, for which the schedule is likely to be announced by the Election Commission of India in the coming days. Prime Minister Modi is also expected to visit the state, his seventh this year, on Saturday. During his visit, he will take part in various events, including a Metro ride and a mega public meeting organized by the BJP.

Modi will participate in programmes organised in Chikkaballapura,

Bengaluru, and Davangere districts. He will inaugurate the Sri Madhusudan Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research at Chikkaballapura, and later fly back to Bengaluru to inaugurate the Whitefield Metro Line and ride in the Metro. Modi will then proceed to Davangere and address a public meeting, as part of BJP's poll preparations in Karnataka, marking the culmination of the 8,000-kilometre 'Vijay Sankapla Yatre'.

The 20-day 'yatre', which began from four different parts of the state in specially designed vehicles or 'Rathas', was kickstarted on March 1 by BJP national President J P Nadda at Male Mahadeshwara Hills in Chamarajanagar district. Several senior BJP leaders, Chief Ministers of other BJP-governed states, and Union Ministers had taken part in the programme. This is said to be the first party meeting which the Prime Minister will be attending since the poll preparations began in Karnataka. **PTI**

Congress members stage rail roko in TN

CHENNAI, MARCH 23

Congress Party leaders and supporters in Tamil Nadu staged protests on Thursday in response to the recent sentencing of party leader Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case. In Kumbakonam and Virudhachalam, party members staged a rail roko, while in Chennai, Congress lawmakers held a "black band" protest in front of the State Assembly.

TNCC chief K S Alagiri was among those who took part in the rail roko, which occurred at Kumbakonam railway station. "There was no direct reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Gandhi's election campaign. He had made a passing reference to those having a common surname," Alagiri later told reporters. He criticized the BJP government for labeling anyone who opposes Modi as anti-national. Alagiri then boarded the Cholan Express to travel to Chennai.

A Surat court in Gujarat had sentenced Rahul Gandhi to two years in jail in a criminal defamation case for his "Modi surname" remark during the 2019 general election campaign in Karnataka. BJP legislator and former Gujarat Minister Purnesh Modi had filed the case against the Wayanad MP. Gandhi was granted bail and given a month to respond. **PTI**

Sri Lankan Navy arrests 12 Indian fishermen

TN CM flags issue with Centre

CHENNAI, MARCH 23

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has expressed concern over the recurring incidents of Indian fishermen from the state being harassed allegedly by the Sri Lankan Navy, and has urged the Centre to ensure the release of 28 such fisherfolk from Lankan custody. In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Stalin stated that 12 fishermen were arrested on Thursday and two mechanised fishing boats were seized

by the Lankan Navy.

Stalin emphasized that this year alone, 28 fishermen and four fishing boats have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy, and such incidents of arrests have been increasing at an "alarming frequency."

He also pointed out that despite several letters of protest sent by the Government of Tamil Nadu highlighting the escalation in the number of such instances of arrests of their fishermen, the harassment continued. **PTI**

Army, Air Force conduct joint exercise Vayu Prahar

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

As part of its ongoing efforts to validate plans to execute synergised operations, the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force conducted a multi-domain air-land exercise 'Vayu Prahar' in the eastern theatre earlier this month, sources revealed on Thursday.

The joint exercise, which took place in the second week of March, aimed to test the rapid mobilisation of a designated rapid reaction force from the hinterland to undertake air-landed operations



at an advance landing ground, the sources said. The air-landed force was further tasked with executing contingency tasks in high-altitude terrain conditions as per

a realistic exercise scenario.

"The conduct of Exercise Vayu Prahar enabled coordination and rehearsal amongst various agencies for quick mobilisation, transportation and deployment of forces within a theatre which can be executed across theatres," a source stated.

The exercise, which spanned 96 hours, saw the participation of army formations, special forces, and the Indian Air Force in the eastern theatre. The source added that the exercise had validated and refined procedures necessary for synergised joint operations. **PTI**

Massive data breach, details of 16.8 cr citizens leaked: Cyberabad Police

HYDERABAD, MARCH 23

In a significant development with grave national security implications, the Cyberabad Police uncovered a massive data breach and arrested seven individuals allegedly involved in the theft and sale of sensitive data of the government and important organizations. The data includes details of defense personnel, personal and confidential information of

about 16.8 crore citizens, and more than 140 different categories of information, such as mobile numbers of citizens and NEET students.

The accused were operating through three companies (call centers) in Noida and other places, and at least 100 fraudsters have purchased data from them. Sensitive data of defense personnel was found with the accused, which included their ranks, email ids, and place of post-

ing, among other things. This can have serious national security implications as the data can be used for espionage, impersonation, and committing serious offenses that may jeopardize national security.

Apart from sensitive data related to the defense sector and government employees, the accused were also found selling information on categories such as Energy and Power sector, PAN card data,

Gas and Petroleum, HNIs, student databases, women databases, data of people who have applied for loans and insurance, and credit card and debit card holders. The accused were selling the data through a search engine company and similar platforms, after aggregating the data leaked from different organizations and registering themselves as service delivery agents.

The Cyber Crime wing of Cyberabad

Police received a complaint about the sale and purchase of confidential and sensitive data, which led to the uncovering of this massive data breach. The data that has been leaked can be used for unauthorized access to important organizations and institutions, and to commit serious financial offenses. The Cyberabad Police are still investigating how the data got leaked and who the insiders are, who are involved in this. **PTI**

MISC

Naveen, Mamata resolve to make federal structure strong

BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 23

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee on Thursday resolved to make the federal structure of the country "strong and permanent".

The two chief ministers held a meeting at the conclusion of Banerjee's three-day visit to Odisha.

Addressing reporters at the end of the meeting at Naveen Niwas -- Patnaik's residence -- with Banerjee beside him, the Odisha CM said, "We resolved to make the federal structure of the country permanent and strong. There was no other political discussion." Banerjee seconded Patnaik and said, "I strongly support what Naveen ji said and I appreciate this." However, both leaders skipped questions on the possibilities of a third front or a regional alliance for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. "It was a courtesy meeting. There was no in-depth discussion about serious political matters. We share a very old friendship," Patnaik said. **PTI**

BJP asks if Cong wants 'complete freedom' for Rahul to abuse others

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The BJP on Thursday asserted that the law has to take its course if Rahul Gandhi abuses people and slammed the Congress over its criticism of his conviction in a defamation case, asking whether the opposition party wants "complete freedom" for him to "abuse" others.

BJP leader and former law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad cautioned Gandhi, saying he will find himself facing "more troubles" if he doesn't refrain from making defamatory remarks, while Union Minister Piyush Goyal asked the Congress leader to apologise for his series of "defamatory" comments.

Both the leaders also hit out at Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for questioning the court's order by noting that several judges hearing the matter were changed. "They should come out of their dynastic mindset and realise that no one

ON THURSDAY, A COURT IN GUJARAT'S SURAT SENTENCED GANDHI TO TWO YEARS IN JAIL IN A 2019 CRIMINAL DEFAMATION CASE FILED AGAINST HIM OVER HIS "MODI SURNAME" REMARKS.

is above the law," Goyal told reporters, while Prasad accused Kharge of contempt of court at another presser. It was "grossly unfair" on the part of Kharge to make such comments, Prasad said.

Making such comments show that the Congress does not believe in the judiciary, he said and asked, "Does it want to keep even the judiciary in its pocket." "If they think that they would get action in their favour by levelling allegations against the judiciary and putting pressure on it, it is their misconception," he said.

Asked whether Gandhi will be disqualified from Lok Sabha, Prasad cited

the provisions made in the Representation of People Act in this regard and said it is for Speaker Om Birla to decide. "This is speaker's decision. I don't have to say anything on that," he said.

On Thursday, a court in Gujarat's Surat sentenced Gandhi to two years in jail in a 2019 criminal defamation case filed against him over his "Modi surname" remarks. The case was filed against the Congress MP for his alleged "how come all the thieves have Modi as the common surname?" remark on a complaint lodged by BJP MLA and former Gujarat minister Purnesh Modi.

Goyal said, "We are all in public life and have to choose our words wisely and maintain basic decorum and dignity in public discourse. Gandhi has disrespected people and every democratic institution be in Parliament or democracy. He should apologise for his series of defamatory statements." **PTI**

BJP appoints 4 new state presidents, banks on OBC face in Bihar

NEW DELHI, MAR 23

The BJP on Thursday named four new state presidents, including Lok Sabha MP C P Joshi in Rajasthan and OBC leader and MLC Samrat Choudhary in Bihar, as the party moves to tone up its organisational machinery with an eye on consolidating its support base in the run up to crucial state and national polls. BJP president J P Nadda also appointed Manmohan Samal, a former state minister, as the head of the party's Odisha unit, while Delhi working president Virendra Sachdeva was elevated as its chief. Choudhary (54), whose standing within the BJP has steadily risen after joining the party in 2018, is the leader of the party in the Bihar legislative council and comes from the politically important Kushwaha community. He replaces Lok Sabha MP Sanjay Jaiswal at the helm of the Bihar BJP. Joshi (47) will replace Satish Poonia, an MLA from Jaipur's Amber constituency, and comes close on the heels of veteran Rajasthan BJP leader Gulab Chand Kataria being eased out of active politics following his appointment as Assam governor. **PTI**

Himanta episode in Azad's memoir

'Rahul 'mismanaged', Sonia didn't assert herself'

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

"Let him go" was Rahul Gandhi's blunt reply when told that Himanta Biswa Sarma, once the Congress' key leader in Assam, had the support of a majority of MLAs and would rebel and quit the party, Ghulam Nabi Azad writes in his autobiography "Azaad".

Azad, a former Congress loyalist who quit the party in August 2022 and launched his own regional party, also targets Sonia Gandhi and says she did not assert herself as party president "despite understanding the disastrous consequences that lay ahead".

Sarma, who went on to join the BJP and is the chief minister of Assam, was an important Congress strategist. Ten MLAs followed him when he quit the party in September 2015 over differences with the Congress leadership in Assam.

"Rahul told us bluntly that there would be no change in leadership. We pointed out to him (Rahul) that Himanta had the majority of MLAs and would rebel and quit the party. 'Let him go,' Rahul said. The meeting was over," Azad, 74, says in his autobiography that will release next month.

Azad, who is chairperson of the newly formed Democratic Progressive

Azad Party, says Rahul Gandhi "mismanaged" the Sarma episode. Sarma, 54, was appointed chief minister in 2021, just five years after leaving the Congress, after he ensured a second consecutive win for the BJP in Assam.

According to Azad, he was not sure if Rahul said what he did "to assert himself or because he was ignorant that his decision would have far-reaching consequences, not only in the state of Assam but the entire Northeast".

The former leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha says he apprised Sonia Gandhi of the new "twist in the tale" after the interaction with Rahul Gandhi.

"... it is rather unfortunate that she did not assert herself as the party president. Instead, she asked me to request Himanta to not rock the boat," Azad writes.

From devising a strategy with Indira Gandhi to bring Rajiv into politics and convincing Sonia to become the party chief to his mediation efforts in the tussle between Rahul Gandhi and Himanta Biswa Sarma, Ghulam Nabi in "Azaad" explores the challenges of leadership and the consequences of daring to bring fresh thinking into the political landscape, the publishers Rupa said in a statement. **PTI**

'New' booster dose should work against new covid strains: Guleria

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The Covid vaccines in use in India are providing cover for the original Wuhan strain but if the need for another booster dose is felt as new variants emerge, it should be able to provide protection against all circulating as well as future strains, according to former AIIMS director Randeep Guleria.

During an interview to PTI, he stressed on the need for two data sets - first to ascertain whether the degree of immunity is waning and secondly if the vaccines need to be tweaked when asked if it is time for another precaution dose almost a year after the first one amid the recent uptick in Covid cases.

"Currently the vaccines that we have in India are covering for what was originally the Wuhan strain. After that we had so many variants. And therefore if we have to have a new vaccine, it should provide cover for the circulating strains like we do for influenza," he said.

The renowned pulmonologist, who was part of the national Covid task force, highlighted the need for research on developing vaccines which will cover not only the current circulating strains but also from the emerging variants.

His comments come at a time when the country is witnessing a rise in Covid cases. Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a high-level meeting on Wednesday to review the Covid situation and also

took stock of the public health preparedness. Terming the new XBB.1.16 variant as a "new kid on the block" that could be driving the recent rise, Dr Guleria said new variants will keep coming as the virus keeps on mutating over the time but "as long as they don't lead to severe illness, hospitalisation and deaths, it is alright because it helps in giving some degree of immunity to the population if they have mild illness".

On whether XBB 1.16 has the potential to drive a fresh wave of cases or lead to significant rise in cases in the next few days, he said, "Even if we see a surge, there is no need to worry, as long it does not translate into hospitalization and deaths." **PTI**

Challenging polygamy, 'nikah halala'

Fresh SC bench to be set up to hear pleas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The Supreme Court said Thursday it will set up a fresh five-judge Constitution bench at an "appropriate stage" to hear pleas challenging the constitutional validity of polygamy and 'nikah halala' among Muslims.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala was urged by lawyer

Ashwini Upadhyay, who has filed a PIL on the issue, that section 494 of the Indian Penal Code allows polygamy, halala etc. and needs to be struck down.

"I will consider it. At an appropriate stage, I will constitute a constitution bench," the CJI responded. On August 30 last year, a five-judge bench comprising Justices Indira Banerjee, Hemant Gupta, Surya Kant, M M Sundresh and Sudhanshu Dhulia had made the National Human Rights

Commission (NHRC), National Commission for Women (NCW) and the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) parties to the PILs and sought their responses.

Justice Banerjee and Justice Gupta retired on September 23 and October 6 last year respectively giving rise to the need for reconstitution of the bench to hear as many as eight petitions against the practices of polygamy and 'nikah halala'. **PTI**

WORLD

UNHRC Session

World doesn't need lessons on democracy, human rights from Pakistan: India

GENEVA, MARCH 23

India on Thursday said the world does not need lessons on democracy and human rights from Pakistan whose contribution as a leading exporter of terror and violence is unparalleled and where terrorists thrive and roam its streets with impunity.

Exercising India's Right of Reply at the 52nd Session of Human Rights Council General Debate, Under Secretary Dr P R Thulasidass also called on Pakistan to focus on the safety, security and well-being of its minority communities instead of engaging in futile propaganda and attempting to foment communal disharmony in India.

"From a country where terrorists thrive and roam its streets with impunity, the



world does not need lessons on democracy and human rights. Pakistan's contribution as a leading exporter of terror and violence is unparalleled," Thulasidass said.

He underlined that Pakistan is home to as many as 150 UN designated terrorists and terrorist entities listed by the UN, and these proscribed individuals have active-

ly campaigned and contested in elections.

"Can Pakistan deny the fact that impunity reigns supreme in the country as perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks continue to roam free?...Can Pakistan deny the fact that the world's most wanted terrorist Osama bin Laden was found living in Pakistan near a military academy, sheltered and protected by the deep State?" he asked.

Asserting that Jammu and Kashmir was, is and shall forever remain an integral part of India, Thulasidass said that the union territory is marching towards peace and prosperity along with the rest of India.

Thulasidass said the pluralistic democracy of India is mature enough to address any issues including those instigated from outside. **PTI**

Sri Lanka govt accuses opposition of trying to undermine IMF bailout prog

COLOMBO, MARCH 23

Sri Lankan government on Thursday accused the opposition of trying to undermine the crucial IMF bailout programme by holding a meeting with the Colombo-based Ambassadors and seeking their assistance in getting the global lender to impose tougher conditions with respect to the delayed local polls.

The accusation came days after the IMF approved a USD 2.9 billion bailout programme to help the debt-ridden country overcome its economic crisis and catalyse financial support from other development partners.

Speaking in parliament, Chief Government Whip and Minister of Urban Development Prasanna Ranatunga claimed that the opposition at a secret meeting with foreign diplomats called for stringent conditions to be applied when the IMF starts releasing the disbursements.

The main opposition - the Samagi

Jana Balawegaya (SJB) - defended the meeting with the diplomats, saying they met to inform them about the government's action to postpone the local council elections.

Main opposition leader Sajith Premadasa denied that it was the intention of the opposition to use internal matters to curtail the assistance needed by the country.

The opposition sources said ambassadors or senior diplomats from the US and India were also present at the meeting.

Sri Lanka's election commission earlier this month announced April 25 as the new date for the local elections. The local body polls for 340 councils scheduled for March 9 were postponed due to a plethora of reasons linked to the current economic crisis.

The SJB alleged that President Ranil Wickremesinghe was bearing pressure as the minister of finance to block the money required for the poll as he feared losing the poll. **PTI**

Sri Lanka imports 2 million eggs from India to meet shortage

COLOMBO, MARCH 23

Sri Lanka has imported two million eggs from India to ensure food security in the crisis-hit island nation, Trade Minister Nalin Fernando said on Thursday. Fernando told Parliament that the shipment imported by the State Trading General Corporation had arrived and the stocks would be released in the market within three days.

The decision to import eggs was based on a decision by a cabinet committee to ensure food security, Fernando said. In January when the market shortages were noticed, the Animal Production and Health Department declined to approve the import of eggs from India or Pakistan as both countries reported bird-flu outbreaks in the past six months.

Director General of the Health Department Himali Kotelawala had said that the country of origin of eggs must be free of bird flu for at least six months. "India had recently experienced severe outbreaks of bird flu, so importing eggs from India is contrary to the Animal Health Disease Act in Sri Lanka. The Import and Export Controller General cannot be allowed to import eggs from India", she told reporters then. The trade ministry said the Indian-origin eggs would be allowed to be used only in the bakery industry after necessary quality checks. **PTI**

UK PM Sunak releases tax returns

LONDON, MARCH 23

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has released his tax returns, revealing that the British-Indian leader paid more than GBP 1 million to the Exchequer since becoming a frontline politician in 2019.

The tax release is part of a transparency commitment the UK premier made in November last year.

Sunak, among the wealthiest British politicians, on Wednesday, revealed that he earned a total of GBP 4.766 million between 2019 and 2022 and paid GBP 1.053 million in tax - at a tax rate of around 22 percent.

Over the last tax year, when he was the finance minister, the 42-year-old leader paid GBP 325,826 in capital gains tax and GBP 120,604 in UK income tax



on a total income of GBP 1.9 million.

"I published my tax returns in the interests of transparency, as I said I would, and I am glad to have done that," Sunak said during a visit to north Wales on Wednesday.

"I think ultimately what people are interested in is what I am going to do for

them," he added.

Sunak came under pressure to publish his tax returns after his financial affairs came under the spotlight during the Conservative Party leadership election campaign last year, which he lost to Liz Truss before being elevated as Prime Minister after Truss' short-lived tenure at 10 Downing Street.

It followed the controversy around the non-domicile tax status of his wife, Akshata Murty, who has since relinquished the legal position, which meant she paid tax on her Indian earnings in India. The Opposition Labour Party, which has often raised Sunak's wealth in Parliament to claim he fails to fully empathise with those struggling with a cost-of-living crisis in the country, questioned the "much delay" of their publication. **PTI**

SA official dismissed for trying to secure visas for associate of Gupta brothers

JOHANNESBURG, MARCH 23

A senior official of the South Africa (SA) Department of Home Affairs has been dismissed for trying to secure a visa for a close associate of the fugitive Gupta brothers and others in the UAE and Ethiopia.

Atul, Ajay, and Rajesh Gupta who originally hail from Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, are accused of siphoning billions of rands from South African para-

stats through their close association with former president Jacob Zuma.

Major Kobese, the Director for Appeals in the Department, unsuccessfully facilitated the undue processing of permits of Ashu Chawla and others to which they were not entitled, the ministry said in a statement on Thursday. Chawla was identified as a kingpin in the companies established by the three Gupta brothers.

The Gupta family is currently in self-

exile in Dubai. South African authorities are awaiting their extradition on corruption and money laundering charges. Kobese was found guilty on three counts of gross misconduct in the execution of his duties in a disciplinary hearing that lasted five months, it said.

"The visas which Kobese wanted were not issued because officials based in these missions refused to be part of his shenanigan," the department said. **PTI**

Pak's election body postpones Punjab polls to Oct

LAHORE, MARCH 23

Pakistan's top election body has delayed assembly polls in the politically crucial Punjab province by more than five months, citing deteriorating security situation in the cash-starved country, a move criticised by former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party chairman Imran Khan.

In a late-night order issued on Wednesday, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said that after considering the reports, briefing and material brought before the commission, it has concluded that it is impossible to hold and organise the elections originally scheduled for April 30 "honestly, justly, fairly, in a peaceful manner and in accordance with the Constitution and law".

The ECP said that it "hereby withdraws the election programme and fresh schedule will be issued in due course of time with poll date on October 8."

The assemblies in Punjab and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces were dissolved on January 14 and 18 respectively by the erstwhile governments of Khan's party.

The ECP said the decision was taken after briefing of the government and different departments and intelligence agencies informed that "the law and order situation in the country don't permit to hold elections at any province at this point of time." **PTI**

ENTERTAINMENT

Ananya to star in 'Call Me Bae'

Bollywood star Ananya Panday will star in "Call Me Bae", an upcoming original series from streaming service Prime Video. The series, which has started production, was announced by actor Varun Dhawan in a hilarious video posted on social media.

"Pakki khabar hai guys, @ananyapanday is the new fashionista in the primeverse! watch this first glimpse and stay tuned. #CallMeBae New Series, Now Filming!" Dhawan posted on Instagram.

The short clip opens with Dhawan announcing that Panday will headline the new show from the streamer. "Hi guys, it's me Prime Bae! And today I'm going to reveal Prime Video's new show, 'Call Me Bae'," the 35-year-old actor says in the video.

Panday, 24, interrupts him and says, "Call ME Bae! That's my show, where I play a total fashion expert, just like moi." Dhawan then pokes fun at her as she makes a choice between two different shades of blue fabrics.

In response, Panday channels Hollywood veteran Meryl Streep's "The Devil Wears Prada" character Miranda Priestly and schools Dhawan on the nuances of fashion and couture.

"Call Me Bae" is created by Ishita Moitra who has also co-written the series with Samina Motlekar and Rohit Nair.

In the show, Panday essays the role of Bae, a billionaire fashionista, who is disowned by her ultra-rich family owing to a salacious scandal and has to fend for herself.

PTI



Playing a cop is challenging: Mrunal

Actor Mrunal Thakur says it was challenging to play a cop in her upcoming film "Gumraah", a role that she has tried to deal with responsibly.

The crime thriller is the Hindi remake of 2019 Tamil hit "Thadam", starring Arun Vijay and Vidya Pradeep.

"Gumraah", set to release theatrically on April 7, features Thakur as a cop while Aditya Roy Kapur will be seen in a double role.

"It is difficult to play a cop. But the way my character is written is interesting. There are a lot of shades, there are a lot of ups and downs. It was challenging," Thakur told reporters at the trailer launch of the film.

The actor said she also took notes from her family members, who have been police officers to flesh out her character properly.

Thakur, who garnered wide critical acclaim for her performance in "Love Sonia" and "Sita Ramam", said she is grateful to writers for penning powerful roles for female actors and hopes



this trend continues. "It's about time. We need to change the definition of how Indian actresses were treated role wise. It is lovely to get such powerful roles and I hope there are many more to come," she added.

PTI



Delilah wants to be Jason's 'Khaleesi'

Model Delilah Belle Hamlin is looking to be 'Game of Thrones' actor Jason Momoa's real life 'Khaleesi'!

During a recent interview with E! News, 'The Rundown' host Erin Lim Rhodes asked Hamlin about the latest celebrity to have slid into her DMs (direct messages).

Delilah, who is daughter of Lisa Rinna and Harry Hamlin, replied: "I don't know. I don't do dating apps! We do Instagram. You can just slide in the DMs." She went on to add that she wants Jason Momoa to slide into her

DMs. When Rhodes asked her if she has tried reaching out to him, Delilah replied, "Oh, I did, it just didn't work."

The 24-year-old, whose debut single 'Nothing Lasts Forever' is out now along with the music video, revealed that she has "written other songs [where] the person definitely knows it's about them."

Delilah Belle said she enjoys dinner dates, and her favourite spot is the Italian restaurant Giorgio Baldi. "It's nice. It's like the beach is right there. What if you want to go frolic after, that would be really cute," she said.

BUSINESS

BHIVE starts new co-working centre with 5,000 desks in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Co-working firm BHIVE Workspace on Thursday said it has started a new centre in Bengaluru with a capacity of 5,000 seats as it seeks to tap a rise in demand for flexible office space.

In a statement, the company said it has expanded its co-working portfolio with the addition of Garuda BHIVE Workspace in BTM Layout, Bengaluru.

The co-working centre, developed in collaboration with the Garuda Group, is spread over 2 lakh square feet and will offer over 5,000 seats.

BHIVE has already leased spaces to startups in the healthcare tech, digital banking, insurance and apparel industries. With the addition of this facility, the total co-working portfolio of BHIVE has reached 14 lakh square feet with a total of 40,000 seats across Bengaluru. **PTI**

Over 2.78 lakh EVs registered in India in Jan-March 2023: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said more than 2.78 lakh electric vehicles have been registered in the country in 2023 calendar year so far.

Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are in the process of migrating to Vahan portal and hence their data on EV registration is partially included while Telangana and Lakshadweep data is not available on the portal, Gadkari said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

According to the data on the portal, the registration of electric vehicles (EVs) in India rose to 10,20,679 in 2022 from 3,29,808 in 2021.

Replying to a separate question,

ACCORDING TO THE DATA ON THE PORTAL, THE REGISTRATION OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EVs) IN INDIA ROSE TO 10,20,679 IN 2022 FROM 3,29,808 IN 2021.

Gadkari said National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has planted 344.27 lakh trees under Green Highways Policy during the period 2016-17 to 2022-23 (up to February 2023).

Responding to another question, he said NHAI envisions development of wayside amenities (WSAs) at every 30-40 kilometre across brownfield national highways and greenfield expressways.

Till date, 156 WSAs have been awarded, Gadkari added.

According to Gadkari, in order to promote ease of doing business for private investors, the ministry has facilitated the applications for grant of registration certificate to set up automated testing stations and registered vehicle scrapping facilities through National Single Window System (NSWS).

Currently, 18 states/UTs are live on NSWS for accepting applications for Voluntary Vehicle-Fleet Modernisation Programme (V-VMP), the minister said.

He said the government has received applications from 79 investors for setting up registered vehicle scrapping facilities across 17 states out of which, 48 are approved by the respective states. **PTI**

Aether Industries to set up new units in Gujarat

MUMBAI, MARCH 23

Specialty chemicals company Aether Industries on Thursday said it has signed an initial pact with the Gujarat government to set up new manufacturing plants at its Panoli Site with an investment of around Rs 1,000 crore.

The company has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Gujarat government to this effect, Aether Industries said in a statement.

With an indicated investment of Rs 1,000 crore, generating future employment for more than 1,000 people, the company aims to commission the plants by the year 2025, the statement added.

In the recent past, the company had purchased 1,25,000 sq. Plots at Panoli GIDC, in Bharuch district.

The company aims to utilise the Panoli plots in an efficient manner to manufacture a variety of products for the first time in India. **PTI**

Rupee gains 32 paise to close at 82.27 against USD

MUMBAI, MARCH 23

The rupee gained 32 paise to close at 82.27 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, tracking the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market.

Traders said the weak US Dollar and decline in US Treasury yields on the back of dovish Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) boosted investor sentiments.

The 25 basis points interest rate hike by the US Federal Reserve was on the expected lines, and the declining crude oil prices boosted the overall sentiments, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened strong at 82.38



against the dollar and gained further ground and finally settled at 82.27 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a gain of 32 paise against its previous close.

In intra-day trade, the rupee touched a high of 82.08 and hit the lowest level of 82.41 against the greenback.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled at 82.59 against the US dollar.

The foreign exchange market was

closed on Wednesday on account of Gudi Padwa.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.03 percent lower at 102.31.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures declined by 0.93 per cent to USD 75.98 per barrel.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed 289.31 points or 0.50 per cent lower at 57,925.28 points while the broader NSE Nifty fell 75.00 points or 0.44 per cent to 17,076.90 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers in the domestic capital market on Wednesday as they purchased shares worth Rs 61.72 crore, according to exchange data. **PTI**

VFI Group to manufacture high-end bedding in India

TIES UP WITH US-BASED SETRA SIMMONS

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

VFI Group on Thursday announced its collaboration with US-based Serta Simmons Bedding for setting up two units for manufacturing high-end luxury mattresses for the Indian market.

Serta Simmons Bedding, a Rs 20,000 crore company, is the sole bedding provider for Marriott International for years. Additionally, they cater to some of the world's most renowned hotels, including Intercontinental Hotel Group, Radisson hotels, Hilton Worldwide and Taj hotels.

Speaking at the launch of the part-

nership, VFI Executive Director Nitin Gupta said that with this new collaboration with Serta Simmons Beddings, the VFI Group aims to target the high-end customer base of India and generate Rs 800 crore in revenue by 2026.

At present, the VFI Group has revenue of about Rs 350 crore, Gupta said, adding that this new venture is expected to bring high-end luxurious mattresses to the Indian market, catering to the growing demand for premium sleep products.

Serta Simmons considers India as the fastest growing market with tremendous potential, and to cater to the high-end customers in India, it is setting up 2 factories in Meerut and Vadodara with a deal of technology transfer. **PTI**

Sensex snaps 2-day rally, falls 290 pts to close below 58K

MUMBAI, MARCH 23

Equity benchmark Sensex declined 290 points in a volatile session to settle below the 58,000 mark on Thursday due to a sell-off in banking, financial and IT stocks amid a weak trend in European equities.

Besides, heavy selling pressure in index heavyweight Reliance Industries added to the pressure, traders said.

After rallying for the two straight days, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell

289.31 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 57,925.28. During the day, it declined 375.74 points or 0.64 per cent to 57,838.85.

The broader NSE Nifty dipped 75 points or 0.44 per cent to end at 17,076.90. State Bank of India was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 1.69 per cent, followed by Asian Paints, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HCL Technologies, Reliance Industries, Wipro, IndusInd Bank, Infosys, Power Grid and HDFC twins. **PTI**

C-DoT says Rs 700 cr corpus available to fund startups

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

State-owned research and development organisation C-DOT has a corpus of over Rs 700 crore for funding startups, but the government has kept no limit to fund innovation, a top official of the entity said on Thursday.

Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of Regional Innovation Forum, C-DOT chief executive officer and chairman C-DOT

Project Board RajKumar Upadhyay said that a number of delegations of ministers from neighbouring countries at the forum have expressed interest in technological collaboration with India, which will help in expansion of indigenous innovation beyond the country's boundary.

"We have various schemes of the government to fund innovation. Some of



these schemes are available through C-DoT. Through them we have a corpus of Rs 700 crore to fund startups, but there is no limit of fund if we find the right innovation," Upadhyay said.

The delegation of communications ministers from Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Iran, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh visited the C-DoT campus. **PTI**

SPORT

Nikhat, Nitu
cruise into final of
Women's World
Boxing C'ships

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Nikhat Zareen (50kg) and Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) advanced to the final of the Women's World Boxing Championships with stellar semi-final wins here on Thursday.

While Nikhat out-punched Rio Olympics bronze medallist Ingrid Valencia of Colombia 5-0, Nitu eked out a 5-2 victory over Alua Balkibekova of Kazakhstan.

Reigning champion Nikhat used her speed and tactical acumen to see off Valencia and continue the defence of her title.

Earlier in the rematch of last year's quarterfinals, Nitu and Balkibekova went all guns blazing in the first round. However, the Kazakh was more dominant and took the round 2-3.

In the second round, Nitu came out strongly, landing hooks and jabs. **PTI**

India bag silver, bronze
in mixed team events at
ISSF World Cup

BHOPAL, MARCH 23

India bagged a silver and a bronze in the ISSF Pistol/Rifle World Cup, with the air pistol mixed team pair of Varun Tomar and Rhythm Sangwan clinching the second spot, while the pair of Rudranksh Patil and R Narmada Nithin securing the third spot in air rifle event on Thursday.

India have taken their medals tally in the competition to four, including one gold, a silver and two bronze.

China won both the gold medals on offer on day two of the competition at the MP Shooting Academy Range.

Varun, following his individual bronze-winning effort in air pistol on Wednesday, teamed up with Rhythm to

INDIA HAVE TAKEN THEIR MEDALS TALLY IN THE COMPETITION TO FOUR, INCLUDING ONE GOLD, A SILVER AND TWO BRONZE.

give a tough fight to the Chinese pair of Qian Wei and Liu Jinyao, before going down 11-17 in the air pistol mixed team gold-medal round.

In the initial stages of the final, it looked like the Chinese would enjoy a cakewalk, but the Indians made a strong comeback, going from 7-15 to 11-15 before the Chinese clinched the 15th

series to seal the gold.

Earlier in the qualification round, Qian and Liu had topped the nine-team field with a score of 586, while Varun and Rhythm had finished second with 581.

The second Indian team in the event comprising Divya TS and Sarabjot Singh missed the bronze by a point, finishing fifth with a score of 574. Reigning men's air rifle world champion Rudranksh Patil and R Narmada Nithin, who had combined to clinch gold at the ISSF World Cup in Cairo last month, couldn't recreate the same magic at home, finishing with a bronze. In the bronze-medal match, Rudranksh and Narmada beat the Chinese pair 16-8 in what was a much closer match than the scoreline suggests. **PTI**

Indian woman
hockey player Tete
appointed AHF
Athletes Ambassador

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

National women's hockey team midfielder Salima Tete was on Thursday appointed the AHF Athletes Ambassador from India for a term of two years, starting March 25. Tete accepted the certificate and the position during the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) Congress in Mungyeong, Korea.

Tete, who led the Indian women's junior hockey team to a fourth-place finish at the 2021 FIH Women's Junior World Cup in Potchefstroom, South Africa, is among four players from Asia to be appointed for the position.

As the AHF Athletes Ambassador, Tete, along with the other selected athletes from Asia, will play a leadership role in international representation, development, and advocacy of athletes. She will also be working towards promoting awareness about athletes' rights and welfare from the region. **PTI**

We could've won by bigger
scoreline: Stimac on India's win

IMPHAL, MARCH 23

India edged Myanmar 1-0 in the opening game of the Tri-Nation International Football Tournament but head coach Igor Stimac said the scoreline could have been better, given the hosts' complete dominance in the game.

Two decisions involving captain Sunil Chhetri -- an apparent foul on him not given as a penalty in the first half and a goal disallowed for offside -- led Stimac to state, "For me, the result is 3-0, not 1-0. "I cannot say anything to my players as they did everything we agreed upon. Goalkeeper Amrinder was excellent tonight, and Sunil was unfortunate not to score. He was hungry for goals and

could've had a hat-trick," said the Croatian in a release. While many would not have expected Chhetri to play the entire 90 minutes in Imphal just four days after a gruelling ISL final, the skipper's hunger and determination to get back to national duty was what helped Stimac make the decision. "Sunil was the first player to make it to the camp after the ISL final. He did not waste a minute but rather rushed to join the national team. That proves his hunger and commitment. He is one of the fittest players in the squad and can play continuously for three days," the coach said. In the pre-match press conference, Stimac said one of the elements of these friendlies will be to celebrate the players' achievements in the ISL and recognise their good performances. **PTI**

Vani ends three-year title drought,
wins Hero WPGT's 7th leg

GURUGRAM, MARCH 23

A little over three years after her last win on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour (WPGT), Vani Kapoor drilled a crucial birdie on the very last hole to card 3-under 69 and take the lead in the seventh leg of the ongoing season.

That slender edge was good enough as Gaurika Bishnoi, who led for a major part of the day, was unable to find a birdie over the last seven holes and also bogeyed the Par 4 14th.

Vani finished at 2-under 214 for three days and Gaurika (72) ended at 1-under 215 to be second. Ridhima Dilawari, who played alongside Gaurika, too, had



a chance as she birdied the 16th and 17th. She needed a birdie to force a play-off with Vani, but instead double-bogeyed the last hole and fell to third place.

Vani, who started the day three behind the 36-hole leader Tvesa Malik, had one

birdie and one bogey on the front nine. As the lead group of Tvesa, Gaurika and amateur Vidhatri turned into the back nine, Gaurika held the pole position. It was Vani's day, more so on the back nine. She not only birdied three times but also saved a couple of very good pars to snatch a fine win.

Vani, who won her first title on the Hero WPG Tour as an amateur more than 10 years ago, has since won more than 35 trophies, most of which have come between 2014 and 2018.

Since then, she has been playing a lot in Australian, South African and Ladies European Tours, as she searches for her first pro win on the international circuit. **PTI**

Bairstow to miss entire IPL,
Livingstone cleared: Report

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Prolific England batter Jonny Bairstow will miss the entire IPL this year as his cricket board refused to grant him No Objection Certificate (NOC) to play in the high-profile T20 league beginning on March 31, according to a report.

The 33-year-old Bairstow is recovering from a leg injury he sustained in September last year.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), however, cleared all-



rounder Liam Livingstone, who is coming back after recovering from his knee and ankle injuries, to play in the IPL.

Punjab Kings had bought Livingstone

and Bairstow for Rs 11.50 crores and Rs 6.75 crores respectively during the IPL auction.

"Punjab Kings have some bittersweet news as England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has cleared Liam Livingstone for participation in the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) but has stopped Jonny Bairstow from taking part," a report in cricbuzz said on Thursday. "...given the long injury lay-off, the ECB has decided not to issue him (Bairstow) the NOC for the season, which kicks off on March 31." **PTI**

AHF honours HI with
best organiser award

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Hockey India (HI) was on Thursday awarded with the Best Organiser Award by the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) for the successful hosting of the FIH Men's World Cup in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela earlier this year.

The award was received by HI secretary-general Bhola Nath Singh during the AHF Congress held in Mungyeong, Korea. While the Kalinga Hockey Stadium in Bhubaneswar had previously

hosted the FIH World Cup in 2018, the newly-constructed Birsu Munda Stadium in Rourkela caught the imagination of the hockey fraternity for its huge seating capacity. The Birsu Munda Hockey Stadium also features an Olympic-style hockey village, which housed the participating teams, giving them the experience of a Games Village at multi-discipline sporting events such as the Olympics, Commonwealth and Asian Games. The tournament mascot, Oly, also created awareness about the endangered Olive Ridley Turtles. **PTI**