Ex-diplomat T S Sandhu sworn in as Lieutenant Governor of Delhi

NEW DELHI: Taranjit Singh Sandhu was sworn in as the 23rd Lieutenant Governor of Delhi in a ceremony held at Lok Niwas on Wednesday.

Delhi High Court Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya administered the oath of office and secrecy to Sandhu in the ceremony attended by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and other dignitaries. His predecessor, Vinai Kumar Saxena, has been appointed as the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh.

A 1988-batch Indian Foreign Service officer, Sandhu was one of the most experienced Indian diplomats on United States affairs. He served in the Indian Mission in Washington, D.C., multiple times.

He was India's ambassador to the United States from February 2020 to January 2024. The 63-year-old former diplomat had also been at the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations from July 2005 to February 2009.

He unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha polls in 2024 on the BJP ticket from the Amritsar constituency in Punjab.

Meanwhile, newly-appointed Delhi Lt Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Saturday visited the Moti Bagh gurdwara and offered prayers, reminiscing on his deep personal association with the area. Speaking with reporters, Sandhu said he had lived in the neighbourhood earlier during different phases of his life and used to visit the gurdwara regularly. "I used to live in this area when I was studying at JNU, and later stayed in Chanakyapuri at the accommodation for Ministry of External Affairs staff. After that, I lived in New Moti Bagh," he said.

Sandhu said both the New Moti Bagh gurdwara and the Malai Mandir temple were part of his routine visits during that time.

Census also include transgender headed households, RS told

NEW DELHI: The upcoming Census will collect data on sex of head of household--Male, Female and Transgender, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, in a written response, said Census 2027 will be conducted in two phases. The questions for the first phase, which covers Houselisting and Housing Census, have been notified.

"Information on Housing condition, Household particulars including name and sex of the head of the household, amenities available and assets possessed by household will be collected in this phase. Three categories of sex of head of household viz. Male/Female/Transgender will be collected," Rai said.

Questions for the second phase, which is Population Enumeration where information of each individual will be collected, will be notified in due course, he added.

The minister said enumerators shall undertake house-to-house field visits in the entire enumeration area for the collection of Census data to avoid any exclusion on any ground.

"Provision of self-enumeration is an additional facility for the respondents to submit data. Enumerators will confirm self-enumeration data before final submission. Further, FAQs, necessary 'Tool Tips' and validation checks for questions are provided in the self-enumeration Portal itself to ensure accuracy of data," he said.

The minister said all suitable measures have been taken for data security while collecting data on mobile, during data transmission and at the server level.

"Adequate training is being provided to all field functionaries appointed for Census work including enumerators and supervisors. Validation rules are incorporated in the mobile app itself to ensure data consistency and accuracy. Further, Data collected by enumerators will also be monitored and checked by supervisors," he said.

The Union Cabinet has approved Rs 11,718 crore for conducting the Census of India, 2027, which would include the caste enumeration for the first time.

The 16th Census since Independence will be a fully digital exercise and will offer citizens the option of self-enumeration. The decadal exercise, scheduled for 2021, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic across the country.

In landmark first, SC allows passive euthanasia for man in coma for over 12 years

NEW DELHI: In its first ever order allowing passive euthanasia, the Supreme Court on Wednesday permitted the withdrawal of artificial life support to a 32-year-old man who has been in a coma for more than 12 years.

Ruling on the long discussed emotive issue, a bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and K V Viswanathan asked the Union government to consider bringing comprehensive legislation on passive euthanasia. It also directed AIIMS-Delhi to ensure that life support is withdrawn with a tailored plan so dignity is maintained.

Passive euthanasia is the intentional act of letting a patient die by withholding or withdrawing life support or the treatment necessary to keep him alive. Ghaziabad's Harish Rana, who was a student of Panjab University, suffered head injuries after falling from the fourth floor of his paying guest accommodation in 2013 and has been in a coma since.

Directing AIIMS-Delhi to grant Rana admission in palliative care so medical treatment can be withdrawn, the bench stressed that the process be carried out in a "humane manner".

The top court noted that Rana survived only through clinically administered nutrition via 'percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy' tubes, and medical boards had unanimously concluded that continuation of treatment merely prolonged biological existence without any possibility of recovery.

When primary and secondary boards have certified withdrawal of life support, there is no need for judicial intervention, the apex court said.

It also asked the Union of India to ensure that chief medical officers in all districts maintain a panel of registered medical practitioners for nomination to secondary medical boards.

The court made special mention of Rana's parents, expressing its appreciation to them for showing their immense love and care for their son. "His family never left his side," he said.

The order allowing passive euthanasia is in line with the court's 2018 Common Cause judgment, which was modified in 2023 and recognised the fundamental right to die with dignity.

In the 2018 judgement, a constitution bench had recognised passive euthanasia and the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right under Article 21.

LPG shortage 1 Cr people to be unemployed: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI: AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday slammed the Centre for 'heavy LPG shortage' affecting people across the country and questioned the prime minister's "support" for Israel and the US.

The former Delhi chief minister said, "There is a chance that almost 1 crore people would be unemployed because of the power shortage situation emerging," he said. "There is a heavy shortage of LPG in the country. The reason behind this is that 90 per cent of the LPG imported in India is from the Strait of Hormuz. Restaurants and hotels are facing shortages. In the next two days, 50 per cent of hotels are on the verge of shutdown, news is coming from Delhi NCR, Bihar," Kejriwal said. Kejriwal accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "demolishing" India's non-aligned foreign policy of several decades and making Iran our "enemy".

NCERT book row: SC directs Centre to form panel of domain experts

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to constitute a committee of domain experts within a week to finalise the curriculum related to legal studies in NCERT textbooks.

The top court said that its orders in the matter were not intended to prevent any healthy and objective criticism of the institutional function of the judiciary.

The apex court, while hearing a suo motu case concerning NCERT's Class 8 social science book, which contained "offending" contents on corruption in the judiciary, noted that the chapter was drafted by the textbook development team under the chairmanship of Professor Michel Danino.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant directed the Centre, states, Union Territories and universities to forthwith disassociate the three experts who drafted the controversial chapter. The textbook development team was under the chairmanship of Danino and consisted of Suparna Diwakar and Alok Prasanna Kumar as its members.

The bench, also comprising Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, said the three experts who drafted the chapter can move the apex court for modification of the order.

It said the panel of experts to finalise the curriculum related to legal studies would include a former judge, an academician and a renowned law practitioner. The bench asked the Centre to also associate the National Judicial Academy, Bhopal, in finalising the curriculum related to legal studies.

During the hearing, the Centre informed the bench that it has directed the NCERT to review textbooks of all classes. The bench observed that instead of asking the NCERT to do so, it would have appreciated if the Centre constituted an expert committee to review the curriculum.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the government has asked the NCERT to review textbooks of all classes, not just class eight. He assured the bench that a panel of domain experts would be constituted to examine the curriculum.

"We have started systemic changes," he told the bench, adding that nothing will be published without being vetted by the domain experts.

Mehta also informed the bench that the NCERT director has filed an affidavit tendering an unconditional and unqualified apology.

On February 26, the apex court imposed a "complete blanket ban" on any further publication, reprinting or digital dissemination of NCERT's Class 8 social science book as it contains "offending" contents on corruption in the judiciary, saying they have fired a gunshot and the judiciary is "bleeding".

Observing that there appeared to be a "deep-rooted conspiracy" and "calculated move" to undermine the institution and demean the dignity of the judiciary, the apex court had directed that all copies of the book - physical and digital - currently in circulation be immediately seized and removed from public access without any delay.

Nehru sat through debate, requested more time for Oppn: Cong slams Rijiju for 1954 comparison

NEW DELHI: The Congress slammed Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday for contrasting the 10 hours allocated for a debate on the resolution for the Lok Sabha speaker's removal with the two-and-a-half-hour debate on a similar resolution in 1954, saying Jawaharlal Nehru had then requested the bulk of the time be allotted to the opposition.

The debate is likely to conclude on Wednesday with Union Home Minister Amit Shah's response to the resolution.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said that in Tuesday's debate in the Lok Sabha on the motion for the removal of the Speaker, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Rijiju proudly claimed that 10 hours had been allotted for the debate, whereas in December 1954, only 2.5 hours had been set aside for a similar motion.

"What he forgot to mention was that on December 18, 1954, the prime minister himself sat through and took part in the debate. While speaking, Jawaharlal Nehru requested the deputy speaker, who was presiding in the House, that the bulk of the time should be allotted to the opposition," Ramesh said on X.

When the motion was moved in the Lok Sabha on December 1, 1954, the Congress had 364 MPs in a House of 489 members, he pointed out. "On December 18, 1954 (as on later occasions in 1966 and 1987), there was a deputy speaker in the Chair in the Lok Sabha while the motion against the Speaker was being debated. Since mid-2019, there has been no deputy speaker in the Lok Sabha, which is a clear violation of the Constitution," Ramesh said. Intervening in the debate on the resolution for the removal of Om Birla from the Speaker's post, Rijiju on Wednesday slammed TMC's Saugata Roy for questioning the decision on who will preside over the proceedings during the discussion on the opposition's resolution.

"Such senior MPs should know that in 1954, when the opposition party brought a resolution against G V Mavalankar, a full day's time was demanded for discussion. Jawaharlal Nehru had allocated an hour and a half.

"There was a lot of debate over it, and finally, a consensus was reached on a

CBI arrests Darwin Labs co-founder Ayush Varshney in Rs 20,000 crore Gain Bitcoin scam case

NEW DELHI: The CBI has arrested Darwin Labs co-founder Ayush Varshney, one of the main accused in the Rs 20,000 crore Gain Bitcoin currency scam case, officials said on Wednesday.

The agency had issued a Look Out Circular against Varshney. His attempt to flee the country on Monday triggered an alert, leading to his detention at the Mumbai airport, they said. Varshney was formally arrested on Tuesday.

According to the CBI, Darwin Labs designed and developed the digital infrastructure which formed the operational backbone of the alleged fraudulent enterprise Gain Bitcoin.

During the investigation, the agency detected the alleged involvement of Darwin Labs Private Limited and its co-founders -- Varshney, Sahil Baghla and Nikunj Jain, the chief capital officer and founder at Vaomi AI -- in the design, development and deployment of a cryptocurrency token known as MCAP and its associated ERC-20 smart contract.

In a statement, it said that Darwin Labs allegedly played a central role in building the technological architecture underpinning the cryptocurrency ponzi scam perpetrated through a web of platforms, including the flagship site www.gainbitcoin.com.

It was allegedly masterminded by Amit Bhardwaj (now deceased) and his brother Ajay Bhardwaj, the officials said.

The company developed several key components, including the Bitcoin mining pool platform GBMiners.com, a Bitcoin payment gateway, the Coin Bank Bitcoin wallet and the Gain Bitcoin website used to interface with investors.

Launched in 2015, the Gain Bitcoin operation was camouflaged under the facade of Variabletech Pte. Ltd, officials said.

The scheme lured the investors offering extraordinary returns of 10 per cent per month in Bitcoin over an 18-month period, urging them to purchase the digital currency from external exchanges and deposit it with GainBitcoin through "cloud mining" contracts.

"The funds collected from investors were subsequently misappropriated. The case is being investigated under Sections 120B, 406 and 420 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 66 of the Information Technology Act, 2000," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

108 Naxalites with Rs 3.95 Cr bounty surrender in Chhattisgarh; Rs 3.6 Cr cash, 1 kg gold seized

JAGDALPUR: In a remarkable success of the government's fight against Left Wing Extremism, 108 Maoists carrying a collective reward of Rs 3.95 crore surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district on Wednesday, officials said.

Besides a huge stock of weapons, Rs 3.61 crore in cash and one kg of gold valued at about Rs 1.64 crore were recovered from Maoist dumps, the highest seizure of cash and valuables from a single location in the history of anti-Naxal operations in the country, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj Pattilingam said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has set a deadline of 31 March 2026, for the eradication of Naxalism from the country.

Among the surrendered Naxalites, six were divisional committee members carrying a reward of Rs 8 lakh each, as per officials.

The cadres, belonging to the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC) of Maoists, turned themselves in at Jagdalpur, the Bastar district headquarters, Pattilingam said.

DKSZC formation of outlawed CPI (Maoists) orchestrated several deadly attacks in south Bastar in the past.

Information provided by the surrendered cadres helped security forces achieve significant successes, including the recovery of weapons, cash and other materials from Maoist dumps, the official said.

A total of 101 weapons were seized, including AK-47, INSAS and SLR rifles, light machine guns, .303 rifles and barrel grenade launchers, dealing a significant blow to the already weakened military capability of the Maoist organisation, Pattilingam said.

Among those who surrendered were several key cadres, including divisional committee members Rahul Telam, Pandru Kovasi and Jhitru Oyam from the West Bastar division, Ramdhar alias Biru from the East Bastar division and Mallesh from the North Bastar division.

Others included Muchaki, commander of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) battalion, and Kosa Mandavi, a divisional committee member from the Andhra-Odisha Border area of Maoists, the official said.

The large-scale surrender indicated that Maoist ideology was weakening and even members within the organisation were questioning its relevance, Pattilingam said.

He said many cadres were influenced by the "Poona Margem - Rehabilitation to Rejuvenation" initiative and were choosing to abandon violence and return to mainstream society.

Efforts are being made under the rehabilitation policies of the Centre and the Chhattisgarh government to ensure security and a dignified life for the surrendered cadres, the official said.

Of the 108 surrendered cadres, six were divisional committee members, three company platoon committee commanders, 18 platoon party committee members, 23 area committee members and 56 party members, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma told reporters in Raipur.

District-wise, 37 Maoists belonged from Bijapur, 30 were from Dantewada, 18 from Sukma, 16 from Bastar, four from Narayanpur and three from Kanker.

The government aims to eliminate Naxalism by March 31, 2026, said Sharma, who holds charge of the state Home department.

Maoists are increasingly abandoning violence due to sustained security operations and the government's rehabilitation policy, which offers them an opportunity to lead a peaceful life, he said.

MeT issues yellow warning in 5 districts

SHIMLA: The Shimla Meteorological Station issued a yellow warning on Wednesday for thunderstorms accompanied by hail, lightning, and gusty winds reaching speeds of 40-50 km/h at isolated locations in Chamba, Kangra, and Kullu districts on March 12, 14, and 15. Additionally, Mandi and Shimla districts are expected to experience similar conditions on March 12 and 15. Meanwhile, the maximum and minimum temperatures in the region have remained above normal. Overall, the weather across the state has been dry, with a slight drop in temperatures. Una recorded the highest temperature at 33.2 degrees Celsius, while Tabo was the coldest, with a low of 1.2 degrees Celsius.

India imported over 18,842 MTs of uranium from 2008-09 to 2024-25: Govt in LS

NEW DELHI: India imported 18,842.60 metric tonnes (MTs) of uranium in different forms for its reactors between 2008-2009 and 2024-2025 under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, the government informed the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

In a written reply, Union minister Jitendra Singh said that the country's nuclear power generation using imported uranium increased from 3,704 million units in 2009-2010 to 39,180 million units in 2024-2025. Till January, India had generated 33,815 million units for 2025-2026, he said.

"The government has formulated a roadmap to reach 100 GW of nuclear power capacity. As per the roadmap, the present nuclear power capacity of 8.78 GW (excluding RAPS-1) is expected to reach about 22 GW by 2031-32 on progressive completion of projects presently at various stages of implementation," the minister said.

Singh also stated that another 32 GW of nuclear power capacity had been planned to be set up beyond 2032 by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited comprising indigenous pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs) and light water reactors (LWRs) with foreign cooperation by 2047, taking the capacity to about 54 GW.

"The balance of 46 GW is expected to be set up by other public sector enterprises (central and state), state governments, private sector and joint ventures in different business models, comprising reactors of different technologies," the minister said.