

Centre alerts 6 states amid rising Covid cases

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

The Centre on Thursday asked six states - Maharashtra, Gujarat, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka - to follow a risk assessment-based approach to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 infections, citing a possible localised spread of the virus.

"There are a few states which are reporting higher numbers of cases indicating possible localised spread of infection," Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has said in a letter to these states.

Bhushan advised these states to examine the situation of COVID-19 at micro-level and maintain focus on implementation of necessary measures for prompt

and effective management of the disease, duly ensuring effective compliance with various advisories issued by the Ministry of Health.

Asking the states to keep a strict watch, he mentioned that since the past few weeks a rise in cases has been noted specifically in certain parts of the country with a total of 2,082 cases being reported in the week ending March 8 and the figure rising to 3,264 cases in the week ending March 15.

He stressed on monitoring new and emerging clusters of new COVID-19 cases, influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory infection cases in all health facilities or through dedicated fever clinics on a regular basis for detecting early warning signals of the spread of infection.

He mentioned that Maharashtra has reported an increase in weekly cases from 355 in the week ending March 8 to 668 in the week ending March 15. Gujarat has reported an increase in weekly cases from 105 in the week ending March 8 to 279 in the week ending March 15. Telangana has reported an increase in weekly cases from 132 in the week ending March 8 to 267 in the week ending March 15. Tamil Nadu has reported an increase in weekly cases from 170 in the week ending March 8 to 258 in the week ending March 15. Kerala has reported an increase in weekly cases from 434 to 579 during the period. Karnataka has reported an increase in weekly cases from 493 to 604 during the period. **PTI**

Khalistani demonstrations in Brisbane India takes up matter with Australia

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

India has taken up with Australia the demonstrations outside its honorary consulate in Brisbane by pro-Khalistani elements.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi suggested that the work at the consulate was very briefly halted following the demonstrations on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 10 raised with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese the recent incidents of attacks on temples in Australia as well as pro-Khalistani

activities in that country.

Next day, Albanese said he assured his Indian counterpart Modi that Australia will not tolerate attacks on religious places and anyone responsible for such activities will face the "full force of the law".

"There is an honorary consulate there and not a Consulate General of India. I understand small number of protesters were there. For a little while there were some disruptions. But it is not closed," Bagchi said at a media briefing. "The Honorary Consulate continues to function normally providing necessary services. I would not like to comment on footages

particularly video footages which are not been confirmed," he said referring to some videos of the demonstration.

Bagchi said India has taken up the issue with the Australian authorities.

"We have taken it up with the government. You heard the prime minister taking it up with the Australian prime minister. And we have been taking up on a regular basis whenever such incidents occur. Unfortunately they have occurred a number of times," Bagchi said.

"Our teams are in touch and that's how we take this up quickly. I am not going to get into the composition or the level of the teams but they are in touch," he said. **PTI**



Two pilots die after Army helicopter crashes in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, MARCH 16

Two pilots on board a Cheetah helicopter of the Army were killed when it crashed near Mandala in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday morning, a defence spokesperson said. The deceased officers have been identified as Lt Colonel VVB Reddy and his co-pilot Major Jayanth A, he said.

Defence spokesperson Lt Colonel Mahendra Rawat said in Guwahati that the helicopter was on an operational sortie from Missamari in Assam's Sonitpur district to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. The flight encountered "inconducive weather" and was returning to Missamari when it crashed, he said.

"The helicopter lost contact with Air Traffic Control (ATC) around 9.15 am. Five search parties of the Indian Army, SSB and ITBP were immediately launched. The wreckage of the aircraft

was found near Banglajaap east village of Mandala," Rawat said.

"A Court of Inquiry is ordered to ascertain the cause of the accident," he added. The Eastern Command, in a tweet, said the Army stands firm with the bereaved families. "LtGenRPKalita #ArmyCdrEC & All Ranks offer tribute to the supreme sacrifice

THE FLIGHT ENCOUNTERED "INCONDUCTIVE WEATHER" AND WAS RETURNING TO MISSAMARI WHEN IT CRASHED

of Lt Col VVB Reddy & Maj Jayanth A, in the line of duty at Mandala, #Arunachal Pradesh while carrying out operational flying of Cheetah Helicopter," it said.

Earlier in the day, Rohit Rajbir Singh, the superintendent of police, Special Investigation Cell (SIC), said villagers had found the crashed chopper ablaze in Dirang, and informed district officials. "Villagers from Bangjalep at Dirang located the chopper around 12.30 pm," Singh said. The area has no mobile connectivity and the weather is extremely foggy with visibility as low as five meters, he said. **PTI**

Gujarat conman takes J&K admn for a ride, twice

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SRINAGAR, MARCH 16

A conman from Gujarat took the officials in the Jammu and Kashmir administration for a ride twice by posing as a senior official in the Prime Minister's Office. Not only did he enjoy Z+ Security cover during both the trips besides five star hospitality, he even presided over some official meetings. He did it twice but ran out of luck on the third occasion when he got exposed and arrested.

According to court documents, Kiran Patel was on his third visit to the Kashmir valley and was subsequently nabbed by alert security officials on March 3.

Patel had claimed he had been given



CONMAN PATEL HAD CLAIMED HE HAD BEEN GIVEN A MANDATE BY THE GOVERNMENT TO IDENTIFY BUYERS FOR APPLE ORCHARDS IN SOUTH KASHMIR

a mandate by the government to identify buyers for apple orchards in south Kashmir and a couple of IAS officers were in awe of him as he had been dropping names of high-ranking bureaucrats and politicians in the national capital.

He was produced before a court here last evening for extension of his police remand. A case under relevant sections of cheating and forgery was registered

against him on March 2 and he was arrested the next day.

During his earlier visit, he had travelled to tourist hotspot Gulmarg claiming that the government had tasked him to look for improvement of hotel facilities in the area.

Security agencies got suspicious after he landed at the airport on March 2 as there was no information of any VIP movement.

An attempt was made to stop him at the airport but this could not fructify as he had already stepped into a bullet-proof car on the way to the hotel.

After his questioning and subsequent arrest, security officials recovered forged identity cards from his possession, the documents said. **With agency inputs**

PUNJAB

AAP govt in Punjab completes one year

'Not working for next election, but next gen'

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday listed out the achievements of the AAP government on its first anniversary and promised to accelerate the state's progress to turn it into 'Rangla Punjab'.

"Since we did so much work in the first year, we will now shift to the second gear of progress. Big industrialists are keen to invest in Punjab, they will set up their units and it will create jobs," the chief minister said in a video message.

"Our motive is not (to form) the next government. People have made the government. Our priority is to take our next generation forward and raise the standard of living of the poor," Mann said.

AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Twitter: "On this day a year ago, the new hopes of the people of Punjab had taken oath. Punjab's hope on AAP has now become a trust. Many promises made to



the public have been fulfilled in this one year, some will be fulfilled in the coming years. We will fulfill each and every promise made to the people of Punjab in five years," Kejriwal said, adding, "We will make Rangla (vibrant) Punjab."

In the 2022 Punjab Assembly election, the Aam Aadmi Party won 92 of the total 117 seats. "Within one year, we gave 26,797 government jobs," Mann said, adding 87 per cent of the households in the state got zero electricity bills. He also said that a decision to regularise the services of 14,000 tem-

porary employees in the education department and 14,000 in other departments has been taken.

Mann said, "If you have shown faith in me and then keep the faith. I will never break your faith." The chief minister said that his government will start a "very big campaign" against drugs.

On the agriculture front, Mann said his government gave MSP on 'moong' crop and Rs 1,500 per acre for promoting direct seeding of rice and also cleared sugarcane dues of Rs 392 crore. More than 500 mohalla clinics have been opened in Punjab.

Asserting that his government has zero tolerance towards corruption, claimed that his government took strict action in graft cases. Many former ministers are in jail and action has been taken not only against influential people but also against those who belonged to the ruling AAP, Mann added. The AAP was born out of an anti-corruption movement, he said. **PTI**

4 state toll plazas closed

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

With the motive to provide relief to the common man, Punjab Public Works Department (PWD) has made four roads of the state toll free for commuters.

Listing out Punjab Government's achievements of one year, Punjab PWD Minister Harbhajan Singh ETO said that Ludhiana-Malerkotla, Hoshiarpur-Tanda, high level bridge at Makhu, Balachaur-Garhshankar-Hoshiarpur roads have been made toll free for the commuters.

He said that the contracts of these toll plazas have expired but the companies were indulging in several tantrums to get it extended. He said that keeping the interests of Punjabis at hand, the state government has decided to close these toll plazas with immediate effect. Apart from this, more such toll plazas will be closed in coming days as the state government is already preparing the list of all other such defaulters.

Assailing the successive governments in the state for overburdening people by mortgaging the roads of Punjab for their vested interests, he said that the state government will take every possible step to ensure that people are given reprieve from this burden.

Speaking about the other such initia-



tives taken by the department, he said that the 65 Sewa Kendras have been converted along with up-gradation of 215 primary health centres to Aam Aadmi Clinics during FY 2022-23.

"166 km road has been completed with an expenditure of Rs 86.70 crore under special assistance scheme," he said while adding that 3571 km length has been completed with an expenditure of Rs 509 crore and work is ongoing on link roads projects.

Singh said that time bound works such as up-gradation of schools, heritage gates and streets, 4-laning of roads and beautification works have been completed for G-20 meetings. Further, repair and maintenance of various government buildings, hospitals and public buildings have been carried out in a big way in Amritsar. He said 373 km of rural roads have been upgraded under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in the state.

Office of travel agent who issued fake visas located

700 students face deportation from Canada

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

Jalandhar police on Thursday said they have located the office of the travel agent who allegedly issued fake documents to more than 700 Indian students facing deportation from Canada.

The police said the office is located near the city bus depot but it has remained closed for six months. They said they are verifying other details but are yet to receive any complaint in this matter. Some media reports have said that more than 700 Indian students are facing deportation from Canada due to submission of fake documents issued by a Jalandhar-based travel agent.

The students had gone to Canada in

2018-19 on a study visa but the fraud came to light after they applied for permanent residency (PR) in the North American country recently. While examining their documents, the Canadian authorities found the 'admission offer letters' to educational institutes to be fake and the Canadian Border Security Agency issued deportation letters to them. The reports said the travel agent had charged more than Rs 16 lakh per student for his services.

"We have not yet got any complaint in this regard. But still we are verifying," Jalandhar Deputy Commissioner of Police (Headquarters) Vatsala Gupta told reporters. She said the office of the travel agent has remained shut for the past six months. **PTI**

Kotkapura firing incident

Anticipatory bail plea of Sukhbir Badal dismissed

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

A court in Punjab's Faridkot Thursday dismissed the anticipatory bail plea of former deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal in the 2015 Kotkapura police firing incident but granted relief to his father and former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal.

Both the Akali leaders last week had moved the Faridkot court for anticipatory bail. After hearing arguments on March 14, the court of additional district and sessions judge, Faridkot had reserved its order.

The court dismissed the anticipatory

bail plea of former deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badal, said one of his counsels Arshdeep Singh Cheema. However, the court granted anticipatory bail to the former chief minister, Cheema said.

The Special Investigation Team of Punjab Police probing the police firing case last month had filed a charge sheet in a court in Faridkot naming the then Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and then Deputy Sukhbir Singh Badal and ex-DGP Sumedh Saini and others.

Sukhbir Badal and Saini were named as "masterminds of conspiracy for use of illegal excessive force to hide the inaction" of the state on three sacrilege

incidents in Faridkot. The then chief minister Badal was blamed for "facilitating the execution of the conspiracy" in the 7,000-page charge sheet.

The incidents related to the theft of a 'bir' (copy) of the Guru Granth Sahib, putting up handwritten sacrilegious posters, and torn pages of the holy book being found scattered at Bargari in Faridkot in 2015.

These incidents had triggered protests and two persons – Gurjeet Singh and Kishan Bhagwan Singh – were killed in Behbal Kalan and few injured at Kotkapura in Faridkot in police firing. **PTI**

Lawrence Bishnoi gang member held in Goa

GOA: Goa Police on Thursday arrested an alleged member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang wanted in a robbery case in Rajasthan, an official said here. The man, who hails from Mandor in Jodhpur district, was held by a team of Panaji police, he said. The arrest was made after Sardarpura police station in Jodhpur district informed Panaji police about his whereabouts here, the official said. **PTI**

'Jan Maal Lok Adalat' to start from Jalandhar: Jimpa

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

Punjab Government would start first of its kind 'Jan Maal Lok Adalat' from Jalandhar. Revenue Minister Bram Shanker Jimpa said that as per the guidelines issued by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, efforts would be made to solve the problems of people

related to the revenue department on the spot. He said that during 'Jan Adalat' various schemes and offices of the revenue department will also be inspected. Before this, Jimpa had started a unique initiative by organising 'Janta Darbar' of Water Supply and Sanitation Department.

Jimpa said that 'Jan Maal Lok Adalat' would be held on March 20. Complaints

and problems related with Revenue Department would be heard and solved on the spot. He said that the government led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann is making immense efforts to make the functioning of the revenue department easy and people friendly. The Department has adopted online system to streamline the work and more concrete steps will be taken in the future.

He further said that Lok Adalats would also be set up in other districts of Punjab. Jimpa said it is also the aim of the government that the people should not face any kind of hardship for the facilities and get all the facilities at their doorstep without any hassle. If any citizen has a problem, complaint or difficulties, it would be resolved in a timely manner. If any officer or employ-

PUNJAB

Bishnoi interview not conducted from any Punjab jail: DGP

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

With Punjab government and police left red-faced over the recent interview of incarcerated gangster Lawrence Bishnoi to a private news channel, DGP Gaurav Yadav on Thursday categorically stated that it was not conducted from the high-security Bathinda jail or any other jail in the state.

Addressing a press conference at Police Headquarters in Chandigarh, Yadav said a quick inquiry into the incident has revealed it was impossible to conduct the interview from Bathinda jail. Bishnoi, an accused in the singer Sidhu Moosewala murder case, was brought back to the Bathinda jail in March after the Rajasthan Police took the gangster on a production warrant in some other case in February.

The assertion came two days after the news channel ran the interview, which triggered criticism by the opposition parties over the state of law and order in the state. They also demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Mann, alleging he has failed to "control jails".

DGP Yadav said, "The interview is a deep-rooted conspiracy to cause trouble and disrupt harmony in Punjab." He added that use of mobile phone or inter-



'Failure of journalistic ethics'

Reacting on the interview, Sidhu Moosewala's father Balkaur Singh said it was a conspiracy to defame the slain singer ahead of his first barsi on March 19. "But such people will never succeed in as Moosewala has carved a place in the hearts of the people," he added. He said interviewing a hardcore gangster from inside the jail is failure of journalistic ethics along with a clear indication of the deteriorating law and order situation.

net in the high security zone is impossible. Yadav said the interview might have been recorded earlier.

"In the interview, Lawrence Bishnoi is sporting a long beard and a long hairdo which is quite visible. He is wearing a yellow t-shirt.

Interview stage-managed by AAP govt: Congress

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

Punjab Congress on Thursday alleged that the CM Bhagwant Mann-led AAP government in Punjab stage-managed the interview of the jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and called it a deep-rooted conspiracy to defame slain singer Sidhu Moosewala just days ahead of his first death anniversary.

"As Moosewala's parents recently staged a dharna outside the Punjab Vidhan Sabha during the ongoing budget session and had been speaking against the AAP government for failing to arrest the main accused of their son's murder, the AAP government stage-managed the interview through a private channel to discourage people from reaching in large numbers at the singer's death anniversary," alleged Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa.

Terming the Aam Aadmi Party government's one-year regime in Punjab as



a year of bad governance, Bajwa said the state had plunged into an economic mess and the law-and-order situation had collapsed completely. He said that the crime rate in the state had shot up ever since the AAP came to power in the state. "Some of the gravest crimes that took place in the past year were including an RPG attack on the Intelligence Headquarters in Mohali, Sidhu Moosewala's murder, false claims by CM Mann on Goldie Brar's arrest, Nakodar cloth merchant's killing, gangster Deepak Tinu escaping the custody

and the recent Ajnala violence," Bajwa added. Demanding CM's resignation, PPCC chief Amarinder Raja Warring and former deputy CM Sukhjinder Randhawa said Bhagwant Mann also being the Home Minister and Jails Minister should own the moral responsibility for three back-to-back incidents - laying siege to Ajnala police station by self-styled separatist leader Amritpal Singh, gang war among two groups and the interview of Lawrence Bishnoi.

The Congress leaders said the pictures of the gangster being shown by Punjab DGP on given dates was to mislead. "It is also possible that the interview had been done from Bathinda Jail few days ago but aired later. The government is hiding its failure," Warring said.

Challenging the CM and DGP to come clean on the timings and where and how the interview was arranged, Randhawa said the state government must interrogate the gangster and the channel to find the truth behind the interview.

Ludhiana to get bigger, better passport office

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
LUDHIANA, MARCH 16

The Passport Seva Kendra (PSK), Ludhiana, will be shifted to a bigger and better location soon. This was stated by AAP MP (Rajya Sabha) from Ludhiana Sanjeev Arora here today.

Arora said he had written a letter in this regard to Minister for External Affairs Dr S Jaishankar. "Dr Jaishankar has accepted my request for a better location and bigger office for PSK. He has sent his reply in a written communication," Arora informed.

In his letter, Arora had apprised the Minister that Passport Seva Kendra at Ludhiana was opened in the 2011 and is short of space currently. There is almost no parking space available and the waiting area is also short. In monsoon, water logging is also a major concern. The waiting period for an appointment of a passport application is also too long, mainly on account of not enough infrastructure," Arora had stated in his letter, requesting Jaishankar to get the PSK moved to a bigger place with ample parking at the earliest as people of Ludhiana and adjoining areas are facing inconvenience.

Harsimrat demands resumption of parliamentary proceedings

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

Former union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal today held a symbolic protest to demand resumption of parliament proceedings to allow members to raise peoples' issues including the complete breakdown of law and order in Punjab and the sense of fear among Punjabis at gangsters giving interviews from jail.

Holding a placard outside parliament, Badal appealed to the Speaker to ensure peoples' issues could be highlighted. "It is the ruling party's responsibility to ensure smooth function of the august house. It is unfortunate that the ruling party has joined the opposition in disrupting the parliament."

Urging the Speaker to save democracy, the Bathinda MP said the issues of farmers and youth including the government's inability to double farm incomes besides rising unemployment needed to be taken up for resolution. "The common man is also facing the heat of increase in daily commodities



and there is no respite in sight," she said.

Badal said she also wanted to take up the issue of complete breakdown in the law-and-order situation in Punjab under the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) dispensation. She said amid the turmoil in Punjab, during the course of which, a large section of industry had shifted to other states, there was a most disturbing development of dreaded gangster - Lawrence Bishnoi giving an interview to the media from Bathinda jail.

"This has rattled the common man

and there is a sense of fear that no one is safe. A short while earlier Punjab jails witnessed gang-wars and now this development shows that the law-and-order situation has gone completely out of hand. There are even demands for the resignation of chief minister Bhagwant Mann who holds the home ministry and there is a feeling that urgent corrective steps are needed to prevent Punjab from slipping into complete anarchy," she said.

All pending court cases to be settled: Kataruchak

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

The Punjab Government led by the Chief Minister had vowed to undertake every possible step for the welfare of all sections of the society on assuming office one year ago. As part of this, the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department must ensure that there should not be any delay in the process of giving jobs to the kin of the deceased employees.

These views were expressed here today by Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Lal Chand Kataruchak while chairing a meeting to review the functioning of the department.

The Minister directed the officers present to exert themselves for lowering the number of pending court cases pertaining to the department and bring these down to zero. Every case must be studied and analyzed thoroughly, added Kataruchak.

Abdullah led delegation of Oppn meets CEC

'Delay in elections is denial of constitutional rights'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MAR 16

Veteran politician from Jammu and Kashmir and Lok Sabha member Farooq Abdullah led a delegation of leaders from Opposition parties to meet the Election Commission (EC) to press for early assembly polls in the Union Territory.

Jammu and Kashmir is without a legislative assembly and an elected government for the last five years, the National Conference (NC) leader said after a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar here. "The CEC heard us and has assured that the commission would soon hold a meeting to discuss the issue," Abdullah said. The delegation informed the CEC and other members of the commission that the government has been claiming of restoring normalcy in Jammu and



Kashmir and that now the onus is on the EC (to hold assembly elections), he said.

"So, we asked why was the commission not taking note of the plight of the people of Jammu and Kashmir," Abdullah, a three-time chief minister of the erstwhile state, said.

In a memorandum submitted to the poll panel, the leaders said "in disregard to the letter and spirit of the Constitution, an unrepresentative and unaccountable bureaucracy is allowed to run the government to the discomfort and inconvenience of the general public".

The memorandum signed by NCP leader Sharad Pawar, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, AAP leader Sanjay Singh and others, said the EC is

under the Constitutional obligation to hold assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir.

The delegation said any further "delay in and denial of assembly elections would amount to denial of fundamental and democratic rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and a breach of Constitutional obligations".

The panchayat elections and elections to other public representative institutions cannot be a substitute to legislative assembly elections and the government and for that matter, the EC cannot avoid and delay assembly elections on that ground, the delegation said in the memorandum.

The opposition leaders said in each case, the argument though, inherently specious, could have been that as panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) were in place there was no need to hold assembly elections.

They said the assembly elections would be the first and important step towards restoration of all the Constitutional rights guaranteed in the Constitution and fulfilment of political aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Waning militancy 'opportunity' for centre to start development activities: Azad

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SHOPIAN, MAR 16

Militancy in Jammu and Kashmir has come down in the past some years and time has come for the Centre to help the Union Territory in development activities, Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) chief Ghulam Nabi Azad said on Thursday.

"There is poverty, unemployment, but it is also a reality that there is a huge difference in militancy. Sporadic incidents happen, but they happen in the country as well. Militancy has come down," Azad told reporters after a public rally in this south Kashmir district.

He said the central government should take advantage of the reduction in militancy in the Valley.

"Time has come for the Centre to help the state a lot in terms of development, for projects, roads, for setting up industries. The central government should take advantage of no or less militancy. If they do not do anything, then there is no benefit of ending militancy," the former J and K chief minister said.

Asked that there was talk of conferring Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the



T5 tunnel opens for traffic, bypasses most vulnerable stretch on NH

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, MAR 16

The T5 tunnel that bypasses the landslide-prone Panthyal stretch on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was opened for traffic on Thursday, officials said.

Work on the twin-tube 880-metre tunnel, part of the highway realignment project, started in February 2020. Its completion has put an end to the threat of shooting stones which have consumed numerous human lives, they said.

Over the past couple of years, a temporary iron and steel tunnel at the crucial stretch provided some relief to the people travelling on the high-

way. But the rolling stones continued to cause frequent disruptions in the smooth movement of traffic.

"The T5 tunnel at Panthyal was opened for two-way traffic which will now move smoothly without the fear of disruption from falling rocks," Deputy Commissioner, Ramban, Mussarat Islam said.

The four-laning project of the 270-km highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country, was started by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) in 2011.

The work that includes a number of small and major tunnels, bridges and flyovers is likely to be completed by next year after missing several deadlines over the past decade.



Mehbooba snubs critics after performing ritual in temple

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, MAR 16

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Thursday defended her recent visit to a Shiv temple in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch and performing a ritual there, saying "we live in a country that is home to the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb" and there is no need to discuss the matter further.

A video of the former chief minister offering water to Shivling inside Navgraha temple, Mandi-Ajote in Poonch on Tuesday has gone viral, drawing criticism from some quarters.

"We are living in a secular country that is home to Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb. The temple was built by Yashpal Sharma (former PDP leader who died last year) and his sons want me to visit the place. I went inside and someone gave me a small vessel filled with water with a lot of belief and love.

"I do not want to break his heart by refusing to pour water (on the Shivling). He asked for it and I did it (out of respect for him)," Mehbooba Mufti told reporters here.

Asked about some Islamic scholars from Deoband in Uttar Pradesh disliking it, she said she did not want to go into it and whether it is allowed or not in her religion.

"In our country, Hindus and Muslims live together and there are more Hindus offering Chadar' at Muslim shrines than Muslims themselves. This issue is related to myself and there is no need for further discussion over it," she said.

Situation in India no different from Pak

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Thursday said like the ruling party in Pakistan is trying to arrest former prime minister Imran Khan, the BJP-led central government here is misusing central agencies to put opposition leaders in jail.

Speaking at the party headquarters here, the former chief minister said she

is concerned about the difficulties being faced by people in the aftermath of the revocation of Article 370 and bifurcation of the erstwhile state into two Union Territories in August 2019.

"Nothing new is happening in Pakistan... it is happening here (India) as well," Mufti said while responding to a question on the developments in crisis-hit Pakistan where the ruling party is planning to arrest the Pakistan-Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman on corruption charges.

"The situation is not different in India where sitting ministers, former ministers are also jailed... Manish Sisodia (AAP), (Kalvakuntla) Kavitha (daughter of Telangana CM K Chandrashekar Rao), Lalu Prasad (RJD president), Shiv Sena

leaders and others have been targeted (jailed or summoned)," she said.

Former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao also went to jail (in 1996) as per the law of the land, however, the BJP-led central government is misusing the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) and CBI against the opposition

leaders to put them in jails, she said.

Asked about the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir and the role of her party, she said, "When the election takes place is not my priority. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are facing in difficulties in the aftermath of the 2019 development."

"No outside industry has come to J&K from 2019 onwards. Jammu businessmen are suffering after the administration stopped the darbar move (a practice under which the government used to function six months each in Srinagar and Jammu)," she said, claiming that people from outside are coming and settling in Jammu.

Asked about Lt Governor Manoj Sinha's statement that 47 terrorists and their families who were provided jobs by the previous governments were dismissed by his administration, Mufti said he will set a record by dismissing employees but not providing jobs to aspirants.

In our country, Hindus and Muslims live together and there are more Hindus offering Chadar' at Muslim shrines than Muslims themselves. This issue is related to myself and there is no need for further discussion over it

Mehbooba Mufti
PDP president

REGION

HP Economic Survey

GDP growth to be 6.4 pc in FY23 against 7.6 pc in 2021-22

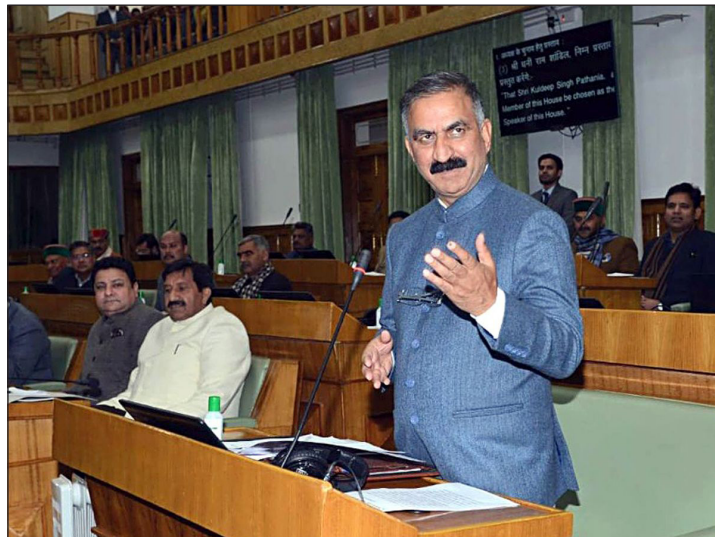
SHIMLA, MARCH 16

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Himachal Pradesh at constant prices will grow by Rs 8,143 crore year-on-year in 2022-23, while growth in real GDP terms will be 6.4 per cent in the current fiscal against 7.6 per cent in 2021-22.

The Economic Survey presented in the Vidhan Sabha by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu on Thursday pegged the GDP at constant prices (2011-12) in Financial Year 2022-23 at Rs 1,34,576 crore against a provisional GDP estimate of Rs 1,26,433 crore for 2021-22.

The GDP at current prices is estimated at Rs 1,95,404 crore in 2022-23 compared to 1,76,269 crore in the previous year, reflecting an absolute increase of Rs 19,135 crore, and the nominal GDP growth is estimated at 10.9 per cent in 2022-23 against 13.5 per cent in 2021-22.

As per the advance estimates for 2022-23, the gross value added (GVA) from the primary sector is likely to grow at 2 per cent at constant prices, and the GVA of the primary sector would move up from Rs 16,395 crore during 2021-22



to Rs 16,717 crore in 2022-23. The GVA of the secondary sector is also marginally up at Rs 60,444 crore during the current year against Rs 56,408 in 2021-22. The services sector has shown a significant and fast-growing share in the GVA in 2022-23 at constant prices and is estimated at Rs 49,527 crore against Rs 46,350 crore in 2021-22.

The tertiary sector accounted for 43.6 per cent of the state's GVA at current prices, followed by the secondary Sector at 42.7 per cent and Primary Sector at 13.7 per cent.

The per capita income (PCI) is also estimated to increase to Rs 2,22,227 at current prices for Financial Year 2022-23 from Rs 2,01,271 in 2021-22, showing

a growth of 10.4 per cent against 13.1 per cent in the previous year.

The contribution of the agriculture sector to gross state value added (GSVA) at current prices increased by 40 per cent to Rs 24,847 crore in 2022-23 (Advance Estimates) from Rs 17,767 crore in 2018-19.

The GSVA of crops at current prices increased from Rs 10,286 crore in 2018-19 to Rs 15,561 crore in 2022-23.

The contribution of the industry sector (including Mining and Quarrying) at current prices to GSVA is estimated at Rs 79,284 crore in 2022-23 (42.97 per cent).

In 2022-23, the manufacturing sector is expected to grow at 6.7 per cent, which is the third-highest growth rate in the industry sector.

The domestic tourist arrivals increased from 32.13 lakh in 2020 to 56.37 lakh in 2021 and further to 150.99 lakh in 2022 in absolute terms, reaching the pre-pandemic levels.

Himachal Pradesh ranked second in India in terms of sustainable development goals (SDGs) after Kerala in 2020-21. The unemployment rate of the state is lowest at 4.0 per cent in India. **PTI**

Fire breaks out at chemical factory in Baddi

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SOLAN, MARCH 16

Major fire erupted in the godown of a chemical factory in the Baddi industrial town on Thursday. No loss of life was reported. Loss to property is yet to be ascertained.

The fire occurred in Shree Aadinath Alcochem at Malkhumajra village. It was yet to be ascertained if the godown had a fire certification and its fire-fighting equipment was in working order.

According to the firemen who rushed to the spot from Baddi with 20 people, thinner was stored in the factory. Nine fire tenders were pressed into service from nearby fire stations like Baddi, Nalagarh as well as industrial units like Vardhman Textiles, Baddi and TVS Motors, Nalagarh, to douse the flames.

Thick black plumes of smoke were seen rising from the godown. Controlling the fire was a major challenge for firemen as several water tenders were exhausted in order to contain the blaze. The inflammable nature of the chemical made it difficult to control the fire. Baddi DSP Priyank Gupta said the fire was controlled around 6 pm and no one was injured in the incident. As per the preliminary probe, presence of inflammable thinner had caused the fire while other reasons like short circuit or negligence would be probed after the fire was fully controlled. **PTI**

Metro connectivity to Pinjore-Kalka from Chandigarh under mobility plan: Khattar

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Thursday said metro connectivity to Panchkula's Pinjore-Kalka from Chandigarh and Zirakpur should be made under the Comprehensive Mobility Plan (CMP).

The CM was speaking during a meeting of the CMP, chaired by Punjab Governor and Chandigarh UT Administrator Banwarilal Purohit here. Punjab Tourism Minister Anmol Gagan Mann, Chandigarh Mayor Anup Gupta, Haryana Chief Secretary Sanjeev Kaushal, along with senior officers from Chandigarh and Punjab were present during the meeting. A detailed presentation on the comprehensive mobility plan for the tricity which includes Chandigarh, Panchkula (Haryana) and Mohali (Punjab) was given by the officials of the Rail India Technical and Economic Service (RITES), a Haryana government statement said. Various proposals for a mass rapid transport system to tackle the tricity's growing traffic congestion were discussed. **PTI**

BJP stages walkout from HP Assembly over closure of facilities

SHIMLA, MARCH 16

BJP members raised slogans in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on Thursday demanding the reopening of facilities closed by the new government, triggering slogan-shouting by the ruling Congress MLAs as well before walking out of the House.

Ahead of the pandemonium in the House, BJP MLAs had marched from the main gate of the assembly complex to Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's office carrying chains and locks.

As they squatted outside the CM's office in the complex and shouted slogans, Congress MLAs too arrived there, also chanting slogans.



Since assuming office in December last year, the Congress government has closed down over 900 facilities and institutions set up by the previous BJP government, saying such establishments were set up during the fag end of its tenure without budgetary provision.

The BJP has been demanding the

reopening of the facilities which include schools, colleges, health centres, revenue subdivision, and PWD and electricity offices, among others.

Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania tried to restore order and allowed Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Thakur to speak, but BJP members resumed

slogan shouting after Thakur concluded his speech and staged a walkout.

Thakur said that the government was taking the issue lightly but there was an outcry against the closure of institutions without following due procedure.

"When BJP members tried to meet the chief minister, some Congress MLAs tried to block them and resorted to hooliganism... Had I not restrained the BJP MLAs, the situation could have become unfortunate," Thakur said.

Chief Minister Sukhu said that he requested the former chief minister and BJP MLAs to come to his chamber and not squat on the floor but they did not heed as they wanted to make headlines. **PTI**

3 die as car falls into gorge in HP's Kasauli

SHIMLA, MARCH 16

Three people died and two sustained injuries after their car fell into a deep gorge near Jangeshu village on the Kasauli-Parwanoo Road in Solan district on Thursday morning, police said.

Preliminary investigations revealed that the five occupants of the ill-fated car

were on their way to Parwanoo from Kasauli when the incident occurred after the driver lost control of the car, police said. Suraj Thakur, a resident of Abhipur village near Nalagarh, Shubham from Nalagarh and Sangam from Kurukshetra in Haryana died on the spot. The injured were taken to ESI hospital Parwanoo, they said. **PTI**

Road crash in Hamirpur leaves one dead

HAMIRPUR, MARCH 16

A man was killed while his sister sustained serious injuries when their motorcycle skid and hit a bus on the Dangdi-Kangu link road in the district, police said Thursday.

The deceased Shivam (21) was returning to his village along with his

sister Anshika (18) after taking part in the Holi fair in Sujanpur Tira when the accident occurred on Wednesday night, they said. Shivam lost control of the bike at a sharp turn, police said.

The injured girl was rushed to a Hamirpur hospital for treatment. A case has been registered and investigations are underway, police said. **PTI**

OPINION

The Express India NEWS

Governor justified to call 'trust vote'

In a strange observation the Supreme Court of India on Wednesday raised a question mark over Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari calling for a trust vote in June last year when a group of Shiv Sena MLAs rebelled against the Chief Minister Udhav Thackeray. Media reports quoted a five-judge bench headed by the Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud observing, "The Governor must be conscious that calling for a trust vote may lead to the toppling of the government". Of course a government will get toppled if it has lost the confidence of the house and support of the legislators. Then what is wrong in the Governor calling for a trust vote? He is not supposed to prevent the fall of the government after it loses support of the majority.

The Governor is a constitutional authority endowed with certain powers. If the legislators of a ruling party approach him telling him that they no longer support the government, what should he do, if not call the "trust vote"? Should he "counsel" the rebel legislators that they should fall in line? It is difficult to understand what the Supreme Court wants the Governor to do in such

a situation and not call for a trust vote. In fact the Supreme Court itself in the famous SR Bommai case has held that the trust vote can be decided only on the floor of the house and that is constitutionally correct.

The court observed, "the Governor should not enter any area which precipitates the fall of a government.

IF THE LEGISLATORS OF A RULING PARTY APPROACH GOVERNOR TELLING HIM THAT THEY NO LONGER SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT, WHAT SHOULD HE DO, IF NOT CALL THE "TRUST VOTE"?

People will start ditching the ruling party and the Governor will end up toppling the ruling party. This will be a sad spectacle for democracy". This indeed will be a sad spectacle for democracy if and when an elected government falls. But won't it be equally sad to allow a government to continue when it has lost the confidence of the house?

Chief Justice Chandrachud was reported to have commented during the hearing, the Governor has to ask himself the question, "what were you fellas doing for three years? If it was one month after the election took place and they suddenly bypassed the BJP and joined INC, that's different. Three years you cohabit and suddenly one fine day group of 34 say there is discontent. Enjoying the spoils of office and suddenly one day you just ..."

Why does the Governor need to ask such a question? If the legislators have lost the trust and confidence in the leader and seek change of leadership what is wrong in that. Governor cannot act in a partisan manner and question the legislators as to what happened to them after "enjoying the spoils of office". That is not the job of the Governor. His job is to check whether the government continues to enjoy the confidence of the house or not. And to establish and validate that, the only way is to hold a trust vote. Governor Koshyari precisely did that. Holding what he is constitutionally supposed to do, against the Governor, is not being fair to him.

Mehar Baba, the man who knew no fear



BY MAJ GEN HARVIJAY SINGH (RETD, SM)

Mehar Singh was commissioned in August 1936 and posted to No.1 Squadron Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF). He was amongst the first six pioneering officers of the squadron in operations in wild and mountainous North West Frontier Province (Now in Pakistan), he flew in one month as many as hundred hours; this was to be the pattern of his career full of historic daring exploits.

In 1937, Flying Officer Mehar Singh and his air gunner Ghulam Ali were attacking a tribal post, when, his fuel tank was hit by rifle fire. He crash-landed his Wapiti aircraft in rocky terrain and had to escape and evade the hostile tribesman wanting his blood. Singh and Ali extricated the Lewis gun from the downed aircraft and took refuge in a cave. At nightfall, they walked back without maps, through the hostiles and returned safely... Mehar Singh knew no fear.

In 1942, the C-in-C awarded Mehar Singh a Commendation Certificate in recognition of his operational flying in Sind during Hur disturbances. By now Mehar Singh had acquired great reputation as a flier and was affectionately called Mehar Baba by his colleagues.

Asghar Khan, an officer under him who later became Chief of the Air Staff of Pakistan, said about him - "With the solitary exception of Squadron Leader Mehar Singh, a pilot of outstanding ability, no one was able to inspire confidence among us."; There was no one like Mehar Baba.

Mehar Singh raised No 6 Squadron on 6 Dec 1942 and commanded it in Arakans of Burma during WWII. RIAF tentatively settled down for operations under extremely difficult conditions. Under his leadership, the Squadron with its Hurricanes came to be known as Eyes of the 14th Army.

His reputation was aptly and amusingly summed up by Field Marshal Slim, the 14th Army Commander in his memoirs, recounting an impromptu visit to No 6 Squadron: "The last air patrol had run into a bunch of Zeros (Japanese fighter aircraft) and had been shot down. The Sikh Squadron Leader, an old friend of mine, at once took out the next patrol himself and completed the mission. His methods, rumour had it, were a little unorthodox. It was said that if any of his young officers made a bad landing, he would take them behind a basha (temporary hutment) and beat them. Whatever he did, it was effective; they were a happy, efficient and gallant squadron." Mehar Singh was awarded DSO (Distinguished Service Order) in March 1944.

He was the first and only officer of the India Air Force to have won this award. Soon after the war, Mehar Singh was called upon to reorganize, strengthen and train the RIAF. In 1947, when Pakistani raiders attacked Jammu and Kashmir, it was decided to fly in 1 SIKH Regiment. Early morning 27 October, 1 SIKH was airlifted



Srinagar Airfield 1947



Leh Airport 1948



Mehar Baba

to Srinagar by the Air Force and civilian Dakotas. The Dakotas were required to fly higher than their designed capability with negligible navigation aids and destination was a dusty Srinagar airfield.

Dauntless, the first three Dakotas took off from Willingdon (Safdarjung) airfield at 0500h and touched down at 0830h with 1 SIKH. The brave Sikhs were just in time to save Srinagar airstrip and city from being overrun. Later an Infantry Brigade was airlifted while Tempests, Spitfires and even Harvard's provided Close Air Support to the Army. On a busy day upto a hundred planes landed daily bringing in troops, ammunition and supplies and evacuating casualties and refugees.

In my long experience of war, I have not come across another such massive airlift carried out so successfully - Lord Mountbatten. Air Commodore Mehar Singh, Air Officer Commanding No 1 Operations Group, accomplished the uphill task in record time of five days and was awarded the Mahavir Chakra (MVC), the first in Indian Air Force.

A few days later, Poonch town in the Jammu region was besieged on 21 November 1947 and remained under siege for one year till 22 November 1948. The town was desperately in need of supplies. Brigadier Pritam Singh, the garrison commander used the besieged civilians to construct a temporary airstrip.

On 12 December 1947, Mehar Singh carried out a daring trial landing. The same day, much to the cheer of the beleaguered defenders, Dakotas car-

rying a section of mountain artillery landed. Thereafter the Air Force established an air bridge of Dakotas, first by day and later by night. Despite constant shelling by enemy, the air bridge flew in supplies and flew out refugees: forty thousand within a few weeks, a rare feat indeed. He also introduced the novelty of arming Dakotas on supply missions and carried out bombing-cum-supply missions personally.

In 1948 Pakistani raiders continued with their operations, besieged, and captured Kargil and Dras in May. Hordes of raiders also swarmed into the Ladakh Plateau heading for Leh. By then, the Leh Garrison had been reduced to a handful from the Maharaja's Army.

Till now Ladakh had no airstrip, it was crucial to establish one to support the troops operating at these daunting heights. A temporary airstrip was prepared at Leh and a trial landing planned.

On 24 May 1948, flying through uncharted routes over the Himalayas, Commodore Mehar Singh landed a Dakota at Leh, 11,540 ft above sea level, thus helping to secure Ladakh. His daring exploits in flying over uncharted mountains - more than 23,000 feet above sea level in a non-pressurised plane - are unmatched in the Military History of the World. Four months after the Leh landing, Mehar Singh resigned his commission.

On 11 March, 1952, nine days short of his 33rd birthday, he died when the civilian Bonanza aircraft he was flying, caught in a freak, sudden storm crashed on the outskirts of Delhi, snuffing out a charmed life.

Death, be not proud; For, Mehar Baba flies forever in his immortal shroud.

The Express India NEWS

NATION

ED rejects Kavitha's plea to defer proceedings

Fresh summons issued for Mar 20

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Thursday rejected BRS leader K Kavitha's plea to defer proceedings against her till the Supreme Court ruling on her petition seeking protection from arrest and summons, as it issued a fresh notice to her for questioning on March 20 in the Delhi excise policy money laundering case, officials said.

The Telangana MLC sent an "authorised representative" in the morning with a six-page petition to the investigating officer of the case in Delhi stating she was skipping the March 16 summons as they explicitly does not require her

to appear in person.

In the letter sent to the ED, Kavitha said: "I humbly beseech your good self that the proceedings before the Supreme Court being sacred and sacrosanct, the outcome thereof must be awaited before any further proceedings take place with respect to the subject summons." "I once again request your good self that you may please defer the proceedings awaiting appropriate order(s) or direction(s) by the Hon'ble Supreme Court," she wrote.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear on March 24 the plea by Kavitha seeking protection from arrest and challenging the summons issued against her by the ED in this case.

Sources in the agency said her plea was rejected in view of the ongoing investigation which is at an important phase including the requirement of her physical and document-based confronta-

tion with other accused arrested/involved in the case.

Kavitha has been asked to appear next week on March 20, officials said.

The 44-year-old politician was first questioned in this case on March 11 and she spent close to nine hours there, following which, she was asked to depose again on March 16.

In her letter, Kavitha spoke about her first deposition before the ED where she said she "furnished all relevant information and answered all queries to the best of my knowledge, ability and understanding".

Kavitha, however, expressed surprise and "shock" that her phone was "impounded" by the agency that day and she was not physically confronted with any arrested accused despite the agency's earlier "categorical assertion" for the same.

'Whole tamasha' to divert attention from Adani issue : Rahul

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

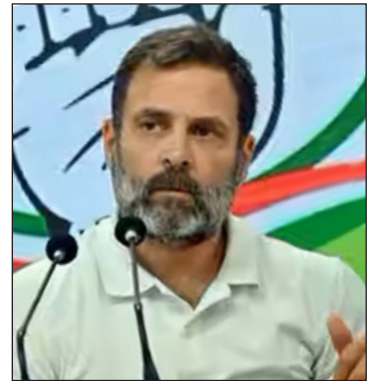
Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged the whole "tamasha" around his remarks in the UK has been created by the government to divert attention from the Adani issue and asserted it is a "test of Indian democracy" as to whether he would be allowed to respond to the allegations by the BJP in Parliament.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here, Gandhi said the question before the country is that whether after four BJP leaders have made allegations about a member of Parliament, that person would be given the same space as them or he be "going to be told to shut up".

In an apparent reference to the controversy over his remarks in the UK, Gandhi said this whole thing is about distraction, and claimed that the government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are "scared" over the Adani issue and that is why they have "prepared this whole tamasha".

Gandhi on Thursday arrived in Parliament House after his return from abroad and met Speaker Om Birla urging him to allow him to speak in Lok Sabha.

"I went to Parliament this morning with the idea of putting (forward) what I have said or what I feel on the floor of the House. Four ministers have raised allegations against me in Parliament House, it is my right to be allowed to speak on the floor of the House," the



former Congress chief said.

"I told him (the Speaker) that people from the BJP have made allegations against me and as a member of Parliament, it is my right to speak," he said.

Gandhi said Birla was "non-committal" and just smiled.

The Congress leader said he is hopeful though not very sure that he would be allowed to speak in Parliament on Friday.

Gandhi said he had asked some fundamental questions about the relationship between Modi and Adani Group chairperson Gautam Adani.

The whole idea is that all those questions must not be on the table and that is why this whole exercise of four-five ministers and the prime minister speaking, he claimed.

"More importantly whose money is in these shell companies, who is this unknown person whose money is in these shell companies," Gandhi asked.

Class 10 paper leak failure of govt: Himanta

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
GUWAHATI, MARCH 16

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday conceded that the question paper leak for Class 10 state board exam is a "failure" on the part of his government.

During an assembly session, Sarma also stated that the mastermind behind the scandal has been identified. "The matric paper leak should not have hap-

pened. It reflects our failure. I accept it," he told the House. The centre in-charge of a school is the main culprit, and three others teachers were also found involved in the matter, he said.

The government, in future, will take all possible steps to further strengthen the Board of Secondary Education, Assam (SEBA), which conducts the Class 10 matriculation examination in the state, Sarma said.

"The Assam Police has cracked the

case within 48 hours. I request the accused to surrender before the police and share further details," he added.

The Assam Police will take the case to a logical conclusion and the strictest punishment will be given to the culprits as per the law, the chief minister said. "I was silent for the last three days because I wanted the police to continue their investigation. Police have collected all physical and electronic evidence, and will now proceed to arrest them," Sarma pointed out.

On National Vaccination Day, PM hails healthcare workers

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

On National Vaccination Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday lauded all healthcare workers for their efforts towards keeping India healthy and reaffirmed the commitment to building a healthy country.

His remarks came after a tweet by Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who said that on National Vaccination Day, the entire nation salutes the hard work of frontline healthcare workers to ensure the vaccination of every child.

Tagging his tweet, Modi said, "Compliments to all our healthcare workers for their efforts towards keeping India healthy. On National Vaccination Day we also recall India's strides in vaccinating people and reaffirm our commitment

to building a healthy India." Also tagging a tweet by the V O Chidambaram Port Authority which said that this fiscal year, the port has handed 36.03 million tonnes of cargo, Modi said, "Good! India's port sector is growing rapidly and contributing to economic progress." Responding to another tweet by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways on 'Serang Sandhya' who has taken command of a ferry, Modi said in a tweet in Hindi, "Tribute to women power! New records of women in water, land and sky will prove to be milestones in building a developed India." Sandhya, 44, became the first woman in Kerala to hold the title of boat master or serang.

Tagging a tweet by Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar that policies of the central government to make the sugar industry self-sufficient

Delhi Budget to have 'biggest outlay' for infra projects

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

The 2023-24 budget of the AAP government, to be tabled in the assembly on Tuesday, will have "the biggest" outlay of capital expenditure for infrastructure projects such as roads and double-decker flyovers, Delhi government sources said.

With a boost in tax revenue, the government's budget outlay for 2023-24 may be close to Rs 80,000 crore, they said ahead of the Budget Session of the Delhi assembly that will start on Friday.

The Arvind Kejriwal government's plan to beautify and modernise the national capital's infrastructure will be the main focus of Budget 2023-24.

"The budget will have the biggest outlay for capital expenditure towards infrastructure projects in the last eight years of the Kejriwal government," a

source in the Delhi government said and added that education and health will also be major focus areas.

The Delhi government has plans to upgrade and beautify the entire 1,400 kilometres road network of the public works department and nearly Rs 20,000

WITH A BOOST IN TAX REVENUE, THE GOVERNMENT'S BUDGET OUTLAY FOR 2023-24 MAY BE CLOSE TO RS 80,000 CRORE

crore will be spent over a period of 10 years on the project, he said.

Three double-decker flyovers will be constructed in the city with the lower deck for vehicles and the upper deck for metro rail trains, the source said.

The Kejriwal government in the last eight years has completed 28 flyovers

and underpasses, and another 30 flyovers, underpasses and bridges will be constructed by it, he said. The tax collection of the government in the current and the next financial year is expected to remain as per estimates, the sources said.

The annual budget size of the government for 2022-23 was Rs 75,800 crore and Rs 69,000 crore in the year earlier.

The Delhi assembly's Budget Session will start with Lt Governor V K Saxena addressing the House. The budget will be presented on March 21 and it will be preceded by an Outcome Budget of the government.

Finance Minister Kailash Gahlot will present his first budget in the assembly.

He was given charge of the department after the resignation of deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case.

NATION

44 lawmakers take oath in Tripura

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
AGARTALA, MARCH 16

Altogether 44 newly elected MLAs of Tripura assembly took oath on Friday.

They were sworn in as Protem Speaker Binoy Bhusan Das at a ceremony on the assembly premises. Thirty MLAs of BJP including Chief Minister Manik Saha, its ally IPFT's lone member Sukla Charan Noatia, and 11 lawmakers of CPI(M) including its state secretary Jitendra Chaudhury took oath as MLAs. Two of the three Congress members -- Birajit Sinha and Gopal Chandra Roy -- were sworn in, while its other MLA Sudip Barman will take oath on Saturday, as will 14 elected members of Tipra Motha, the protem speaker said. "The first session of the assembly is scheduled to begin on March 24 and elections for the speaker and deputy speaker will be held on that day," Das said. A senior BJP leader said Ratan Chakraborty, who was the speaker of the previous assembly, is likely to retain the post, while MLA Biswabandhu Sen may be the next deputy speaker.

The CM posted on social media, "With the blessings of the people, today I took oath as a Member of the Tripura Legislative Assembly. I wholeheartedly thank the people of Town Bardowali constituency for giving me this opportunity."

'Misuse' of Delhi govt's Feedback Unit; CBI books Sisodia in fresh FIR

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

The CBI has filed a fresh FIR against Delhi's jailed former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia in connection with the alleged misuse of official position and financial impropriety in the government's Feedback Unit (FBU) which was also used for collecting "political intelligence", officials said Thursday.

Already arrested by the CBI in the excise policy case and at present in the custody of the Enforcement Directorate, the woes of 51-year-old Sisodia aggravated after the agency booked him and five others on Tuesday for alleged criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust, forgery and under provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, they said.

Along with Sisodia, the agency has named 1992-batch IRS officer Sukesh Kumar Jain who was then secretary of vigilance, retired CISF DIG Rakesh Kumar Sinha who was working as special advisor to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and joint director in the



Feedback Unit, they said.

It has also booked former joint deputy director of Intelligence Bureau Pradeep Kumar Punj, who was working as deputy director of the FBU, retired assistant commandant of CISF Satish Khetrpal who was working as feedback officer, and Gopal Mohan, advisor, anti-corruption, to Kejriwal, officials said.

Reacting to the development, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said, "PM's plan is to slap several false cases

against Manish and keep him in custody for a long period. Sad for the country!" Delhi BJP working president Virendra Sachdeva said this is a serious issue and the agency should probe it from the angle of sedition.

"I believe it's a matter of sedition. Was it that the information of the Feedback Unit was being shared with any foreign power. The agency should also probe if the FBU was getting funds from foreign countries," he said.

UDID mandatory from Apr to avail 'benefits' for persons with disabilities

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Persons with disabilities will have to mandatorily provide centrally issued Unique Disability Identification (UDID) number from April 1 to avail benefits under 17 government schemes for them.

The government said those who do not have a UDID card will have to provide UDID enrolment number (generated from UDID portal only) along with certificate of disability. "It may be noted that physical copy of disability certificate or uploading the disability certificate is not required, in case of availability of a valid UDID number," said an office memorandum of the Department of Disability Affairs. In the memorandum, the department said the move aims to bring transparency and to reduce the burden of paperwork on the people with disabilities, the UDID will be mandated for various schemes of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and its associated organizations.

'India on right path under PM Modi'

Varun Gandhi turns down Oxford Union invite

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

BJP MP Varun Gandhi has turned down the Oxford Union's invite to speak at a debate on whether India is on the right path under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he sees no merit or integrity in voicing domestic challenges at an international forum and that such a step will be a "dishonourable act".

A source said Gandhi, who has been at times critical of the government's policies, took the decision as the noted debating society based at Oxford in England wanted him to speak against the motion that "This House Believes Modi's India Is On The Right Path".

The development comes incidentally at a time of a raging debate over his cousin and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's comments in London which have been described by the ruling party as "demeaning" to Indian democracy, more so as they were made from the foreign soil. The invitation for the debate, scheduled between April and June, was extended to the BJP lawmaker on behalf of the union's president Matthew Dick.



Declining the invite, he said in his reply to the union that citizens like him regularly have the opportunity to discuss topics like this with ease in India, raising criticism of government policies in the public square and the august Parliament.

However, such criticism must be made within India to policy-makers and raising them outside the country would be inimical to its interest and a "dishonourable act", he said. Politicians like him may have their differences on individual policies at the central and state levels, however, they are all together on the same path for India's rise, he said.

The union's invite to Gandhi said Prime Minister Modi's rule has catapulted India to greater prominence on the global stage, with many equating his policy agendas to robust economic growth, tackling corruption, and putting "India first".

Military hardware

India approves capital acquisition worth Rs 70,584 cr

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

India on Thursday approved capital acquisition of a plethora of indigenously-developed military hardware including indigenous BrahMos missiles, marine diesel engine, artillery gun system, electronic warfare suits and utility helicopters at a cost of Rs 70,584 crore as part of a mega procurement plan.

Out of the total acquisition plan, the Indian Navy's proposals constitute more than Rs 56,000 crore, which largely included Shakti Electronic Warfare (EW) systems, maritime helicopters and other key equipment, officials said.

All the platforms and weapons systems are being procured from domestic sources.

The other key military hardware which are being procured included long range stand-off weapon (LRSOW), K-9 Vajra-T gun system, 155mm/52 caliber advanced towed artillery gun system (ATAGS) and gun towing vehicles (GTVs) for the Indian Army.

SP NE meet in Kolkatta, Akhilesh to meet Mamata

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
KOLKATA, MARCH 16

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is scheduled to be in the city on Friday to attend his party's two-day-long national executive and will meet West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at her residence, party sources said on Thursday.

The party is holding its two-day national executive in Kolkata from March 18 to discuss policies and strategies for assembly election in Rajasthan, Chhatisgarh and Madhya Pradesh later this year and the Lok Sabha poll in 2024, they said.

Yadav is slated to meet West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on March 17 at her residence at 5 PM, the sources said.

"On March 17 Akhilesh Yadav ji will meet Mamata Banerjee at her residence. It is a courtesy visit, but they will discuss the country's political situation. He will address party workers at Moulali Yuva Kendra in the afternoon," SP vice-president Kiranmoy Nanda said.

Banerjee and Yadav share a very cordial relationship.



Yadav had lent his party's support to TMC during the 2021 Bengal assembly poll, which was reciprocated by Banerjee when she campaigned for the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister during the 2022 election in that state.

Nanda said "On March 18 and 19 there will be a closed-door national executive meeting. On March 19 Akhilesh Yadav ji will address a press conference at 1 PM," Nanda added.

The SP national executive will be held in Kolkata after a gap of 11 years. The party founder, the late Mulayam Singh Yadav had then chaired the meeting.

NATION

Police team attacked, held hostage for 2 hours in Haryana; 5 cops hurt

NUH (HARYANA), MARCH 16

Five policemen were allegedly injured seriously when a criminal, his family members and villagers attacked and took them hostage in Gokulpur village here, police said on Thursday.

A team of Faridabad Police had gone to the village on Wednesday to nab the criminal involved in a case of theft of a tractor-trolley. It was held hostage at gunpoint by the accused in a house for two hours and later chased away, they said. Mobile phones, cash and other belongings of the policemen were also snatched. After getting information, a team of Nuh Police reached the spot and took the injured policemen to a hospital, police said.

On the complaint of the sub-inspector in-charge of the police team, a case was

registered against 15 identified men and women and around 30 unidentified people at Punhana police station. They were booked under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code, including attempt to murder, wrongful confinement, obstructing public servant in discharge of public function, and under the Arms Act, the police said.

"All the accused are absconding. Our teams are conducting raids at suspect places and they will be arrested soon," Superintendent of Police, Nuh, Varun Singla said. According to the complaint filed by Jalaluddin, a sub-inspector of the crime branch at Uncha in Faridabad, police had arrested one Talim, a resident of Gokulpur village, in a case of theft of a tractor-trolley.

During interrogation, he revealed that after stealing the tractor-trolley, he sold it to a person, Ajruddin, of his village

for Rs 1.40 lakh. To nab Ajruddin, an eight-member police team was formed under the sub-inspector and a raid was conducted at the house of Ajruddin in Gokulpur on Wednesday afternoon, as per the complaint.

"When we reached Ajruddin's house and called his name he climbed the roof of the house and made some noise, following which a number of people including women surrounded us."

"They all were carrying arms and sticks in their hands and launched a murderous attack on us, resulting in injuries to the policemen. Even after this, they did not stop and took the police party hostage at gunpoint in Ajruddin's house," the sub-inspector said. "After two hours, they released us and sent us away saying that if we again come to the village again, they will not let us go alive," he said in the complaint. **PTI**

Cong, AAP accuse Kirron Kher of using 'inappropriate' words for voters

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

The Congress and the AAP on Thursday slammed BJP MP from Chandigarh Kirron Kher, accusing her of using "inappropriate" words while referring to her constituents at an event here, and demanded that she apologise.

They claimed that Kher, a second-time MP from Chandigarh, used words such as "laanat hai" and "chittar ferne chahiye" while referring to voters. Kher was addressing an event in Kishangarh here on Wednesday and she talked about the development works done for the residents of the Deep Complex locality.

In a video, the MP is purportedly heard saying that "agar Deep Complex mein ek bhi banda mere ko vote na dale toh phir bade laanat ki baat hai... jaakar chittar ferne chahiye unko, kyon ki itne paise deke maine unki sadke banvayi (If not even one from Deep Complex votes for me, then it is a highly shameful thing... they need to be beaten up with slippers)".

Kher appeared to be speaking in a lighter vein, but her political rivals latched



on to her remarks and launched a scathing attack. Reacting to the BJP MP's remarks, Chandigarh Pradesh Mahila Congress president Deipa Dubey said, "It is sad that the Chandigarh MP is saying that if people don't vote for her they will be beaten with slippers. What does she want to convey by using such language?" "She is also heard saying that she got roads built by giving money. Did she give the money for this from her own pocket? What kind of language is she using... and this is not the first time that she has used such language," she said.

The Chandigarh Mahila Congress demands that "she apologise to people because of whom she is the MP", Dubey said. **PTI**

HP assembly passes bill to levy water cess on 172 hydropower projects

SHIMLA, MARCH 16

In a major initiative to generate revenue, Himachal Vidhan Sabha on Thursday adopted with amendments a bill to levy water cess on 172 hydropower projects in the state and projects coming in future.

The amendments moved by Randhir Sharma (BJP) pertained to widening the scope for appointment of Chairman and members of Water Commission to facilitate inclusion of technocrats, retired army personnel, judges, engineers, financial and management experts and giving relaxation to projects with 5-MW or less capacity. After intervention of Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Deputy Chief minister Mukesh Agnihotri, who holds the portfolio of Jal Shakti department, moved the bill with amendments which was passed by the House. Agnihotri said the water cess would not put any burden on the public and generate an annual revenue of about Rs 4,000 crore. The modalities of the cess are yet to be worked out. The bill was brought after serious considerations and hydropower companies would be consulted and relief to projects with less than 5 MW capacity, owned by Himachali youth would be considered, Agnihotri said adding that the opposition should cooperate with the government and not side with capitalists. **PTI**

G20 meet on education

Delegates deliberate on strengthening research, promoting innovation

AMRITSAR, MARCH 16

Delegates attending the G20 Education Working Group meeting here on Thursday deliberated on strengthening research, promoting innovation through collaboration and building capacities.

More than 55 delegates from G20 countries, guest countries, and invited organisations such as UNICEF are participating in the three-day event which began on Wednesday.

The meeting was chaired by Union Secretary Higher Education K Sanjay Murthy with Secretary School Education and Literacy Sanjay Kumar and Secretary in the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Atul Kumar Tiwari as alternate chairs, according to an official statement issued here.

Presentations were also made by Research Innovation Initiative Gathering (RIIG), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNICEF during the meet's second day.

The event brought together all G20 member countries, invited countries and international organisations to discuss the importance of knowledge sharing and collaboration to generate solutions to common global challenges.

The G20 countries stressed on identi-



fying and addressing problems that inhibit effective academic research collaborations, the statement said.

It was also acknowledged that, in order to create a multiplier effect for a larger and more inclusive global advantage of "our accumulated knowledge and innovation skills, there is now a need for stronger collaboration among countries in research and innovation", it said.

Some of the topics covered included developing a framework for joint collaboration for the exchange of researchers and students, international research, data privacy, and other ethical concerns,

the statement said.

During the meeting, the delegates also stressed on gender equality and gender inclusion in the research arena as well as improved grassroots participation in order to bridge the gap between academia, the private sector and society.

In the second and third sessions of the day, discussions were centred around use of blended learning to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy, the importance of teacher training to induce creativity in classroom teaching by designing learning materials and development of skill development frameworks. **PTI**

Haryana: Scheme for people with income below Rs 1.80L launched

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 16

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Thursday launched a scheme which aims to provide financial aid in case of death or permanent disability of a member of a family having an annual income less than Rs 1.80 lakh.

The scheme is named Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Antyodaya Parivar Suraksha Yojana, an official statement said. It aims to provide financial assistance in case of death --natural or accidental or permanent disability -- of a member of a family having an annual income less than Rs 1.80 lakh as verified in the Parivar Pehchan Patra or Family Information Data Repository (FIDR) database, it said.

The financial assistance would vary depending on the age of the beneficiary. Also, the scheme will also include an amount of Rs 2 lakh under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY). Haryana Parivar Suraksha Nyas (HPSN) will be the implementing agency for the scheme, said Khattar while launching it during a programme here. "With the aim to bring various insurance schemes under one umbrella, Haryana Parivar Suraksha Nyas has been established. **PTI**

NATION

U'kd Speaker asks govt to issue show cause notice to CS

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
GAIRSAIN, MARCH 16

Uttarakhand Assembly Speaker Ritu Khanduri on Thursday directed the state government to issue a show cause notice to Chief Secretary SS Sandhu in connection with a breach of privilege motion brought against him by four Congress MLAs.

Chakrata MLA Pritam Singh, Jaspur MLA Adesh Chauhan, Khatima MLA Bhuvan Kapri and Dharchula MLA Harish Dhami moved the

THE SPEAKER ASSURED THE MEMBERS THAT THE MATTER WILL BE INVESTIGATED BUT THEY INSISTED ON A DIRECTION FROM HER.

breach of privilege motion against Sandhu accusing him of not following the protocol and talking to them when they went to call on him on Thursday morning.

Informing the assembly about it,

Pritam Singh said, "We four MLAs went to meet the Chief Secretary this morning. Not to speak of greeting us, he did not even find it necessary to talk to us." Accusing the chief secretary of not following the protocol, the MLAs demanded a direction from the speaker in this regard.

The speaker assured the members that the matter will be investigated but they insisted on a direction from her.

She then directed the state government to serve the chief secretary with a show cause notice asking him to explain his behaviour.

Efforts on to secure release of ex-Navy personnel from Qatar: MEA

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MAR 16

India on Thursday said it attaches "high priority" to secure early release of eight former Indian Navy personnel who are in detention in Qatar for over six months.

The Qatari authorities have not yet publicly made any charges against the Indians who were working for private firm Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services.

"We attach high priority to the matter. There are continuous efforts by our embassy for resolution of the matter so that early return and repatriation can take place of the detained Indian nationals," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said at his weekly media briefing.

He was responding to a question on the matter.

THE QATARI AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT YET PUBLICLY MADE ANY CHARGES AGAINST THE INDIANS WHO WERE WORKING FOR PRIVATE FIRM DAHRA GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES AND CONSULTANCY SERVICES.

"Our embassy has been seeking consular access. I think one more request is pending so that they can ascertain the welfare and well-being of our nationals and the family meetings and family visits are continued to be facilitated," Bagchi said.

Indian officials have been given consular access to the eight men on a number of occasions.

The men could speak to their family members on a few occasions.

Rahul insulted Parliament from foreign soil, must apologise: Anurag

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Congress leaders have a habit of maligning the country and putting the blame on others, Union Minister Anurag Thakur said on Thursday, amid a political row over Rahul Gandhi's remarks in the UK that structures of Indian democracy are under attack. "Welcome to Parliament. It has been a week-long wait. Rahul Gandhi has maligned India from foreign soil, has spread lies and insulted Parliament. He should come to the House and apologise," the information and broadcasting minister said. Rahul Gandhi on Thursday arrived in Parliament House after his return from abroad and met Speaker Om Birla urging him to allow him to speak in Lok Sabha. Thakur recalled that former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had called Planning Commission members a "bunch of jokers", while Rahul Gandhi had torn a government ordinance and dubbed it as "nonsense". "I wonder how (former prime minister and senior Congress leader) Manmohan Singh had stood such insults," the BJP leader said outside Parliament. During his interactions in the UK, Rahul Gandhi had alleged that the structures of Indian democracy are under attack and there is a "full-scale assault" on the country's institutions. He had also told British parliamentarians that microphones are often "turned off" in Lok Sabha when an opposition member raises important issues.

EC proposal on overseas Indian voters under discussion with MEA

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

An Election Commission proposal to facilitate electronically-transmitted postal ballot system for overseas Indian voters is under discussions with the Ministry of External Affairs to "iron out" logistical challenges involved in its implementation, Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday.

In a written reply, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju also said the total number of overseas electors as on January 1 this year

stands at over 1.15 lakh.

"The Election Commission of India has taken up a proposal to amend the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 to facilitate electronically-transmitted postal ballot system for overseas electors. The matter is under discussions with the Ministry of External Affairs to iron out the logistical challenges involved in the implementation of the proposal," Rijiju said. According to the EC website, as of now an overseas voter is not issued a photo identity card they are allowed to vote in person at the polling station by

producing their original passport.

The EC has maintained that overseas voters find it difficult to fly down to India to cast vote.

The minister recalled that earlier, on the recommendation of the poll panel, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2018, to enable the overseas electors to cast their vote either in person or by proxy, was passed by Lok Sabha in August, 2018.

The Bill was pending in Rajya Sabha for consideration but lapsed due to the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha.

Woman, 25, found with throat slit in Delhi, husband absconding

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

A 25-year-old woman was found with her throat slit Thursday afternoon inside her rented house in the northeast Delhi's Karawal Nagar area, police said.

Police found one Nisha, a resident of Rama Bai Mohalla, Karawal Nagar, dead with her throat apparently slit with a sharp edged weapon, a senior police officer said.

Her 32-year-old husband, Azeez, is absconding along with their two children, police said.

Transport union threatens to boycott Char Dham Yatra

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
RISHIKESH, MARCH 16

Uttarakhand Transport Mahasangh on Thursday threatened to boycott the upcoming Char Dham Yatra in protest against a government order on mandatory installation of location tracking devices in vehicles operating on the pilgrimage route.

The yatra will begin on April 22 with the opening of the Yamunotri and Gangotri temples. Kedarnath will open on April 25 and Badrinath on April 27.

The State Transport Authority recently decided not to issue green cards to vehicles without a tracking device.

"The timing of the decision is wrong.

The Char Dham Yatra is to commence soon and the availability of the location tracking device is limited," Uttarakhand Transport Mahasangh president Sudhir Rai said. "We will have no choice but to boycott the yatra if vehicles operating on the yatra route are not exempted from this mandatory requirement," Rai said.

Rai also opposed the proposed move to impose a daily limit on the number of pilgrims visiting the Char Dham temples.

"The restriction on the number of pilgrims was imposed due to the Covid pandemic. Now that the pandemic is almost over and its treatment is also available, there is no justification for a daily cap on the number of pilgrims visiting the Himalayan temples," he said.

AAP video shows Delhi LG 'leading mob' against Medha Patkar in 2002

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

The AAP Thursday on released a video purportedly showing Delhi LG V K Saxena inciting a mob during the 2002 Sabarmati Ashram attack in Ahmedabad.

The party asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure that the Lt Governor is held accountable for his "crimes."

There was no immediate reaction from the LG office on Saxena's role in the incident which took place at the Mahatma Gandhi-founded ashram, where scores of journalists and activists had gathered to call for peace in the wake of the 2002 Godhra train burning.

Senior AAP Leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh called upon the citizens of the country to "see and recognise the real face of the LG."

A man of criminal character cannot be responsible for law and order and security in the national capital, he alleged.

Singh in a press conference here shared a video that purportedly showed Saxena inciting and leading a mob that attacked activist Medha Patkar in 2002 at Sabarmati Ashram.

Saxena was named "Accused No. 4" in the FIR filed in connection with the incident, he said.

He went on to accuse Saxena of rioting, voluntarily causing hurt, wrongful restraint, criminal intimidation, unlawful assembly, and intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace citing the FIR. **PTI**

WORLD

2.5 tons of uranium missing from Libyan site, poses radiological risk: UN report

VIENNA, AUSTRIA, MARCH 16

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reported that 2.5 tonnes of natural uranium have gone missing from a Libyan site, which "may present a radiological risk".

The IAEA inspectors found on Tuesday that "10 drums containing approximately 2.5 tonnes of natural uranium in the form of uranium ore concentrate... were not present" as previously declared at the location. The site "is currently not under the regulatory control of Libya's state authority," the report said.

The IAEA will conduct "further activities...to clarify the circumstances of the removal of the nuclear material" from the site and investigate the material's "current location", the report said.

Uranium ore concentrate is considered to emit low levels of radioactivity. But the IAEA cautioned that "the loss of knowledge about the present location of nuclear material may present a radiological risk, as well as nuclear security concerns."

The report did not identify the site or say why Libya was in possession of the material. The document said that the location was routinely monitored by the IAEA through commercial satellite imagery and other open source information. It was through analysing these images that the agency decided to make a physical inspection, despite the security risk and logistical challenge, it said. **PTI**

Debt crisis: Lanka Prez assures transparency

COLOMBO, MARCH 16

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe has sent an open letter to the country's official bilateral creditors, including India, China, and Japan, assuring them of transparency, equal treatment, and equitable burden-sharing in resolving the country's economic crisis.

He stated that necessary safeguards would be put in place to ensure equitable burden sharing and comparability of treatment. The President committed to communicating transparently with all creditors on any debt treatment terms agreed upon before being formalised and to reporting regularly on the country's indebtedness.



The Executive Board of the IMF is scheduled to meet on March 20 to consider Sri Lanka's request for a bailout. If approved, the first tranche of the facility would be released shortly. Sri Lanka would need to restore debt sustainability over a 10-year period as per the agreement with the

IMF, and debt treatment remains the most critical aspect of that exercise.

The IMF in September last year approved Sri Lanka a 2.9 billion dollar bailout package over four years pending its ability to restructure its debt with creditors, both bilateral and sovereign bondholders. By the end of June 2022, Sri Lanka owed nearly USD 40 billion to bilateral, multilateral, and commercial loans, and Chinese loans amounted to 20 per cent of the total debt owed and 43 per cent of the bilateral loans.

The country declared its first-ever debt default in April 2022 as the economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948 triggered by forex shortages sparked public protests. **PTI**

Pentagon releases footage of Russian aircraft intercepting US drone

WASHINGTON D.C, MARCH 16

The Pentagon has released a video that shows a Russian Su-27 fighter jet conducting an unsafe intercept of a US Air Force surveillance drone in international airspace over the Black Sea. In the 42-second video released on Thursday, the Russian fighter jet is seen approaching the back of the MQ-9 drone and releasing fuel as it passes, according to the Pentagon. The US military said it had to ditch the MQ-9 Reaper in the sea after the Russian fighter jet poured fuel on the unmanned aerial vehicle and then struck its propeller. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley have spoken to their Russian counterparts about the incident.

While intercept attempts are not uncommon, this incident amid the ongoing war in Ukraine has raised concerns about the possibility of direct conflict between the US and Russia. The calls with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of Russian General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov on Wednesday were the first since October. The fact that the two countries' top defense and military leaders were talking so soon after the encounter over the Black Sea highlights the seriousness of the situation. **PTI**

No TikTok on UK govt devices

LONDON, MARCH 16

The UK government has banned TikTok, the Chinese-owned social media video app, from its devices over security concerns. Cabinet Office minister Oliver Dowden made the announcement in Parliament on Thursday, saying that the ban is in line with the US, Canada, the European Union, and India, which has banned the app entirely from the country.

Dowden cited the risk to government data and information posed by the app. He emphasized that the security of sensitive government information must come first, and the use of other data-extracting apps will be kept under review.

The ban is a prudent and proportionate step following advice from the UK's cybersecurity experts.

The move comes after a security review that examined the potential

vulnerability of government data from social media apps on devices and the risks around how sensitive information could be accessed and used by some platforms.

TikTok has strongly denied sharing user data with the Chinese government.

However, the UK government has decided to prioritize the security of sensitive information and ban the app on government devices. **PTI**

Japan and S.Korea to improve ties

TOKYO, MARCH 16

In a significant move to strengthen their security and economic ties, Japan and South Korea have agreed to resume regular visits between their leaders and take steps to resolve a trade dispute during a summit held in Tokyo on Thursday. The meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol is a crucial step towards overcoming

a difficult history that has often put the two US allies at odds with each other.

Both leaders stressed the importance of improved ties as they opened the summit, which took place just hours after a North Korean missile launch and encounters between Japanese and Chinese vessels in disputed waters. The resumption of regular visits between the leaders, which have been on hold for more than a decade, was described by Mr. Kishida as a "big step" to rebuild their relationship.

The two countries have also agreed to resume defense dialogue and vice-ministerial strategic talks, while restarting a process of trilateral communication among Japan, South Korea, and China. The summit could revise the strategic map of northeast Asia, as the two nations seek to form a united front driven by shared concerns about a restive North Korea and a more powerful China.

The agreement is expected to have significant implications for regional security and economic stability. **PTI**



Judge offers to spare Imran Khan's arrest in corruption case

ISLAMABAD, MARCH 16

A district court judge in Pakistan has offered to halt attempts by the Islamabad police to arrest former prime minister Imran Khan in a corruption case if he surrenders before the court. Additional District and Sessions Judge Zafar Iqbal made the statement during a hearing of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) case seeking criminal proceedings against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party chief for hiding details of Toshakhana gifts.

The judge had reissued non-bailable arrest warrants for 70-year-old Khan on February 28 and directed the capital city police to bring him to court by March 18. During the hearing, the judge remarked that Mr. Khan should surrender unconditionally before seeking any favour from the court. Mr. Khan's counsel presented an undertaking as per the directions of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) that his client would appear in the court on March 18. However, the judge remarked that the undertaking was meaningless if the former premier was not present.

The judge stated that he would prevent the Islamabad police from arresting Mr. Khan if he surrendered in court. He added that legally, Mr. Khan should have been directly brought to court, and it wouldn't have been possible to harass him during the court appearance. He also said that being a poor country, Pakistan cannot afford to waste its resources on such matters. If Mr. Khan had appeared before the court, the arrest warrants would have been cancelled, the judge said.

Earlier, the judge had issued non-bailable arrest warrants for Khan and

instructed the police to present him in court. However, Mr. Khan managed to dodge the arrest and later approached the Islamabad High Court (IHC) for the cancellation of the warrants. The IHC, while granting some relief to Mr. Khan, had told him to appear in the sessions court by March 13, but the former Prime Minister once again skipped the hearing.

Mr. Khan was ousted from power in April last year after losing a no-confidence vote, which he alleged was part of a US-led conspiracy targeting him because of his independent foreign policy decisions on

Russia, China and Afghanistan. Since his ouster, Mr. Khan has been asking for early elections to oust what he termed an "imported government" led by prime minister Shehbaz Sharif. However, Mr. Sharif has maintained that elections will be held later this year once the parliament completes its five-year tenure.

The judge issued notices to the secretariat police and ECP and summoned them to court. The situation remains tense as PTI supporters and law enforcement agencies have been clashing over Mr. Khan's arrest. **PTI**

ENTERTAINMENT

Kangana slams 'Leftists'

FOR HIJACKING WIKI

Kangana Ranaut, who is known to be unabashed and unfiltered, has slammed 'Leftists' for 'hijacking' her Wikipedia page.

On Thursday, the 'Queen' actor took to her Instagram account to call out the free online information-based encyclopedia Wikipedia for misleading the readers with incorrect information about her.

Ranaut said leftists have hijacked Wikipedia. She said most of the information about her on Wikipedia is wrong, including her birthday, height, background, and other details.

Ranaut, who will be celebrating her birthday next week, clarified that her birthday is on March 23 and not March 20, as mentioned on wiki.

"No matter how much we try to rectify it its warped again," Ranaut wrote, requesting her fans and readers to not trust Wikipedia as it is totally wrong.

Meanwhile, Ranaut has wrapped up shooting for 'Chandramukhi 2'. The film's crew cut a cake to celebrate the wrap, a picture of which Kangana shared on her Instagram stories. Directed by P. Vasu, the film also stars Raghava Lawrence and Lakshmi Menon. The sequel of the iconic horror comedy is scheduled to release this year. Kangana is also gearing up for her directorial 'Emergency' in which she will be seen essaying the role of former prime minister Indira Gandhi based on the Emergency that was announced in 1975. Apart from this she will also be seen in 'Tejas'.



Eva Green faked 'hospitalisation' to avoid sci-fi shoot

French actress and model Eva Green planned a fake hospitalisation to avoid the shooting of multimillion-pound sci-fi movie 'A Patriot', the court has been told.

According to The Guardian, Green asked her agent in September 2019 Whatsapp message, "If they come back to you and say they are going to go ahead with the movie, what can we say...? Could we say this situation has made me ill over the weekend? We could say I had to go to hospital as I had a serious rash all over my body?"

Later in the conversation, the 42-year-old asked for a doctor's help to back up the claim.

Green was due to appear in the movie alongside Charles Dance and Helen Hunt before production was shut down in October 2019.

The revelation came to light in the legal case of the 'Casino Royale' actor against the production company White Lantern. Green is suing the production company after the film was abandoned, claiming she is entitled to her million-dollar (£810,000) fee for the project despite its cancellation under the terms of their agreement.

White Lantern Films and lender SMC Speciality Finance are bringing a counterclaim against Green, alleging that she undermined the independent film's production and renounced the contract.

The production company lawyer Max Mallin KC said the French

actor took pains to skip the movie's shoot by telling her agent, Charles Collier, "invent a story about Green being hospitalised."

They added that Green "appeared to contemplate faking a broken arm" to avoid performing.



Law Roach to continue working with Zendaya



Zendaya's infamous stylist Law Roach announced via an Instagram post on March 14 that he was retiring due to "politics and false narratives."

However, the next day, the stylist took to his Twitter account to squash any rumours that he will not be working with the Euphoria actress, Entertainment Tonight reported.

"So y'all really think I'm breaking up with Z," he tweeted to his more than 33,000 followers on Twitter. "[W]e are forever!"

He followed up with another tweet, "She's my little sister and it's real love not the fake industry love."

Then he tweeted out a GIF of two kids playing patty cake in a field and overlaid text that read, "ME & U MUST NEVA PART."

In an interview with Vogue published on Wednesday, March 15, Roach had revealed

that he isn't quitting the fashion industry entirely.

"I'm not saying I'm retiring from fashion. I love fashion. I love the businesses, and I love being creative. What I'm retiring from is the celebrity styling part of it: the being in service and at service of other people. That's what I'm retiring from, yeah," he clarified.

In addition to Zendaya, Roach is a stylist to many stars, including Naomi Campbell, Priyanka Chopra, Kerry Washington and Issa Rae.

Law had won some of the biggest accolades in 2021 when he was honoured with the Gem Award for Jewellery Style. He was also bestowed with the inaugural Stylist Award for American Fashion at the 2022 CFDA (Council of Fashion Designers of America) Awards in New York.



BUSINESS

Adani group says Vinod Adani is part of promoter group

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Vinod Adani, the little known elder brother of Adani group founder Gautam Adani, is part of the promoter group, the conglomerate has said after questions were raised about his status following short seller Hindenburg Research naming him prominently in its scathing report on the Adani group.

"We would like to submit that Gautam Adani and Rajesh Adani are individual promoters of various listed entities within the Adani group and Vinod Adani is an immediate relative of the individual promoters," the group's flagship Adani Enterprises said in a stock exchange filing on Thursday.

Accordingly, as per the applicable Indian regulations, "Vinod Adani is part of the 'promoter group' of various listed entities within the Adani group." In response to Hindenburg questioning the role of Vinod Adani, 74, in the Adani



group where it alleged "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud" and use of offshore shell companies to inflate stock prices, the apples-to-airport conglomerate had in January said that "Vinod Adani does not hold any managerial position in Adani listed entities or their subsidiaries and has no role in their day to day affairs." "We reiterate that any transactions by the Adani portfolio companies with any related party have been duly identified and disclosed as related party transactions in compliance with Indian laws and standard and have been carried out on arm's length terms," it had said.

Hindenburg Research had alleged that Vinod Adani was responsible for creating and managing a vast network of offshore shell entities meant for stock parking, market manipulation and laundering money, to help the conglomerate's companies maintain their appearance of financial health.

The group has denied all Hindenburg allegations, calling them "malicious", "baseless" and a "calculated attack on India".

Vinod Adani is widely reported to be working out of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Regulatory filings show he is a Cypriot national.

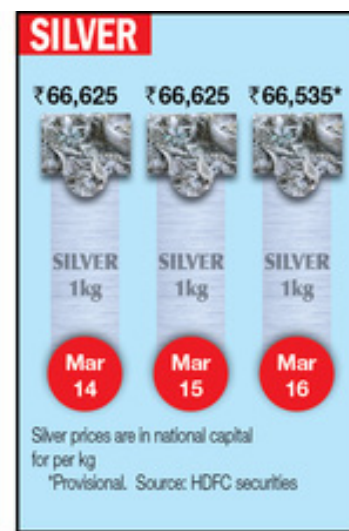
When Adani group bought Swiss giant Holcim AG's stake in Ambuja Cements and ACC, the deal was completed via a Mauritius-based entity called Endeavour Trade and Investment.

In the filing, Adani group said the fact that Vinod Adani was part of the promoter group had been submitted to Indian regulatory authorities from time to time in various disclosures.



Spot gold prices for 24-carat in Delhi for per 10 grams
*Provisional. Source: HDFC securities

HDFC GRAPHICS



Silver prices are in national capital for per kg
*Provisional. Source: HDFC securities

Gold jumps Rs 380; silver declines Rs 90

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Gold price jumped Rs 380 to Rs 57,450 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid gains in rates of the precious metal overseas, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal had ended at Rs 57,070 per 10 grams.

Silver, however, declined Rs 90 to Rs 66,535 per kilogramme.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets

traded at Rs 57,450 per 10 grams, up Rs 380 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas market, gold was trading higher at USD 1,922 per ounce while silver was flat at USD 21.61 per ounce.

Comex Gold prices slightly up in Asian trading hours on Thursday as troubles at Swiss lender Credit Suisse renewed concern of a banking crisis worldwide and investors moved towards the safe-haven metal, Gandhi said.

OYO rolls out accelerator prog for small 1st-gen hoteliers

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Hospitality tech platform OYO on Thursday said it has rolled out an accelerator programme, which will provide financial assistance, mentorship and guidance to selected small first-generation hoteliers.

Hotel owners with more than five running hotels are eligible to be a part of the accelerator programme.

Over 200 properties are expected to be onboarded under this programme in key business cities, such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai in south India, Delhi, Gurugram and Noida in north India; Kolkata and Siliguri in east India and Mumbai in west India, OYO stated.

During the pilot phase of this programme, which started two weeks ago, OYO has onboarded two hoteliers in Hyderabad, and one each in Kolkata and Delhi, who are operating more than 50 properties located across these three cities.

"OYO's accelerator programme will provide financial assistance, access to a pan-India network of over 15,000 corporate accounts and more than 10,000 travel agents, mentorship & guidance, dedicated relationship managers, and active monitoring of hotel level dynam-



ic pricing," the company stated.

The focus of the programme is on increasing the footprint of brands like Townhouse Oak, OYO Townhouse, Collection O and Capital O.

The plan is also aligned with OYO's focus on increasing its premium hotel footprint in India in 2023. It aims to increase the number of premium hotels under its brands.

"We come across many hoteliers whose aspiration for growth and their business acumen far exceeds the capital and resources available to them. OYO had tried to support their growth in the past in whatever manner we could.

"However, we realised that we will be able to encourage many more such hoteliers if we provide special focus to this initiative and move in a planned and targeted manner to help many more such small entrepreneurs," Anuj Tejpal, Chief Merchant Officer at OYO, said.

EV charging stations susceptible to cyber attacks: Gadkari

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Electric vehicle charging stations are also susceptible to cyber attacks and cyber security incidents like any other technological application, Parliament was informed on Thursday. In a written reply to Lok

Sabha, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), which is mandated to track and monitor cyber security incidents in India, received reports of vulnerabilities in products and applications related to electric vehicle charging stations. "The government is fully cognizant and aware of various

cyber security threats and is actively taking steps to combat the issue of hacking," Gadkari said. He said as per the information reported to and tracked by CERT-In, the number of cyber security incidents during 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 is 2,08,456; 3,94,499; 11,58,208; 14,02,809 and 13,91,457, respectively.

Lamborghini to deploy hybrid tech model range in India by 2024-end

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Italian automaker Automobili Lamborghini plans to deploy hybrid technology in its models in India by the end of 2024 as the Italian super sports car maker aims to halve the emissions from its cars in the coming years, according to a top company executive.

The niche player also expressed confidence that the country's taxation policy remains consistent though any tax

reductions will be welcome.

The company currently sells three models -- premium SUV Urus and two super sports cars Huracan Tecnica and Aventador in the country, with prices starting upwards of Rs 3 crore.

"The roadmap for us is that by the end of 2024 we are going to hybridise our entire model range. So this year we will have a first hybrid, the new V12, then in 2024 we will have the Urus hybrid and also a new V10 which is also going to be a hybrid," Lamborghini India

Head Sharad Agarwal told PTI.

In 2028, the company plans to bring in a fourth model globally which is going to be the fully electric model, he added.

"The idea is to reduce 50 per cent of the emissions from our cars by 2025," Agarwal said. The company will bring in the upgraded models globally and then introduce them in the Indian market as well. Lamborghini began its India operations in 2007. Last year, it sold 92 units in India, a growth of 33 per cent over 69 units in 2021.

SPORT

India climbs to fourth place in FIH rankings

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Indian men's hockey team has climbed up two spots to reach fourth place in the latest FIH rankings following its remarkable back-to-back wins against world champions Germany and Australia in the Pro League matches in Rourkela. India surpassed Australia, who moved down to fifth place, whereas Germany slipped down to the third spot. India won all four of their matches, two against Germany and two against Australia, at the Birsa Munda Stadium, the world's largest all-seater venue. This triumph is an impressive feat, especially after India's disappointing last-16 exit in the World Cup held in January. India emerged victorious in both double-legged matches against Germany 3-2 and 6-3 and defeated Australia 5-4 and 4-3 in the penalty shootout (after 2-2 in regulation time) in the first and second games. The Indian team led by Harmanpreet Singh's all-win performance took India to the top of the FIH Pro League points table, moving them up from sixth to fourth place in the latest FIH rankings. The Netherlands holds the top spot, while Belgium occupies the second place in the latest rankings.

When asked about the world ranking, Harmanpreet Singh, the captain of the Indian team, stated, "These things (world ranking) don't matter to us so much. We don't keep this in mind when we play. Our only priority was to convert our chances and keep the pressure on the opponent." He also praised the young-



sters' performance who got an opportunity to show their talent and stood up to the occasion.

The 21,000-capacity Birsa Munda Stadium has become a fortress for the Indian team, remaining unbeaten in eight matches. The Indian team has won seven matches and drawn once at the venue. They played four matches at the venue in the World Cup, winning three and drawing one. India beat Spain 2-0 in the first group match and played out a 0-0 draw against England in the second. They beat Wales 4-2 in the last group match at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar before losing to New Zealand in the knockout crossover game at the same venue to crash out of the showpiece.

The Indian team won two classification matches at the Birsa Munda Stadium to finish at joint ninth place in the World Cup. Harmanpreet said, "We are happy to keep our record intact here in ARourkela. We haven't lost a single match

here in this magnificent stadium. Definitely, the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium is very lucky for us."

India dropped or rested eight players from the World Cup team, including senior players like Akashdeep Singh, Mandeep Singh, and Nilakanta Sharma. Australia came to the FIH Pro League with almost half of their first XI being rookie players who were not in the World Cup squad. Despite the changes in the squad, the Indian team performed exceptionally well, with new players like Selvam Karthi shining bright as the fourth highest goal-scorer in the FIH Pro League.

Harmanpreet believes that there are many positive takeaways from the matches played in Rourkela that will help the team prepare for the upcoming Asian Games. He added, "When you get so much love and encouragement from fans, we want to go out there and win every single game." **PTI**

Virat Kohli speaks about stepping down as RCB captain

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Virat Kohli, the star batter of Star India, has spoken out about his decision to step down as the captain of the Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) team after the 2021 season. Kohli revealed that he had lost his belief and felt that his "tank was absolutely empty" towards the end of his IPL captaincy tenure.

RCB had a poor run in 2019 when they lost six consecutive games and finished at the bottom of the IPL table. Kohli quit as RCB captain after the 2021 season, with South Africa's Faf du Plessis taking over the reins.

During a motivational speech to the RCB women's team ahead of their clash against UP Warriorz in the WPL, Kohli said, "The time when my captaincy tenure was coming to an end here, I was left with no belief, to be very honest. I was gone, the tank was absolutely empty. But that was my own perspective, that was me just an individual saying that I have seen so much of this, I can't just manage it, handle it anymore."

Kohli further spoke about how the new team members brought in fresh ideas and energy, which helped RCB reach the playoffs three years in a row. He stated that he was now excited about the upcoming season and that it was a collective responsibility to pull each other up.

Kohli's decision to step down as RCB



captain came after he had made up his mind to quit as India's T20 skipper following the 2021 T20 World Cup. He was later removed as ODI captain and quit as Test captain as well.

Kohli also revealed that there were phases in his career when he felt insecure and tried to save his reputation. He stated that he needed constant reminders, even from younger players who had a fresh perspective, and that he had been under pressure because he had played for so long. He added that he had been insecure and tried to perform in every game to maintain his reputation. **PTI**

Zareen starts World boxing title defence

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Nikhat Zareen, the 2022 Commonwealth Games gold medalist, began her title defence campaign in style with an impressive RSC win over Azerbaijan's Anakhanim Ismayilova in the opening round of the Women's World Championships on Thursday. Despite being the reigning champion, Nikhat was unseeded in the tournament, but that did not deter her from displaying her best performance.

Competing in the 50kg category, Nikhat took her time to figure out her opponent's game before unleashing a flurry of combination punches. She dominated the bout so much that the referee had to give Ismayilova the 'count' thrice before stopping the contest in the second round. Commenting on her unseeded status, Nikhat said, "It's not a problem." **PTI**

Gujarat giants defeat Delhi Capitals

MUMBAI, MARCH 16:

The Gujarat Giants clinched a victory against the Delhi Capitals team in a thrilling match of the Women's Premier League. The Giants restricted the Capitals from reaching their target of 147 runs by taking all their wickets in

18.4 overs, leaving them with a score of 136.

The match had a slow start, with Gujarat struggling to make an impact in the early overs of the game. However, the team bounced back, thanks to half-centuries by Laura Wolvaardt and Ashleigh Gardner. The duo's impressive performance helped Gujarat post a

competitive total of 147/4 in 20 overs.

From the Capitals side, Marizanne Kapp and Arundhati Reddy were the highest scorers, with a score of 36 and 25 runs respectively.

Kim Garth, playing for the Giants, was the most economic bowler of the match, taking 2 wickets and conceding only 18 runs in 4 overs.



Pandya: Focused on learning from Bilateral fixtures

MUMBAI, MARCH 16

Hardik Pandya, the Indian all-rounder and stand-in captain for the first ODI against Australia, believes that bilateral series are just as competitive as ICC tournaments. Pandya stated that there is no point in brooding over past failures in global competitions, and that the team's focus has been on learning from bilateral fixtures.

Despite India's recent struggles in ICC tournaments, Pandya does not believe the team needs to try anything new. "We will be trying to be a little brave which I think in the last couple of series we have done quite well," he said at a press conference at the Wankhede Stadium. Pandya also stated that the players are comfortable with workload-related calls made by the management, and that he is ready to share whatever workload comes along with the other bowlers. **PTI**