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DEHRADUN, MONDAY MARCH 8, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹2

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Lotus blooming in mire created by TMC: Modi

PM raps Didi for insulting people of Bengal, vows ashol poriborton; Mithun joins BJP



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public meeting ahead of West Bengal Assembly elections at Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday

AP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi explained the “poriborton” narrative during the Sunday’s mega election rally at Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata even as he launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for “letting down and insulting the people of Bengal” who had repudiated faith in her by voting her to power in 2011.

“This will be the ashol

poriborton (real change) and not the fake one unleashed by the Trinamool Congress when people brought Mamata didi to power with great hopes, but she betrayed them and chose to play the limited role of a bua (aunt) to her own bhatija (nephew) considering not for once the plights of lakhs of other nephews that looked up to her for respite,” said the PM, taking a dig at the Chief Minister for allegedly unleashing a regime marked by “cor-

ruption and nepotism.”

Cine star Mithun Chakrabarty on Sunday joined the BJP in front of a massive saffron crowd at the historic Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata. The megastar, who received praises from Modi, said he had been inspired by the PM’s ideas.

“Yes I have been involved in some kind of extreme politics in my early years as I wanted to do something for the poor and downtrodden...

now I have joined the BJP as I have seen the PM doing the works that correlate with my dreams... So I have joined this party and will campaign for it,” the former TMC Rajya Sabha member who shared an excellent chemistry with the erstwhile Left Government too said.

Reciting a dialogue from one of his movies where he said, “I am a cobra ... whose one bite will transform you into a photo frame.”

Attacking Mamata for allowing “syndicate raj, tolalabji (extortion) and corruption” to flourish during her rule, Modi said, “Your Government has seen so many scams that a ‘scam Olympics’ can easily be organised here.

The PM reminded “nepotism” and “cut money” had been the only considerations for getting an appointment in Government jobs. “But after the BJP comes to power on May 2, things will change forever... we will bring ashol poriborton and not the fake one.

“Bengal will become sonar Bangla (golden Bengal) and from city of joy Kolkata will graduate into city of opportunities... new flyovers will be constructed, new infrastructures will be developed, industrial investment which had become a story of the past will return to Bengal...”

“The smaller cities and towns will get adequate infra-

structure to sustain a self-supporting economy, food processing and port land development which have great prospects in Bengal will be developed... there will be new opportunity for the farmers, workers and businessmen, slum dwellers will no longer have to live in shanties and they will be given pucca houses,” the PM said.

Taking a jibe at Mamata for often abusing him Modi said the Chief Minister often gets

angry at him and calls him Ravan, daitya and danav (demon).

“I want to ask you Didi that why you are so angry at me for the rise of BJP in Bengal” he said, adding that Lotus bloomed only in swamps.

“The mire (read misrule) that the Trinamool Government has created in Bengal has led to the blooming of Lotus,” he said.

CBI summons two IPS officers in cross-border cattle smuggling case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has summoned two senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officers for questioning in connection with the illegal cross-border cattle smuggling case. The agency has asked IPS officer of DIG rank Kallol Ganai and SP rank officer Anshuman Saha to appear for questioning at the CBI office in Kolkata on Monday, sources said.

Ganai was earlier posted as DIG of Murshidabad Range, while Saha was posted as Additional SP of Murshidabad district where the alleged king-

pin of the cattle trade Mohammad Enamul Haque operated. The CBI had registered the case on September 21 last year against four persons, including some Border Security Force and Customs officers, who were allegedly bribed by the international cattle smugglers to facilitate the passage of bovines from their jurisdiction along the international border with Bangladesh.

The CBI had carried out searches at 34 locations across the country and arrested then BSF Commandant Satish Kumar and cattle smuggler Mohammad Enamul Haque last year.

Didi hits back, says Modi, Shah India's biggest extortionists



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a protest rally against the hike in fuel and LPG prices, in Siliguri on Sunday

PTI

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday responded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vitriolic attack launching a scathing counterattack calling “him and Home Minister Amit Shah the biggest tolalabji (extortionist) and syndicate” operators of the country. Mamata, who led a massive march against rising fuel and cooking gas prices in North Bengal city of Siliguri, said, “Here the PM is calling TMC a syndicate and our men tolalabji ... but I must say there is no bigger tolalabji than him and Shah and no bigger syndicate run by him and the HM.”

She said the PM is “peddling lies to mislead the voters,”

adding “the lesser people cannot extort more than ₹500 or ₹1,000, but what could be the amount when the people up there do the same”. Saying that the Prime Minister was the biggest extortionist she said, “they are always accusing us of taking cut money ... but how much did they get in the deals out of selling Rail, BSNL, Coal India, Air India and defence sector ... who will answer that.” Attacking the Prime Minister for unleashing “Jumla politics” she said, “he is making tall promises but first of all ask him to deposit Rs 15 lakh in every bank account that he had promised before the 2014 Lok Sabha elections ... ask him to turn UP, Bihar and MP into golden States before promising Sonar Bangla.”

Cong accepts 25 seats as DMK fails to yield

DMK to fight on 180 seats, deal inked

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

After weeks of dilly-dallying, the DMK allocated 25 seats to the Indian National Congress on Sunday for the upcoming election to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. The DMK will contest on 180 seats in the House of 234.

The deal was signed by DMK chief MK Stalin and president of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee KS Alagiri in the presence of All India Congress Committee leader Dinesh Gundu Rao.

“The DMK and the Congress have sealed the seat-sharing deal. The Congress will contest on 25 Assembly seats and the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat. Both cadre will now work together. We will win



DMK president MK Stalin and Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president KS Alagiri pose with the agreement paper of seat-sharing for upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls at Anna Arivalayam in Chennai on Sunday

PTI

big,” Rao said.

The gloom on the face of Alagiri and Rao during the photo session made it clear that the Congress had to eat humble pie in the negotiations with the DMK. The Congress had asked for at least 40 seats, a seat lesser than what it was allocated by the DMK for the 2016 Assembly election.

But the party that ruled singlehandedly till 1967 and had contributed all-time greats like

K Kamaraj, N Sathiyamoorthi, C Rajagopalachari, R Venkitaraman and C Subramanian to the nation was at the mercy of the DMK leaders who cited the low striking rate of the Congress as the reason for the reduction in the number of seats.

The only consolation for the Congress is that it has been allocated the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat where a bypoll is being held on April 6.

CAPSULE

INDIA, US DISCUSS AFGHAN PEACE TALKS
New Delhi: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and US special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad spoke over phone on Sunday and discussed the latest developments pertaining to the Afghan peace talks.

P4

Indian vaccines rescued world from Covid-19: Top US scientist

PTI ■ HOUSTON

The rollout of the Covid-19 vaccines by India in collaboration with leading global institutions has “rescued the world” from the deadly coronavirus and the contributions by the country must not be underestimated, a top American scientist has said.

Dr Peter Hotez, Dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) in Houston, during a recent webinar said the two mRNA vaccines may not impact the world’s low and middle income countries, but India’s vaccines, made in collaboration with universities across the world such as BCM and the Oxford University, have “rescued the world” and its contributions must not be underestimated.

Wrestler Phogat wins gold, retains world number 1 ranking in 53 kg

PTI ■ ROME

Living up to the expectations, star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat grabbed the 53kg gold medal along with world number one rank while Bajrang Punia booked his spot in the final of the men’s 65kg event at the Matteo Pellicone Ranking Series event, here on Sunday.

The 26-year-old World bronze medalist and the only Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for the Tokyo Games, Vinesh blanked Canada’s Diana Mary Helen Weicker 4-0 in the 53kg title clash.

Vinesh scored all her points in the first period and held on to her lead in the second to ensure a top-of-the-podium finish. Vinesh had won a gold medal in Kiev last week.

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Relevance of women for Atmanirbhar Bharat



■ RAMESH POKHRIYAL 'NISHANK'

Our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said, "Every woman has entrepreneurial qualities and values. Women will become stakeholders in decision-making if they are financially independent."

However, over the years, institutionalised belief systems have undermined women's work capacity. In the 21st century, it is essential to recognise women's capabilities to work, while building an equitable and Atmanirbhar society.

We must remember that for a society to become Atmanirbhar, it is essential to harness the Iccha Shakti, Gyan Shakti and Karma Shakti of women. The 'Shakti' (power) of the women has been hailed from time immemorial, along with a deep-seated prejudice. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, a 19th-century intellectual and thinker, passionately wanted to remove the prejudice and called for a radical transformation for women's empowerment. He believed that all paid employment and professions should be linked with

brainpower and ability rather than gender.

Agarkar apprised the society with the vision of an egalitarian Atmanirbhar society of the future where "there will be freedom available to men and women to practise the profession of their choice, to acquire as much knowledge as desired, to pass the examinations and obtain the degrees of their liking". Like Agarkar, Pandita Ramabai, Dr Rukhmabai, Savitribai Phule and many other women activists echoed with the same thought.

With much progress obtained through the years, I would also want to highlight the work of MN Srinivas, a noted anthropologist. In his ethnographic study of south rural India in 1977, he had documented the prevalent belief that when women work for wages, it is an indicator of

low family status. This resonates with the present Economic Survey Report 2021-22, the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of females in 2018-19 was only 26.5 per cent, compared to 80.3 per cent for males. Thereby, India must increase women's participation in the workforce to the global average of 48 per cent for becoming Atmanirbhar. India should boost its GDP growth with 27 per cent if women did as much formal work as men as per IMP.

Thereby, aligning with the present status of women's participation in the workforce, I, at this moment, encourage women to connect themselves with this year's theme of International Women's Day, i.e. #ChooseToChallenge. The women must choose to challenge to call out gender bias

and inequality while becoming Atmanirbhar. To help advance women's participation, the Government of India under the Prime Minister's leadership is committed to creating an enabling environment for women; devoid of institutional and structural barriers. The government has taken important initiatives to promote gender quality and welfare while increasing its workforce participation. These include Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 and the POSHAN Abhiyaan.

Additionally, the Ministry of Education, along with developing a gender-sensitive curriculum, has sanctioned around 6,000 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyas, a residential

girls' secondary school. Scholarships are being provided to meritorious students of economically weaker sections to reduce their drop out at upper primary class under National Means Cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS). Self-defence training is imparted to girls of class VI to XII under Samagra Shiksha scheme in more than three lakh schools. At higher education level, the ministry has facilitated the development of 16 women exclusive universities. A total of 3,503 supernumerary seats have been created for female students to encourage women student's participation in IITs. As a result of this, I am glad to share that we have seen a steep upward increase in the number of women enrolled in IITs/PhD. There are now 3,411 women in IIT UG courses in

the year 2019 compared to 1,871 in 2015; similarly, 4,597 women are currently enrolled in PhD in the year 2019 compared to 3,283 in 2015.

While the government is encouraging women students' participation across the school and higher education, few women have already been able to break the shackles of gender prejudices. They are now leading the universities as the vice chancellors – a reform which was long due! Hansa Mehta became India's first woman vice-chancellor of Sido Kanhu Murmu University (SKMU) in Dumka, Jharkhand; becoming the second tribeswoman in the history of India to be appointed vice-chancellor. This depicts the movement of India to become Atmanirbhar with women leading from the forefront. Thus, while we must celebrate the wonderful women's achievements, we should also assimilate our efforts to make the Atmanirbhar Bharat, rooted in principles of equality. A new India is being made, sans gender prejudice.

University of Kerala, acclaimed educationist professor Najma Akhtar became the first woman vice-chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia. Lately, Sonajharia Minz has been appointed as the vice-chancellor of Sido Kanhu Murmu University (SKMU) in Dumka, Jharkhand; becoming the second tribeswoman in the history of India to be appointed vice-chancellor. This depicts the movement of India to become Atmanirbhar with women leading from the forefront. Thus, while we must celebrate the wonderful women's achievements, we should also assimilate our efforts to make the Atmanirbhar Bharat, rooted in principles of equality. A new India is being made, sans gender prejudice.

(The writer is the Union Minister of Education)

Villagers discuss preparations for Chalda Maharaj Yatra

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

To review the preparations of approaching Chalda Maharaj Yatra which is due in November in this region after a gap of 66 years, the people of Samalta village organised a meeting on Sunday in the presence of the Pradhan of the Gram Panchayat, Jaipal Singh. In the meeting, many villagers said that they will donate ration worth over Rs 20 lakh for over 50,000 devotees who would be participating in the Yatra.

According to the president of Shri Chalda Mahasu Maharaj Mandir Samiti, Sardar Singh Tomar, various committees have been formed to ensure the proper arrangements during the Yatra. Apart from this, the proper construction of roads and installation of solar lights in the village before the month of November was also proposed in the meeting. Moreover, the deputy director of the Information and Public



Relations Department, Kalam Singh Chauhan stated that Chalda Maharaj Yatra would happen in the village after 66

years and everyone should work together to make it a successful event for all the devotees.

Labourer dies after falling from 3rd floor

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

An 18-year-old labourer died and another was injured after they fell from the third floor of an under-construction building in

South Delhi's Hauz Khas. The incident occurred on Saturday. The deceased has been identified as Inderjeet while Santosh has sustained injuries and is undergoing treatment at the local hospital. The duo hailed from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. Police said that the two were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident.

According to Atul Kumar Thakur, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South district, Inderjeet and Santosh were working as labourers at the under-construction building site where the accident took place.

Delhi Govt providing lowest tariff for charging electric vehicles: Gahlot

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said that the Delhi Government is providing the lowest tariff for charging electric vehicles in the country with a provision of sub-metering for commercial buildings to provide 'Electric Vehicles' (EVs) charging facilities anywhere in the national capital.

Gahlot said that the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) notified a policy wherein a commercial building like a hotel or malls, providing EV charging facilities can install a sub-meter and the EV tariff rate will apply to these. This will encourage people to provide EV charging facilities on their own premises.

"The Government has carried out a comprehensive planning to build an effective EV charging infrastructure across the national capital for faster uptake of electric vehicles (EVs). The government left no stone unturned to pave way for the smooth transition of EVs. We already have over 72 charging stations in the city and 100 new charging stations are coming up with 500 charging points in the next six months," he said.

The minister has urged malls, corporate, market complexes, and cinema halls, hotels to promote electric

vehicles and set up charging stations on their premises.

"I appeal to the stakeholders to take the Switch Delhi Pledge at <https://ev.delhi.gov.in/Pledge> and come together to encourage the public to switch to EVs. Take this pledge to install charging stations to pave a way for a cleaner and greener Delhi," Gahlot added.

"As the Switch Delhi Campaign enters the fourth week, we will focus on creating awareness on the sound public charging infrastructure that is in place in Delhi. This will be a key enabler in achieving CM Arvind Kejriwal's vision of making Delhi the EV capital of India," he added.

"Delhi already has the highest number of charging stations in any city in India. Delhiites can view the list and location charging stations in the national capital on Delhi's EV website - ev.delhi.gov.in. The government aims to achieve the goal of having charging stations every three km in the city," Gahlot said. Switch Delhi is an eight-week mass awareness campaign by the Delhi Government to sensitize each Delhiite about the benefits of switching to EVs to the environment as well as to make them aware of the incentives and infrastructure being developed under Delhi's EV policy.

Covid-19 nearing endemic phase in Delhi: Jain

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain on Sunday said coronavirus was nearing an "endemic" phase in the national capital.

The Delhi Government is all prepared to deal with cases, he said, adding that less than 10 per cent beds dedicated for treating covid-19 patients are occupied and 90 per cent beds are still vacant.

The minister said that the COVID-19 positivity rate was well below one per cent and

this rate was around 15 per cent in November last year.

The positivity rate has remained below one per cent for the last two months.

The fluctuation in this rate is not that much, the minister added. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the COVID-19 positivity rate should remain less than 5 per cent. The health minister added that less than 10 per cent beds reserved for coronavirus patients are occupied in the city hospitals. An infection is said to be endemic in a population when



it is constantly maintained at a baseline level in a geographic area without external inputs.

"Coronavirus is nearing an endemic phase in Delhi. Experts say some cases continue to occur in the endemic

phase. Delhi witnessed a swine flu outbreak around 10 years ago, but still some cases are reported every year. Coronavirus is not going to end completely... We will have to learn to live with it," Jain said.

Jain said the total number of COVID tests conducted in Delhi was around five times the national average.

According to a health bulletin issued on Sunday, over 91,000 COVID-19 tests were conducted in the national capital on Saturday, the highest so far.

'85% staff of Delhi prisons received Covid vaccine shots'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Around 85 per cent Delhi Prison staff and over 58 per cent security personnel deployed in three jails, Tihar, Rohini and Mandoli prisons in the National Capital have received COVID-19 vaccine shots.

A senior prison official said there are around 2,000 jail staff, out of which, 1,700 staff have been vaccinated. Out of around 1,700 security personnel deployed with Delhi Prisons and who have regis-

tered on Co-WIN portal, 1,000 personnel have got the coronavirus vaccine shots.

According to Sandeep Goel, the Director General, Prisons, the department has encouraged its staff to get the vaccine shots.

"We have been encouraging the jail staff and security personnel to get the vaccine. Most of the staff members have already taken the first dose of the vaccine. It is safe and essential for our health," said the DG.

Capital records 286 new Covid cases

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital on Sunday recorded 286 new COVID-19 cases and two deaths on Sunday while the positivity rate stood at 0.31 per cent.

These 286 cases came from 91,614 tests including 71,250 RT-PCR tests and 20,364 rapid antigen tests, conducted the previous day. The test done is highest so far amid a sudden surge in incidences, as per data shared by the health department. The city registered 321 new coronavirus cases, the highest daily count in nearly one-and-a-half months, and a death on Saturday, and 312 cases and a fatality on Friday. On Sunday, 286 new cases and two deaths were recorded, taking the death toll to 10,921, according to the latest health bulletin.

A total of 585 cases were reported on January 1 and 384 on January 4. It had dropped to 306 on January 11 and risen again to 386 on January 12, according to official figures. The numbers had started to come down the next month and on February 26, 256 new cases were recorded; the highest daily count in February, as per figures. The number of active cases stood at 1,803 on Sunday, the bulletin said. Health experts and



doctors have attributed this "sudden rise" in the number of cases to complacency among people, not following COVID-19-appropriate behaviour and "assuming all is well now".

The number of people under home isolation on Sunday rose to 937 from 879 on Saturday, the bulletin said, adding that over 6.28 lakh people have recovered till date.

As per the bulletin, 14 beds in COVID care centres are occupied by persons under quarantine, including travellers who have returned by the Vande Bharat Mission and bubble flights.

Health experts and doctors have attributed this "sudden rise" in the number of cases to complacency among people, not following COVID-19-appropriate behaviour and "assuming all is well now".

Women who gave birth to children in PCR vans invited as chief guest in Delhi

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Commissioner, S N Shrivastava has invited the mothers who gave birth to children in moving Police Control Room (PCR) vans as special guests on the occasion of Women's Day celebrations.

According to Isha Pandey, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, PCR, Unit, "Women who delivered babies in the vans will be invited and honored at New Police Headquarters (PHQ) as guests, on the eve of the coming International women's Day". "During lockdown which was imposed on March 24, 2020, the vans had shifted 997 pregnant women to various hospitals in 2020. In nine sensitive cases, babies were born in PCR vans," said the DCP.

During lockdown, all modes of transports were suspended and ambulance services were also not available due. Most of ambulances were also occupied during shifting COVID-19 patients.

The Delhi Police, PCR vans played an essential role not only in transferring pregnant women but also taking senior citizens to hospital for the treatment.

Narrating some instances where delivery took place in PCR vans, Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police said that on May 16, 2020, the PCR Mobile Patrol Van staff received a call regarding requirement of urgent medical assistance for a pregnant woman.

"A PCR van rushed to the spot, which was in Jhuggi near Nithari Village. The police personnel met the caller and immediately shifted the preg-

nant woman, Kiran in the van. While the PCR van was on its way, Kiran suffered extreme labour pain. The PCR personnel stopped the vehicle and provided necessary assistance to her during which she gave birth to a baby girl in the van and they have named her Shanvi. Now the baby is about one year old and is hale and

suffered labour pain. She gave birth to a boy which they have named Jivansh in the MPV. Now the baby is about one year old and is hale and hearty. Similar is the story in the other remaining seven cases," said the PRO.

"The MPVs staff displayed exemplary conviction and commitment to duty by help-

respective work fields to recognize and celebrate their achievements, on 'Women's Day'.

"It is Delhi Police Commissioner, S N Shrivastava's vision to exalt women officials' visibility in force and for this he has also decided to post them to take



hearty," said Biswal.

"In another incident on May 5, 2020, at about 05:00 AM, the PCR Mobile Patrol Van (MPV) staff received a call regarding the requirement of urgent medical assistance for a pregnant woman. After reaching the spot near Nangloi, the MPV staff shifted woman, Asha in the van and while they were on the way to hospital she

ing the women deliver their babies in PCR van though they are untrained for delivery of babies, thus taking the services of PCR to a higher level," said the DCP, PCR.

This year, Delhi Police in order to establish a strong bond between police and public had also taken a step to promote its women personnel and they will be deployed in their

various responsibilities in their departments. This will also play a major role in establishing communication and friendly relations between public and police," the PRO had said.

The Police, during this week, have also organized several events which also includes its band which is performing across the National Capital, especially in girls schools.

CM discusses March 18 event with dist heads

Office bearers complain about party workers sharing baseless opinions on social media

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

District heads of the Bharatiya Janata Party have told chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat that some party workers are stating baseless things on Whatsapp groups. They said that strict action should be taken against such persons. The party office bearers said this in a meeting presided over by the chief minister in Gairsain on Sunday to discuss details of the programme to be held on March 18 to mark four years of the state government in office. Rawat told the office bearers that union minister Nitin Gadkari will be the chief guest in the state level programme to be held on March 18 at

Lacchiwala in Doiwala constituency while similar events will be held simultaneously in all the assembly constituencies of the state. He asked them to seek the cooperation of party workers for publicising the event at the district level. Referring to the salient features of the state government's works, Rawat said that budgetary provisions have been specially made this time for women, youths, new Panchayats and school children among others. The Atal Ayushman Uttarakhand Yojana, drinking water connection for just Re one in rural areas, milk on four days and eggs on one day per child in Anganwadi centres are among the other prominent measures taken by the state government. Further, special focus is being



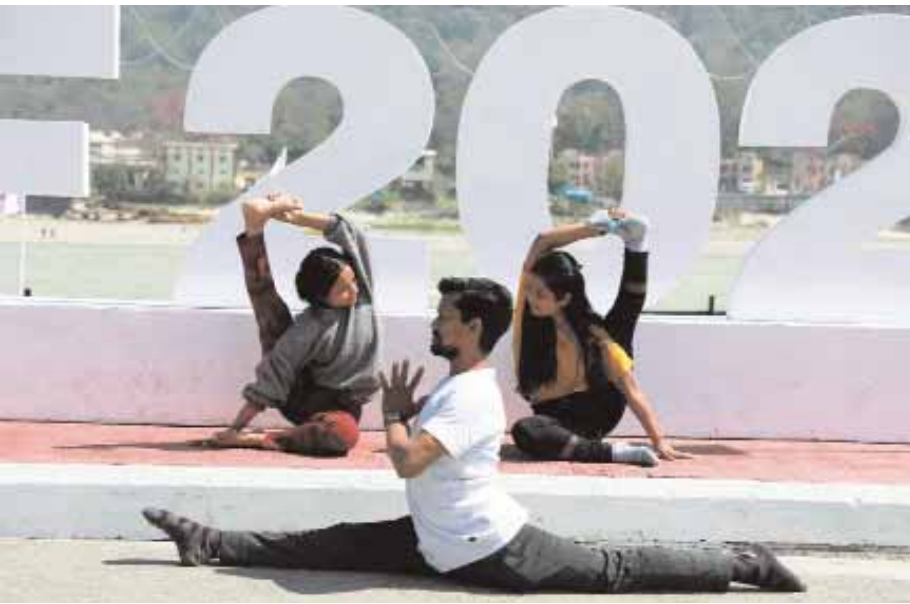
laid by the state government to tackle the problem of migration. Rawat also stressed on the importance of collective focus on how to improve the rural economy of the state. Referring to the right accorded to women of co-ownership in their husband's ancestral property, the CM said that this decision will have major positive repercussions in the future.

The future action plan of the party was also discussed in the meeting. The CM and district heads also discussed plans to further strengthen the party at the booth level. The district heads said that some party workers are stating baseless things on Whatsapp groups and said that stringent action should be taken against such persons.

International Yoga Festival concludes in Rishikesh

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The 29th international Yoga festival organised jointly by the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board and Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam concluded in Rishikesh on Sunday. The governor Baby Rani Maurya presided over the concluding ceremony which was also attended by the Vidhan Sabha speaker and Rishikesh MLA Prem Chand Agrawal, Tourism minister Satpal Maharaz, AYUSH minister Harak Singh Rawat and Rishikesh mayor Anita Mamgain among others. Speaking on the occasion, the governor said that Yoga is the ancient heritage of India which does the task the providing energy to people among other effects. The Vidhan Sabha speaker Prem Chand Agrawal said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had played a vital role in popularising yoga throughout the world in recent times. How to



remain disease free by practising Yoga is a message that has been broadcast across the world now, he said. The Tourism minister Satpal Maharaz opined that the nation can become

stronger with the power of Yoga. AYUSH minister Harak Singh Rawat said that the sapling of the international yoga week planted about three decades ago has matured now.

This is a matter of pride, he said. The GMVN managing director Ashish Chauhan, general manager Jitendra Kumar and others were also present on the occasion.

Stories of some real women achievers of Uttarakhand

PURNIMA BISHT ■ DEHRADUN

As the world marks the International Women's Day today, The Pioneer looks into the inspiring stories of some women in Uttarakhand who inspire others to break the glass ceiling by following an unconventional path in their life. One of such women is 23 years old Minakshi Khatri, popularly known as Aipan Girl, who is working since December 2019 to revive the traditional art form of Kumaon - Aipan. According to Khatri who hails from Nainital district, she used to make Aipan designs since childhood with her mother and grandmother. She said that this local art is gradually losing its identity among the young generation so she started making Aipan drawings in various items used

in home decor and started to put them on social networking sites. After she received appreciation and various orders from people across the country, she decided to connect with several local women who were fond of Aipan designs and started a small group. "Now we also run national and international workshops for Aipan drawings as many people want to learn this art form," said Khatri. Several women know Aipan and through this initiative the local women get to showcase their talent across the world. Khatri informed that she would soon start work to promote this folk art in other districts too. Further, there are two Dehradun-based women, Richa Karnwal and Jyoti Doval who took the digital India campaign to another level by starting a Facebook page- Uttarakhand Virtual Bazaar

last year which has over 17,000 members so far. According to one of the admins of this group- Pooja Doval, they started this virtual Bazaar during the lockdown to give local women a platform to do business from their comfort zones. Doval stated that in this virtual bazaar, one will find everything from food, clothing and home decor things among various other items. Another inspiring woman is an e-rickshaw driver Gulistan Ansari who is considered among the first women e-rickshaw drivers of the State. She lives with her mother and has been driving the e-rickshaw for over three years. She said that sometimes she has to face certain issues for being a woman but she mostly gets a positive response from the passengers and her col-



leagues. "I started to drive e-rickshaw to financially support myself and my mother who could not work due to her illness and all my five sisters are married," said Ansari. On being asked about what she thinks about women's day, Ansari

said that she does not know much about it but wanted to add that it is very important for women to be financially independent. According to her, women should do the job they like rather than overthinking that a particular job belongs to a man only.

UPNL outsourced workers to gherao secretariat today


PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The outsourced employees of Uttarakhand Purva Sainik Kalyan Nigam Limited (UPNL) will gherao the secretariat today in order to be heard by the State government. According to the president of the UPNL Employees Union, Kushagra Joshi, thousands of employees from various districts have been protesting for over two weeks at the protest site in Ekta Vihar but the government failed to initiate any dialogue with them. He said that the government is avoiding them probably because they are protesting in peace but now they have decided to intensify their protest. "We wanted a relevant dialogue with the government in order to raise our




issues before the administration but our government could not get the time for the protesting workers. So now we have decided to gherao the secretariat to make ourselves heard by the higher bodies," said Joshi. Moreover, the union had also decided to gherao

Secretariat a few days ago too but it could not happen as they didn't get the permission from Dehradun district administration. However, this time the protestors made it clear that they would gherao Secretariat on Monday irrespective of the administration's permission.



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PM ADDRESSES JANAUSHADHI WEEK

‘Poor saved ₹50k crore due to health schemes’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the poor and needy have been able to save ₹50,000 crore annually due to various health-related measures taken up by his Government like providing affordable medicines, healthcare and reducing the prices of medical devices. He was addressing the virtual conference on ‘Janaushadhi Week’ and dedicating 7,500th Janaushadhi Kendra at North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health & Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) in Shillong.

Jan Aushadhi Kendras were launched by the Modi Government in 2015 to provide affordable medicines. In a virtual address at the ‘Janaushadhi Week’ celebrated across the nation from March 1 to March 7 to create awareness about the ‘Jan Aushadhi’ scheme, the Prime Minister said it is helping countrymen living in tribal areas in the North East and the mountainous areas.

The Prime Minister, who also interacted with people from different parts of the country, further said, “It is clear from my discussion with people who run the Janaushadhi centres at every corner of the country and some of its beneficiaries, that this scheme is becoming a very big companion of poor and mid-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the Janaushadhi Diwas celebrations via video-conferencing in New Delhi on Sunday

dle-class families. This scheme is becoming the medium of both service and employment”. Underlining the various steps taken up by his Government to make healthcare affordable to the poor and needy, he said prices of essential drugs as well as medical devices such as stents and knee implants have been reduced manifold.

“It has led to the saving of ₹12,500 crore per year for the needy people. The Ayushman Bharat scheme is helping 50 crore people get ₹5 lakh worth of treatment. Over 1.5 crore people have already taken this benefit. It is estimated that it has led to savings of around ₹30,000 crore for people. “It means that if we collate the savings being affected by Janaushadhi, Ayushman Bharat and decline in prices of drugs and stents (medical devices) if

we only take Government schemes in the health sector, then poor and middle-income groups are saving around ₹50,000 crore per year,” the Prime Minister said.

To enhance medical education, he said before 2014, where there were about 55,000 MBBS seats in the country. In 6 years, it has been increased by more than 30,000. Similarly, in the PG seats — which used to be at 30,000 — more than 24,000 new seats have been added. The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana aims to provide quality medicines at an affordable price. Sales in the financial year 2020-21 (up to March 4, 2021) have led to a total saving of around ₹3,600 crore for citizens, as these medicines are cheaper by 50-90 per cent than market rates.



Indian Army officers during a media interaction, a day before International Women's Day, at South Block lawn in New Delhi, Sunday

PM Modi to inaugurate ‘Maitri Setu’ between India and B’desh tomorrow

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Tuesday inaugurate the ‘Maitri Setu’ between India and Bangladesh — a bridge built over the Feni river, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) said.

He will also inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple infrastructure projects in Tripura during the event, it said.

Prime Minister Modi will inaugurate the ‘Maitri Setu’ between India and Bangladesh on March 9 at 12 noon via video conferencing, the PMO said in a statement.

The bridge ‘Maitri Setu’ has been built over the Feni river which flows between the Indian boundary in Tripura and Bangladesh.

The name ‘Maitri Setu’

symbolises growing bilateral relations and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh, the PMO said. The construction was taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd at a project cost of ₹133 crore, it said. The 1.9 km long bridge joins Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.

It is poised to herald a new chapter for trade and people to people movement between India and Bangladesh, the PMO said.

With this inauguration, Tripura is set to become the ‘Gateway of North East’ with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is just 80 Kms from Sabroom, it said.

Prime Minister Modi will also lay the foundation stone for

setting up an Integrated Check Post at Sabroom.

It will help ease the movement of goods and passengers between the two countries, provide new market opportunities for products of North East states and assist seamless movement of passengers to and from India and Bangladesh, the PMO said.

The project is being taken up by the Land Ports Authority of India at an estimated cost of about ₹232 crore, the statement said.

The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone of National Highway (NH)-208 connecting the Unakoti district headquarters at Kailashahar with the Khowai district headquarters. It will provide an alternative route to the NH-44. **PTI**

Second part of Budget Session from today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With high-voltage Assembly election campaigns going on, the month-long second part of the Budget session of Parliament begins on Monday to focus on debates on demands of grants to many departments. The main focus of the Government in the second part of the session is to get the various demands for grants for the year 2021-22 passed along with the Finance Bill which carries various tax proposals. Besides these mandatory agendas, the Government has listed



various bills for passage in the session which concludes on April 8.

Some of the bills listed by

the government include the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, National

Cong Parl committe plans to corner Govt in House

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

With the Parliament all set to reconvene on Monday after a brief interval during the Budget Session, the Congress Parliamentary committee met on Sunday to discuss the issues to be raised in the House to corner the Government.

Chaired by Congress parliamentary party chairman Sonia Gandhi, the virtual meeting of the party leaders also had the participation of G-23 members like Anand Sharma and Manish Tewari besides newly appointed Leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge and leader of the party in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, AK Antony and Jairam Ramesh also attended the meeting in which the Congress discussed the strategy to counter the Government on issues like farmers’ agitation, fuel price hike and unemployment.

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi targeted the government on farm laws and tweeted: “Livelihood is right not favour, PM Modi, please give MSP”

Recently, Sonia had targeted the Government over the

disinvestment of PSU by the Government. In an article, she wrote: “The Modi government is using the economy’s collapse since the pandemic to rush headlong into its mission of handing over large portions of India’s wealth to its favourite crony capitalists. It has announced its intent to become cash rich by selling the family silver, through hasty privatisation of India’s public sector undertakings (PSUs).”

She said the Modi government has explicitly embraced “privatisation”, instead of “dis-investment”.

On the issue of newly floated social media rules, the Congress has demanded answers from the government.

Congress Spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said: “It is absolutely certain that at the time of corona, when the entire world including all of us were standing rock solid with the Government and hoping that the Prime Minister is thinking about our lives, our livelihood, he was thinking about how to sort out this crisis, he was actually preparing to stab us in the back by first compromising with the freedom of speech and expression in the country by first controlling free press.”

Mallikarjun Kharge, the newly appointed Leader of

Opposition, said: “They are choking agriculture and most importantly, they have no plan to address the growing concern of unemployment in the country.”

According to a Rajya Sabha bulletin, the reports of Standing committees of Health, Energy, Science and Technology, Forests and climate change will be presented in the Upper House.

On the first day of the Parliament, the newly appointed members will take oath and reports of parliamentary committees will be presented. Besides, Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad will move the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, which has been passed by the Lok Sabha.

The Congress and Left MPs are planning to move a Resolution that this House disapproves the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 (No. 14 of 2020) promulgated by the President of India on November 4, 2020.

While the Law Minister will move the Bills for consideration and passing, to amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, as passed by the Lok Sabha, be taken into consideration.

How much liability would pension for divorced daughters of freedom fighters incur: SC to Centre

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has asked the Centre as to how much financial liability will a divorced daughter of a freedom fighter incur if given family pension like an unmarried or a widowed daughter.

A bench of justices UU Lalit and KM Joseph posed the question after the Centre told it that if at all the court allows family pension to divorced daughters of freedom fighters besides the unmarried and widowed daughters, then it will incur a financial liability and open a Pandora’s box.

“How much will be the financial liability? Divorced daughters” cases would be very minimal and thus minimum liability would be incurring. Divorce daughter cases are hardly of any number in the country”, the bench observed.

The top court was dealing with a question whether a divorced woman is entitled to her freedom fighter father’s family pension like an unmarried or widowed daughter as two different high courts have

given contradictory opinions on the issue.

The matter was brought before the top court by Himachal Pradesh resident Tulsi Devi (57), who has challenged a high court verdict of last year dismissing her plea for grant of freedom fighter family pension on grounds that there was no provision made in the rules.

During the hearing, advocate Dushyant Parashar, appearing for Devi, said the divorced daughter of freedom fighter should be put on a par with the widowed or unmarried daughter.

He said that his client’s father has sacrificed his life for the country and she cannot be allowed to lead a life of penury in view of no source of income to sustain herself and survive.

Parashar said that a circular of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) dated December 14, 2012 records the intent for extending the benefit to divorced daughters on a par with widowed or unmarried daughters. **PTI**

Prez stresses on women’s safety, independence on Women’s Day

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday appealed to all countrymen to work relentlessly towards women’s safety, education and independence, on the eve of International Women’s Day.

Kovind said “we will be

able to pave the way for women, especially our daughters, to become more active, capable and empowered only by doing so. Let us dedicate this occasion of International Women’s Day to the honour, safety and empowerment of women and resolve that we will support them in changing every tradition and policy that hinders their progress,” the President said in a statement.

He extended congratulations and best wishes to all women on the occasion, saying “women are an inspiration to our family, society and the nation”.



Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill, Electricity (Amendment) Bill, Crypto currency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill. The part two of the session is taking place at a time when political parties have their focus on elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry. Senior leaders of various parties, especially the regional ones, are likely to skip most of the House sittings to focus on campaigning.

The first part of the Budget session started on January 29

with the President’s address to joint sitting of both houses of Parliament. The address was boycotted by over 20 opposition parties, including the Congress, in support of the demand of the protesting farmers for the repeal of the three farm laws.

The Union Budget was tabled on February 1. Thereafter, House proceedings were washed out for four consecutive days over the opposition’s demand for separate discussion on farm issues. To compensate the session’s lost time, the House sat till midnight for several days.

Fruit growers demand 100% duty on Iranian apple imports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Worried over a market flooded with Iranian red apples which is cheaper, an organisation of fruit and vegetable growers from hilly States and union territories on Saturday demanded imposition of 100 per cent duty on apples imported from Iran and other countries via Afghanistan under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

Kashmir-based apple growers have expressed concern over what they call an illegal import of Iranian apples from Afghanistan to India. They say Iranian produce is being sold in mandis across India and it is inflicting heavy losses on apple traders of Kashmir.

“To safeguard the interests of the domestic growers and associates, the import duty on apple should be levied 100% on realistic basis and import should be fixed. Otherwise, this devaluation of duty will result in losses of revenue to the respective Government,” Hill States Horticulture Forum (HSHF) said. The forum said it has also decided to first approach the respective governments for redressal of the



vital issues which include “illegal and unlawful import of apples from Iran and other neighbouring countries through Afghanistan under SAFTA at Zero per cent import duty”.

The colour and texture of the Iranian apple closely resembles the Kashmiri apple, which is famous for its juiciness and distinct flavour. Kashmiri horticulturists are worried about losing market share to the imported apple this year – because it is cheap.

The forum said this is not only harmful but will prove fatal for small and marginal fruit growers. “The sale of these apples in Mandis ... has resulted in 30%-40% decrease in prices for domestic farmers this year and there is an anticipation that if this continues farmers in these apple growing states will have no market left and will have no means of sustenance,” it added.

Jaishankar, US’ special envoy for Afghanistan discuss peace talks

New Delhi: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and US special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad spoke over phone on Sunday and discussed the latest developments pertaining to the Afghan peace talks.

Last November also, Jaishankar and Khalilzad had held talks during the latter’s India visit on the historic peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government and related issues.

“Received a call from US Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad @US4AfghanPeace. Discussed latest developments pertaining to peace talks. We will remain in touch,” Jaishankar tweeted on Sunday.

India has been keenly following the evolving political situation after the US signed a peace deal with the Taliban in February last year.

The deal provided for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, effectively drawing curtains on



Washington’s 18-year war with Taliban in the country.

India has also been maintaining that care should be taken to ensure that any such process does not lead to any ‘ungoverned spaces’ where terrorists and their proxies can relocate.

India has been a major stakeholder in Afghanistan and it has extended developmental assistance to tune of around \$3 billion in the last few years to the country. **PTI**

CHEATING PERSON WITH DISABILITY

CCPD slams Delhi Police for inaction

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coming to the rescue of a 55-year-old man suffering with Cerebral Palsy and whose premises has been illegally occupied by a Delhi lady cop for the past one year, the Court of Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities (CCPD), under the Social Welfare Ministry, has expressed displeasure at the Delhi Police’ failure to act against its personnel for cheating the person with disability (PwD).

“...this is not merely a matter of civil nature but a matter of abuse of a person with disability by a representative of the Government and provisions of Section 7 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016,” said the court in a

recent hearing in a petition filed by PwD Brijesh Kumar Jhamb.

Jhamb had alleged that except initiating departmental enquiry (DE) the police had not taken any action against the erring cop Manisha posted at Security Line, Vinay Marg who was neither paying her rent nor vacating the premises.

On the basis of the Jhamb complaint, the CCPD issued notice to Delhi police which was represented by ACP Satveer Singh (Security) during the case hearing on February 2, 2021.

Commissioner for Persons with Disability Upma Srivastava expressed shock that in “cases where a property is occupied illegally, it is normally police approached

for eviction. However, contrary to this in the present complaint, a lady constable of police is herself harassing the complainant”, this despite that the complainant’s condition was pathetic who was trying hard to make the two ends meet in the absence of rental income, his only source of income.

The Court has now directed the Delhi police to expedite the DE against the erring cop as well as deduct rental amount from her salary to ensure that Jhamb can live a dignified life.

Given the seriousness of the situation and the assurance given by the respondent that necessary action will be taken towards redressal of the complainant’s grievance, Commissioner Srivastava has

also suggested imposition of considerable penalty on the lady police constable including suspension from the service and recovery of the entire due amount of rent for cheating a person with disability.

Initially Jhamb had approached the district DCP (South East) and SHO of the area who dismissed the matter calling it ‘tenancy dispute between landlord and tenant, which is civil in nature and no police action is required”.

According to Jhamb, he had rented out his premises at Govind Puri, Kalkaji to Manisha in October 2019 on a monthly rent of ₹8,500. He alleged that she stopped giving rent from February, 2020. Jhamb also alleged that Manisha behaved rudely with him and threatened him of dire

consequences if he reported this matter to any one further.

Unhappy at the police response, the court noticed that “miscarriage of justice is being carried out by a representative of Delhi Police which should not be taken lightly by her superiors.

“As evident from the hearing held, the condition of the complainant is pathetic who has been reduced to a hand to mouth existence on account of loss of the basic source of his livelihood, i.e. the rental from his flat,” said the court in a five page order.

“Till such time the inquiry is over, the rental amount be deducted from the salary of the lady constable and deposited in the account of the complainant to ensure that he can live a dignified life,” it further said.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), under the Ministry of AYUSH, has filed patent for bio-production of secondary metabolites from Bel (Aegle marmelos), in-vitro production of secondary metabolites from tree species of Dashamoola (10 roots used in ayurveda) through hairy root cultures and development of anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory agents from Dioscoria floribunda.

“While the first two projects belong to the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB), Coimbatore, the third project is being carried out by Central Institute of Medicinal and



Aromatic Plants (CIMAP), Lucknow. The CIMAP filed patent is titled as “A synergistic polyherbal formulation exhibiting potential cancer activity,” said JLN Sastry, CEO, National Medicinal Plants Board in a statement here.

Filing of the patent is the NMPB part of a special drive to identify the patentable projects which are sponsored under the ‘Research and Development Component’ of Central Sector Scheme (CSS)

on “Conservation, Development and Sustainable Management of Medicinal Plants”.

NMPB generally sponsors various R&D programs under CSS to both Governments as well as private organizations across the country, said the official.

Sastry said “this is just the humble beginning for NMPB’s team and will file more patents in the coming times.”

The NMPB has also developed e-CHARAK, an e-channel for herbs, aromatic raw material, and knowledge as a virtual market place for trade of medicinal plants produce and also enable information exchange between various stakeholders involved in the sector.

TAMIL NADU POLLS

Bring in Priyanka slogan echoes in Kanyakumari

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Even as the BJP has decided to field Pon Radhakrishnan (69), former Union Minister of State for Finance and Surface Transport in the Narendra Modi Government (2014-2019) as the party candidate for the April 6 byelection to Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat, a section of Congress leaders in Tamil Nadu has asked the party high command to bring in Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, AICC general secretary as a candidate.

The seat fell vacant as Congress leader H Vasanth Kumar, who was elected to Lok Sabha in the 2019 General Election succumbed to Covid-19. Vasanth Kumar had won the 2019 Lok Sabha election by defeating Pon Radhakrishnan by more than 2.6 lakh votes. It

is to be seen whether the Kanyakumari electorate would prefer this time a candidate who was thrashed in an election held two years ago. Karti Chidambaram, MP, senior Congress leader has asked the Congress High Command to field Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Kanyakumari as the Congress candidate and this has found acceptance among a large section of the party cadre. The people of south Tamil Nadu have been enthused by last week’s visit of her brother Rahul Gandhi MP to the three districts of Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari which are Congress strongholds.

Radhakrishnan who had won the seat in the 1999 and 2014 Lok Sabha election had been defeated from the constituency six times, making

him a veteran of battles. “I am always available to the people of the constituency whether I am in power or not and this makes them come to me for all their needs. Ill continue to do what I could to help the people,” said Radhakrishnan. M Ravinson, lawyer and a senior citizen from Kanyakumari said as the constituency happens to be a stronghold of the Congress, the result is a foregone conclusion. Radhakrishnan won in 1999 because of support by the DMK while in 2014, the Congress, the DMK and the BJP fought separately. There were reports that the BJP would field a new face but the announcement has made it clear that the party in Tamil Nadu is still under the control of Ponnar, as Radhakrishnan is addressed.

Early Gujarat polls likely if BJP wins in West Bengal: Minister

Valsad: A Gujarat Minister on Sunday claimed Assembly polls in the State could be brought forward from late 2022 if the BJP wins in West Bengal.

Elections in the eastern state will be held in eight phases from March 27, while counting of votes will take place on May 2.

The term of the present Gujarat Assembly is till December next year.

Talking to reporters in Umargam in south Gujarat’s Valsad district, state Forest and Tribal Affairs Minister Raman Patkar said the environment is conducive for early polls in Gujarat at a time when the BJP is winning everywhere.

“When the BJP is winning all around, then (the party’s) parliamentary board and the state and national leadership understand that it is better to hold elections (in Gujarat) in this conducive environment,” he said.

“And if BJP wins in West Bengal, then the announcement (for polls in Gujarat) can be made in a short time,” Patkar claimed.

Patkar’s statement comes against the backdrop of the BJP registering a massive victory in the recently-concluded local bodies polls in the state.

The party won 90 per cent seats in the local bodies polls, as well as all six municipal corporations, 75 out of 81 municipalities, all 31 district panchayats and 196 out of 231 taluka panchayats. **PTI**

Maha infection spurt continues, fresh cases cross 11-K mark

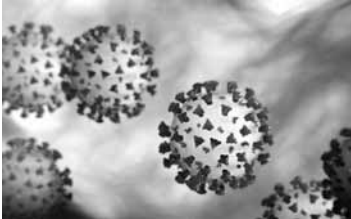
TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The second wave spurt of Covid-19 cases continued in Maharashtra on Sunday, as the number of daily infections crossed 11,000 mark, while the daily coronavirus toll came down to 38.

After infections breached the 10000-mark for two consecutive days, Maharashtra on Sunday touched a new high of 11,141 in the second round of intense spread of the Covid-19 ever since it first broke out in March last year.

A cursory look at the increase in the number of cases being witnessed in the state since March 1 this year (March -1: 6397, March 2: 7863, March 3: 9855, March 4: 8998, March 5: 10,216, March 6: 10,187 and March 7: 11,141) reveals that there has been a steady increase in the number of cases during the past one week.

There has been a mixed trend as far as deaths are concerned during the last one week. While there were 30 deaths on March 1, the death tally ever since then has been: March 2-54, March 3—42, March 4—60, March 5-53, March 6—47 and March 7—38.



With the 11,141 new cases reported on Sunday, the total number of infections climbed from 22,08,586 to 22,19,727. Similarly with 38 fresh deaths, the total number deaths rose from 52,440 to 52,478.

As 6013 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year went up to 20,78,044. The recovery rate in the state dropped marginally from 93.36 per cent to 93.17 per cent.

With four fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai rose from 11,500 to 11,504, while the infected cases went up by 1361 to trigger a jump in the infections from 3,32,208 to 3,33,569.

Meanwhile, the number of “active

cases” total cases in the state went up from 92,897 to 97,983. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 2.37 per cent to 2.36 per cent.

There are a maximum of 20,347 “active” cases in Pune, followed by Nagpur (11,635), Thane (10,294), Mumbai (9319), Amravati (5037), Akola (4811), Jalgaon (4538), Aurangabad (4264) and Nashik (3741).

Pune district, which continued to be the worst-affected city-district in Maharashtra, saw the total number of cases increase from 4,19,162 to 4,21,162, while the total number of deaths in Pune went up from 8087 to 8092.

Thane district remained in the third spot --after Pune and Mumbai -- after the total number of infections rose from 2,84,811 to 2,85,729, while the total deaths climbed from 5,831 to 5,834.

Of the 1,68,67,286 samples sent to laboratories, 22,19,727 have tested positive (13.16 per cent) for COVID-19 until Sunday.

Currently, 4,39,055 people are in home quarantine while 4,650 people are in institutional quarantine.

Book dedicated to Ernakulam Press Club out

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

News about news reporters may not have that much attraction for newspaper readers. Most of the daily newspaper readers are not aware of the process involved in the making of news reports which fill the daily's sheets. The lives of journalists, the unsung heroes and heroines of the media industry, fade into oblivion once they retire from service or walk into the autumn of life.

This is the reason which prompted PA Mahboob, veteran journalist, who authored “Untold Stories by Journalists” which is being released by Congress leader A K Antony, whose profession as a politician was launched from Ernakulam. This is the first comprehensive account of how journalists in Ernakulam district built the first-ever Press Club building in the country.

In modern times, scribes rush to the government with petitions and memorandums seeking hike in monthly pensions, medical benefits and accommodations, journalists of yesteryears struggled to meet both the ends of life together. Most of them were the carry forward products from the freedom struggle movement, according to P Rajan, octogenarian



journalist and chronicler of Kerala politics, who played a major role in making the dream of scribes in the district to have a building of their own.

“This is the first ever Press Club building in the country, having completed the construction in 1968. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi inaugurated the four-storied building on December 15, 1968,” writes Mahboob quoting from various news reports that appeared in the editions of December 16, 1968.

What makes this building unique in many ways is the cost of construction, the speed with which it was built and the fact that the journalists who did not seek any financial aid from the State Government for the

building.

“The plot of land on which the building stands was bought from the Kerala Government paying the prevailing market rate. The cost of construction was met by a lottery. We journalists spread out across the State to sell the lottery, each ticket costing Re one. The first prize was Rs 10,000/- and a Herald Car,” reminisces P Rajan, the lone surviving member of the journalistic fraternity of those days.

Besides being the first ever Press Club building in the country, this institution is the one that pioneered the concept of Meet-The-Press. Politicians that include Prime Minister, union cabinet ministers and former heads of State had par-

ticipated in the Meet-The-Press programmes organized by us and this later caught up with the rest of the nation,” said Mahboob, who literally started his journalistic profession as a primary school student with the Press Club.

“I have seen my late father, himself a journalist and his fellow journalists sharing space on the footpath as well as in the verandah of a studio near the Ernakulam Guest House, the favorite accommodation of VIPs frequenting Ernakulam. Those days I used to ride a bicycle to Ernakulam to help my father,” said Mahboob.

The 369-page account has been done in the characteristic style of reporters, without any embellishment or adjectives. “That’s how we reporters file our copies from the Press Club and it is the professionals in the newsroom who make it in readable format. There was no newsroom staff for this book,” said Mahboob with a smile. The book is not about just how the building was constructed. It has many incidents like “behind the news”, accounts of how reports developed over the time in that era when telephone was a rare commodity, cars were luxury while Akashwani was the only source of news.

On Women’s Day, NTPC announces recruitment drive for women

New Delhi: On Women’s Day, NTPC Ltd, India’s largest integrated power company announces plans for recruiting only women executives as a special recruitment drive across its areas of operations. This will further strengthen women power in India’s largest power generation company.

Such recruitment drive will further enhance gender diversity as parameter for NTPC. NTPC has been working at improving its gender ratio wherever possible. To attract more woman applicants, number of innovative initiatives have been taken. The application fee at the time of recruitment is completely waived-off for women employees. To support women workforce, NTPC adheres to policies like Child Care Leave with Pay, Maternity Leave, Sabbatical leave and NTPC Special Child Care Leave on Adoption of a Child/Delivering Child through Surrogacy. NTPC has also introduced special facilities at work like Child Care Facilities and Crèche Facility to make life of mother’s convenient at work. Additionally, Special counselling session are arranged for women employees, special initiatives are taken for developing leadership/managerial competencies of women employees etc.At NTPC townships, also referred to as ‘mini India’, women play a pivotal role in community developmental activities to foster a diversified culture through Ladies Clubs promoted by NTPC.

School workers suspended after ‘girl sweeping floor’ video goes viral in Aligarh

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

The BSA has suspended Bhupendra Singh and Deepak Singh, fourth grade employees, after the photo of a student getting a broom in a former secondary school in Dhanipur went viral on the internet media. Incharge Principal Neelam Saxena has been warned. The head-master has been suspended for the food not being cooked in the mid-day meal in primary school, Faridpur.

BSA Laxmikant Pandey said that there was a complaint in the DM War Room about the case of the student getting a broom in the former secondary school, Dhanipur. When the team went to school and investigated, the matter was found correct. The condition of school's infrastructure was bad. The in-charge headmistress was warned for this. In primary school Faridpur Dhanipur, the team found 47 out of 158 children present. Nothing was found to work under boundary wall, toilets, submersible and rejuvenation.

MDM was also not formed from March 1 to 6. Composite grant consumption bills were not introduced. Principal Rishpal Singh has been suspended. Only 30 children out of 493 were present in Composite School, Sihor Dhanipur. There was no cleaning and dyeing. The incharge headmistress could not give information about rejuvenation and departmental work. The headmaster has been summoned to the office with the documents. Attendance at East Secondary School Kaliyanpur Dhanipur was signed by Rashmi Tripathi, Incharge Principal at Panjika, but she was not in school.

Punjab set to take major leap in women empowerment and protection through collaboration with UN

Chandigarh: The Punjab Government is all set to join hands with various United Nations and other global agencies to scale its efforts to empower and protect women, with Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh slated to launch eight special initiatives to mark the International Women’s Day.

The initiatives scheduled for launch on Monday include appointment letters for 2047 Master Cadre women teachers as well as Sanja Shakti helpdesks and 181 Sanjh Shakti helpline for women at all police stations, with women operators to predominantly man the same for prompt and sensitive response to crimes against women.

An official spokesperson said the pro-women initiatives would be launched virtually by the Chief Minister from Punjab Bhawan, Chandigarh, with simultaneous programmes at District Headquarters and block levels across Punjab. Social Security, Women and Child Development Minister Aruna Chaudhary will join the main launch event with other Ministers and MLAs.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister would also personally hand over appointment letters to some of the newly recruited women teachers in the Master Cadre in the School Education Department. A total of 2407 women teachers across the State will be given the letters.

According to an official spokesperson, the state government’s collaboration with international agencies was aimed at safeguarding women from crimes, protecting their rights and introducing gender sensitization curriculum in school syllabus

Punjab CM orders immediate action on 7-point Agenda 2022

Chandigarh: With a record-breaking 84.6% of the manifesto commitments already accomplished - a feat never achieved before by any political party, and the promise of fulfilling the remaining in the next one year, Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Sunday directed all Ministries and departments to move aggressively and proactively to push for the realization of the 7-point ‘Agenda 2022’ he had unveiled in the Vidhan Sabha on Friday.

The agenda, aimed at ensuring total protection of people and their properties in an environment of peaceful co-existence conducive to saving the lives and livelihood of all Punjabis against all odds, is centered around citizen welfare through a holistic focus on overarching development of the state. The overarching goal of the agenda is to ensure the development of a ‘Kaamyab & Khushal Punjab’.

The futuristic agenda, which has set the stage for his government beyond the current term of his government, is designed to meet the aspirations of the people of Punjab, Captain Amarinder had announced in the Vidhan Sabha on Friday while sharing with the House his goals ahead. Cognisant of the fact that this would need more time, he had said, during his speech in response to the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the Governor’s address in the Vidhan Sabha, that “I am sure that the people of Punjab are conscious of this.”

J&K: Hundreds of Rohingyas vacate temporary dwellings to escape crackdown

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A day after more than 150 illegal immigrants from Myanmar were shifted to a “holding centre” in Hiranagar hundreds of panic stricken Rohingyas vacated their temporary dwellings in Kiryani talab area of Bhatindi and adjoining areas to escape police crackdown on Sunday.

Questioning the police action against them some of the senior members of the community also alleged that they were being targeted in the election season because they belong to the ‘Muslim’ community.

Meanwhile, the common markets where the majority of Rohingyas had set shops and run their small business units wore a deserted look in the area. Jawans of para military forces were deployed in and around their dwellings to maintain a strict vigil.

Kiryani talab area remained the focal point during the day.

Large number of these Rohingyas had converged there to chalk out future course of action in the wake of a strict action against them.



Rohingyas moves with their bags and baggage to escape police action in Jammu

Mohd Zubair told The Pioneer, initially we had no clue where members of the Rohingya community were shifted.Late in the night we came to know through different news platforms that police had shifted them to Hiranagar in Kathua. He said, “family members of Rohingyas spent the long night waiting for their relatives to return home”. In the

absence of any concrete information about the whereabouts of their relatives, the majority of these Rohingyas were gripped with fear and not willing to go before the policemen.

According to local residents in the area the police had directed them to report at MA stadium around 11.a.m for carrying out verification

of their documents and UNHRC cards.

Instead of visiting MA stadium, a large number of these immigrants from Myanmar, accompanied by their family members, stepped out with ‘bags and baggage’ and started marching towards ‘Mecca Masjid’ located in Bhatindi.

As they were marching through the streets local policemen on duty tried their level best to convince them to return to their dwellings. These Rohingyas spent the major part of the day occupying lanes and bylanes in the area. Late evening they were directed to return to their plots and were also given a deadline of atleast four days to sort out their issues at work including pending payments.

Meanwhile, some of the senior members of the Rohingya community also appealed to the Government of India to give them some time to settle their payment issues at work before shifting them to any other place. They also appealed to the centre govt not to penalise all of them for fault of few among them involved in wrong doings.

JN MEDICAL COLLEGE OF AMU ASSAULT CASE

Resident doctors’ strike seeking arrest of accused continues

Aligarh: Junior doctors of JN Medical College are adamant on demanding the arrest of the main accused for assaulting the doctor at the trauma center. Doctors clearly say that the strike will continue till the accused go to judicial custody. Meanwhile two patients succumbed to death during the strike. Patients are returning back due to this strike.

Dr. Asad Alam, who was on duty at the Trauma Center of the Medical College, was beaten up by the attendant. In this case, two accused got bail from the court. While the main accused Rizwan is still away from the grip of the police. The strike was announced by the RDA to demand the arrest of the accused. On Friday evening, the Chairman of RDA, Dr. Mohammad Kashif, expressed satisfaction over the police action and announced the withdrawal of the strike. **PNS**

‘Stick to basics of surveillance, contact tracing and testing’

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

With no let up in the continued surge in the number of Covid-19 cases in the Mumbai metropolitan region (MMR) and other cities across Maharashtra, the Centre has advised the State administration to “stick to the basics of surveillance, contact tracing and testing”.

In its report submitted after its visit to the state 4 on March 1 and 2, the team deputed by the Union Health Ministry has said: “Don’t let the guard down: stay to the basics of surveillance, contact tracing and testing. Micro plan and ensure strict compliance of protocols. Strengthen teams to ensure meticulous home quarantine, do focussed testing of 100% population in hotspot areas repeated at five days, and isolate positives to check spread”. While advising the Maharashtra government to undertake a massive Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign, the Central team

said: “Massive IEC Campaign and collective behavioural change and influencing for Covid-appropriate behaviour is needed”.

“Those who are opinion makers - some political leaders, some doctors - they may themselves not be following these. Renewed effort at motivation, communication, engagement with opinion makers and strict enforcement is a must. Media orientation/ engagement will be useful,” the Central team’s report said. The Central team asked the state government to strengthen the ‘Me Javabdar’ (I am responsible) campaign.

Among other things, the Central team asked District Collectors, Municipal Commissioners and Police Commissioners to “lead from the front proactively” to enhance coordination among the various implementing agencies. “What needs to be done is fairly known.... ‘getting it done’ is what is required now,” the report said.

Covid-19: 112 more cases in J&K

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday recorded 112 new Covid-19 cases that took the tally to 1,27,044, while one more death due to the coronavirus pushed the toll to 1,962, officials said.

Out of the fresh cases, 19 were reported from the Jammu division and 93 from the Kashmir division of the union territory, they said.

The officials said Srinagar district recorded the highest of 35 cases followed by 19 in Baramulla district and 15 in Jammu district.

Ten other districts had cases in single digits.

The number of active cases is 892 in the union territory, while 1,24,190 patients have recovered so far, the officials said.

The death toll in the union territory due to the pandemic is 1,962 as one fresh death was reported from Kashmir valley in the past 24 hours, they added.



Vendors wait for customers to sell utensils at weekly Chor Bazar, also known as ‘Gujari’ or ‘Ravivari’ bazar, in Ahmedabad on Sunday

PTI



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Risky resolve

Will Mamata's decision to contest Nandigram backfire or bring her back to power?



Electoral politics is a tricky game and, for political parties that are practically a one-person show, it's especially important for the supremo to choose to contest from such an Assembly seat that it sends a strong message among the masses that the leader is attached to the grassroots and doesn't hesitate to take the rivals head on. This has a psychological impact on the voters, not only in the particular constituency the leader contests from but across the State, which helps consolidate the vote bank in that party's favour. TMC chief Mamata Banerjee seems to have hit the right note by deciding to contest from Nandigram, the seat held by her one-time confidant Suwendu Adhikari who dumped the TMC to join the BJP in December. By doing so, Mamata — who is beleaguered by a spate of defections from the TMC in the five months preceding the Assembly elections — has taken the fight to the BJP's camp and tried to project a pro-poor image by returning to her political roots. The Trinamool's sweep of Nandigram in 2007 is one of the key factors that paved the way for her political resurrection and catapulted her to power in 2011. Adhikari, who wields considerable influence in the constituency, had thrown down the gauntlet to Mamata to contest from the seat. Now, Mamata seems to have accepted the challenge and asserted that "this is a smiley election". It might appear to be a case of simple political enmity but

there is no denying that it has deeper political connotations.

With almost 40 per cent Muslim voters and a sizeable number of Dalits in the constituency, Mamata might be confident of her win and Adhikari, after all, may not have very bright prospects of defeating her but the contest here will certainly be demanding on her in terms of time, energy and attention to other seats; in other words, a victory in Nandigram might cost Mamata a few other constituencies. At a time when Didi is already licking the wounds inflicted by scores of defectors, her special focus on Nandigram might cost the Trinamool dear in West Bengal. Undoubtedly, Adhikari — who was the architect of the ouster of the Left from Nandigram in 2007 — is the BJP's biggest acquisition but the saffron party's real objective is to oust the TMC from power and not just win the battle of prestige. So, from this viewpoint, Mamata's decision to contest from the constituency might actually serve the BJP which has already launched its "Mission 200+". Moreover, Mamata's dropping out of Kolkata's Bhowanipore seat, which she represented for two terms and where her party trailed in the 2019 general elections by a few thousand votes, has given the saffron party ammunition to mock her by saying that it shows her nervousness. Whether it is Didi's apprehensiveness or a bold, calculated move, or the BJP's ploy to make Mamata channelise all her energy and focus on to Nandigram, thus making her a spent force elsewhere, is the moot question which only voters will answer. For now, with the recent turn of events, West Bengal has become a hot spot of politics with the parties doing all that they can to win the elections.

PICTALK



A Japanese macaque soaks in a hot spring in Jigokudani valley in Nagano Prefecture, northwest of Tokyo

AP

Diabolical dowry

A young woman's recent suicide in Ahmedabad must jolt our conscience and nudge us to correct course

We are living in the 21st century but it seems, for a majority of women in India, we are still living in ancient times when a woman's worth was quantified by the amount of dowry she brought along at the time of marriage. What else can explain the shameful fact that when women are going into space, working as scientists and leading countries and global bodies, young women in our country are forced to end their lives because they are unable to bear the harassment meted out by their husbands and in-laws over "inadequate" dowry? The latest in the long line of victims of a despicable and archaic system, which was abolished and criminalised in India in 1961, is a 23-year-old woman from Gujarat who ended her life by jumping into Ahmedabad's Sabarmati river. Before dying, she shot a video and made an impassioned plea to all Muslims for ending the dowry system as "it is illegitimate and forbidden". Though the woman's husband was arrested for abetting her suicide, and many prominent leaders from the community have condemned those who take dowry and asked people to end this social evil, it will not bring the woman back.

Dowry is a blot on our society and country where we worship goddesses and women are considered the incarnation of Lakshmi and Durga. It is a shame that in a nation whose Prime Minister has given a clarion call for "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao", our daughters are either killed or forced to commit suicide over dowry. The National Crime Records Bureau's 2017 report is an indication of the gravity of the situation as India recorded nearly 7,000 dowry-linked deaths. Also, dowry deaths rose from 19 per day in 2001 to 21 per day in 2016. As usual, the fingers will point towards weak law enforcement and non-implementation of laws, but the fact remains that the laws are adequate to end this malaise. The Supreme Court recently made it abundantly clear that it will not tolerate harassment of women for dowry. It is we, the people, who have to change. Parents must educate their daughters and stop seeing them as a burden. If you have a self-reliant daughter with good education and a job, you don't have to pay someone for her upkeep. Women, too, should refuse to marry men who seek dowry. It is only when the parents and women grow a spine that this evil practice will end. Don't expect anyone else to come and help you. This Women's Day, do take a pledge to help yourself.

Exorcising the OROP conundrum

The 'One Rank One Pension' imbroglio is tormenting our Defence personnel and veterans, who continue to lose hope each passing day



DEEPAK SINHA

One issue that distinguishes the Narendra Modi Government from its earlier iterations is the manner in which it has used the military, quite successfully at that, to portray an apparently muscular foreign policy, not least for the domestic audience. This has allowed it to reap rich dividends at the hustings. Yet ironically, apart from praising the military in public, Modi has done little for them on the ground, displaying little concern for the morale or well-being of its personnel.

Take the issue of welfare of our servicemen. The Government has reduced Canteen facilities, is intent on opening up and monetising Cantonment lands, adding to the insecurity of families of servicemen separated over long periods due to their spouses being deployed either operationally or on training. In addition, he has refused to authorise the Non-Functional Financial Upgrade (NFFU), which is authorised to other Central Government services, including the Central Armed Police Forces, thereby lowering their status and emoluments in comparison to the other services. The plain fact is that the grant of NFFU to bureaucrats allows them to get OROP, through the back door as it were, because nearly all of them now retire in the Apex Grade.

All these little pinpricks rattle and more so this Government's unwillingness to implement OROP in letter and spirit as envisaged by the Parliamentary Committee headed by veteran BJP MP Bhagat Singh Koshyari: A definition that had been accepted by both Houses of Parliament and the then UPA Government in power. What is particularly galling is that Modi used this very issue to galvanise the serving and veteran community during the 2014 general elections.

His sanctioning of a distorted version of what had been promised earlier forced the veterans to launch peaceful protests on June 14, 2015, which contin-



ue to this day. The fact that the Government has done nothing to resolve matters, and instead resorted to issuing misleading statements and even violence against them, is undoubtedly a precursor as to how this Government will handle the farmers' protest in the long run.

At the end of the day, the issue is very simple. All that the veterans demand is a chance to live out their retirement with dignity, feasible only if their pensions are protected from rising inflation as the majority retires relatively young; that this Government is unwilling to do so reeks of hypocrisy.

For example, even while this Government opposes OROP for its military veterans, it lost little time in ensuring that all Members of Parliament receive pensions calculated in much the same manner that military veterans have been demanding. In 2018, it amended Clause 8A of 'The Salary Allowances and Pension of Members Act, 1954' to provide for an increase in the authorised pension every five years on the basis of the Cost Inflation Index, which clearly links pensions for all former members to what is received by the incumbent.

This unfair treatment, espe-

cially the Government's refusal to put in public domain the Justice Reddy Committee (to look into anomalies in OROP) Report, submitted in October 2016, forced the military veterans to approach the Supreme Court. Over four years later, the case has made tardy progress mainly due to the Government's efforts to delay.

By not taking cognisance of this issue, the Bench has not been kind to the veterans, who continue to suffer and lose hope as each day passes. What is worse, the Justices hearing the case, now in the final arguments stage, have repeatedly postponed the hearing on the grounds they have not had the requisite time to study and understand the case in detail. The next hearing is in a few days and one hopes the Bench will actually hear the case and not kick it down the road.

Oddly enough for the vast majority of us, not particularly conversant with the intricacies of the judicial process, this hearing in itself appears to be completely superfluous. This is because the Supreme Court had on September 9, 2008, in its judgment in the case of Union of India and Maj Gen SPS Vains and Others, ruled: "No Defence personnel senior in rank can get lesser pension

than his junior irrespective of the date of retirement and similarly placed officers of the same rank are to be given the same pension irrespective of the date of retirement." These are directions that the Defence Ministry has yet to fully implement and which in no uncertain terms accede to what the veterans have been demanding.

Interestingly enough in 2014, when the Supreme Court was passing directions to the Government to correct the anomalies in the pensions of High Court Justices, then Chief Justice of India P Sathasivam directed that "one rank one pension must be the norm in respect of a constitutional office", a benefit which Justices of the Supreme Court already enjoyed.

Finally, can it really be the case that in a democracy like ours, the constitutional authorities do not see themselves as mere public servants and believe themselves to be superior to other Government servants and ordinary citizens?

(The writer is a military veteran, who is a consultant with the Observer Research Foundation and Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai. The views expressed are personal.)

“AT THE END OF THE DAY, THE ISSUE IS VERY SIMPLE. ALL THAT THE VETERANS DEMAND IS A CHANCE TO LIVE OUT THEIR RETIREMENT WITH DIGNITY, FEASIBLE ONLY IF THEIR PENSIONS ARE PROTECTED FROM RISING INFLATION AS THE MAJORITY RETIRES RELATIVELY YOUNG

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PUNISH THE PROTOCOL VIOLATORS

Sir — The Government must step up its awareness drive with respect to COVID-19 vaccination as many people are still not aware of the importance of getting vaccinated. Most of these people are from villages who don't follow the safety protocols. They neither sanitise their hands regularly nor wear a face mask.

The Government must advertise the list of the centres where jabs are being provided in vernacular newspapers across the nation. It must also announce it on radio and telecast the list on national television. The information will help ensure that senior citizens choose their nearest hospital for immunisation in a hassle-free manner.

Further, just imposing a fine on those who err is not enough. There should be strict punishment for not wearing the mask. It is also seen that police officials often misuse their powers and threaten the poor in the name of not adhering to the guidelines. They extort money from poor vendors who fail to wear mask or who do not wear it properly. The Government needs to disseminate information with respect to Coronavirus vaccination through all mediums of communication. It is also the responsibility of the citizens to maintain social distancing and get themselves vaccinated when their turn comes. Even for those who have taken the jab, precaution is first and foremost. We have no idea how the virus mutates or changes its form and becomes lethal. We must remember that prevention is always better than cure.

Varun Dambal | Bengaluru

GOVT MUST ACT TO END THE PLIGHT OF FARMERS

Sir — The ongoing farmers' protest is the result of the Government's arrogance as it is not ready to agree to the demand of the growers. The farmers are demanding complete repeal of the three contentious farm laws and are not ready to settle for anything less. The Government, on the other hand, is hell-bent to impose these laws as it is in consonance with its agenda of rampant privatisation. It will be a setback to the prevailing Minimum Support Price (MSP) system

Food wastage is a curse



It refers to the editorial 'Blasphemous' (March 6). It is a sin to waste food but the reality is that when people go to restaurants and eateries, they waste food as they order more than they can eat. The rest of the food in their plate is thrown into dustbins. Despite the Government's attempts to provide food security to all, it is still a distant dream.

Thousands die of hunger every year in India and abroad and yet people don't realise the importance of not wasting food. The United

Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) report 2021 showing 50 kg per year per person food wastage is both worrying and disheartening in view of the fact that the wastage accounting for millions of metric tonnes, if saved, can save thousands of lives of the hungry and the malnourished.

We must not forget about the plight of those who go to bed hungry. Thousands of labourers, who were recently forced to leave the big cities and migrate back to their villages during the COVID-19 lockdown, are struggling hard to sustain themselves. We have responsibility towards our poor brethren. It is also seen that people who order food at home too waste much in their plate. While placing an online order, we must take care that we order only the quantity which we can easily consume. There is a lot of wastage of vegetables, fruits and other items like fish, meat and eggs during transportation and due to lack of proper storage facilities.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

for the crops and will finish off the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) mandis in India.

The 100-day period of protest is a blot on India's democracy and the treatment meted out to the protesters is simply inhumane. However, the Opposition is with the farmers. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi hit out at the Centre over the farmers' protest and said nails were laid at Delhi's borders for those, whose sons risk their lives at the country's borders.

Farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at several border points of Delhi, including Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur, since November 28 last year but farmers across the India are now coming out in their support.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

WHY NEED CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT?

Sir — Companies signing celebrities as the brand ambassadors for their products seems

to be the trend. While the intended purpose of such a move is to push up the sales, when a product has a fair market share, what is the need for brand ambassadors?

Further, when a company can achieve a sizeable market share for a product on its own strength, why should it spend unnecessarily? And naturally, such expenditure will have a bearing on the buyers as product price will go up, for where else will the company find money to meet such heavy expenditures?

To sum up, a product does not need any endorsement if it has a fair share of acceptance in the market. Even if celebrities are roped in, seldom does it help boost the sales, for the people know better about the products than the celebrities. The product must be of such quality that consumers purchase it even if a celebrity doesn't endorse it.

V S Jayaraman | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

The State Government must ensure piped water in every household in Gujarat, including those in the slums and shanties, by 2022.

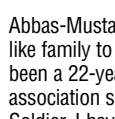


Gujarat Chief Minister — Vijay Rupani



By the end of June, we will already be in economic normality. We are going to have greater growth and recovery in industrial activity.

Mexico President — Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador



Abbas-Mustan are like family to me. It's been a 22-year association since Soldier. I have always loved their vision of making movies.



Actor — Bobby Deol



The health of the elite athletes training in the national camp for Olympics is our priority, but we have to follow protocol of the health department.

Union Sports Minister — Kiren Rijiju




The Delhi Cabinet has given approval for constitution of the Delhi Board of School Education.

Delhi Chief Minister — Arvind Kejriwal

FIRST COLUMN

EMPOWERMENT BEGINS AT HOME



RAVI CHANDER KOCHHAR

Women’s empowerment has often been a buzzword and the central theme of numerous seminars, webinars and panel discussions in the recent past. This is more so as International Women’s Day, which is celebrated on March 8, approaches. At every such forum, it has been emphasised that a woman must have the courage to stand up and make her presence felt to ensure that she gets her due in every walk of life, be it her family, educational institutions or the workplace. All stakeholders, including the Government and society must play their respective role in ensuring women empowerment, for nurturing and effectively taking women on board for nation building.

Here, rather than mere formulation and enactment of various policies and provisions, society has a much more important role to play in achieving the desired outcome. If you study life histories of those who have made a mark in society, they follow a certain pattern with commonalities including their upbringing, education and career profile, further signifying the impactful role societies play in women’s empowerment.



As it is said, “charity begins at home”, the starting point for women’s empowerment is within the family where each sibling must be given equal opportunity all through their formative years. In this regard, parents can play a very important role and both mother and father have to walk the talk and consciously drive home the point among the children that the girl child is no different and doesn’t have to be treated differently.

The second stage which equally influences the mindset of the young generation towards the principles of gender equality and women empowerment is at the educational institutions. It is here that they come out of their homes and join peers of both genders. These children are under the mentorship of their teachers and the onus lies with the schools and colleges to ensure that the girl child is given a fair chance at every level, not only in academics and research but in all other extracurricular activities as well. It is up to the management to ensure an equal opportunity to all. There should be no discrimination in the selection process and every male and female candidate should be given a fair chance. Thereafter, all through their career, it must be ensured that women are given opportunities at par with their male counterparts and assessed on the same parameters for professional appraisal and promotions. It is also the responsibility of the management to create a conducive work environment devoid of any form of discrimination.

Further, considering the special needs of women and the biological differences with men, maternity and other leaves should be granted at the appropriate time. On the other hand, women must not take any undue favour or advantage and must climb the ladder of success on their merit. Be it professional, administrative, or interpersonal relationship, women must move with confidence. They must prove themselves as competent, committed and self-motivated. Moreover, there is a need to change the male mindset and men must understand that in today’s competitive world with the ethos of gender equality at the helm, if any woman is better, they must accept the fact, learn to respect her authority and take orders from a female boss. Remember there are no free lunches and every opportunity comes with a price tag. The question is whether you are ready to pay the price!

(The writer is Group Pro Vice Chancellor, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)

Defying norms for better lives

Sadly, in spite of women’s foray into many non-traditional fields, only one-quarter of Indian women, compared to 82 per cent of men, are in the labour market

This year, two women created history by joining the Telangana Southern Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TSSPD-CL) as junior powerline workers and becoming a part of a workforce that has solely comprised men in the State. The women did so after qualifying tests, including climbing up an electric pole. Still the job didn’t come on a platter. The duo had to knock on the High Court’s door, challenging the corporation’s stand that “such posts are reserved for men.”

Nevertheless, despite such occupational segregations and archaic rules, many women dared to storm male bastions. Surely, Delhi’s Mehrunnisha Shokat Ali is one of them. She has been working as a bouncer for the last 15 years, demolishing the notion that women belong to the weaker sex and need men’s protection. “I was always fascinated by people in the Army and the police. But I couldn’t nurture any such ambitions as my highly orthodox father was totally against giving any of his daughters an education. Thankfully, my mother sent us to school”, reminiscences Mehrunnisha. “When I joined the NCC in school, my father got furious and burnt my uniform. Luckily, by that time, I had learnt some basics of judo and boxing. Later, after seeing a posse of well-built men in black suits in the show Indian Idol, I wanted to become one of them”, she recounts.

However, after her father suffered a loss in business, the responsibility of becoming the family’s breadwinner was thrust on her. Luckily she met Arun Rana, who owns a security agency and a restaurant in Hauz Khas, South Delhi. Rana engaged her in his restaurant as he was “looking for women bouncers to put female customers at ease and found her very capable of easing any tension.” Now, in her mid-30s, Mehrunnisha, who maintains a strict workout regime, has earned the experience of working with many high-profile women and men in the world of film, entertainment and business. She looks forward to launching her own security agency with her sister Tarannum, who is also a bouncer.

Unlike the Ali sisters, for 24-year-old Sabina working for a top global brand in Gurugram, the path was less bumpy. Sabina confidently says: “I learnt martial arts in order to become a bouncer. I am not in the profession for money alone, I get a lot of respect in my workplace. I shall marry, only if I am allowed to work.” Now, the vice-president of a security agency with a pan-India clientele, Sabina admits that “there is a growing demand for women security personnel and many clients consider them safe, more disciplined and efficient.”

The security business is not the only glass ceiling that women are breaking. While, in the Indian psyche, alcohol, cocktails, booze are still taboo words and going to a bar is a strict “no, no” for girls, there are many women like Delhi’s Suchana Bera Sharma, who are breaking the barriers here too. A management degree-holder, Suchana is a mixologist and currently the India brand head of a major player in the global spirits industry. A prolific travel, cuisine and lifestyle writer with a huge Instagram following, Suchana explains that “mixology is not only about creating a unique blend, but delving deep into the history and culture of each drink by continuously educating one-



THIS MAJOR GENDER GAP IN EMPLOYMENT CAN ONLY BE REVERSED BY TURNING THE FOCUS ON WOMEN IN ECONOMIC REVIVAL STRATEGIES AND ADOPTING A GENDER-SENSITIVE APPROACH IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD. ONLY THEN WILL WE BE ABLE TO CREATE A ‘NEW INDIA’

The writer is former Director-General, Doordarshan, and All India Radio. She was also Press Secretary, President of India. The views expressed are personal.



self, along with hands-on experience.” A young mother, she gives the credit for her success to her parents, husband and two siblings and says “more women are now shaking off inhibitions, coming forward and supporting each other.”

Though women at the steering wheel may not be a uncommon sight, but, choosing it as a vocation is. Notwithstanding age-old biases about women drivers, Delhi’s Anjana, Kolkata’s Manasi and Jaipur’s Ganga are professional drivers. Leaving behind their traumatic past, all of them got their training under the ‘Women at the Wheels’ programme of the Azad Foundation, a multi-city-based NGO. Anjana, who has been driving commercial cabs for the last eight years, now confidently says that, “I enjoy my work. I got my heavy vehicle driving licence in 2020 and am ready for any challenging job.” Trapped in an unhappy marriage with a drunkard husband who had no fixed income, Anjana was desperately looking for a job to feed her two children when Azad Foundation came to her aid. Anjana, now, in her late-30s, says that “my life’s only mission is to fulfil the dreams of my two children. My husband no longer interferes in my life, though the separation suit is still pending in the court.” Manasi, a victim of child marriage, proudly says, “I use my Alto 300 car for commercial rides, which I got under the

West Bengal Government’s Gatidhara scheme in 2019. This way I can feed my family.” She lost her husband even before her first child was born. Manasi was soon thrown out of her in-laws’ house, while, her impoverished father was equally unwilling to bear her burden. In search of a living, she left her father’s home for Kolkata, got a job at a loan financing company for a paltry sum, which enabled her to put her son at a care agency. In her lone struggle, she was duped by an unscrupulous man with false promises of marriage, who deserted her once she became pregnant. The local church came to her rescue and her life got irrevocably changed once she came in touch with the Azad Foundation. Now, her elder son is in a boarding school, the younger one studies in a reputed school in Kolkata and Manasi is saving money for a house of her own.

While, Ganga’s poor father married her off at an early age, and at her in-laws’ place, she faced continuous harassment, initially, for dowry, and later, for giving birth to two girl children. When she came to live with her husband in his workplace at Jaipur, she attempted to commit suicide along with her daughters when she couldn’t bear the mental and physical torture any more. She was rescued from the railway station and given shelter at a welfare home, where she worked for some time,

and put her daughters in an orphanage. Today, her daughters stay with her, study in good schools, and she is the owner of two cars. She drives one herself while the other one is driven by her sister. Ganga says that “I don’t want to look back, and I would like to help more women who suffered like me.”

Amrita Gupta, director, research and advocacy, Azad Foundation says that in order to encourage resource-poor women, who are mostly first generation learners, a flexible training mode is followed, covering technical skills for the licence test, and also transformative aspects like spoken English, self-defence, basic etiquette. On an average, about 300-400 women get training every year and about 50 per cent of them get placements.

Sadly, in spite of women’s foray into many non-traditional fields, only one-quarter of Indian women, compared to 82 per cent of men, are in the labour market, says a World Economic Forum, 2020 report. Worryingly, this is likely to shrink further by 23.5 percentage points in the post-pandemic phase, says Oxfam.

This major gender gap in employment can only be reversed by turning the focus on women in economic revival strategies and adopting a gender-sensitive approach in a post-pandemic world. Only then will we be able to create a ‘New India.’

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

I WILL CONTEST FROM NANDIGRAM AS I STICK TO MY WORDS. THIS IS A SMILEY ELECTION. —WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE



WE WANT THE SON OF MIDNAPORE, NOT OUTSIDERS. WE WILL SEE YOU ON THE BATTLEFIELD. ON MAY 2, YOU WILL LOSE AND LEAVE. —BJP LEADER SUVENDU ADHIKARI



When the unsung dare to dream and sing despite all odds

If we look around us, in the communities closest to us, we may find many such women shining beneath the rubble of class, caste and poverty



SWATI PAL

The writer is Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi. The views expressed are personal.

I first heard about Shilpa when her mother started helping me out at home around six-and-a-half-years ago. She is the eldest of four siblings, all girls. Her mother would often tell me sorrowfully about how she would be taunted by others for not having borne a son and I would pacify her and tell her that I, too, was one of four daughters. It was always wonderful to hear about her daughters and slowly as the anecdotes were narrated, I learnt about Shilpa.

I learnt that she could sing Hindi, English and even Punjabi songs. Soon I was delighted to actually hear her sing and she sang with her father, a man who makes his living by setting up a food stall where he sells the most delicious biryani among other delicacies. The father sang melodiously but Shilpa’s voice

simply held me spell-bound. It was powerful, it was musical and it was like liquid gold. Not a note out of place. And the felicity with which she sang English songs quite took my breath away.

Shilpa was never interested in studies but completed her school education till the 12th standard. Hearing her talk in English and listening to her sing, in three different languages with equal fluency, I understood as never before that the university of life is as educative as actual institutions of repute and concrete.

Shilpa tells me, and I quote her own words, in English, “I did not learn to sing. I used to sing on my own and listen to the songs on radio and TV. I heard a



brother (boy) singing, his name is Vijay. He took me to his NGO named Ideal Youth Health and Welfare Society and when we went there, he told me that we could sing there. That platform became my identity for me.”

As time went by, Shilpa met like-minded people at the NGO, people who nurtured a passion for singing like herself. And with them, she

formed a band, the Savitribai Phule Band. I marveled at the appropriateness of the name: Who better than the great Indian social reformer and educationist, Savitribai Phule often credited as being the mother of Indian feminism, to name one’s band after. The band members are Shivraj, Raja, Aman, Varsha, Neha, Sunil, Rohit and Shilpa herself. Shivaraj is the Coordinator. Sunil plays the cohone, Aman and Varsha, the guitar and Neha and Raja form the chorus. Shilpa is the lead singer of the band and is accompanied by Rohit. They have performed professionally at various places in Delhi including the Viswa Yuva Kendra where their performance was hugely appreciated and also at Lucknow and

Chandigarh.

Shilpa is a representative of women who dare to dream, who are powerhouses of talent and creativity, who do not allow their social standing to come between them and the world. If we look around us, in the communities closest to us, we may find many such women, who are precious gemstones, shining beneath the rubble of class, caste and poverty.

The college which I have been a part of for close to three decades has many such students. Students who come from the most underprivileged situations but that did not prevent Aisha from becoming a writer, Smridhi from becoming a police officer and Shweta from becoming a professional photographer (names have been changed). One may have been a Delhi Road Transport bus

driver’s daughter, another may have had a sex worker as her mother and yet another may have a parent who sweeps the road. But they became who they are today, after beating all odds. On the sheer dint of their talent and hard work.

When I asked Shilpa what her dreams and plans for the future are, she answered fearlessly and confidently, “I want to be a very big singer in the future. I want to take my band forward and perform abroad.”

She trains daily. Sings wherever called. Her passion burns bright. She is undaunted by circumstances. Failures never dim her ebullient spirit. So she may have no definitive plan of action but somehow, I know she’s going to make it big, as big as the dreams she has. If she is only allowed to sing, the way she wants.

Biden marking ‘Bloody Sunday’ by signing voting rights order

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A new executive order from President Joe Biden directs federal agencies to take a series of steps to promote voting access, a move that comes as congressional Democrats press for a sweeping voting and elections Bill to counter efforts to restrict voting access.

His plan was being announced during a recorded address on the 56th commemoration of “Bloody Sunday,” the 1965 incident in which some 600 civil rights activists were viciously beaten by state troopers as they tried to march for voting rights in Selma, Alabama.

“Every eligible voter should be able to vote and have it counted,” Biden says in his prepared remarks to Sunday’s Martin and Coretta King Unity Breakfast. “If you have the best ideas, you have nothing to

hide. Let the people vote.”

Biden’s order includes several modest provisions. It directs federal agencies to expand access to voter registration and election information, calls on the heads of federal agencies to come up with plans to give federal employees time off to vote or volunteer as nonpartisan poll workers, and proscribes an overhaul of the government’s Vote.gov website.

Democrats are attempting to solidify support for House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process. It was approved Wednesday on a near party-line vote, 220-210.

The voting rights Bill includes provisions to restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that



In this March 7, 1965, file photo, a state trooper swings a billy club at John Lewis, right foreground, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to break up a civil rights voting march in Selma, Ala. The March 7, 2021, Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee will be the first without the towering presence of Lewis, as well as the Rev. Joseph Lowery, the Rev. CT Vivian and attorney Bruce Boynton, who all died in 2020

allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

Democrats say the Bill will help stifle voter suppression attempts, while Republicans

have cast the bill as unwanted federal interference in states’ authority to conduct their own



President Joe Biden departs after attending Mass at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington on Saturday

elections. The Bill’s fate is far from certain in the closely divided Senate. Conservative groups have undertaken \$5 million campaign to try persuade moderate Senate Democrats to oppose rule changes needed to pass the measure.

With his executive order, Biden is looking to turn the spotlight on the issue and is

using the somber commemoration of Bloody Sunday to make the case that much is at stake.

Bloody Sunday proved to be a conscious-shocking turning point in the civil rights movement that led to passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Similarly, Biden is hoping the Jan. 6 sacking of the U.S.

Capitol by a pro-Donald Trump mob will prove to be a clarion call for Congress to take action to improve voter protections.

“In 2020 — with our very democracy on the line — even in the midst of a pandemic — more Americans voted than ever before,” Biden says in his prepared remarks. “Yet instead of celebrating this powerful demonstration of voting — we saw an unprecedented insurrection on our Capitol and a brutal attack on our democracy on January 6th. A never-before-seen effort to ignore, undermine and undo the will of the people.”

Biden’s remarks also pay tribute to the late civil rights giants Rev. CT Vivian, Rev. Joseph Lowery and Rep. John Lewis. All played critical roles in the 1965 organising efforts in Selma and all died in within the past year.

Where ISIS ruled, Pope calls on Christians to forgive, rebuild

AP ■ QARAQOSH (IRAQ)

Pope Francis urged Iraq’s Christians on Sunday to forgive the injustices committed against them by Muslim extremists and to rebuild as he visited the wrecked shells of churches and met ecstatic crowds in the community’s historic heartland, which was nearly erased by the Islamic State group’s horrific reign.

Christian and Muslim leaders in Mosul have welcomed Pope Francis’ visit to the Iraqi city devastated by war and are calling on Christians who fled the Islamic State group’s onslaught to return.

At each stop in northern Iraq, the remnants of its Christian population turned out, jubilant, ululating, decked out in colourful dress, though heavy security prevented Francis from plunging into the crowd as he would normally do. Nonetheless, they simply seemed overjoyed that he had come and that they had not been forgotten.

It was a sign of the desperation for support among an ancient community uncertain whether it can hold on. The traditionally Christian towns dotting the Nineveh Plains of the north emptied out in 2014 as Christians — as well as many Muslims — fled the Islamic State group’s onslaught.

Only a few have returned to their homes since the defeat of ISIS in Iraq was declared four years ago, and the rest



Pope Francis, surrounded by shells of destroyed churches, leads a prayer for the victims of war at Hosh al-Bieaa Church Square, in Mosul, Iraq, once the de-facto capital of ISIS on Sunday

remain scattered elsewhere in Iraq or abroad. Bells rang out in the town of Qaraqosh as the pope arrived.

Speaking to a packed Church of the Immaculate Conception, Francis said “forgiveness” is a key word for Christians.

“The road to a full recovery may still be long, but I ask you, please, not to grow discouraged. What is needed is the ability to forgive, but also the courage not to give up.” The Qaraqosh church has been extensively renovated after being vandalized by IS mili-

tants during their takeover of the town, making it a symbol of recovery efforts.

Iraq’s Christian population, which have exited here since the time of Christ, has dwindled from around 1.5 million before the 2003 US-led invasion that plunged the country into chaos to just a few hundred thousand today.

Francis’s visit to Iraq, which was on its last day Sunday, aimed to encourage them to stay and help rebuild the country and restore what he called its “intricately designed carpet” of faith and ethnic groups.

Earlier Sunday, Francis, dressed in white, took to a red carpeted stage in the north’s main city, Mosul, surrounded by the grey hollowed-out shells of four churches nearly destroyed in the war to oust ISIS fighters from the city.

It was a scene that would have been unimaginable years earlier. Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, was at the heart of the IS so-called “caliphate” and witnessed the worst of the group’s rule inflicted on Muslims, Christians and others, including beheadings and mass killings.

Swiss vote on proposal to ban face coverings in public

AP ■ BERLIN

Swiss voters delivered their verdict Sunday on a proposal to ban face coverings, both the niqabs and burqas worn by a few Muslim women in the country and the ski masks and bandannas used by protesters. A projection after polls closed pointed to a very close result.

The measure would outlaw covering one’s face in public places like restaurants, sports stadiums, public transport or simply walking in the street.

There would be exceptions at religious sites and for security or health reasons, such as the face masks people are wear-



ing now to protect against Covid-19, as well as for traditional Carnival celebrations. Authorities would have two years to draw up detailed legislation.

The Swiss government opposes the measure and says that people covering their faces

is a “marginal” issue. It argues the measure could harm tourism — most Muslim women who wear such veils in Switzerland are visitors from well-heeled Persian Gulf states, who are often drawn to Swiss lakeside cities. And it says that it wouldn’t help the women affected.

It backs instead requiring people to show their faces if requested to do so by authorities. Supporters of the proposal, which is coming to a vote five years after it was launched and has come to be known colloquially as the “burqa ban,” argue that the full-face coverings symbolise the repression of women.

Harry, Meghan to delve into tough royal split with Oprah

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

The time has finally come for audiences to hear Meghan and Harry describe the backstory and effects of their tumultuous split from royal life.

Sunday night’s airing of a two-hour special hosted by Oprah Winfrey will provide the first, and unprecedented, peek into the couple’s departure from royal duties and the strains it has placed on them.

How it’s received is likely to depend on which side of the Atlantic Ocean viewers are on.

The show, which includes Winfrey’s interviews with Meghan and Harry, will air first in the United States — Meghan’s home country — at 8 p.m. Eastern. Hours earlier, Harry’s grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, will deliver a royal address



This image provided by Harpo Productions shows Prince Harry, left, and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, in conversation with Oprah Winfrey

before Commonwealth Day. British audiences will wake up Monday to headlines and social media posts about

Winfrey’s special, but won’t be able to see the full interview until Monday night when it airs on ITV. Royal interviews that

aren’t tied to a specific topic are rare, and prior televised sessions have often proved problematic. Prince Andrew’s 2019 BBC interview about his links with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein led to his own departure from royal duties after he failed to show empathy for Epstein’s victims.

Harry and Meghan’s departure from royal duties began in March 2020 over what they described as the intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media toward the duchess, who is biracial.

Clips released ahead of the airings suggest that at least Meghan will have some pointed criticisms of royal life. In one she describes the royal family as “the firm,” a nickname that is sometimes used affectionately and sometimes critically.

AP ■ TEHRAN (IRAN)

A British-Iranian woman held in an Iranian prison for five years on widely refuted spying charges ended her sentence on Sunday, her lawyer said, although she faces a new trial and cannot yet return home.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was able to remove her ankle bracelet for the first time since she was released from prison on furlough last March because of the surging coronavirus pandemic, the lawyer said. She has been under house arrest at her parent’s home in the capital of Tehran since. Iranian state-run media on Sunday that she has been summoned to court again on March 13 over murky new charges, including “spreading propaganda,” which were first announced last fall.

Her long-running case, playing out against the backdrop of a decades-old debt dispute between Britain and Iran, has strained diplomatic ties between the countries and sparked international outrage.

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on Sunday welcomed the removal of Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s ankle tag but called for her to be allowed to return home.



In this file photo, Richard Ratcliffe, the husband of British charity worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who is being held in Iran poses for a photo with a giant Mother’s Day card and flowers left on the steps of the Iranian Embassy, in Knightsbridge, London

“Iran’s continued treatment of her is intolerable,” he said on Twitter.

“She must be allowed to return to the UK as soon as possible to be reunited with her family.”

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 42, was sentenced to five years in jail after being convicted of plotting to overthrow Iran’s government, a charge that she, her supporters and rights groups vigorously deny.

Iranian-British national ends 5-year sentence in spy case

AP ■ YANGON

Police in Myanmar’s ancient former capital, Bagan, opened fire on Sunday on demonstrators protesting last month’s military takeover, wounding several people, according to witness accounts and videos on social media.

At least five people were reported wounded as police sought to break up the Bagan protest, and photos showed one young man with bloody wounds on his chin and neck, believed to have been caused by a rubber bullet. Bullet casings collected at the scene indicated that live rounds were also fired.

The city, located in the central Mandalay region, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in recognition of the more than 2,000 pagodas or their remnants still situated there, dating from the ninth to 13th centuries, when it was the capital of a kingdom that later



Protesters are dispersed as riot police fired tear gas behind a makeshift barricade in Yangon, Myanmar on Sunday

became known as Burma and is now Myanmar.

Bagan is best known for being one of the country’s top tourist attractions, but it has also been the scene of large protest marches against the military’s February 1 seizure of power. Large protests have

occurred daily across many cities and towns in Myanmar, and security forces have responded with greater use of lethal force and mass arrests. At least 18 protesters were shot and killed on February 28 and 38 on Wednesday, according to the UN Human Rights Office.

Nepal’s top court quashes unification of Oli-led CPN and Prachanda-led CPN

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal’s Supreme Court on Sunday quashed the unification of the erstwhile Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) led by Prime Minister K. Sharma Oli and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’, in a huge blow to the two warring leaders amidst a tussle for power.

The CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Centre) merged in May 2018 to form a unified Nepal Communist Party following victory of their alliance in the 2017 general elections.

On Sunday, an apex court bench of justices Kumar Regmi and Bam Kumar Shrestha issued the verdict giving authenticity of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) to Rishiram Kattel, who had registered the party at the Election Commission (EC) in his name prior to the formation of Nepal Communist Party (NCP) led by Oli and Prachanda. The Kathmandu Post newspaper reported. Kattel had challenged the Election Commission’s decision to register Nepal Communist Party (NCP)

under Oli and Prachanda in May 2018. The Bench said that a new party cannot be registered with the Election Commission when it already has a party registered with a similar name.

“The Supreme Court has passed a verdict in our favour,” Kattel’s lawyer Dandapani Poudel was quoted as saying by the paper. “We have won the case.”

Nepal’s Parl holds first meeting after reinstatement by SC

Kathmandu: Nepal’s reinstated lower house of Parliament held its first meeting on Sunday during which the lawmakers belonging to the ruling Nepal Communist Party’s (NCP) splinter faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ boycotted the session.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari last week summoned the session of the House of Representatives in accordance with the Supreme Court’s Feb 24 ruling which annulled embattled Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli’s “unconstitutional” decision to dissolve it.**PTI**

Rouhani: Iran ready to take steps when US lifts sanctions

Tehran: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Sunday his country was prepared to take steps to live up to measures in the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers as soon as the United States lifts economic sanctions on Iran.

In a meeting with Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney, Rouhani said: “Iran is ready to immediately take compensatory measures based on the nuclear deal and fulfill its commitments just after the U.S. Illegal sanctions are lifted and it abandons its policy of threats and pressure.” Rouhani criticised the

European signatories of the historic nuclear deal for what he said was their inaction on their commitments to the agreement. He said Iran is the only country that kept its side of the bargain. **AP**

B-52s again fly over Mideast in US military warning to Iran

Dubai: A pair of B-52 bombers flew over the Mideast on Sunday, the latest such mission in the region aimed at warning Iran amid tensions between Washington and Tehran. **AP**

Etna keeps up its spectacular explosions, ash rains on towns

AP ■ ROME

A particularly spectacular blast from Italy’s Mount Etna volcano belched out a towering cloud of ash and lava stone Sunday onto Sicilian villages, the latest in a series of explosions since mid-February. Italy’s national geophysics and volcanology institute INGV said the powerful explosion at 2 a.m. was the 10th such big blast since Feb. 16, when Europe’s most active volcano started giving off an impressive demonstration of nature’s fire power, coloring the night sky in shocking hues of orange and red.

Business confidence in India touches decadal high: FICCI

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

As the demand scenario improves and economic activities gather momentum, a FICCI survey shows that confidence among Indian businesses and entrepreneurs is significantly high and the business confidence index is at a decadal high.

The Overall Business Confidence Index stood at 74.2 in the current round, against the index value of 70.9 reported in the previous survey and 59 reported a year back.

“The recently announced Union Budget 2021-22 has been forward looking.

This together with measures announced as a part of the ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’ package has infused optimism among the industry members and the same is corroborated in the improved outlook for various operational parameters,” said a statement by the industry body.

In the current survey, though the proportion of respondents anticipating better sale prospects in the near term

remained unchanged at 66 per cent from the previous survey round.

However, the companies were buoyed to regain some control over pricing power.

Nearly 27 per cent respondents expect an increase in the selling price of their products over the next six months as compared to 21 per cent stating the same in the previous round and 14 per cent a year back.

The statement said improved economic conditions and greater pricing power is likely to drive profits of corporate India over the next two quarters.

The percentage of participants citing higher profits over next six months increased to 36 per cent in the latest survey from 33 per cent respondents stating likewise in the previous round.

Further, the outlook on employment and exports also reported a discernible improvement.

Nearly 35 per cent respondents were optimistic about better hiring prospects over the

next two quarters (up from 22 per cent stating the same in the previous round).

Export prospects were also reported to be better in the current round with 41 per cent respondents indicating higher outbound shipments.

The corresponding number in the previous round was 27 per cent.

Furthermore, the proportion of respondents citing ‘higher to much higher’ investments in the coming six months witnessed an upswing in the current survey when compared to the previous round.

Nearly 31 per cent participants said they foresee ‘higher to much higher’ investments over coming six months as compared to 19 per cent participants stating likewise in the previous round.

The present survey drew responses from a wide array of sectors and was conducted during the months of January and February 2021. The survey gauges expectations of the respondents for the January to June 2021 period.

Centre proposes to raise LIC’s authorised capital to ₹25K cr

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

With a view of listing the state-run insurance major Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), the government has proposed to raise the authorised capital of LIC to Rs 25,000 crore.

As per the amendments proposed under the Finance Bill 2021, the authorised share capital of LIC shall be Rs 25,000 crore divided into 2,500 crore shares of Rs 10 each.

The share capital of the corporation shall consist of equity shares and preference shares, which may be fully paid-up or partly paid-up, said the Finance Bill.

“The corporation may from time to time increase its issued share capital, with the previous approval of the Centre, whether by public issue or rights issue or preferential allotment or private placement or issue of bonus shares to existing members holding equity shares, or by issue of shares to employees pursuant to share based employee ben-



efits schemes, or by issue of shares to life insurance policyholders of the Corporation, or otherwise,” it said.

However, the central government shall at all times, not less than 51 per cent of the issued equity share capital of the corporation and for five years after the IPO, the Centre will hold not less than seventy-five per cent.

The mega IPO is likely to take place around Diwali this year. Presenting the Union Budget for FY21-22, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that all the announced disinvestment processes, including the LIC IPO will be completed in the upcoming fiscal.

Petrol prices unchanged across metros for 8th day

In the national Capital, petrol was sold for ₹91.17 per litre on Sunday

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Oil marketing companies (OMC) kept fuel prices unchanged for the eighth consecutive day across the four metros on Sunday.

In the national capital, petrol was sold for ₹91.17 per litre on Sunday.

Similarly, in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, the fuel was priced at ₹97.57, ₹93.11 and ₹91.35 per litre, respectively, all unchanged from the previous levels.

The surge in the retail prices comes despite a surge in crude oil prices. Brent crude futures are currently over \$69 per barrel.

After a spike in global oil prices seen over the last two weeks with crude price jumping close to \$67 a barrel, prices had fallen to around \$63 a bar-



rel but it rose again to cross \$69 a barrel mark now after the OPEC+ decision to continue with crude production cut in April.

In tandem with petrol prices, diesel prices too were unchanged in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata at Rs 81.47, Rs 88.60, Rs 86.45 and Rs 84.35 per litre, respectively.

Petrol and diesel prices have been rising continuously since February 9.

In the 14 increases since then, prices have gone up by Rs 4.22 per litre for petrol while diesel rate has risen by Rs 4.34 a litre in Delhi.

The increase in the previous weeks has taken petrol to cross historic high levels of Rs 100 a litre in several cities across the country.

The petrol and diesel prices have increased 26 times in 2021 with the two auto fuels increasing by Rs 7.46 and Rs 7.60 per litre, respectively so far this year.

Oil companies’ executives said that petrol and diesel prices may increase further in coming days as retail prices may have to be balanced in line with global developments to prevent OMCs from making loss on sale.

Shiprocket records multifold jump in D2C women sellers on its platform

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce logistics firm Shiprocket on Sunday said it has recorded several fold jump in women entrepreneurs that directly ship products to consumers which range from healthcare to personal care, electronics, etc.

The logistics firm registered a 273 per cent growth in the volume of shipments year-on-year done by women sellers when compared to February 2020.

“Shiprocket observed that there was a nearly 700 per cent increase in the women seller count on its platform between February 2020 and February 2021 with the count going from a little over 2,000 to more than 20,000 women sellers in a year, taking the total to almost 23,000,” Shiprocket said in a report.

The new report compiles various trends observed by Shiprocket

from February 2020 to February 2021 with a sample size of over 23,000 women sellers across India highlighting growth of Women in D2C (direct to consumers) sector and opportunities for ‘womenpreneurs’, the company said.

The D2C sellers may get orders from famous e-commerce portals, their own website or over phone and ship their products directly to con-

sumers.

“D2C has become a segment with immense traction in recent times among women. More and more women are now venturing into entrepreneurship through online selling. On our platform, there has been a major uptick in the number of women D2C sellers since early last year,” Shiprocket co-founder and CEO Saahil Goel said.

Shiprocket observed that a large chunk of the traction from women sellers, over 24 per cent, came from social media while online stores accounted for more than 12 per cent, offline channels comprising nearly 10 per cent.

The least traction was observed from marketplaces which accounted for a little over 3 per cent. The logistics platform also identified that Tier-I cities, with nearly 55 per cent, had the maximum women sellers while Tier-II cities followed closely with over 45 per cent.

Shiprocket identified the top 5 categories in which women sellers operate to be Healthcare, comprising over 39 per cent, Personal Care, consisting of more than 25 per cent, apparel, comprising of nearly 19 per cent, over 10 per cent women in electronics, and kitchen products accounted for almost 7 per cent of women sellers, the report said.

Health schemes, lower drug prices led to annual saving of ₹50k cr for needy families: PM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the poor and needy have been able to save Rs 50,000 crore annually due to various health-related measures taken up by his government like providing affordable medicines, healthcare and reducing the prices of medical devices.

Modi, who dedicated to the nation the 7,500th Janaushadhi Kendra at North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health & Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) in Shillong, also said the move to provide affordable medicines through the Janaushadhi scheme is spreading across the length and breadth of the country.

In a virtual address at the ‘Janaushadhi Week’ celebrated across the nation from March 1 to March 7 to create awareness about the ‘Janaushadhi’ scheme, the Prime Minister said it is helping countrymen living in tribal areas in the North East and the mountainous areas.

“Today when the 7,500th centre has been inaugurated, it has been held in Shillong. It is clear from this how much public health centres are expanding in the North East,” Modi said.

The Prime Minister, who also interacted with people from different parts of the

country, further said, “It is clear from my discussion with people who run the Janaushadhi centres at every corner of the country and some of its beneficiaries, that this scheme is becoming a very big companion of poor and middle-class families. This scheme is becoming the medium of both service and employment.”

Underlining the various steps taken up by his government to make healthcare affordable to the poor and needy, he said prices of essential drugs as well as medical devices such as stents and knee implants have been reduced manifold.

“It has led to the saving of Rs 12,500 crore per year for the needy people. The Ayushman Bharat scheme is helping 50 crore people get Rs 5 lakh worth of treatment. Over 1.5 crore people have already taken this benefit. It is estimated that it has led to savings of around Rs 30,000 crore for people.”It means that if we collate the savings being affected by Janaushadhi,

Ayushman Bharat and decline in prices of drugs and stents (medical devices) if we only take government schemes in the health sector, then poor and middle-income groups are saving around Rs 50,000 crore per year,” the Prime Minister said.

GST evasion: CBIC asks field offices to exercise max caution, prudence in property attachment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC has directed its field offices to exercise utmost prudence and maximum caution in attachment of property of a taxpayer and said that such a remedy can be considered in cases involving GST evasion, fake invoicing and delay of more than three months in depositing tax collected.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has come out with guidelines for provisional attachment of property under GST Act which tasks the Commissioner to exercise due diligence and carefully examine all the facts of the case, including the nature of offence and amount of revenue involved, and also record on file the basis on which he/she has formed such an opinion to attach property of the taxpayer.

“It is reiterated that the power of provisional attachment must not be exercised in a routine/mechanical manner ... The remedy of attachment being, by its very nature, extraordinary, has to be resorted to with utmost circumspection and with maximum care and caution,” the CBIC said.

In the guidelines the CBIC listed out types of cases where provisional attachment can be

considered to be resorted to subject to specific facts of the case.

These include where a taxable person has supplied any goods or services or both without issue of any invoice with an intention to evade tax; or issued invoice or bill without supply of goods or services or both; or fraudulently availed input tax credit.

Also cases where a taxpayer has collected any amount as tax but has failed to pay the same to the government beyond a period of three months from the date on which such payment becomes due; or fraudulently obtained refund; or passed on input tax credit fraudulently to the recipients but has not paid the commensurate tax would qualify for provisional attachment of property.

The provisional attachment of property would be valid for a period of one year.

“It should be ensured that the value of property attached provisionally is not excessive. The provisional attachment of property shall be to the extent it is required to protect the interest of revenue, that is to say, the value of attached property should be as near as possible to the estimated amount of pending revenue against such person,” the CBIC said.

DoT to issue demand notes to telcos on upfront payment for spectrum bought in auctions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will issue demand notes to telcos next week on an upfront payment for spectrum acquired in the just-concluded auctions, sources said.

The demand note follows auctions raking-in winning bids of over ₹77,800 crore, for 855.6 MHz of spectrum. Billionaire Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance Jio spent the most in the auction, picking up 488.35 MHz spectrum in bands such as 800 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2300 MHz for ₹57,122.65 crore.

Bharti Airtel bid about ₹ 18,699 crore to acquire 355.45 megahertz (MHz) out of the total 855.60 MHz of radiofre-

quency acquired by all telcos, while Vodafone Idea, bought 11.80 MHz of spectrum worth Rs 1,993.40 crore.

DoT sources told PTI that the demand notes will be sent out to the three companies this week, and entails largely the upfront payment for spectrum that is ready to be allocated.

Spectrum will be offered for assignment for a validity period of 20 years. As per the auction terms, successful bidders can pay entire bid amount in one go, or exercise an option to pay a certain amount (25 per cent for spectrum won in 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz bands or 50 per cent for spectrum won in 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz bands) upfront with remaining

amount in a maximum up to 16 equated annual instalments, after a moratorium of two years.

A DoT official said the demand notes together total about Rs 20,000 crore, but did not provide operator-wise break-up.

About 2308.80 MHz of spectrum, that carry telecom signals in seven bands worth nearly Rs 4 lakh crore at start price, was up for bidding in the auction held recently. Although the spectrum finally acquired by telcos fell woefully short of this overall kitty and bids hovered at reserve price, DoT said, and analysts concurred, that auction outcome and response had surpassed initial expectations.

FPIs pull out investments amid rising bond yields

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

As the rising bond yields in the US cause panic in the global markets, foreign portfolio investors (FPI) have turned to sell their holdings.

FPIs have pulled out a net Rs 881 crore from the Indian equity market in the first week of March. They have pulled out a net investment of Rs 5,595 crore from the debt segment, showed NSDL data. However, the net investment in the debt-VRR segment was at Rs 1,320 crore during March 1-5.

The rising bond yields have nearly brought a halt to the bull run both in the global and the domestic equity markets. Further, investors also have taken to profit booking after markets touched record

highs, analysts said. Investors are hoping that the upcoming Federal Open Market Committee’s meeting would stress on keeping interest rates subdued for some more time which may stabilise the bond markets. Inflow of FPIs in the current financial year has been robust and Rs 2.62 lakh crore of net investments have been made in FY21 by FPIs.

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20-computer no. 39714 dated 03.03.2021. **Work and location:** Tender for Bulk Advertising Rights Through Installation of Dual Display Information System (DDIS) Screens at various stations of Mumbai Division for a period of five years. **First Year Reserve Price ₹:** 85,23,524/- (excluding taxes etc.). **Approx. cost of Work ₹.:** 4,53,37,208/- (excluding taxes etc.). **Cost of Tender Form ₹: 10,000/- EMD ₹: 9,06,800/- Website where Tender form available:** www.irps.gov.in **Date & Time of closing of online submission:** Upto 15.00 hrs on 30.03.2021 **Date & Time of opening of e-tender:** At 15.30 hrs on 30.03.2021 Please visit our website www.irps.gov.in to download the tender document, corrigendum and further details. Cost of tender and EMD shall be accepted only through online net banking or E-payment gateway. Bidder should regularly visit website to keep themselves updated. 0711
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Global trends, oil price to dictate market trend this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets will focus on long term bond yield trends, crude oil prices and macro-economic data this week as investors look for cues amid volatility, according to analysts.

Besides, investments by FPIs (Foreign Portfolio Investors) as well as domestic investors, movement of rupee against the US dollar and developments on the coronavirus front are likely to be closely

watched for cues.

“The US 10 Year G-Sec yields have surpassed 1.5 per cent on a closing basis which is somewhat negative for global equities.

The Dollar Index has also moved up from 90 to 92 level, which is seen as a negative for emerging market currencies and also equities.

“In the absence of any major domestic trigger Indian markets could take a cue from global developments and the US markets,” said Rusmik

Oza, Executive Vice President, Head of Fundamental Research at Kotak Securities.

The tone of the market seems to be on the downside, for now, Oza added.

On March 5, benchmark BSE Sensex tumbled over 440 points and the NSE Nifty cracked below the psychological 15,000-level amid relentless sell-off in global equities as US bond-market turmoil continued to rattle investors.

The 30-share Sensex plum-

meted by 440.76 points or 0.87 per cent to close at 50,405.32, continuing its falling trend for the second day on Friday due to concerns over bond yields. The NSE barometer Nifty ended lower by 142.65 points or 0.95 per cent at 14,938.10.

“In the coming week, the market will be mainly focusing on the expectations on whether the Fed, in its upcoming meeting, will maintain its accommodative stance in a rising bond yield market.

For and on behalf of Board of Directors

Sd/-

Sandeep Garg

Director

(DIN: 00021295)



THE FUTURE IS SOUND

Whether you are preparing for government jobs or upskilling to reach greater heights in career, the audio format will continue to influence learning, shares DUSHYANTT KOHLI

Audio has never gone out of vogue as citizens today are able to learn on the move. With the utility of audio going beyond radio services and entering into the digital realm, people are provided new learning opportunities. Be it news, entertainment or educational information, audio is converting anytime into learning time, considering that accessibility has become ubiquitous and affordable. Since radio, the subsequent advancements in technology moved the audience towards television and personal computers for their everyday needs. More importantly, education and learning through the internet began to take shape in the early 2000s, laying the foundations for an EdTech industry. Due to the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, students, schools, training institutions, and colleges now view learning outcomes through a different lens. Within a span of a year, e-learning platforms have disrupted the ecosystem.

However, as a developing nation, there are several challenges that we need to cope with. For instance, all the major e-learning platforms require high quality video streaming and internet connectivity so that users are able to avail the resources they have to offer. Unfortunately, several corners of India are yet to see the infrastructure that can present high-bandwidth content for all. Beyond this, people across generations are suffering from various health effects

on account of excessive screen times as school lectures and live interactions are primarily in the video format.

In fact, recent reports suggest that the current average screen time every week is around 6.9 hours, on account of the ample time available during the pandemic. Indians access their internet mostly through their smartphones, and within a year, it has increased by 25 per cent, from 4.9 hours to 6.9 hours from April 2020 onwards. Such trends do not indicate a healthy precedent, and audio could prove to a suitable hands-free alternative. Even for education, video creation and development are arduous processes that require time and effort to achieve quality. We often forget that a majority of competitive exam aspirants hail from tier III, IV cities, and rural areas that lack the resources to afford video-based services. With price constraints and limited access to the latest technologies, the chances of aspirants who wish to crack examinations is hindered. On the bright side, the gap is now being addressed by audio services, through podcasts, audio lectures, and bite-sized audio clips on course concepts due to easy production processes and low costs.

Diversity in course offerings and exam prep

In the last couple of years, we have seen the proliferation of several EdTech apps, delivering different levels of edu-

cation across all age groups. Similarly, several audio-based learning apps are offering multiple courses on their platforms, making it ideal for candidates preparing for government exams to be on top in the highly competitive space. Be it courses like current affairs, static GK, History or English. They are delivered by subject matter experts in the audio format, which helps in sequencing audio content for exam preparation, and cracking government jobs.

Moreover, some of these apps also have versions that cater to feature phone users, which function on low bandwidths and affordable data packs. It makes it easier for users to download or stream content while consuming far lesser data as compared to video services. In fact, exclusive exam preparation content is available in vernacular languages like Hindi, Bengali, and others as well, reaching a wider audience beyond the big cities. In addition to this, career coaches and teachers realise the quality, reach and potential of audio-based learning. The students are increasingly expressing a desire to learn from the best, and short audio content and clips from experts is the preferred format, and it is redefining their approach towards job seeking.

Effectiveness of audio-based learning

The quality learning programmes

are often unaffordable even in the realm of digital. Here is where audio is playing a transformative role as it is bringing inexpensive services into the deep corners of the country by merely utilising existing infrastructure. In fact, several players in the podcasting and audio-based educational space are serving millions of students every day, making it an effective medium for consuming good quality exam preparation content.

The critics often question the efficacy of audio as a medium of learning. They argue that providing both text and audio material for preparation could overwhelm aspirants. However, there is enough evidence from the scientific world that points towards audio's role in improving the cognitive abilities of listeners. The argument is that repetitive listening can lead to better retention of concepts. Analytical reasoning too can be understood through audio, which is contrary to popular notions that audio's role in imparting education is inadequate for attaining reasoning abilities.

Going by examples from the real world, we can understand how customer care services, doctors and medics, and musicians develop an ear for sound, structure, and form. Similarly, even in audio-based learning, it becomes easier by replaying audio files and practicing concepts by visualisation.

This trend is identifiable in India as more and more users are consuming audio content in their native languages, ensuring better retention.

Reasons for audio's resurgence and how the future looks

One of the most impressive aspects of audio that has only been rediscovered during the pandemic is the positive effect of passive listening. Since the lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions were imposed, a majority of citizens remained indoors, relying on all the tools at their disposal to bring their lives back to normal. Audio-streaming services and apps underwent astounding growth, thanks to the increase in content consumption by users while staying home.

It further justifies the fact that people feel comfortable carrying out their daily chores and listen passively to educational content, thereby, saving precious time. Further to this, it is enabling the conversion of non-study time into learning time, due to hands free devices that play audio files through voice commands. Therefore, whether a person is preparing for government jobs or upskilling to reach greater heights in their career, audio will continue to influence learning, and impact even the future generations.

(The writer is the COO of Khabri.)

Attain wisdom

People should strive to achieve values and ethics as these shape character, says

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI



Off lately, governments across the globe have come to accept the fact that the absence of right values is the cause of various ailments, including the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. Millions and billions have been spent and are still being spent by countries on re-establishment of values in our present-day degenerated society, but, as is evident from the result, success evades them all. The elderly people grumble and complain that the millennials have thrown values to the winds. Some allege that the whole society has become corrupt; others say that because of corruption, the government has become almost bankrupt. Newspapers are full of news about ghastly crime. Religious leaders say that religion is being defamed.

In fact, every individual is an eye-witness to the degeneration of morals and all are crying for values. But why are all efforts not showing any tangible transformation in even a few thousand people? That's a million dollar question. If we ponder deeply over the matter, we will find that there is no human being who does not adopt any values whatsoever. Everyone does imbibe some values. However, the values differ from man to man, depending upon his world-view or his belief system because every man has some belief about his own identity, about the society, about man's nature, about time and space, etc... Similary everyone has some views about religion, education, business, media, government, politics, etc. This network of beliefs gives him/her a world-view, different from the world-view of others. It is this world-view that determines a person's outlook, attitudes and pattern of behaviour.

People across the world practice values taught by religious preceptors or some public figure. For example, some people put into practice vedantic, buddhist, jewish, christian, muslim values, while some others try to imbibe Gandhian values or values taught by some leader. Now, all the above mentioned set of values were advocated by different souls, according to their world-view. However, there is no universal code of conduct available for all people to follow. No one has, uptill now, given a comprehensive, all-inclusive, totally rational and absolutely correct world-view because such a view can be given only by one, for he (god) alone is perfectly moral, truly knowledgeable, all-virtuous and the parent of all souls, whichever religion, philosophy or world-view they may profess. He is of impeccable character, without any weakness, incomparably just and fair, totally free from prejudice of any sort, above any sectarian, regional, racial or narrow view and without any consideration of benefit to himself. He has not even the least degree of selfishness but is overwhelmed with love for all and the will to be generous, kind, compassionate, co-operative, friendly and ever-helpful.

But what is essentially relevant in the present context is that he has the knowledge of the present, the past and the future in its entirety and without any gaps. The knowledge which he has is not divided into any departments or compartments but is wholesome. It does not have any inner contradictions. It is final and does not require any research or future confirmation. It takes into account all religions, culture, geophysical circumstances, human nature, etc. It is theoretical, practical and also experiential. It has distilled wisdom, without any impurities, fallacies and pseudo elements. It does not have even a grain of fake or artificial ingredients. So, the world-view formed on the basis of that revealed knowledge or divine wisdom is the only one that is capable of removing a person's flaws of character. It is that knowledge which brings right type of values and transformation in one's life.

It is, therefore, essential that those who earnestly and sincerely feel that our society should be value-based should also make all efforts that they themselves and all others should have the right world-view, for without it, cultivation and development of right values will remain mere a wishful thinking or an unrealised dream.



Chalhan is a nondescript hamlet located one and a half kilometers from the main road in Shalla Gram Panchayat of Gohar block of Mandi district in the hilly state of Himachal Pradesh. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the residents of this village who own five to seven bighas of land on an average. Till two years ago, the village did not have a link road and was considered a major development challenge by its inhabitants.

Anybody who fell sick had to be taken on a chair or charpoy (cot) by at least four men to the main road from where they could be taken to the nearest hospital. The farmers had to hire ponies for carrying their produce to nearby markets. It became a tedious task, especially during the monsoon. The tough, hilly twisted trails become muddy, slippery and risky to commute. The government's commitment to work towards connecting rural India, the long-standing demand of the villagers for the link road finally materialised two years ago.

"The link road has transformed our lives," says Purnanand, a resident of the village. Now the pickup vans and ambulances can easily come on this road which is connected to the state highway. "We are now able to save money that we used to pay for hiring ponies. Sometimes our vegetables would perish or we had to sell them at throw away prices. Now we can

Connecting dots

Villagers witnessed the transformation brought about by link roads in Shalla Gram Panchayat and hoped that a similar development would touch their lives, says SARITA BRARA



sell them at a much higher price because of which our income has gone up," shares Purnanand.

This is the story of every household in 35 small and big villages in Shalla Gram Panchayat. All these villages have been connected by link roads to their main road heads for transportation. A single household hamlet of Jeyog too was connected via a link road one year ago.

Hetram recalls the day his mother fell sick. He had to wait for a day to get help from men

from nearby villages to carry his mother to the main road from where she was taken to the hospital. They carried her on a chair on the steep path on hilly terrain. It took them almost an hour to cover the small distance. Overwhelmed by the Panchayat's concern,

"It took almost five years to connect every single village and hamlet in all the seven wards of this Gram Panchayat with road heads," informs Raj Kumar, the Panchayat Pradhan. The last vil-

lage that was connected by a link road was a few months ago in November 2020. Shalla Gram Panchayat is indeed a remote area of Mandi district tucked away in a difficult mountainous terrain. The process to get these link roads was equally difficult.

"It wasn't easy at all - making rounds of the concerned departments for sanctions and clearances, pleading villagers to part with their land for the sake of the convenience of all others. One has to apply every method from

cajoling to counselling to get consent for using their land for the benefit of the villages otherwise everyone in the village has to struggle," says Raj.

The roads have undoubtedly changed the lives of the villagers. Many farmers in these villages are today earning a decent income by growing cash crops like peas and other vegetables. This wasn't doable earlier because of the fear that their produce will perish before it could be transported to the market. Another constraint was the money required to be paid for the ponies which cost them a lot.

The construction of a 16-kilometer-long road has solved connectivity issues of a population of over 1,000 people in five villages. It has given a boost to tourism as it connects them to a famous temple. This road has also been metaled. With lakhs of people travelling here, opportunities for employment have opened up. The Gram Panchayat has also been able to increase its revenue from parking fees for the vehicles.

For Udham Singh, a resident of Village Chhatti, it is a matter of envy as his village is located on the boundary of Shalla and Tulna Gram Panchayat. A home guard with agricultural land, Udham has been running from pillar to post to get a link road sanctioned for his small village but has not been successful in his endeavors so far.

"My village, with nearly half

a dozen families, is approximately five kilometers from the nearest road head. Since my village does not fall under Shalla Gram Panchayat, they can't construct the road from their allotted funds," shares Udham Singh.

The challenges of this village are also the same. The health and transportation of agriculture produce are the main concern of the villagers here as well.

Connecting villages to road heads in this state, especially in extremely remote and hilly terrains is a tedious task. Getting clearances, especially for the villages that come under forest areas is not that easy, carving out roads through mountains is time consuming, costly and difficult.

According to the information available on the official website of The Public Works Department (PWD) of Himachal Pradesh government, 6,948 out of its 17,449 villages were not connected by road till the end of October 2020, which means that nearly 40 per cent of the villages in the state were not connected. Their challenges are endless. Monsoon and winter become even more difficult due to the lack of connectivity. Seeing how the lives of inhabitants of Shalla Gram Panchayat has been transformed through these link roads, villagers of other remote regions are full of hope that soon their prayers will see the light of day.

—Charkha Features

Leaders can let you fail and yet not let you be a failure.
—Stanley McChrystal

CONCERNED ABOUT DRUG USE? THIS APP HELPS

Researchers at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign are developing a new smartphone app that may help teach young adults how to talk to a peer if they are concerned about that person's drinking or drug use.

The app named "Harbor" prompts the user to answer several questions about their friend's substance use behaviour and provides feedback on the potential seriousness — a feature that may be especially helpful to people who feel conflicted about intervening. Designed for people aged between 18-29, Harbor teaches young adults how they can "act as first responders for their close friends who demonstrate risky substance use behaviours," according to the app's lead developer Douglas C Smith from the varsity.



TRUSTED SUPPORT MAY HELP BATTLE DEPRESSION

Learning about their health through a trusted source may help teens take better care of themselves, leading to less depressive symptoms, says a new study.

The study indicated that trust played a factor in whether receiving health information improved depression. The more that adolescents trusted their parents or teacher as a credible source of health information, the more likely they were to experience less depression. Additionally, even though adolescents reported that they trusted traditional media — like TV, radio and newspapers — more than online content, only content from social media or websites resulted in actual changes in behaviour. "This study was actually inspired by my students, after several of them came to me really stressed out," said researcher Bu Zhong from the Pennsylvania State University.



OBESITY – BIGGEST KILLER OF HUMANKIND

For over two decades, obesity has emerged into a bigger health crisis globally and in India, than hunger. Obesity is now the leading cause of disabilities and deaths around the world. More so, during the COVID-19 pandemic when lakhs of people died across countries, one key reason was the ailments associated with overweight.

On the eve of World Obesity Day, healthcare professionals underlined the need to enhance awareness on this ever-growing lifestyle disease, which is fast emerging as the biggest killer of humankind in the modern era. "Over the past century, the world has progressed on many health parameters. Today there are very less deaths among kids due to immunisation against ailments; and availability of food is shifting focus away from malnutrition. However, changing lifestyles and easy access to high-calories food is pushing children and adults towards obesity, which unfortunately has some devastating outcomes at times," said Dr Riyaz Khan, CEO, Continental Hospitals.



KIDNEY STONES LINKED TO BONE PROBLEMS

People with kidney stones may be at risk of osteoporosis or bone fracture, says a new study. The study, published in the Journal of Bone and Mineral Research, found that approximately one-quarter of individuals with kidney stones had a diagnosis of osteoporosis or bone fracture around the time of their kidney stone diagnosis. "We hope this work raises awareness regarding the possibility of reduced bone strength in patients with kidney stones," said lead author Calyani Ganesan from Stanford University in the US. "In our future work, we hope to identify which patients with kidney stones are at higher risk for osteoporosis or fracture to help guide bone density screening efforts by clinicians in this population," Ganesan added.



YOUNGSTERS TOO DRUNK TO USE PROTECTION

One-fifth of young adults forget to use contraception at the height of passion because they are too drunk to remember when having sex, says a study. The study, commissioned by OnePoll with 1,200 participants aged between 16-25 years, indicates that many youngsters are taking unforeseen risks due to a lack of knowledge, education and intoxication. The study showed that four in 10 have had sex during a night of drinking alcohol, while 13 per cent have had intercourse and not remembered the following day whether they had used protection or not, reports The Sun. "We need to arm our young people with as much information as possible before they get to the point where they are experimenting with sex and drink," said Joanna Buckard, a spokeswoman for The National Organisation for FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) in the UK.



India Eves suffer heavy loss on return

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lizelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt shared the highest opening wicket stand against an under-prepared India to give South Africa an emphatic eight-wicket win in the first ODI of the five match series here on Sunday.

Asked to bat, India never got the momentum it needed and could only manage 177 for nine despite sedate fifty from skipper Mithali Raj (50 off 85) and a quick-fire 40 off 41 balls from her deputy Harmanpreet Kaur

Lee (83 not out off 122) and Wolvaardt (80 off 110) helped South Africa chased down the target in 40.1 overs with a record 169-run stand.

India would quickly like to forget their first outing in 12 months and come back much stronger in the next game against a side which has come into the series with substantial game time.

The South African opening duo did not look any sort of trouble against the India pacers as well as their highly rated spinners. Lee smashed 11 fours and a six while Wolvaardt collected 12 boundaries.

Veteran India pacer Jhulan Goswami (2/38), playing her first game since November 2019, was the most impressive in an otherwise disappointing bowling effort. Debutant pacer Monica Patel got only four overs in which she conceded 20 runs.

The spin-bowling troika of Rajeshwari Gaekwad, Deepti Sharma and Poonam Yadav failed to provide any breakthroughs that were needed to keep India in the game.

Earlier, the 62-run stand between Raj and Kaur steadied the innings after India lost their first three wickets for 40 runs, including star opener Smriti Mandhana (14 off 20), who looked in sublime touch during her short stay.

Harmanpreet, playing her 100th ODI, looked ominous but played one big shot too many to be caught at long off. She



Need more time to rediscover rhythm: Harman

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Indian women's ODI vice-captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Saturday said the team was lacking match practice and will need time to get back into rhythm after being away from International cricket for a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We didn't get any International cricket for a year. Apart from three IPL games we didn't get much time to work as a unit. As a team you need to spend time and get ready for any series," Kaur said at the post-match press conference. "Nowadays everybody is looking for a big total, every game we want to score more

smashed six boundaries in her entertaining knock.

Raj, who took some time to get going in her first game since November 2019, then shared a 52-run partnership with Deepti Sharma (27 off 46) to keep the innings moving. But her dismissal off a full-toss

than 250 but for that you need some time and matches.

"In the past few years we had built a rhythm but we will need time to create that rhythm and next game we will try to do that as a unit," added Kaur, who was playing her 100th ODI.

The Indian team last played on March 8 last year when they lost to Australia in the T20 World Cup final.

Additionally, they got only two days of nets before the series, making it tougher for the players to be at their best from the word go which was visible as India struggled with the bat, managing 177 for nine in the designated 50 overs.

The 31-year-old conceded

that her side was guilty of throwing away their wickets and lacked partnerships with both bat and ball.

"When you are playing after a long time there are chances were you can collapse but they bowled well and we threw our wickets. As a bowling unit, there were no partnership, you need partnership whether it is bowling or batting," she said.

"Today I felt our bowling was also not upto the mark, our spinners are good but it can happen if you are playing after a long time, sometimes things cannot be in your favour. We had a bad day today, whatever we were doing, we couldn't execute it."

BRIEF SCORES

India: 177 for 9 in 50 overs (Mithali Raj 50, Harmanpreet Kaur 40, Deepti Sharma 27; Shabnim Ismail 3/28, N Mlaba 2/41). **South Africa:** 178 for 2 in 40.1 overs (Lizelle Lee 83 not out, Laura Wolvaardt 80; Jhulan Goswami 2/38).

IPL 2021 STARTS APRIL 9

No home games, no crowds at 6 venues including Mumbai

2021 SEASON SCHEDULE

M NO	DAY	DATE	TIME	VENUE	TEAM1	TEAM 2
1	FRI	9-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Mumbai Indians	Royal Challengers Bangalore
2	SAT	10-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Chennai Super Kings	Delhi Capitals
3	SUN	11-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Sunrisers Hyderabad	Kolkata Knight Riders
4	MON	12-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Rajasthan Royals	Punjab Kings
5	TUE	13-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Kolkata Knight Riders	Mumbai Indians
6	WED	14-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Sunrisers Hyderabad	Royal Challengers Bangalore
7	THU	15-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Rajasthan Royals	Delhi Capitals
8	FRI	16-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Punjab Kings	Chennai Super Kings
9	SAT	17-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Mumbai Indians	Sunrisers Hyderabad
10	SUN	18-April	3:30 PM	Chennai	Royal Challengers Bangalore	Kolkata Knight Riders
11	SUN	18-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Delhi Capitals	Punjab Kings
12	MON	19-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Chennai Super Kings	Rajasthan Royals
13	TUE	20-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Delhi Capitals	Mumbai Indians
14	WED	21-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Punjab Kings	Sunrisers Hyderabad
15	WED	21-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Kolkata Knight Riders	Chennai Super Kings
16	THU	22-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Royal Challengers Bangalore	Rajasthan Royals
17	FRI	23-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Punjab Kings	Mumbai Indians
18	SAT	24-April	7:30 PM	Mumbai	Rajasthan Royals	Kolkata Knight Riders
19	SUN	25-April	3:30 PM	Mumbai	Chennai Super Kings	Royal Challengers Bangalore
20	SUN	25-April	7:30 PM	Chennai	Sunrisers Hyderabad	Delhi Capitals
21	MON	26-April	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Punjab Kings	Kolkata Knight Riders
22	TUE	27-April	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Delhi Capitals	Royal Challengers Bangalore
23	WED	28-April	7:30 PM	Delhi	Chennai Super Kings	Sunrisers Hyderabad
24	THU	29-April	3:30 PM	Delhi	Mumbai Indians	Rajasthan Royals
25	THU	29-April	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Delhi Capitals	Kolkata Knight Riders
26	FRI	30-April	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Punjab Kings	Royal Challengers Bangalore
27	SAT	1-May	7:30 PM	Delhi	Mumbai Indians	Chennai Super Kings
28	SUN	2-May	3:30 PM	Delhi	Rajasthan Royals	Sunrisers Hyderabad
29	SUN	2-May	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Punjab Kings	Delhi Capitals
30	MON	3-May	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Kolkata Knight Riders	Royal Challengers Bangalore
31	TUE	4-May	7:30 PM	Delhi	Sunrisers Hyderabad	Mumbai Indians
32	WED	5-May	7:30 PM	Delhi	Rajasthan Royals	Chennai Super Kings
33	THU	6-May	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Royal Challengers Bangalore	Punjab Kings
34	FRI	7-May	7:30 PM	Delhi	Sunrisers Hyderabad	Chennai Super Kings
35	SAT	8-May	3:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Kolkata Knight Riders	Delhi Capitals
36	SAT	8-May	7:30 PM	Delhi	Rajasthan Royals	Mumbai Indians
37	SUN	9-May	3:30 PM	Bangalore	Chennai Super Kings	Punjab Kings
38	SUN	9-May	7:30 PM	Kolkata	Royal Challengers Bangalore	Sunrisers Hyderabad
39	MON	10-May	7:30 PM	Bangalore	Mumbai Indians	Kolkata Knight Riders
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55	SUN	23-May	3:30 PM	Kolkata	Mumbai Indians	Delhi Capitals
56	SUN	23-May	7:30 PM	Kolkata	Royal Challengers Bangalore	Chennai Super Kings
				PLAYOFFS		
57	TUE	25-May	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Qualifier 1	Defending champions Mumbai Indians will face Royal Challengers Bangalore in the tournament opener in Chennai on April 9. The Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad will host the final on May 30 as well as the play-offs.
58	WED	26-May	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Eliminator	
59	FRI	28-May	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Qualifier 1	
60	SUN	30-May	7:30 PM	Ahmedabad	Final	

SINGLES



Lionel Messi casts his vote during Barca presidential elections

MILAN WIN TO BOOST TITLE HOPES

VERONA: AC Milan boosted title hopes by winning 2-0 at Hellas Verona in Serie A on Sunday despite being without a number of key players missing through injury. Rade Krunic and Diego Dalot scored for Milan, which moved to within three points of league leader Inter Milan. The Nerazzurri host Atalanta on Monday.

ANKITA STUNS ERRANI IN QUALIFIERS

MEXICO CITY: India No 1 Ankita Raina notched up one of the biggest wins of her career as she stunned Sara Errani in the first round of qualifying at the WTA 250 tournament in Guadalajara in Mexico. The world No 168 fought from a set down to beat the Italian second seed and world No 106 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 in two hours and 6 minutes. She will next play Leonie Kung in an attempt to qualify for the main draw.

LEWA HAT-TRICK TOPS HAALAND DOUBLE

MUNICH: Robert Lewandowski scored a hat-trick to leave him on 31 Bundesliga goals this season and seal Bayern Munich's 4-2 comeback home win over Borussia Dortmund. Dortmund raced into a 2-0 lead as Erling Haaland netted twice in the first nine minutes behind closed doors at the Allianz Arena. However, Lewandowski then struck twice — the second from the penalty spot — to haul Bayern level before the break. Leon Goretzka put Bayern ahead for the first time with two minutes left before the Poland striker completed his hat-trick on 90 minutes.

PSG, LYON CRUISE INTO NEXT ROUND

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe grabbed a pair of goals as holders Paris Saint-Germain eased into the French Cup last 16 on Saturday with a 3-0 victory at Brest, while Ligue 1 title rivals Lyon defeated second-division Sochaux 5-2. Mbappe returned from a one-match ban and fired PSG ahead on nine minutes. Julian Draxler set up Pablo Sarabia for a second goal before half-time. And then Verratti created third, somewhat inadvertently, as he prodded across goal and straight into the chest of Mbappe, wrong-footing Brest goalkeeper Sebastien Cibois.

DELHI IN VJAY HAZARE QUARTER-FINAL

NEW DELHI: Wicketkeeper-batsman Anuj Rawat smashed a dozen of sixes in his unbeaten 95 off 85 balls as an under-pressure Delhi made a remarkable recovery to beat Uttarakhand by four wickets in the pre-quarter final of the Vijay Hazare Trophy on Sunday. Delhi will meet Uttar Pradesh in their quarter-final match on Monday. Batting first, Uttarakhand posted 287 for 8 in 50 overs. In reply, Delhi surpassed the target in 48.3 overs after being reduced to 146 for 6 in the 33rd over.

LIVERPOOL CRASH AGAIN AT ANFIELD

LIVERPOOL: Mario Lemina condemned troubled Liverpool to a sixth successive home defeat as Fulham earned a shock 1-0 win that left the champions' top four bid in turmoil on Sunday. Jurgen Klopp's side are four points adrift of fourth-placed Chelsea, who can extend that lead to seven if they beat Everton on Monday. That would leave Liverpool with a tough task to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish.

Agencies

Marin beats Sindhu in Swiss final

PTI ■ BASEL

World Champion P V Sindhu finished a distant second best in the Swiss Open final after being completely routed by Olympic Gold medalist Carolina Marin of Spain in a lop-sided women's singles title clash here on Sunday.

The 25-year-old Indian, who had won the coveted World Championship Gold medal here in 2019, couldn't match the speed and accuracy of Marin during her 12-21, 5-21 defeat in the final that lasted only 35 minutes.

It was Sindhu's third successive loss to Marin, who had won both the Super 1000 events



in Thailand in January before finishing runners-up at the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals.

Playing her first final in 18 months, Sindhu, ranked 7th in

the world, entered the match with a 5-8 head-to-head record against Marin, having lost her last two matches against the former world No 1.

The world No 7 Indian, who didn't drop a game in the last four matches this week, however, failed to summon her 'A' game under pressure as Marin came up trumps to claim her third title of the year. She seemed completely clueless against a rampaging Marin, who outclassed the Indian with her pace, power and precision during the summit clash.

Sindhu will next compete at the \$850,000 All England Championships to be held from March 17 to 21.

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Ravi Shastri was both Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev's 'go to man' with his all-round abilities during the '80s and India head coach firmly believes that young Washington Sundar could play a similar role in the current Test team.

The left-handed specialist batsman, who also bowls mean off-breaks, scored three half centuries in his four Tests along with six wickets which includes prized scalps of Steve Smith and Joe Root.

Do you see glimpses of you in him?



"I think *Washy* has far more natural ability than I had," said the veteran of 80 Tests who had close to 4000 runs and 150 plus wickets.

"He has the ability and he belongs at this level and he can go a long way. If he could focus on his bowling (in Tests), India could have a very good number six for overseas conditions.

"Someone who can get you those 50s, 60s and 70s and then bowl for you 20 overs and can pick up 2-3 wickets. That was my role overseas (during whole of 1980s) and I think he can do that role easily," the head coach said during a virtual press meet on Sunday.

Washington should start batting in the top four for Tamil Nadu across formats, suggested Shastri.

"Definitely, he should be batting in the top four for his state. There is no question about that. I would like to have a word with Tamil Nadu selectors or *DK* (captain Dinesh Karthik) for that matter. I think he should be batting in the top four," Shastri said.

For Shastri, Sundar's innings of 96, coming in at 153 for 6 was a better effort than his 85 not out in Chennai.

"Washington Sundar, this is unreal. Facing some of the toughest bowlers in the world. I would say this innings was far better as the WTC was on line," he said.

Federer 'pain free' ahead of Qatar Open

AFP ■ DOHA

Roger Federer said retirement was never really an option during his battle with injury, insisting on Sunday the pain is "completely under control" ahead of his return to competitive tennis at this week's Qatar Open.

The 39-year-old hasn't played a match since a semi-final defeat to Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open in January 2020 and acknowledged it was unusual for a player of his age to return after injury.

"I know it's on the rare side for a 40-year-old to come back after a year out," he said at a media briefing in the Qatari capital Doha.

"The important thing is I'm pain free and injury free. I'm very happy to be back playing a tournament — I never thought it was going to take this long."

On his rivalry with Rafael Nadal and Djokovic, who this week overtakes his record of 310 weeks as world number one in men's tennis, Federer said "it's a great debate to have."

"I think what Novak and Rafa have done of late is extraordinary — they're not 25 either," he said with a smile.

"Novak did it in Australia, Rafa did it at The French — they seem at their peak which is great for tennis and for the debate.

"My concern is my own health, my own game (more) than the record.

"The guys are unreal. I hope they keep on going and can do everything they possibly want — you want to leave the game with no regrets, and in that respect we all sleep very well at night."

Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam title winner, said that while "expectations are really low" for his campaign in Qatar, he hoped to surprise himself.



Gerrard leads Rangers to league title

AFP ■ GLASGOW

Rangers' first Scottish Premiership title for 10 years was confirmed Sunday after Celtic's drew 0-0 at Dundee United to stand 20 points behind their Glasgow rivals with six games left to play.

Steven Gerrard's men have stormed to the title without losing a game to end Celtic's record-equalling nine consecutive Scottish league titles.

Rangers were not even in the top-flight for four of those seasons after the club was demoted to the fourth tier following liquidation in 2012 due to financial troubles.

"This club has been to hell and back over the past 10 years," said Gerrard after Saturday's 3-0 win over St Mirren put Rangers on the brink of a first major trophy since 2011.

"I've only been part of it for three, but I can certainly relate and I've got that feeling and that affection with the fans and I know what they have been through."

The former England and Liverpool captain never won a league title during his legendary 17-year career at Anfield.

However, Gerrard has transformed Rangers' fortunes, both domestically and in Europe, since taking his first senior managerial role in 2018.

The newly crowned Scottish champions have reached the last 16 of the Europa League for the second



Rangers manager Steven Gerrard hangs out the window of the dressing room to cheer with fans gathered outside the stadium

consecutive season and face Slavia Prague on Thursday.

Rangers were denied the chance to rub salt into Celtic wounds by winning the title at Celtic Park in two weeks' time in their next league fixture.

Celtic dropped points for the 12th time in the league this season with caretaker manager John Kennedy taking charge for just the second time since Neil Lennon resigned last month.

The issues that have dogged Celtic all season cost them at Tannadice as they dominated but failed to find the net with 27 attempts on goal.

"Our objective was to get to 10, but Rangers have been better than us this season," Kennedy told *Sky Sports*. "We've been champions for so long, but we've not been good enough this season."

Thousands of Rangers fans

ignored coronavirus restrictions to descend upon Ibrox on Saturday to get the title celebrations going early.

"Once we got close or achieved our first big part of success together, which was always going to be the hardest, I had a good idea what the reaction would be like," said Gerrard.

"I think what you've seen today is 10 years of what these supporters have been through. I'm delighted for them and really proud of the players efforts because they've been outstanding this season."

"From a league point of view, they've been close to perfect"

The Scottish Government condemned the scenes outside the stadium on Saturday and pleaded with supporters not to congregate again on Sunday.



Kiwis win final T20, series

AFP ■ WELLINGTON

A century opening stand by Martin Guptill and Devon Conway saw New Zealand clinch their T20 series against Australia in Wellington on Sunday after the tourists faltered in the face of an experimental spin attack.

Set a target of 143 for victory, Glenn Phillips hit the winning runs with a six to seal New Zealand's victory by seven wickets and to take the series 3-2.

Guptill, who had been out of form going into the series, led with a masterful 71, including seven fours and four sixes, while Conway contributed 36 with the pair putting on 106 for the first wicket.

New Zealand stumbled slightly when Kane Williamson went first ball but a Guptill single denied Riley Meredith the hat-trick.

Phillips, unbeaten on 34, guided New Zealand home with 27 balls to spare.

With the first four games in the series won by the team batting first, New Zealand captain Kane Williamson needed to be innovative when he lost the toss and was told to bowl.

He put his faith in spin with his slow bowlers sending down 12 overs, the most for New Zealand in a T20 match, and they took four of the eight wickets.