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## India, US discuss Ukraine war fallout

Won't set any 'red line' for India on energy imports from Russia: US

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the US discussed the ramifications of the ongoing war in Ukraine during a telephonic conversation between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar late on Wednesday. The two leaders reviewed regional priorities, the worsening humanitarian situation in Ukraine and promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"Just completed a useful conversation with @SecBlinken. Reviewed the progress on our bilateral cooperation. Discussed developments pertaining to the Indo-Pacific, Ukraine, and the global economy," Jaishankar tweeted.

"The two leaders spoke to review regional priorities, including the worsening humanitarian situation in Ukraine and our shared efforts to promote a free, open, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific, in



A soldier poses for the picture in Kyiv, while standing guard amid the destruction caused after shelling of a shopping centre

which the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states is respected," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said. Meanwhile, visiting US Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economics, Daleep Singh, on Thursday said the USA will not set any "red line" for India on its energy imports from Russia but does not want to see a "rapid acceleration".

"Friends don't set red lines," Daleep Singh told reporters. As against purchase of 16 millions barrels oil in 2021, India has bought at least 13 million barrels of Russian crude oil since

India. Blinken wrapped up a tour of the West Asia, North Africa, and India on Wednesday, making an impassioned appeal to Algeria to limit its ties with Russia.

"The countries of North Africa and the Middle East (West Asia) have experienced themselves the consequences of Russia's military campaigns before," Blinken said.

India and the US have been in touch over the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The US Deputy NSA Daleep Singh arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday on a two-day visit.

Hours after his arrival, Singh held talks with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal. Singh is known to be a key architect in designing the US sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

The visiting US official also met Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla on Thursday and discussed India-US economic cooperation and strategic partnership. "Look forward to working together on global issues of mutual interest, including in G20," Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The discussion between Jaishankar and Blinken took place hours before Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrived in New Delhi to hold talks with the Indian leadership on Friday.

It is the first visit by a Russian Minister to India since the military operations began in Ukraine on February 24. India and Russia are likely to discuss issues like rupee-rouble trade and procurement of oil at discounted prices. The two sides are also likely to take stock of the ongoing weapons supply, including S-400 missile, to

## Defiant Imran won't resign, ready to face no-trust vote

In slip of tongue, Pak PM says 'threat letter' from US to topple Govt

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Defiant Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Thursday that he will not resign despite losing the majority and insisted that he will play till the last ball and face the vote of no-confidence in the National Assembly on Sunday which will decide where the country will go.

In a live-address to the nation, 69-year-old Khan also discussed a 'threat letter' and termed it as part of a foreign conspiracy to remove him as he was not acceptable for following an independent foreign policy. He named the US as the country behind the threat letter in what appeared to be a slip of tongue.

Khan's address came at a critical juncture of his political career when he lost majority after defection from his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Two of his allied parties also withdrew their support and joined the ranks of the Opposition.

"The nation should decide where the country should go...I always played until the



Pakistan's Opposition leaders Shahbaz Sharif, left, and Maulana Fazal-Rahman share a point during a press conference, in Islamabad

last ball. I will never resign," he said. "Those against me should have resigned...they should not have sold themselves for money."

Calling the rebel lawmakers as "traitors", Khan said that they will be branded as such for the rest of their lives as he pleaded them to come back and foil the attempt to topple his government.

"I will fight against the conspiracy and will never let it succeed," Khan said as he vowed to face the no-trust vote in the assembly on Sunday.

His speech came hours after Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri abruptly adjourned the

National Assembly session till Sunday after Opposition lawmakers demanded an immediate vote on the no-trust motion.

The resolution against the embattled premier was tabled by Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shehbaz Sharif on March 28.

Khan needs 172 votes in the lower house of 342 to foil the Opposition's bid to topple him. However, Opposition claims it has the support of 175 lawmakers and the PM should immediately resign.

No Pakistani Prime Minister has ever completed a full five-year term in office.

Also, no Prime Minister in Pakistan's history has ever been ousted through a no-confidence motion, and Khan is the third premier to face the challenge.

Khan talked at length about the "threatening letter" which he said was an official communication by Pakistan's ambassador and showed that the opposition leaders were in contact with that country as it was written before the no-confidence move.

"They (officials of other country) said that if no confidence succeeds then things will be fine...but if Imran Khan remains in power, relations will deteriorate and you (Pakistan) will have to face problems," Khan said, quoting from the document.

Khan said the foreign official knew the ones who would come into power after him would have no issues taking orders from the external forces. "But what is most disturbing is that our people, who are sitting here, are in contact with foreign powers," he said, as he referred to the "three stooges" — Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz president Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan Peoples Party co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari and Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

Continued on Page 2

## UK for more robust economic, strategic, defence ties with India

Delhi, London exhort respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As conflict persists in Ukraine, India and Britain on Thursday called for upholding principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law. Britain also favoured more robust economic, strategic and defence ties with India given the unstable global order.

These were the main takeaways from the talks between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and visiting British Foreign Secretary Elizabeth Truss. The talks took place a day before Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discusses the entire gamut of the Ukraine conflict and India-Russia ties with his Indian counterpart on Friday. He may also call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss during their meeting in New Delhi on Thursday

Besides reviewing the ramifications of Russia's military operation all over the world, India and Britain also discussed ways to further enhance cooperation in the strategically important Indo-Pacific region. The two Ministers also

## AAP gains most in RS polls, BJP wins 5, Left 2, Cong 1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the Rajya Sabha elections for 13 seats across six States on Thursday, the AAP booked five RS berths unopposed from Punjab, the BJP won five, the Left two, and the Congress one. BJP's tally has now gone up to 102 in the 245-member RS.

With this, the Congress may now lose its status of Leader of Opposition by July this year, when another round of biennial elections for the Upper House will be held. The Congress lost three of its seats — two from Assam and one from Himachal Pradesh.

BJP candidate Manik Saha won the lone RS seat in Tripura bagging 40 first preferential votes, Left candidate Bhanu Lal Saha got just 15 votes.

The results for two seats of Assam RS polls had to be delayed after the Congress moved the EC seeking to invalidate of votes of 5 NDA MLAs alleging they publicly revealed their ballot papers. But, the EC rejected the demand.

seats. The Congress suspended its defectors from the party.

From Kerala, the LDF bagged two seats and the UDF one. LDF candidates P Santosh Kumar of the CPI and AA Rahim of the CPI(M) registered a comfortable victory.

The BJP has already won the lone Rajya Sabha seat from Nagaland unopposed. BJP leader S Phangnon Konyak won the seat becoming the first woman to enter the Upper House from the State. Nagaland is the only State in the country without an Opposition.

BJP candidate Manik Saha won the lone RS seat in Tripura bagging 40 first preferential votes, Left candidate Bhanu Lal Saha got just 15 votes.

The results for two seats of Assam RS polls had to be delayed after the Congress moved the EC seeking to invalidate of votes of 5 NDA MLAs alleging they publicly revealed their ballot papers. But, the EC rejected the demand.

## Govt shrinks AFSPA areas in North-East

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major decision that will impact sentiments in the North-East, the Union Government on Wednesday decided to "reduce disturbed areas" under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in the States of Nagaland, Assam, and Manipur. The decision will considerably reduce areas under the AFSPA effective April 1, 2022.

"In a significant step, GoI under the decisive leadership of PM Shri @NarendraModi has decided to reduce disturbed areas under Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in the States of Nagaland, Assam, and Manipur after decades," Home Minister Amit Shah said in a tweet.

Justifying the move, the Home Minister said the reduction in areas under AFSPA is a result of the "improved security situation and fast-tracked development due to the consistent efforts and several agree-



ments to end insurgency and bring lasting peace in North East under the leadership of Modi". The decision has been taken after decades of AFSPA use in the North-East region which, in recent years, saw considerable normalcy with several extremist groups, including Bodo, ULFA and NSCN(IM) signing peace accords with the Centre.

There has been frequent unrest and agitation in the

Northeast for repeal of the AFSPA.

During UPA's time, the then Home Minister P Chidambaram had spoken about "reviewing" AFSPA across the country including in J&K.

The "Disturbed Area" tag will be removed from 23 districts and partially from one district in Assam. In Manipur, 15 police station areas of six districts will be out of the purview of the act. In Nagaland, the Disturbed Area Notification will be removed from 15 police stations in seven districts.

Welcoming the move, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said the leadership of the Prime Minister has brought a new era of peace, progress, and security to the North East.

"Reduction in areas under AFSPA will further create a conducive environment for fast-paced growth in the region," he said.

Continued on Page 2

## Wildlife traffickers use 'air' to escape checks

Attempts to smuggle 70K exotic animals in 10 yrs, 140 seizures from airports reported

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wildlife traffickers are blatantly exploiting the shorter travel time and extensive reach that the aviation sector offers. A new study has revealed that in ten years since 2011, about 70,000 native and exotic animals — in many cases their body parts and derivatives like Red Sandalwoods — were attempted to be smuggled from 18 airports.

Chennai airport was most frequently misused to move illegal wildlife products speedily with significantly fewer transit losses, said the report "High Flying: Insight into wildlife trafficking through India's airports" which was released recently here by the

TRAFFIC India. At least 140 wildlife seizure incidents were reported from the airports during the period. "It is the tip of the iceberg. The seizures reflect the ongoing trafficking and not an actual representation as most of the illegal wildlife trade goes unchecked and unreported," said Dr Saket Badola and Astha Gautam, authors of the study.

The report noted that all kinds of nefarious tricks were used to traffic the contrabands. "Checked luggage and personal baggage, concealment of wildlife contraband within passenger clothing, footwear, and other wearable and through the wrong declaration of protected species, all of which makes detection cumbersome for enforcement agencies were most common tactics," it said.

What was more concerning was that many of the seized species are categorised as threatened on the IUCN Red List and listed in the Convention on International



Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendices.

"For instance, the Indian Star Tortoise is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. However, traffickers clearly disregard the threatened status and international CITES rules in Appendix I prohibiting its trade as the Indian Star Tortoise was the highest number of native species seized between 2011 and 2020," said the report.

Among the species groups seized (including both Indian and exotic species), reptiles were the most encountered group during the stated period (46 per cent), followed by mammals (18 per cent), timber (13 per cent), and species from the marine environment (10 per cent). The highest number of native species seized included the Indian Star Tortoise, followed by the Black Pond Turtle Geoclemys hamiltonii while the highest number of non-native species seized was Red-Eared Slider Turtle, followed by

the Chinese Pond Turtle Mauremys reevesii, said the 12-page report based on the analysis of the seized wildlife items in the last ten years.

Similarly, several flora species, including Agarwood Aquilaria malaccensis, Red Sanders Pterocarpus santalinus, Sandalwood Santalum album, and medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) like Kuth Saussurea costus roots were seized at the airports.

Chennai International Airport recorded the highest number of wildlife seizure incidents, followed by Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai, and Indira Gandhi Airport, New Delhi. "Illegal wildlife trade through airports is a major conservation threat magnified by the growth in the airline sector. It is important for enforcement agencies to prioritize bringing an end to wildlife trafficking," said Dr Badola, who also heads TRAFFIC's India Office

Continued on Page 2

## Sonia alleges budget cut for rural jobs; Min says it rose to ₹1L cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday expressed concern about the budgetary cut for MGNREGA, saying all the State Budgets have a negative balance in their accounts to the tune of ₹5,000 crore which has led to delays in payments to workers. Sonia's contention was countered by Union Ministers Giriraj Singh and Anurag Thakur who said her assessment was "far from the truth".

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour, Sonia said MGNREGA which was joked about did help the poor during Covid-19 and played a positive role. She urged the Centre to make adequate allocations to the welfare scheme and ensure payments within 15 days.

Rural Development Minister Singh and I&B Minister Thakur hit back at Sonia, accusing her of politicising the issue and claimed that her remarks were "far from the truth".

"The issue raised by the honourable member is far from the truth. The budgetary allocation for MGNREGA in 2013-14 (UPA years) was ₹33,000 crore, whereas under Prime Minister Narendra Modi it had reached ₹1.12 lakh crore. No need to show us the mirror," Singh said.

Thakur also said that during 2013-14, a sizeable amount in the MGNREGA budget was not reaching the beneficiaries, but today beneficiaries receive the amount directly to their account.

Continued on Page 2



# UAPA Tribunal confirms Govt's 5-year ban on Zakir Naik's IRF

New Delhi: A tribunal under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) has confirmed the Centre's decision declaring Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) as unlawful and imposing a five-year ban on the organisation set up by fugitive Zakir Naik who is accused of inspiring Muslim youths in India and abroad to commit terror acts.

The one-member tribunal, which was constituted by the Government last year to consider whether there was sufficient cause for declaring IRF as an unlawful association, said in its order dated March 9 that there was "sufficient cause" behind the imposition of the ban on the association.

The then Delhi High Court Chief Justice D N Patel, who was the presiding officer of the tribunal, stated that he was "in full agreement" with the submissions made by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Centre, and there was material to show that IRF was indulging in unlawful activities.

The tribunal observed that IRF involved in activities which not only incites and encourages the youth to undertake the

unlawful activities with an intent to threaten the sovereignty, unity, integrity and security of India but also causes disaffection against the country and there is every reason to conclude that the organisation be declared as an unlawful association.

The IRF was first banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967) by the central government on November 17, 2016. The ban was extended for five years on November 15, 2021.

In a notification, the Union home ministry said the central government had constituted a tribunal consisting of Justice D N Patel, Chief Justice of the High Court of Delhi, on December 13, 2021 for adjudicating whether or not there was sufficient cause for declaring the IRF as an unlawful association.

"Whereas, the said tribunal in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (3) of section 4 of the said Act (UAPA), passed an order on the March 9, 2022, confirming the declaration made in the said notification," it said.

It further said that a perusal of the evidence showed



that the "actions and conduct of Dr Zakir Naik, who is admittedly heard and soul of IRF, are prejudicial to the national interest of India".

"This tribunal is of the view that there are sufficient reasons and causes for declaring the Islamic Research Foundation as an unlawful association and consequently, this tribunal confirms the Notification dated 15.11.2021, issued by the government of India for the imposition of ban on IRF for a period of five years with effect from the date of the aforesaid notification, i.e. 15.11.2021," said the order which was published by the home ministry on March 30.

The tribunal rejected IRF's submission that after the im-

sition of a ban in 2016, it did not undertake any activity that is prejudicial to the national interest of the country and stated that "it appears that IRF and its office bearers have continued to indulge in unlawful activities which are detrimental to the national interest".

"Upon perusal of relevant evidence submitted by central government, it is apparent that not only Dr. Zakir Naik continues to be active on social media but he also continues to propagate his activities in various Gulf countries. It can be safely stated from the perusal of the evidence, that actions and conduct of Dr. Zakir Naik, who is admittedly heard and soul of IRF, are prejudicial to the national interest of India," the order said.

PTI

# J&K Police seizes hawala money for subversive acts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The Jammu and Kashmir Police claimed to have recovered 'hawala' money meant for subversive activities in Jammu district on Thursday. So far police have arrested only one person while a former Minister Babu Singh, whose name figured in the case, was still absconding.

In a written statement public relations officer of the Jammu zone police headquarters said, "On the basis of a specific input that some unknown people are going to receive 'hawala' money at Jammu, several checking points were established. On suspicion police arrested one person namely Mohammad Shareef Shah (64 years) R/O Syed Pora, Larnoo, Kokernag, Anantnag, from Gandhi Nagar area and recovered 6 lacs & 90 thousand from his possession".

The police spokesman further said, "On questioning Shareef Shah disclosed that he

was tasked by Jatinder Singh @ Babu Singh, Kathua (Chairman of Nature - Mankind Friendly Global Party) to collect money from one Omer at Srinagar. After receiving money from Omer, Shareef came to Jammu and was caught".

During preliminary interrogation Shareef disclosed names of his local and foreign associates, Javed and Khaib residents of PoK and Farooq Khan of Toronto.

Police spokesman said, "the accused Mohd. Shareef is also admin of a secret whatsapp group having members from different places including Pakistan."

In addition, three more persons identified as Gurdev Singh R/o Jammu, Sidhant Sharma r/o Kathua and Mohd. Shrief Sartaj r/o Jammu have also been detained for questioning regarding the hawala transaction. A case has been registered and investigation is in progress, police spokesman said.

# UK for more robust economic, strategic, defence ties with India..

From Page 1

It comprises comprehensive plans for the relationship over the next ten years and also serves as a useful instrument to actively monitor and pursue priorities.

A major step in this direction was taken last year when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his British counterpart Boris Johnson launched the India-UK Enhanced Trade Partnership that aims to more than double bilateral trade by 2030. "I think the roadmap 2030 has progressed quite substantially. So, a lot to be done. In all of this, we have had geopolitical situations, quite apart from the Covid which had its impact earlier during the delegation-level talks with Truss," Jaishankar said.

On her part, Truss said it is a vital time in global security in the wake of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. It is essential to respect the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law.

"It is very important for the UK that we are improving our economic, security and defence relationships because we are living in a more unstable world. That's why we are strengthening our work with India," she added.

Truss also said she was

happy to visit New Delhi for the third time in a year and review the progress made on the "Roadmap 2030" venture.

Jaishankar said there was a lot of work to be done and lauded the setting up of the Strategic Futures Forum. On the Ukraine situation, Jaishankar said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in India last week and the two ministers discussed the scenario in the war-afflicted nation.

Also, he said "our own relationship (with China) is not exactly going through its best period. But the Chinese have their own analysis of what's happening in Ukraine".

He made these observations at the India-UK Strategic Futures Forum. "What we saw happening in Afghanistan last summer had a very strong impact certainly in India, which wasn't the same in Europe. People didn't necessarily relate to the coming of the Taliban the same way or identify with the people affected in the same way," he said.

Speaking at the same forum, Truss said India and the UK lead the world in areas like the number of Unicorns, the number of people involved in the tech industry. Both freedom-loving democracies will help lead the world.

# International seminar on 'rewriting Indian history'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A one-day international seminar was organized by the Department of Sanskrit, University of Delhi on the subject of "Rewriting Indian History" in the Light of Archaeology and Epigraphy.

The inaugural session of the seminar, a couple of days ago, was attended by the RSS Joint General Secretary Dr. Krishna Gopal as the chief guest.

Prof. Chandkiran Saluja, Director- Sanskrit Promotion Foundation, Prof. B. R. Mani and other dignitaries were present in the inaugural session along with Sr. Prof. Ramesh Chandra Bhardwaj, Head of Sanskrit Department, University of Delhi. The wel-

come address, was made by Prof. Om Nath Bimli, Director, Department of Sanskrit, South Campus, Delhi University.

Supporting the need for rewriting, Dr Krishna Gopal said "people who came 200 to 300 years ago wrote our history." Proposing that the Aryans are Indians, the RSS leader said that none of the European languages have the Maha-Pranaswaras, only the Indians can produce these sounds.

He talked about the fact that India gave democracy to the world, it did not come up after the French revolution.. Vaishali and Magadha were the first independent Ganarajyas, democratic entities.. Vaishali had nearly 7000 representatives, he said.

In the inaugural statement delivered in the first session, the Head of Sanskrit Department, Prof. Ramesh Chandra Bhardwaj, stated that Delhi University is the world's largest and ancient Sanskrit center which is the house of the knowledge for various disciplines in Sanskrit and houses material on all subjects and grammar records.

Head of the Faculty of Social Sciences Arts at Nehru University, Prof. Kaushal Sharma propounded the importance of Geography in writing history. He said that Location is a truth. Monuments are the reality of the truth existing on those locations. If that is the reality you need interpret it. Geography helps us to realize history and validate facts.

# SC strikes down Vanniyars' reservation

Supreme Court on Thursday struck down the 10.5 per cent reservation provided to Vanniyars, a MBC in Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that there is no substantial basis for classifying the Vanniakula Kshatriyas differentially, the Supreme Court on Thursday struck down the 10.5 per cent reservation provided to Vanniyars, a Most Backward Community (MBC) in Tamil Nadu, in government jobs and admission to educational institutions.

A bench comprising Justices L. Nageswara Rao and B R Gavai said population has been made the sole basis for recommending internal reservation for the Vanniakula Kshatriyas, which is directly in the teeth of the law laid down by this court.

"We are of the opinion that there is no substantial basis for classifying the Vanniakula Kshatriyas into one group to be treated differentially from the remaining 115 communities within the MBCs and Denotified Communities, and therefore, the 2021 Act is in violation of Articles 14, 15 and 16.

We uphold the judgment of the High Court on this aspect," the bench said.



Travelling photographer Avantika Meattle, senior Congress leader and MP Shashi Tharoor and Ajay Singh, CMD Spicejet at an exhibition of the photographer's works.

# Defiant Imran won't resign, ready to face no-trust vote...

From Page 1

Khan accused the trio of involvement in corruption and asked if that country would allow someone to become its leader if involved in corruption.

"Will foreign countries want such corrupt people in power in their states? They are ready to accept such corrupt politicians, but I am not acceptable to them," Khan said.

Khan said that he came to politics after he had everything including money and fame, and "I need nothing even today".

He said one of his objectives to join politics was to give a sense of honour to his nation and bring it out of slavery.

"When I started politics, I included three things in my party's manifesto. Justice, which means law is the same for the powerful and the weak. Humanity because there is kindness in an Islamic state, and third, self-reliance (khuddari) because a Muslim nation cannot be a slave," he said.

Khan reminisced about attending a meeting chaired by former military leader Pervez

Musharraf who said that it was important to join the US war on terror, as Musharraf said that "US was like a wounded bear" and could attack Pakistan.

The support was acceptable to the extent that "we all are against terrorism" but to support it militarily cost Pakistan 80,000 lives. No other state and ally of the US suffered like Pakistan, he said. He said Pakistan got taunts from the US, drone attacks and mantra of "do more" instead of appreciation for its role in the war on terror. He said all politicians were afraid of America and never said anything against drone attacks.

"I said from day one after getting the government that our foreign policy will be for Pakistan and not against any other country," he said.

"...Our policy was not anti-US, -Europe, or even India [...] it became anti-Indian after New Delhi revoked the special status of Kashmir and broke international law in August 2019," said Khan, who insists that the Kashmir dispute remained a big issue between the two countries.

# Sonia alleges budget cut for rural jobs; Min says it rose...

From Page 1

He said under Prime Minister Modi, geo-tagging of assets created under MGNREGA was introduced and payments were directly made to workers in their Jan Dhan accounts.

Sonia said Budget cuts are impacting the workers who are not receiving timely payments and compensations. The scheme which was a mainstay of providing employment is hit by monetary constraints, she said.

"There is a regular reduction in the budgetary allocation for MGNREGA. This year the budget for MGNREGA is 35 per cent less than that of 2020. This comes at a time when unemployment is rising continuously," she said.

Noting that the Supreme Court had likened the delay in MGNREGA payments with forced labour, she said the States were told that their annual labour budget will not be approved unless they meet

conditions related to social audit and appointment of Lokpal.

"Social audit should be made effective but workers can't be punished by stopping the money for this," she said.

"I request the Central Government to allocate adequate funds for MGNREGA, ensure payment of workers within 15 days of work, and pay compensation in case of delay in payment of wages," Sonia said.

The House witnessed uproar as the Congress members protested the remarks by the Ministers and sought to counter the Government's viewpoint on MGNREGA.

This is the third time during the ongoing session that the Congress president has raised issues in the Lok Sabha during zero hour, the other two being starting mid-day meals for children post-Covid-19 and the alleged bias shown by the social media towards the ruling party.

# Govt shrinks AFSPA areas in North-East...

From Page 1

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma welcomed the Centre's decision to withdraw the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 completely from 23 districts and partially from one district of the State.

The AFSPA has been in

force in the State since 1990 and this move marks the beginning of a new chapter in Assam's future, he said.

"I wholeheartedly welcome Adarniya PM Shri @narendramodi's decision to withdraw AFSPA from all areas of Assam barring nine districts and one subdivision," the Chief Minister said in a series of

tweets. Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh also hailed the Centre's decision and thanked the Government.

"On behalf of the people of Manipur, I would like to thank the Centre for taking such a move in the interest of the people," said Singh. He described the day as a "momentous occasion".

# Sonbhadra DM suspended for corruption

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lashing the disciplinary whip, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, suspended District Magistrate of Sonbhadra, TK Shibu, on corruption charges and for not adhering to rules during the election.

Shibu is accused of corruption on a large scale during the elections. He has also been accused of corruption in mining and construction works.

"Public representatives had also complained against him that he was making money from mining. The complaints were supported by many activists of civil societies," a government official said.

Besides, during the 2022 UP assembly elections, he has also been accused of serious negligence as district election officer. It was informed that he did not seal the box carrying postal ballot papers during the

election. Pictures of open boxes went viral and at one stage the Election Commission of India was close to cancelling the election in the district, the official said.

He said the situation could be salvaged only after the divisional commissioner of Vindhyaachal got the box sealed by taking representatives of different political parties into confidence.

"In view of these allegations, the government has decided to suspend Shibu. He has been attached with the Revenue department during his suspension period, Additional Chief Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi said.

Meanwhile, the government suspended Senior Superintendent of Police of Ghaziabad, Pawan Kumar, for dereliction of duty and for his failure to control crime. During his suspension period the IPS officer has been attached with the DGP office.

**WATCO**  
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**INVITATION FOR BID (IFB)**  
Bid Identification No. WATCO (W) - 40/2021-22 Dtd.28.03.2022  
WATCO No. //30 Date: 28.03.2022

- Name of the work  
1. Construction of ESR along Kathajodi Rising Main for Improvement of Intermittent Water Supply to 24\*7 Continuous Water Supply In Cuttack City. (at CDA Sector-7, Kaffila Police Station, CDA Sector-6 (Near RTTO Office), 2- Near Park (Jhola Sahi Main Road), Police Colony Raja Bagicha, Highcourt Colony, (Badambadi), 3- at Bilyadharpur, Poparada (Matagaja Park), Sartol UGR Site).  
4. Construction of ESR along Mahanadi Rising Main for Improvement of Intermittent Water Supply to 24\*7 Continuous Water Supply In Cuttack City. (at CDA Sector-13, Near LIC Office / Circuit House, Ranihat Head Works) 5- at Pareswar Sahi, OSAP 8th Battalion, Near Commandant Residence, Chauilaganj, 6- at Potapokhari, Kanheipur, Old Jail Road).
- Estimated cost  
(1)- Rs.736.33 Lakh (2) Rs.1109.08 Lakh (3)- Rs.893.28 Lakh (4) Rs.1016.48 lakh (5)- Rs.769.28 lakh (6) Rs.890.93 lakh (7)- Rs.661.85 Lakh
- Period of completion  
- 9 (Nine) Months.
- Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal  
- From 11.00 AM of DL.06.04.2021 to 5.00 PM of 20.04.2022
- Last date / time of receipt of bids in the portal  
- 5.00 PM of 20.04.2022
- Date & time of opening of technical bids  
- 12.30 PM of 21.04.2022.



# Attack on Chief Minister's residence by BJYM AAP asks HC to set up SIT for time-bound probe

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after an alleged attack outside the residence of Delhi Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal during a protest against his remarks on 'The Kashmir Files' film, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), legislator Saurabh Bhardwaj approached the Delhi High Court seeking constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) for a fair and time-bound investigation into the incident.

The petition, which has also sought directions to Delhi Police and the Ministry of Home Affairs for ensuring the security of the Chief Minister and his residence in future, is likely to be listed for hearing on Friday.

Bhardwaj, in his petition through advocate Bharat Gupta, alleged that the attack and vandalism of the official residence of the Chief Minister appears to have been carried out with Delhi Police's tacit complicity. "On March 30, 2022, several BJP goons, in the garb of a protest, launched an attack on the official residence of the Delhi CM. Videos and

photographs show that these goons casually walked through the security cordon (maintained by Delhi Police), kicked and broke the boom barrier, broke the CCTVs cameras with lathis, threw paint on the gate of the residence and almost climbed over the gate, while Delhi Police personnel simply looked on, doing little to stop the protestors," the plea said.

The MLA said while he strongly supports the right to protest peacefully, even if such protest is against the Delhi Government, violence cannot and ought not to be permitted and condoned.

"In this case, the violence was especially egregious as it was directed towards the Delhi CM and his family. It was meant to subdue, by the use of force, the highest elected official in the NCT of Delhi and, therefore, the elected Government of Delhi. This was a direct attack on democracy," the plea said.

It added that those who were charged with the protection of the Delhi CM, that is, Delhi Police, completely abdicated their duty, without any

regard for the fact that they were protecting an elected constitutional functionary and the fact that he was given Z+ security by Delhi Police itself.

It said the police's inaction was in blatant violation of the High Court's August 22, 2017 order wherein the Delhi Police was directed to ensure that no unnecessary protest takes place on the road in front of the Delhi CM's house as it is a residential area.

"In light of this, the petitioner is constrained to directly approach this court seeking (a) constitution of an SIT headed by a retired Judge of this court to undertake an independent, fair and time-bound criminal investigation into the attack, including the role of Delhi Police officers who were responsible for maintaining the security cordon outside the Delhi CM's residence; (b) directions for appropriate prosecution/action against the identified accused persons/culprits; and (c) direction to the respondents to ensure appropriate security of the Chief Minister of Delhi's person and his residence in future," it said.

## 8 held for vandalising CM's residence; hunt on for others

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Thursday said that eight people have been arrested while a manhunt has been initiated to nab others in connection with the vandalism at Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence in the national Capital on Wednesday.

"Eight people were arrested from Delhi and the numbers could go up as teams have been sent to make more arrests," said sources.

Police had on Wednesday registered a case in connection with the incident against unidentified people. "The case was registered under Sections 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 353 (assault

or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) and 332 (voluntarily causing hurt to deter public servant from his duty) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act," Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Sagar Singh Kalsi had said.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wanted to "kill" Kejriwal after its debacle in the Punjab polls.

He also alleged that activists of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), the youth wing of the BJP damaged CCTV cameras and security barriers at the Chief Minister's residence during the protest.

The protestors, led by BJP

Yuva Morcha's national president and MP Tejasvi Surya, were holding a demonstration against Kejriwal's remarks on the recently released controversial movie 'The Kashmir Files', which is based on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley after the outbreak of militancy.

The Chief Minister's residence is located at 6, Flag Staff Road. The protest started around 11.30 am on March 30. The Delhi Police said proper arrangements were put in place but some 15-20 protestors managed to reach the Flag Staff road and were immediately removed.

Some of the protestors, at around 1 PM, breached two barricades and reached the Chief Minister House where they created a ruckus and shouted slogans, the police had said.

## Ready to lay down my life for India, CM says day after attack

NEW DELHI: A day after Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s youth wing members allegedly vandalised property outside Delhi Chief Minister's residence, Arvind Kejriwal said that he is ready to sacrifice his life if it helps uplift society and he is not important, the country is. Kejriwal asked what would youth of country learn if party that calls itself biggest party of the world was indulging in hooliganism in national Capital? "These acts make youth think that this country will never get developed. If we have to build an India of 21st century then everyone needs to work with love and harmony; only then can this country progress," said Kejriwal. The Chief Minister described such hooliganism as a hindrance to progress of country. Replying to a media query raised during an event at IP Depot, the Chief Minister said, "Kejriwal

is not important. I am an insignificant man when it comes to the larger contexts. I am a simple aammi. I am ready to sacrifice my life for the greater good of the country if it helps." "But I strongly believe that such hooliganism will not aid in growth of our motherland. If we have to tread on path of development, build an India of 21st Century, then we need to live in a society that believes in love, peace, harmony and brotherhood," said Kejriwal. "We wasted 75 whole years in this cheap politics of hatred, violence and hooliganism. What does it say about our country and our politics if biggest party of India, the one which rules our union, acts like this? What will youth think about its leaders? They will think this is the right way and they should adopt it too. This would only hinder path of our development," said Kejriwal. SR

## AAP Govt plans to rehabilitate homeless kids

Sets up task force, puts aside ₹10 cr for residential school for street children in city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the aim to rehabilitate homeless children in the national Capital, the Delhi Government has instituted a field task force which will focus on identifying and providing educational, financial and guardianship support to homeless children across the city.

According to an official, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government has developed a comprehensive plan for bringing dignity into the lives of homeless children and the Government has set aside Rs 10 crore to develop a residential school for such children.

With the strategic support of the Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi (DDCD), the Delhi Commission for Protection of

Child Rights (DCPCR) has launched a project in collaboration with the Salaam Baalak Trust and Youth Reach to deploy a field task force for rehabilitation and reintegration of children in street situations.

According to Jasmine Shah, DDC's vice-chairperson, the Delhi Government set aside Rs 10 crore in this year's budget to create a residential school that will not only provide education but also emotional and psychological support to vulnerable children. "By launching this task force, we will be able to deploy focused efforts to start providing these children with basic amenities they deserve including education, financial support and guardianship," said Shah. "The task-force will be rolled out in a phased manner, starting with South and South-East districts. We are privileged to be a part of this project with the DCPCR to provide relief to street children and help them exercise their right to education, health and safety," said Shah.

## Delhi aims to be EV capital of India

Kejriwal flags off electric autos; 500 women among 3,500 drivers to get livelihood

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the aim to make Delhi the Electric Vehicle (EV) capital of the country, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday flagged off electric autos at the IP Depot. The Chief Minister said that with the launch of e-auto, 3,500 drivers, including 500 women, would now have livelihoods.

"Before flagging off the autos, Kejriwal also inspected every new auto and understood what benefit the consumers would get from these. He sat in the auto of a woman driver and asked her to drive around in order to assess whether women drivers would be comfortable driving the new e-autos. He later called the woman driver to the stage and appreciated her for her driving skills in front of the public," said an official. On the occasion, Kejriwal said that for the first time, electric autos were being launched in Delhi,



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal along with Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot during the E-Auto Flag off ceremony in New Delhi on Thursday  
RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

which is a matter of great pride for the people of Delhi. "The blue-coloured autos will begin to operate for public use on Delhi's roads starting today. Keeping the situation of pollution in Delhi in mind, we are gradually initiating a paradigm shift in vehicles from fuel-based to electric ones. In this direction, these electric autos have been introduced, which will now regularly operate throughout Delhi," said Kejriwal. "As a symbolic gesture, some of the men and women driving these e-autos were handed their official documents. The expression of bliss

on their faces was truly heart-warming. They were extremely delighted to be receiving their papers, and the responsibility to run these autos," said the CM. "On one hand, a number of people are getting employment as a result of this initiative.

Today, a quota of some 3,000-4,000 e-auto drivers has been released, 3,500 have been issued their LoI's today, and they will now be able to operate e-autos on Delhi's roads from now. As a result of this, 3,500 families will now have a livelihood, and Delhi will now have a large fleet of e-autos

available for public use," said the CM. "Within the first year of the implementation of the EV Policy, electric vehicles accounted for around 10 per cent of the total vehicle sales. This shows that there is a great amount of enthusiasm among Delhi's public regarding this revolution in the transportation sector. It also proves that our EV Policy is a noble one, and its implementation is being received well," the CM added.

Elaborating on the system of e-autos, Delhi's Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said, "We have developed a single-window system and partnered with DSL for the software. The purpose of this portal is the streamlining and efficient functioning of application as well as loan issuing process - all one has to do to secure a loan is register on the portal, and all required formalities are fulfilled via this portal itself."

"A subsidy of Rs 30,000 is being provided on every e-auto by the Delhi Government and there is an additional five per cent rebate on loan rates. If one looks at our EV Policy, our goal is clearly stated that is to ensure at least one charging point is present within every three kilometre radius," said Gahlot.

## '59% owners of registered EVs given subsidies'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Transport Department said that around 59 per cent of the owners of 1,39,945 registered Electric Vehicles (EVs) in the national Capital have been provided subsidies under the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy.

The transport department said as many as 57,796 owners of eligible EVs have not been provided subsidies due to various reasons. The department has cited three main reasons for the non-provision of subsidies that includes non-eligibility of vehicles under the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy and the non-furnishing of proper documents by the owners.

In a written response to the question raised by MLA Ajay Mahavar in Delhi Assembly earlier this week, the department also informed that the subsidies has also not been provided in a few cases because owners have not applied for it. "As per the vehicle 4.0 database,

1,39,945 EVs have been registered in Delhi till March 21, 2022 and 82,149 vehicle owners have received the subsidy under the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy 2020," the transport department said.

The department has assured that subsidies to owners of all eligible EVs would be provided soon. In August 2020, the Delhi Government launched the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy with an aim to drive the transition to EVs.

Recognising the urgency to combat pollution, the Delhi Government has rolled out the highest incentives on the purchase of EVs among all Indian States. Under its EV Policy, the Delhi Government has been providing extensive subsidies on purchase of electric two-wheelers and four-wheelers, besides waiving road tax and registration charges. Incentives on EVs range from a maximum of Rs 30,000 for two and three-wheelers and up to Rs 1,50,000 on the purchase of 4-wheelers.

## G'gram to address complaints of colonies, housing societies

Dist admin to form structural audit team within ten days

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The district administration of Gurugram will form a structural audit team within ten days to address complaints of 60 colonies and group housing societies which were received in the last two years regarding irregularities in the construction of buildings.

District Commissioner Gurugram, Nishant Kumar Yadav, held a meeting on Thursday with building structural experts and members of various Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs).

Yadav has also asked for suggestions from the experts, which will be submitted to the administration within two days. "It is very important to prepare a draft of the action plan by making arrangements for permanent settlement of these complaints and structural audit of the complaints received," Yadav said.

Yadav stated that for redressal of complaints work is being done in the direction of finding a permanent solution for structural audit with experts and residents. "A policy is also being prepared by the State Government. Before preparing this policy, suggestions are being invited from the stakeholders and experts related to it so that roadmap for future can be prepared by removing

## ROF Ananda homebuyers stage protest

SAURAV GUPTA ■ GURUGRAM

Buyers of apartments in the BROF Ananda society, situated in Gurugram Sector 95, on Thursday staged a protest against the builder over the alleged incessant delay in handing over possession of the houses and the huge amount of hidden charges.

The builder was supposed to give possession in November 2021 but buyers have been struggling to get their flats for the last several months even after paying the full amount.

The buyers have been consistently staging protests against the builder for failing to deliver the apartments on time but to no avail and buyers allege that all phone calls and emails to the builders are going unanswered. According to home buyer Bhavdeep Singh, who is an advocate by profession, "I purchased a flat in the society when my name came up in a draw in 2018 which was the second draw to allot the flats. I have done full payment of my flat and the builder was supposed to give the possession in November 2021 but they have not done that as yet. This has led to a lot of hardships."

the shortcomings so that there is no recurrence of incidents like Chintal," Yadav added.

## Vikas Kumar to take over charge as new MD of DMRC today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The 1988 batch of Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Vikas Kumar, who was holding the position of Director (Operations) in Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), will be taking over charge as new Managing Director of DMRC from Friday.

Kumar is taking over charge from Dr Mangu Singh, who was the Managing Director of DMRC since January 1, 2012. Dr Singh's illustrious tenure came to an end on Thursday.

"Kumar has over three decades of experience in rail based urban transportation projects. Kumar had also worked with the Indian Railways in various capacities before joining DMRC in September, 2004.

Ever since, he has been associated with DMRC for more than 17 years in key management positions," said Anuj Dayal, Principal Executive Director of Corporate Communications, DMRC. "In DMRC, Kumar has headed the Operations wing of the organisation since 2007 in various leadership capacities such as General Manager (Operations), Executive Director (Operations) and Director (Operations).

He has played a key role in ensuring smooth commencement of Metro services in over 300 kilometres of Metro corridors in the Delhi-NCR," said Dayal. "He has also provided consultancy services to Dhaka Metro project as its Operations and Maintenance Rules Expert.

## STP deaths: FIR filed, 3 people apprehended

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Following the death of two workers after they fell into a six-foot-deep pit while working at a sewage treatment plant in east Delhi's Kondli area, the Delhi Police has registered an First Information Report and also apprehended three people in this regard.

Police said that they have apprehended K P Tewari, who is plant incharge, Raj Kumar, supervisor and Mohammad Haroon, shift incharge of the sewerage treatment plant.

The deceased have been identified as Nitesh (25) and Yashdev (35), both natives of Uttar Pradesh and the post-mortem of the deceased is being conducted. According to Priyanka Kashyap, the Deputy Commissioner of

## Man held for priest's murder in Gurugram

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Police (DCP), East district, a case under sections 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and 9 of Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act has been registered at New Ashok Nagar police station.

The police said after getting information about the incident, a team from New Ashok Nagar police station reached the spot. "The team found that two men had fallen into a pit at the plant.

They were taken out with the help of fire department personnel and rushed to the hospital where they were declared brought dead," the DCP had said. Fire department officials said the men had fallen into a six-foot-deep pit.

## No fine for not wearing masks at public places now: DDMA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the decline of COVID-19 cases, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has decided that there will be no fine for not wearing face masks at public places in the national capital.

The DDMA, however, is likely to issue an advisory for people, asking them to wear masks at crowded places," as per sources. Currently, there is a fine of Rs 500 for not wearing masks at public places in Delhi. The decision was taken at a meeting of the DDMA chaired by Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal. It comes after the city recorded a significant decline in the number of fresh COVID-19 cases over the last few days.

## Post Punjab win, AAP announces new office bearers for 8 more States

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

NEW DELHI: After achieving a thumping victory in Punjab, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday announced new office bearers for eight more states. MLA Dilip Pandey has been appointed election in-charge for Karnataka while MLA Ajesh Yadav has been appointed the election in-charge of Bihar. MLA Ajay Dutt has been appointed co-election in-charge of Himachal Pradesh and party's senior leader Dinesh Pratap Singh has been appointed as co-in-charge of Haryana. "AAP has trusted its experienced leaders to drive its campaigns throughout country. Party's senior leaders with proven electoral performances have been appointed as election in-charges for states party is looking to enter," said AAP's spokesperson. SR

## NSUI protests outside Petroleum Ministry over fuel price hike

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Holding placards and banners, the student activists of National Students' Union of India (NSUI) staged a demonstration outside the Petroleum Ministry on Thursday against the government over the steep hike in fuel prices.

According to police, around 20 protestors were detained during the protest outside the parliament and were taken to the police station in two buses. "This government is continuously increasing the prices. The prices of



Delhi Congress workers during a protest against fuel price hike in New Delhi on Thursday  
RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

petrol and diesel have been increasing continuously for the last several days. It is very unfortunate that due to the corona pandemic, the country's economy is at a standstill but the government is constantly putting the burden of inflation on the pockets of people.

"It will never be tolerated," said Nitish Gaur, National Secretary of NSUI. The NSUI said the students' fraternity protested "in a unique way" by singing songs against inflation and rising fuel prices. Some students were seen sitting outside the petroleum ministry

and singing popular number 'Mehangai Daayan', while several others played musical instruments like Harmonium and Dafli. The Congress has been holding protests regularly against the rising prices. Petrol and diesel prices were on Thursday hiked by 80 paise a litre each, taking the total increase in rates in the last 10 days to Rs 6.40 per litre. Petrol in Delhi will now cost Rs 101.81 per litre as against Rs 101.01 previously while diesel rates have gone up from Rs 92.27 per litre to Rs 93.07, according to a price notification of state fuel retailers.



# Erosion of coastlines to hit livelihood

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Frequent cyclones and sea level rise besides anthropogenic activities such as construction of harbours, beach mining and building of dams are taking a toll on the country's coastline, the Government said in Parliament on Thursday, indicating the livelihood threats looming large on the fisheries communities depending on resources from the sea.

The Government has cited an analysis for the period between 1990-2018, revealing that at least 33.6 per cent of the 6,632 km long coastline of mainland is under varying degree of erosion.

Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of Science and Technology, said the National Center for Coastal Research (NCCR), has been monitoring the shoreline erosion since 1990 using remote sensing data and GIS mapping techniques. "Of the total 6,632 km long Indian coastline of the mainland which has been analyzed from 1990 to 2018 and it is noted that 33.6% of

## Cyclones, rise in sea levels taking toll on Indian coastlines

West Coast Erosion			
	Km	km	%
Gujarat	1945.60	537.5	27.6
Daman & Diu	31.83	11.02	34.6
Maharashtra	739.57	188.26	25.5
Goa	139.64	26.82	19.2
Karnataka	313.02	74.34	23.7
Kerala	592.96	275.33	46.4

the coastline is under varying degrees of erosion," he said in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

The reasons for coastal erosion include increase in frequency of cyclones and sea level rise and anthropogenic activities such as construction of harbours, beach mining and building of dams. He further said that there are 526 maps prepared for the entire Indian coast for

identifying areas vulnerable to coastal erosion in 1:25000 scale along with 66 district maps, 10 state /Union Territories maps.

A Report on "National Assessment of Shoreline Changes along Indian Coast" was released in July, 2018 and shared with various Central and State government Agencies and stakeholders for implementing shore line protection measures. Innovative coastal ero-

East Coast Erosion			
	Km	km	%
Tamil Nadu	991.47	422.94	42.7
Puducherry	41.66	23.42	56.2
Andhra Pradesh	1027.58	294.89	28.7
Odisha	549.50	140.72	25.6
West Bengal	534.35	323.07	60.5
Total	6907.18	2318.31	33.6

sion mitigation measures at two pilot locations have helped.

These are Puducherry Beach Restoration Project, Puducherry where the submerged reef has been implemented by the Environment Ministry and beach nourishment implemented by the Puducherry Government. "This helped in restoration of the 1.5 km long city beach after 30 years and helped in improving tourism and fish-

ing activities in addition to protection of the coast during extreme cyclonic events," the Minister said. Another project is Kadalur Periya Kuppan in Tamil Nadu. "An offshore submerged dyke was implemented. This helped in protection of three fishing Villages during extreme cyclonic events and restored lost beach that is being used for landing of fishing boats and other fishing activities.

# In LS, Opp raises voice against fuel price hike, seeks relief for people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday witnessed yet another walk-out of Opposition Congress and Trinamool Congress members who were protesting the continuous hike in fuel prices and demanding relief for consumers. From word go opposition members started the protest, carrying placards and shouting slogans in house against spiraling of fuel prices and sought that it be withdrawn to provide relief to consumers. The members shouted slogans against Modi -government for its alleged "anti-people" policies. Some of members were seen holding placards saying "categorize SC community". Speaker Om Birla said opportunities were given to opposition on four occasions in past in this session to raise issue and now they should go back to their seats

and take part in proceedings. The opposition members ignored Speaker's plea and continued their protest. Apart from Congress and Trinamool Congress, those who took part in protests include DMK, CPI, CPI-M and TRS members. TRS members were raising some placards seeking justice for Scheduled Castes communities.

After nearly 30 minutes, some members, including Congress and Trinamool Congress, staged a walk out in protest. Opposition had earlier thrice staged walk-out from house. Petrol and diesel prices were on Thursday hiked by 80 paise a litre each, taking total hike in rates in last 10 days to ₹6.40 per litre. Petrol in Delhi will now cost ₹101.81 per litre as against ₹101.01 previously while diesel rates have gone up from ₹92.27 per litre to ₹93.07, according to a price notification of state fuel retailers.

# RaGa, MPs demand rollback of fuel price hike



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and other MPs during a protest over the hike in prices of petrol, diesel and LPG cylinders, at Vijay Chowk in New Delhi on Thursday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up the attack against the Government over the steep hike in fuel prices, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said the rise has been unprecedented and demanded its roll back. Leading a protest by Congress MPs on the issue at Vijay Chowk, he said prices of petrol and diesel have risen nine times in the last 10 days, and the common man is the most affected due to this. Congress

MPs from both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha carrying placards raised slogans against the government and sat on a dharna against the fuel price hike. Among those present included Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

"Our demand is that the government should control prices and stop raising petrol and diesel prices," Gandhi said while noting that the poor and middle class have been worst

hit by the hike. We can see that petrol and diesel prices are climbing rapidly. The government is making thousands of crores from this.

The Congress is protesting across the country against this price rise of petrol and diesel. The government has to stop doing this. It has to ensure that prices do not rise," Rahul told mediapersons

"I had said that when elections will be over, the prices of petrol and diesel will be rising and had asked people to fill up their tanks," he further said.

Rahul shared on Twitter petrol rates in countries in the Indian sub continent. "Petrol Rate in Indian Rupees (Rs) Afghanistan: 66.99. Pakistan: 62.38. Sri Lanka: 72.96. Bangladesh: 78.53. Bhutan: 86.28. Nepal: 97.05. India: 101.81. Don't ask questions to the 'Fakir', who shares knowledge on the camera. Loots India while carrying a bag full of 'jumlas' (rhetoric)," Rahul Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi, using hashtag 'MehangaiMuktBharat'. The

# IMD issues severe heat wave alert for N-W, Central India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

People staying in north, northwest and central India should brace for intense heat-waves in April. The India Meteorological Department on Thursday issued alert to the ministries of Labour, Power and Fire departments owing to heat wave conditions and cautioned people to avoid sun exposure as much as possible.

In its seasonal forecast, the IMD said that north, northwest and central India may see above-normal maximum temperatures in April with below normal rainfall. Regions including Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha will be experiencing summers unlike that in 2020 and 2021.

Intense heatwave has forced the Telangana and Odisha governments to reschedule the timings of the schools. The Telangana government has reduced the timings of half day to all schools from March 31 to April 6

while the Odisha government decided that morning classes will be held for classes 1-8 from 6.30-10.30 am from April 2. Students of classes 9-12 will attend school from 7-11.30 am.

"During April, there will be above normal maximum temperatures over northwest and central India, whereas normal to below normal maximum temperatures are likely over the south peninsular India, eastern parts of central India and extreme southern part of northeast India," Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of IMD said while releasing forecast on Thursday. In its advisory, IMD has alerted the Power Ministry to keep a regular check on power cuts and ensure proper electricity supply.

People have been advised to stay indoors and avoid sun exposure as much as possible as heatwave could lead to severe to moderate health concerns for vulnerable people. The Labour Ministry has also been advised to follow the

same instruction and avoid involving labourers outdoors to escape the direct exposure to the sun. To improve public safety and minimise the risk of fire incidents, the Fire Department has been suggested to be equipped and alert. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra are continuing to witness maximum temperatures hovering between 39-42 degrees during the last few days.

The IMD declares a "heat-wave" when the maximum temperature is over 40 degrees Celsius and at least 4.5 notches above normal. A "severe" heatwave is declared if the departure from normal temperature is more than 6.4 notches, according to the IMD.

On the contrary, thunderstorms will bring rains over south peninsular India, keeping a check on the maximum temperatures. The prevailing La Nina conditions are likely to continue till July or even August, according to IMD.

## CAPSULE

**49 AIR AMBULANCES OPERATING: MOS**  
New Delhi: Only 49 air ambulances are currently being operated in India by 19 operators, according to Minister of State for Civil Aviation V K Singh. "Around 4,100 patients have hired the ambulances during the last three years," Singh said in his reply to a written question in Lok Sabha on Thursday.

**SC CANCELS NEET-PG ADMISSION QUOTA**  
New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday cancelled the All India Quota mop-up round counselling for NEET-PG 2021-22 admissions to "resolve the anomalies" over 146 fresh seats, which were not available for candidates who participated in round one and two of the process.

**1631 COMPLAINTS OF JUDICIARY CORRUPTION**  
New Delhi: As many as 1631 complaints have been received against functioning of the judiciary, including corruption, in the past five years on a centralised system and they have been forwarded to the Chief Justice of India or chief justices of various high courts, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday in a written reply.

**GIVE MORE CHANCES FOR UPSC ASPIRANTS: SC**  
New Delhi: The Supreme Court Thursday asked Centre to consider representation of some aspirants, who could not appear in the UPSC civil services main examination after being infected with COVID and are now seeking an additional attempt, in light of recommendation made in a recent parliamentary committee report.

**STALIN SEEKS AID FOR SRI LANKAN TAMILS**  
New Delhi: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Thursday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi and sought the Centre's approval for the state government to provide humanitarian aid to Sri Lankan Tamils in wake of an economic crisis in that country.

**CBI TO RESUME KOHLI MEMORIAL LECTURE**  
New Delhi: After a two-year-long Covid-induced hiatus, the CBI will resume the D P Kohli memorial lecture on Friday where Chief Justice of India N V Ramana will speak on 'Democracy: Role and Responsibilities of Investigative Agencies'. Justice Ramana will also present 35 awards, including President's Police Medals for Distinguished Service, DP Kohli Best Detective Head Constable and Constable Awards and CBI Gold Medals to best Investigating Officers.

**PU'S LECTURER VISITING PROFESSOR OF IIDEM**  
New Delhi: Ashutosh Kumar, a professor in Panjab University's political science department, has been appointed first visiting professor to T N Seshan Chair at India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIDEM), the training arm of Election Commission.

# ED attaches ₹500 cr assets in money laundering, Forex violation cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached assets worth about Rs 500 crore in two separate cases of money laundering and forex violation. In first case, the ED has attached ₹243.93 crore belonging to Mohamed Asadulla, A Shafiulla and their relatives accused of defrauding Amanath Co-operative Bank Ltd, Bengaluru on money laundering charges.

In second instance, it has seized assets worth ₹216.40 crore of a Chennai-based company Southern Agrifurane Industries Pvt Ltd [SAIPL] and its promoter/director MGM Maran (former chairman of Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Limited) and MGM Anand, under FEMA. The ED initiated money laundering investigation of Asadulla and his relatives on basis of an FIR registered by

Commercial State Police Station, Bengaluru and Chargeshed dated May 5, 2006 filed by CID, Bengaluru under various sections of Indian Penal Code.

In the chargesheet filed in this case before Court of 1st Addl. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM), Bengaluru against Mohamed Asadulla (former General Manager of Amanath Co-operative Bank, Bengaluru), A. Shafiulla (former Branch Manager of Co-operative Bank) and K Hidayathulla (then accountant of said bank) in connection with misappropriation of funds to tune of ₹68.43 crore by opening fictitious overdraft accounts in the name of themselves, their relatives and their entities.

The ED probe revealed that said persons, during year 1997 to 2002, opened 50 fictitious overdraft accounts in name of themselves, their relatives and

their entities to misappropriate bank's funds. Further, the accused persons opened eight other real estate accounts and 165 housing loan accounts to adjust the outstanding amount of the said 50 fictitious accounts. Through this, the accused persons have succeeded in closing 40 accounts out of said 50 fictitious accounts.

As per details submitted by the said bank, out of the eight real estate accounts, 165 housing loan accounts and previously opened 10 overdraft accounts (out of 50 fictitious accounts) are still outstanding and the total loan proceeds of these accounts was to the tune of ₹79.30 crore.

In the second, the ED has seized assets worth ₹216.40 crore of Chennai-based company Southern Agrifurane Industries Pvt Ltd [SAIPL] under provisions of Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

# NIA announces cash reward of ₹10L on four LeT terrorists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has announced cash reward of ₹10 lakh each against four wanted terrorists of the Resistance Front, a frontal organisation of Lashkar-e-Tayabba (LeT) active in Jammu and Kashmir, for provision of information leading to their arrest. The four terrorists are wanted in NIA case related to conspiracy hatched for radicalizing, motivating and recruiting youth of Jammu and Kashmir to effect violent activities in Valley and rest of country. "In any person has any information of importance on suspects leading to their arrest or apprehension, the information may be shared on following numbers and email addresses: NIA Headquarters, New Delhi-info.nia@gov.in, NIA Branch Office Jammu-0191-2476270/2476271 and WhatsApp/Telegram:9149981400," the NIA said in a statement.

# India, France start 5-day mega naval exercise in Arabian Sea

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further strengthen Defence ties, India and France on Wednesday began a five-day mega naval wargame in the Arabian Sea in reflection of growing congruence in their maritime security cooperation.

These drills are part of the 20th edition of the 'Varuna' bilateral naval exercise. The bilateral exercises between the two Navies were initiated in 1993. The exercise was christened as 'Varuna' in 2001 and has become a vital part of India - France strategic bilateral relationship, officials said here on Thursday.

Various units including ships, submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, fighter aircraft and helicopters of the two navies are participating in the exercise. These units will endeavour to enhance and

hone their operational skills in maritime theatre, augment inter-operability to undertake maritime security operations and demonstrate their commitment to promote peace, security and stability in the region as an integrated force.

Having grown in scope and complexity over the years, Varuna series of exercises continue to provide both the navies opportunities to learn from each other's best practices.

The exercise has been a principal driver for operational level interactions between the two navies and has underscored the shared commitment of both nations to security, safety and freedom of the global maritime commons.

French Navy Chief Admiral Pierre Vandier visited India this week during which he held talks with his Indian counterpart Admiral R Hari Kumar focusing on mecha-

nisms to ensure peace and stability in the Indian Ocean amid rising Chinese presence in the region. The visit by the French Navy Chief came over a month after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Paris.

During the visit, Jaishankar said India looks at France as a "trusted" partner in countering myriad security challenges from the seabed to space and from cyber to oceans.

The maritime cooperation between India and France has witnessed a major expansion in the last few years. The Indian and French navies in April last year too carried out a mega wargame in the Arabian Sea.

The French Navy deployed its nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, and its entire carrier strike group in that exercise, reflecting growing congruence in naval ties.

# Pen your experiences for next gen: PM to retiring MPs



Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, RS Dy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh and Union Ministers during a photo session with retiring members of Rajya Sabha, in the second part of the Budget Session, at Parliament, in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI Photo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said future generations will miss the experience of MPs retiring from the Rajya Sabha and urged them to pen down their vast knowledge for posterity. He also urged them to come again to the House. He made this

emotional appeal while bidding farewell to 72 Elders representing 19 states retiring between March and July this year. He asked them to take the experience gained within the four walls of the House to four directions in the best interests of the country and to help inspire coming generations. Incidentally, it was one of the biggest numbers of MPs retir-

ing at same time. Addressing Upper House, he emphasised that experience has more power than knowledge, and the MPs should take it forward in the service of the nation.

Sometimes experience has more power than knowledge, he said, noting that academic knowledge has its limits. "It comes in use in seminars but things gained through experience help find easy solutions to problems," Modi said.

He also opined MPs may feel they have contributed a lot to the House but the House has also contributed to their lives. "We take back more from the House than we give.

We experience India's diversity in its social structure in the house," he said. Some prominent members to retire include A K Antony, Ambika Soni, P Chidambaram, Anand Sharma, Jairam Ramesh, Suresh

Prabhu, Praful Patel, Subramanian Swamy, Prasanna Acharya, Sanjay Raut, Naresh Gujral, Satish Chandra Mishra, M C Mary Kom, Swapan Dasgupta and Narendra Jadhav. Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu said legislators across the country should be driven by passion, performance and procedural integrity and desist from disrupting law making bodies.

Naidu called upon elected representatives to ensure that expectations and aspirations of people are incorporated in designing of laws and policies. He also expressed concern over House having lost over 35 per cent of functional time due to disruptions since 2017.

The retiring members, he said, have a total parliamentary experience of 181 terms including 143 terms in Rajya Sabha and 38 in Lok Sabha. For his

part, Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge referred to Jawaharlal Nehru and said India's first Prime Minister provided Rajya Sabha with power and integrity. Nehru made Rajya Sabha MPs members of various committees. Except, in case of Money bills, both Houses are equally powerful, Kharge added. Kharge emphasised that there can be differences of opinion but it is important that everyone works together.

As this is a permanent House, the journey continues, old members will retire and new ones will come, the Congress leader said. Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma, who too retired, said that he never trooped in Well of House during his entire tenure. Sharma also said he never used impolite words in his speeches and no word of his was ever expunged from records of House.

# Airlines to strictly follow 'one hand bag' rule: Scindia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Civil Aviation Minister Jyotirajiv Scindia on Thursday informed the Lok Sabha that Airlines have been told to strictly follow the 'one hand bag' rule in the aircraft. The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) had issued a circular on February 24, 2000 to enforce the rule, he said during the Question Hour.

Scindia, however, also said different airlines have different luggage policy and that aviation is "a deregulated sector and we can not regulate it". However, ladies hand bag, an overcoat or wrap, a rug or a blanket, a camera or a pair of binoculars, reasonable amount of reading material for flight, umbrella or walking stick,

infant's feed for consumption during flight and infant's carrying basket provided an infant is carried, collapsible wheel chair or a pair of crutches or braces for passenger's use if dependent on these and a gift item purchased from duty free shops are among items that can be carried along with hand bag. According to the BCAS circular dated May 11, 2000, one lap-top may also be allowed as an additional item with one hand bag. Airlines are adhering to guidelines issued by BCAS in their hand baggage policy.

And are giving wide publicity to this rule through their website, social media and signages, he said. Scindia said BCAS has sensitised airline operators for strict implementation of one hand bag rule in its meeting in January.



# UP exam paper leak: Govt orders random verification

7 more arrested, cancelled exam now on April 13

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



were kept under tight security.

He said that these officials would verify whether the seal on the bundles were not tampered with in any way and in case any suspicion arose, they would initiate immediate legal proceedings and appraise the UP Board of Higher Secondary so that they may also take necessary action.

Awasthi also directed the officials that for each random checking, the officers should cross-verify the seals and later send a detailed report to the government by 7 pm on Saturday of the findings made by them.

He said this measure was taken to ensure that no paper leakage could take place from now onwards besides if any discrepancies were found, timely action could be taken so that the exams were not cancelled at the last moment.

Meanwhile, seven more people, including two local journalists, were arrested on Thursday in connection with the leak of Class 12 English paper of the UP Board, police said. Deputy Superintendent of Police (Rasra) Shiv Narayan Vyas said seven more people

were arrested in connection with the case by Nagara police on Thursday.

Those arrested include two local scribes, Divvijay Singh and Manoj Gupta, he said.

The officer noted that altogether 24 people have so far been arrested in connection with the incident. Police have lodged three separate FIRs in Ballia City Kotwali, Nagara and Sikandarpur police stations on Wednesday in this regard.

Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar had said the Ballia district magistrate and district police chief got information on Wednesday morning that the second shift paper had been leaked. He had said on Wednesday that two of the accused were arrested from Ballia's Kotwali police station area, 10 from Nagara and five from Sikandarpur. "Ballia DiOS (Director Inspector of Schools) Brajesh Kumar Mishra is among those arrested," he said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had ordered the Special Task Force (STF) of the Uttar Pradesh Police to probe the case.

# Speculation rife after Shivpal-Yogi meet

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Sulking socialist leader Shivpal Singh Yadav's recent meeting with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has triggered speculation that he may quit the SP-led alliance to join the BJP.

The speculation gained strength amid reports indicating the Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) chief's strained relationship with Samajwadi Party (SP) president and his nephew Akhilesh Yadav.

Shivpal Yadav had met Adityanath on Wednesday.

However, Om Prakash Rajbhar, a key leader of the Opposition alliance, sought to downplay the issue.

There are "some issues" within their family and he is making all efforts to ensure that they remain together, Rajbhar said.

Meanwhile, Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) spokesperson Deepak Mishra told PTI that party workers on Thursday discussed the changing political scene with their leader and told Shivpal Yadav that they

will back whatever decision he takes.

"Shivpal Yadav assured partymen that they will be taken into confidence before taking any decision, which will keep the legacy of (Ram Manohar) Lohia and Jai Prakash Narain alive and work on resolving problems of people," Mishra said.

"In politics, all doors and alternatives are kept open," Mishra said.

When questioned about his options, Mishra said, "Shivpalji had got a proposal from the BJP earlier too. Every political party or leader would like to have popular leader like Shivpal Yadav with them. But he did not go since he has worked with Samajwadi Party workers and led them in all their struggles."

Shivpal Yadav has told workers to remain prepared for struggle and increase their public participation, and a big decision will be taken soon, Mishra said.

Reports suggested that the distance between Shivpal Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav has been widening ever since the veteran leader was not invited to a meeting of newly elected SP MLAs on March 26.

Shivpal Yadav had contested the recent Assembly polls on the SP symbol.

He skipped the Opposition alliance's Monday meeting and also "delayed" oath as a member of the Assembly, indicating that all is not well between both leaders.

Shivpal Yadav took oath on Wednesday and later went to the CM's residence here, fuelling speculation of his changing sides.

Besides Shivpal Yadav, the alliance's other key leader, Pallavi Patel of the Apna Dal (Kamerwadi), who had humbled Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya from Sirathu, had also not attended the meeting of the SP coalition partners on March 28.

Talks are doing rounds that as part of the plan, the BJP



may send Shivpal Yadav to the Rajya Sabha and give his Jaswantnagar seat to his son Aditya Yadav.

Akhilesh Yadav had denied ticket to Aditya Yadav in the Assembly polls.

Eleven Rajya Sabha seats will fall vacant between April and July.

Shivpal Yadav himself has not been speaking much.

On Wednesday, he had told mediapersons that he would tell everything at the right time.

But Rajbhar is still optimistic that things would be sorted out and the speculation of Shivpal Yadav saying goodbye to them would prove wrong.

Rajbhar, who heads the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP), on Thursday said.

"It is a family matter. How much can we do in the tiff within the family? But it has been my effort that all should remain together and work together," Rajbhar told PTI.

"I will talk to both Shivpalji and Akhileshji," he said.

"My effort is to placate Shivpalji. We can only make efforts in this regard. I have also talked to Akhileshji and he has also agreed that I should talk to Shivpal Singh today," Rajbhar added.

On the absence of Pallavi Patel from the meeting of SP allies, Rajbhar said, "Pallavi Patel could not attend the meeting because of some personal work. She had come in the morning and met Akhileshji."

All parties had sent their representatives, including the Apna Dal (K).

After remaining at loggerheads since 2017, Akhilesh Yadav and Shivpal Yadav had decided to mend fences just before the recent state Assembly elections.

Their estrangement had resulted in Shivpal Yadav launching his own party before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

# Left organisations take out rally over 'deteriorating' law and order in Bengal

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Members of CPI(M) women's wing and 10 other Left organisations on Thursday took out separate rallies in various parts of the city to protest the alleged deterioration of the law and order situation in West Bengal under the TMC rule. Women agitators were seen engaging in altercations with the police as they were stopped from going past the barricade set up near administrative buildings in south Kolkata. "We protest the murder of student leader Anis Khan in Amta in the last week of February and the massacre of nine people, including women and children, at Bogtui in Rampurhat. There had also been incidents of gangrape in Basirhat and Malda.

"Law and order has virtually collapsed in West Bengal and the Mamata Banerjee government is busy covering up every incident. We, the women of the state, have hit the street to voice our protests," one of the agitators told reporters.

In another part of the city, several Left groups, including students' organisation AISA, embarked on a rally from Shyambazar five-point crossing to College Street.

"From Amta to Bogtui, people are getting killed and there is no justice anywhere. We want justice," a female protester underlined.

# Chit fund case: ED attaches assets of West Bengal-based journalist

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Assets worth Rs 5 crore of a senior West Bengal-based journalist, Suman Chattopadhyay, and his family members have been attached under the anti-money laundering law in connection with an alleged chit fund scam, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said on Thursday.

The federal probe agency issued a provisional order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for attaching bank accounts and duplex flats situated in and around Kolkata.

The action pertains to the ED probe into the transactions of the ICORE group of companies. The agency had filed a money-laundering case, taking cognisance of an FIR lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against the group and others.

"ICORE group companies ran a chit fund scam and the group illegally raised a huge

amount of money from lakhs of gullible investors by promising unrealistic returns," the agency alleged in a statement.

Chattopadhyay, it said, "personally and through his company Disha Productions and Media Private Limited, has received proceeds of crime to the tune of Rs 9.83 crore from the ICORE group in the guise of business investment in the company".

Apart from the ICORE group, Chattopadhyay also received funds from other chit fund companies such as Saradha Group through the same modus operandi and had come under the ED scanner previously in the Saradha group case, the agency said.

Chattopadhyay, then the editor of a leading Bengali daily, was arrested by the CBI in 2018 in the same case.

The ED attached assets worth Rs 300 crore of the company, its promoters, directors and others in September last year.

# Ensure drugs are not sold without prescription: Maha Minister to officials

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Such practices are against the law, I have asked FDA officials to carry out searches: Yadravkar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Minister of State for Food & Drugs Administration (FDA) Rajendra Yadravkar has said he has ordered his department's officials to crackdown on chemists selling medicines without prescription from a doctor.

Talking to PTI, he said, "The orders were given yesterday in Aurangabad after I received a complaint about sale of drugs from a local pharmacist without a formal prescription of a doctor. Such practices are against the law and should be banned."

"I have asked FDA officials to carry out searches and cross

verification of sale of drugs from pharmacies in the state. The FDA will also prod drug sellers to demand prescription before selling medicines," he said.

There have been some cases where scheduled drugs, which are not easily available and are allowed to be purchased only if prescribed by a physician, were sold across the counter at pharmacies, the minister said.

"No pharmacist was demanding prescription for such drugs. It was shocking and serious as well," the Minister said. Yadravkar said he has sought a primary report in the next 8 days from FDA officials on action taken to curb the practice of selling drugs without prescription. "It will give us some idea about ground reality on sale of drugs. During the 2021-22 fiscal, FDA officials had collected Rs 5.50 crore as fine (for violation of different norms)," he said.

# Two brothers suffocate to death, 4 killed in road accident in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking incident in Hapur, two brothers suffocated to death after inhaling poisonous gas and later their sister also tried to end her life in depression while in a separate incident in Barabanki, four persons, including two scribes, were killed in a road accident.

In Hapur, two real brothers died of suffocation in a room of a sheet printing factory in Pilkhuwa, a handloom town of Hapur district.

Disturbed by the information of losing both her brothers, the sister of the victims hanged herself to end her life. She was rushed to a hospital where her condition remains critical.

Reports said that both the brothers, 22-year-old Naved and 24-year-old Aslam, had gone to get sheets chemically washed in the sheet printing factory located in Mohalla New Arya Nagar of Pilkhuwa on Wednesday. When they reached the room to get the drying sheets, they fell unconscious

allegedly due to leakage of some poisonous gas. When they did not come out of the room for a long time, the other employees went to the room and saw both lying dead.

The deceased were natives of Chhittaunda in Garh, and were living in Shivaji Nagar of Pilkhuwa for the last 10 years.

According to information received, chemicals are used in the factory to make the colours fast on the sheets. The sheets are kept in a closed room for the colours to dry. As the door was closed, poisonous gas emanating from the films had filled the room. Police later sent the bodies for post-mortem.

Meanwhile, when the news of the death of Naved and Aslam reached their sister, she also tried to commit suicide by hanging herself. She was admitted to the hospital in a serious condition. While the police are investigating the matter, DSP Pilkhuwa Dr Tejveer Singh said the bodies were sent for post-mortem and police were making investigations to initiate legal action against the factory owner.

In Barabanki, four people, including two journalists, were killed when a car collided with a mud-laden dumper near Hathi ka Purwa village on Purvanchal Expressway under Lonikra police station area of Barabanki district.

Police said the accident took place on Wednesday night and three people were killed on the spot while the fourth person succumbed to his injuries at KGMU Trauma Centre in Lucknow. All the people in the car were residents of Pratapgarh district and were on their way to Lucknow.

Inspector-in-Charge Vishwanath Yadav said that the speeding car collided with the dumper near the village. On getting information, the local people reached the spot and took out all the occupants in the car and took them to Haidergarh community health centre, where the doctors pronounced three people dead.

The fourth person was referred to the KGMU Trauma Centre in Lucknow, where he also died during treatment.

The deceased were identified as Irshad Khan (30), Abubakar Raine (32), Lukman Raine (33) and Imran (25).

In Bijoor, the motorcycle rider died in an accident on the Bijoor-Noorpur road while a youth died when his motorcycle collided with a tractor-trolley parked on Mandawar Chandak Marg.

Police sent the bodies for post-mortem. According to reports, a motorcycle slipped uncontrollably on Nurpur Road in Kotwali Nagar city police station area, killing the rider Sanjeev of Maujampur area under Harvansh police station. Police reached the spot on getting information and sent the body for post-mortem.

On the other hand, another motorcycle rammied into a tractor-trolley parked near Ranipur village on Chandak-Mandawar road. In this incident, the motorcycle rider, Ravindra Rathi of Aanchal village in Raipur Berisal under the Mandawar police station of Bijoor, was injured. Police sent Ravindra to the hospital where the doctors pronounced him dead upon arrival.

# No corona curbs in Bengal from today, except mask, sanitisers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal Government has decided to end the pandemic restrictions from Thursday midnight, a Nabanna (State secretariat) circular to this effect said.

A circular issued by the State Government said that the "restrictions currently in force are hereby withdrawn." However the advisory in respect of health and hygiene protocols including wearing of mask at all times, "hand hygiene and sanitisation of public places would continue to

be strictly observed until further orders."

The Government brings to an end the Disaster management Act which would no longer be invoked, lifting all curbs on political and public gatherings including wedding parties etc, government sources said.

The State had not witnessed corona related deaths in past several deaths and the number of infections were limited to between 40 and 42 a senior Government doctor said adding however "the people should keep a strict vigil in view of curbs on the interna-

tional flights being lifted ... and also in view of infections returning in some European and other countries including China."

The Government order would come into force past midnight, sources said. The last time the State Government extended the restrictions was early this month.

"It is good that all offices both Government and private would start functioning with normal strength after about two years ... but in all the offices sanitizers and masks would be made mandatory," a government secretary said.

# NIA announces ₹10 lakh reward each on four wanted terrorists of LeT offshoot TRF

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh each on four wanted terrorists of the Resistance Front (TRF), a front organisation of the proscribed Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), operating in Jammu and Kashmir.

The four terrorists, including two Pakistani nationals, are wanted by the NIA in connection with a case registered last year in connection with a conspiracy hatched for radicalising, motivating and recruiting youths of Jammu & Kashmir to

effect violent activities in the Union territory and rest of India, a spokesperson of the agency said.

The case was registered under various sections of Indian Penal Code and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

The cash reward was declared against Pakistani nationals Saleem Rehmani alias 'Abu Saad' of Nawab Shah, Sindh and Saifullah Sajid Jatt of Shangamanga in Kasur and their local associates Sajjad Gul of Srinagar and Basit Ahmad Dar of Redwani Payeen in south Kashmir's Kulgam district.

Under the NDPS Act, the NCB gets 180 days for filing a charge-sheet in a case and in the mid-sea drug bust case, involving Aryan Khan and others, the deadline for filing the charge-sheet was to expire on April 2.

On March 28, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the NCB had moved the NDPS Court, seeking 90 days' additional time to file the charge-sheet in the case.

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# Mid-sea drug bust case: NCB granted 60 more days to file chargesheet

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Special Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act court on Thursday granted 60 days' extension to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) to file a charge-sheet in the much-discussed drug-bust case, in which Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan and others are accused.

Allowing a plea made by Special Public Prosecutor Advait Sethna citing "compelling reasons" for seeking more time to file a charge-sheet in the case, Special NDPS Judge V V Patil granted two months' additional time to file the charge-sheet in the case.

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special court that it was still in process of recording their statements, since many of the accused did not turn up for investigations resulting in an unintentional delay.

It may be recalled that the NCB had arrested Aryan Khan, Arbaaz Merchant, Munnum Dhamecha and five others on October 3, after its officials busted a rave party and seized 13 grams of cocaine, 5 grams of MD (Mephedrone), 21 grams of Charas, 22 pills of MDMA (Ecstasy) and Rs 1.33 lakh in cash from Goa-bound Cordelia Cruises' Empress ship, off the Mumbai coast. Subsequently, the NCB arrested 12 more persons in connection with the mid-sea rave party.

In its plea filed before the special court seeking additional time to file the charge sheet, the NCB had stated: that it was yet to examine panch witness Kiran P Gosavi as it was awaiting permission to interrogate and record his statement and that some of the accused purportedly gave wrong passwords of mobile, laptops and tablets which had resulted in the delay in the extraction of data and forensic examination.

The NCP also told the court that it was trying to find out details of contacts and addresses of the two Nigerian nationals arrested in the case and that the money trail and consideration paid for pur-

chasing drugs was underway. The NCB stated that it had completed its investigation against Mohak Jaswal, Gomit Chopra, Nupur Satija, Abdul Kadar Shaikh, Chinedu Igwe and Okoro Uzeoma, while its investigation against others was still underway.

On their defence lawyers in the case opposed the Prosecution's plea seeking an extension in time to file charge-sheet, contending that the NCB's application for time extension was an excuse to continue keeping the detained accused behind bars. They urged the court that the NCB be directed to file a charge-sheet now and that it could file a supplementary charge-sheet later.

While seeking rejection of the Prosecution's application, the defence lawyers also told the court that the NCB's application was not compelling enough to be granted extension of time as it had failed to disclose which of the accused were not co-operating with the investigation as alleged.

The defence lawyers also argued that the NCB's application not only affected two persons in custody but also the 18 others who were out on bail. They also pointed out that the non-receipt of analysis of digital data was not a ground for extension of time to file the charge-sheet.

# Yogi Govt 2.0 to focus on 2Ds — development, delivery

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In his first tenure Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath strengthened the base of governance, his second innings will focus on 2Ds - Development and Delivery - so as to make Uttar Pradesh the number one State of the country.

"The Yogi Government in its second term has made the 2Ds (development and delivery) its main agenda. The guidelines have been issued regarding this and the ministers and bureaucrats have been asked to formulate development-centric policies," Mritunjay Kumar, the media advisor to the chief minister,

told a select group of reporters here on Thursday.

He said in the first tenure of Yogi Adityanath, people only thought of the government doing the politics of Hindutva but many welfare schemes like free food grain distribution were launched and free houses, free toilets, free LPG and power connections were extended to people without any discrimination.

"The focus now will be on strengthening the delivery system, so that in turn it could speed up the development process," Kumar said.

To give a boost to the 2Ds, the chief minister has already held a couple of rounds of

meetings with ministers and officials and all have been asked to prepare detailed projects department wise within 100 days.

"Asking the ministers to present the schemes during cabinet meetings rather than officials doing so shows that the chief minister wants every minister to know the nitty-gritty of the schemes so that they may know any loopholes," he said. Kumar said that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had already started his efforts to make the state's economy one-trillion-dollar and a ground-breaking function to attract around Rs 10 lakh crore investments will be held sometime in

July, 2022.

He further claimed that the people's support to the ruling party in the 2022 assembly polls vindicated the popularity of Yogi Adityanath government and now the opposition would have to think twice of leveling allegations of Bharatiya Janata Party government indulging in caste politics and Hindutva. "The Bharatiya Janata Party's victory in Hathras, Lakhimpur Kheri and Unnao in the assembly polls proves that the opposition's tirade against the government over specific incidents fell flat and the people too accepted it as just an incident and nothing more," he said.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Global axis

### New Delhi has emerged as the station of choice for notable world leaders

The fighting is in Ukraine, thousands of kilometres from India, but New Delhi is the destination for world leaders to rein in invader Russia. Wonder why, unless they all need to be personally reassured of India's backing to their foreign policies on certain parts of Asia, like the Indo-Pacific, that are undergoing a concern-filled rejig after Vladimir Putin's aggression. The visits are simply numerous. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited New Delhi to announce an increased investment target in India and ended up pitching for greater ties between the two countries for a free and open Indo-Pacific particularly when the world was "disturbed over Ukraine". His Australian counterpart Scott Morrison held a virtual meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and remarked that while the QUAD was distressed over Ukraine, "our focus is very much on Indo-Pacific". China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrived next. India hosted him despite his unwarranted remarks on Kashmir, perhaps to send a message that it is having to deal with China's border standoff on its own and yet face pressure on Ukraine. Then comes the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. He is probably more bothered about India's purchase of discounted Russian crude and arranging a rupee-ruble payment system in view of the western sanctions.



German National Security Advisor Jens Plotner, here Wednesday, said Germany understood India's challenges and saw no reason for Europe to "preach and teach" New Delhi over its position on the Ukraine issue. He could not have been less diplomatic about India's stand on Russia, considering Germany too has an ongoing arrangement for importing Russian gas (though it is trying to cut back on it). But he put the finger on the pulse when he said Putin's logic that historically Ukraine belonged to the Soviet Union could encourage somebody as big as Russia in Asia to follow suit. As if on

cue, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Foreign Minister S Jaishankar on, according to the latter's tweet, "developments pertaining to the Indo-Pacific, Ukraine and global economy". As members of the QUAD, the US and India, along with Japan and Australia, had met on more or less a similar agenda in early March. The conversation is to be followed by US Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh to prepare ground for the '2+2' ministerial dialogue in Washington next month but his presence at this juncture has a meaning. He is the second American official, after US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, in this part of the world. Foreign Ministers of Austria and Greece were also in India last week. Last but not the least, British Foreign Secretary Elizabeth Truss brings a message to New Delhi about supporting the western stand on Ukraine. The diplomatic tours notwithstanding, the point remains that India's neutral stand on Russia and open sympathy for Ukraine have not diminished New Delhi's importance when it comes to the west's standpoint on the Indo-Pacific.

### PICTALK



Tourists shield themselves from a hot summer sun, during their visit to the Taj Mahal

PTI

## Sticky wicket

### Imran's fate as the Pakistan PM is all but sealed but he's fighting on

Even as India becomes increasingly influential globally and a virtual hub for world leaders from across the spectrum to have a stopover here in New Delhi, the mood and situation in Islamabad grows from worse to despondent. It's barely an escape yet for Prime Minister Imran Khan after facing immense heat to resign ahead of the no-confidence vote as he has reportedly lost majority in the National Assembly. Putting up a brave face in his late-night address to the nation, however, he called it "a defining moment" for Pakistan. A squeamish Imran alleged that the "foreign hand" was behind the act of sabotaging his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Government. He also blamed the "three stooges working at the behest of foreign powers" — meaning key Opposition leaders Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) president Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan People's Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and Pakistan Democratic Movement chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman. Accused of mismanaging the economy and foreign policy, particularly by way of damaging relations with the US, Imran indicated he won't be cowed: "I won't resign; I will play till the last ball."



The situation had started unravelling when Army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa had a difference of opinion with Imran on appointing the new chief of Pakistan's powerful spy agency, the ISI. Interestingly, Imran himself has been seen to be too cosy with the Army Generals despite his promise of ushering in a 'Naya Pakistan' that would be free of corruption and nepotism following his election win in 2018. Meanwhile, Shehbaz Sharif, whose brother and former Prime Minister Nawaz is in self-exile in the United Kingdom after being convicted in a corruption case he claims is politically motivated, is the man most favoured at the moment to become the next Premier of Pakistan. Even PPP chairman Bilawal has endorsed Shehbaz's name. Already, a few independent lawmakers as well as Imran's allies Balochistan Awami Party and the Mutthahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan have withdrawn support to Imran's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Government. Shehbaz's road map in office is to improve Pakistan's ties with the United States and the European Union, ostensibly to match and counter India's influence in these spheres. In what could possibly be a shape of things to come, he has also claimed that the otherwise ubiquitous Pakistan Army has been "staying neutral" ahead of the confidence vote, which is good news for him at least for the time being.

# Deuba's visit to rev up ties with India

## After hitting a rough patch during Oli's tenure, there's plausible hope that Indo-Nepal relations will grow stronger for mutual development



RISHI GUPTA

Amid the ongoing contest between China and the United States on asserting their position in Nepal over Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is arriving in India on a three-day visit today. It will be his first visit to India since taking over as the Prime Minister in July 2021. Meanwhile, Deuba and Narendra Modi had held talks in Glasgow on the sidelines of the Climate Summit in October 2021. The meeting evoked interest as it indicated a reach-out moment between the countries.

The visit comes in the backdrop of strained India-Nepal relations in the last three years. Since July 2021, Deuba has made attempts to improve bilateral ties; in fact, a Nepali Congress delegation led by former Foreign Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat visited India in October to prepare the ground for this visit and met BJP president JP Nadda and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar. In August, Vijay Chauthiwala, the head of the BJP's foreign affairs cell, visited Nepal and held talks with Deuba, UML Chairman KP Oli and Maoist Party Chairman Prachanda, among others.

**Backdrop:** With the formation of a Communist Government in Nepal in 2018, the bilateral ties touched the nadir in recent history. Kalapani became the most contentious issue which ex-Prime Minister Oli chose to politicise instead of resolving it diplomatically. Oli's anti-India centric ultra-nationalist outlook proved to be a political stunt to consolidate his position *vis-à-vis* Prachanda, who had been demanding Oli's resignation. Meanwhile, despite India's multiple requests to resolve the border row, the Kalapani issue was used as a tool by almost all political parties to make electoral gains.

**Connectivity and Energy on Cards:** Among many likely agreements and MoUs, connectivity and energy are high on the cards. For a landlocked Nepal, access to the third world through land and sea routes is only



through India. Nepal conducts its third-country trade through India. Meanwhile, on a few occasions, diplomatic tensions interrupted the movement of people and goods at the India-Nepal border. During the Madhesi Andolan in 2015, the border was partially closed after protesters blocked the transit points with India. Thousands of trucks from India, laden with emergency supplies of petroleum, medicines and pulses, were stuck for months.

To ease the supply of such products, India has executed several connectivity projects with Nepal. In 2020, India successfully delivered the first cross-border petroleum pipeline with Nepal, which is one of the firsts in South Asia and stands as a role model for regional cooperation. In October 2021, the two countries signed a MoU on railway connectivity to connect Kathmandu with Raxaul. It will serve as a lifeline for Nepal's cross-border public and container transportation. Despite Oli's best efforts to tarnish India's image, the latter has continued to extend a helping hand to the Himalayan nation.

On the energy front, Nepal has rich hydropower potential. However, this sector has large-



ON THE ENERGY FRONT, NEPAL HAS RICH HYDROPOWER POTENTIAL. BUT THIS SECTOR HAS LARGELY BEEN IGNORED DUE TO AN UNSTABLE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE. FOR OVER THREE DECADES, INDIA HAS BEEN PUSHING TO TAP ITS HYDROPOWER POTENTIAL ON MUTUAL BASIS

ly been ignored due to an unstable political and economic environment. For over three decades, India has been pushing to tap its hydropower potential on a mutual basis. In 1996, the countries signed an ambitious and economically viable Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project aimed at producing more than 5,000 MW. However, the project is stagnating in political indulgences. During Modi's first visit to Nepal in 2014, the project was expected to receive a big push but India's efforts fell prey to a lack of interest from Nepal. Even after 26 years, no joint Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been prepared. For Nepal, Bhutan must serve as a fine example of benefitting from India's technical expertise in power production and encasing the end product by exporting it to India. With renewed scope for cooperation in the hydropower sector, the joint DPR may get tabled during the current visit.

**Geo-Strategic Relevance:** The previous Communist Government in Nepal brazenly danced to China's tunes. With Oli as the Prime Minister, China received maximum encouragement and began to openly intervene in Nepal's domestic and foreign affairs. The Chinese

Communist Party delegations to Nepal in the last three years have demonstrated their outreach. However, with Deuba at the helm, there is a clear sign of rapprochement towards India. Also, with the entry of the US through MCC in Nepal, China is realising the loss of ground. The recent visit to Nepal by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in the backdrop of the parliamentary ratification of the MCC development grant worth \$500 million by the US is clearly seen as competition to BRI and its ill-intended expansionist agenda in Nepal.

Therefore, India as an all-weather development partner of Nepal and the US as an emerging one present a strong challenge to Chinese manoeuvring.

**Conclusion:** PM Deuba's visit to India is a welcome step. However, despite the ongoing bilateral cooperation, developments on resolving the Kalapani issue will be looked at closely. Also, Deuba has a short stint at hand, considering the parliamentary elections by the end of this year. Yet, any progress in bilateral ties will be a clincher in future course.

(The author is a Research Associate with the Vivekananda International Foundation. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### OPENING THE DOORS TO DEVELOPMENT

Sir — It was reported recently that Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari had come to Parliament in a Hydrogen Mirage (meaning progress) car. Currently, fuel prices are at an all-time high. In such a scenario, some people have started changing over to electric vehicles. Even cheaper, the new Hydrogen Mirage car will be considered pollution-free. This car is made by Toyota, a Japanese company. The main feature of this car is that its fuel is made from water. And once the tank is full, it can comfortably cover 646 km. Green hydrogen fuel will be made from water and organic waste.

It takes only three-four minutes to refuel. The main thing is that there is zero pollution and it costs only ₹2 per kilometer. Besides helping the environment, the cost of transport and travel will also remain under control. More importantly, we can export this hydrogen fuel. Gadkari has said that India has a lot of scope in this, too. It will create many employment opportunities. There is no doubt that the hydrogen car will open new doors of development in a situation where pollution levels will continue to rise by the day.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

### BWARE OF FOUL-MOUTHED POLITICIANS

Sir — Our politicians indulging in hate speeches, especially during election rallies, seem to have become an accepted norm over the years. Their speeches are peppered with words that often target castes and religions ('Spread of undignified terms into politics'; March 31). These leaders spew hate and hope that their speeches would divide and polarise people, and fuel violence. Some of the words they speak hurt as much as sticks and stones, and some others are seen as signalling by those seeking to manifest hate into real time. In fact, it is important to place such unparliamentary words on record, since history bears witness to such disparaging remarks. Politicians trading barbs at election

## Social media's negative impact



Two years of the Coronavirus pandemic have been pretty harsh on the lives of teenagers, and these have made their activities virtually dependent on social media. According to a recent study published in *Nature Communications*, the harmful effects of social media are particularly pronounced on girls between the ages of 11 and 13, and boys between 14 and 15 years. The more they are exposed to online apps such as Instagram, Tik Tok, WhatsApp, Facebook etc, the worse they are likely to feel about themselves the following year.

There is ample evidence to suggest the lethal effects of toxic social media leading to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem among children.

With the advent of modern gadgets, smartphones and internet penetration, mental health issues are alarmingly on the rise amongst teenagers. Recently, China passed an order allowing those under 18 years of age to play video games only for three hours a week. The US has called for research on the link between technology and the mental health of youth. These are urgent and pressing issues that need intervention of all sections of society: parents, teachers and media. The first step is to study the true mechanics and nature of the problem on a war footing. There has to be a perfect balance between internet and physical activities if we are to create and nurture a healthy and progressive society.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

time have evolved into a vicious stridency in public discourse that hinges on identity politics. In fact, the very first rule of the EC's Model Code of Conduct for political parties reads, "No party or candidate shall include in any activity which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes and communities, religious or linguistic." But 'identity' is the lowest hanging fruit for our politicians and it essentially hovers around religion, caste, birth and language. Communal rhetoric during elections revives the centuries-old schisms that democracy has been unable to heal.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

### GUARD AGAINST EXAM PAPER LEAKS

Sir — The post-pandemic examination period has started now, and the UP Board examinations are also part of the series. Despite the physical arrangements made by the Government and proper precautions by the anti-cheating squad, the cheaters could repeat the instances of

paper leaks of Class 12th Board exams. Taking immediate action, the authorities immediately booked 17 people, and exams were cancelled in 24 districts. The leak of the English Board examination is regretful and puts the role of the authorities under the cloud as a Government teacher was found guilty in this incident.

After two years of no Board exams, students returned to the Boards for the very first time after the COVID-19 pandemic. Online schools and online coaching of last year and physical Boards of this year, though difficult, were manageable for the students at secondary schools to return to normal. This kind of paper leaks and exam cancellation hurts innocent students as they try honestly and hard to write a good exam, but a section of cheaters spoils all their hard work. Authorities must keep a constant vigil so that such incidents are not repeated.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

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## SOUND BITE

We have a policy that even the last man in the queue gets Govt schemes' benefits.

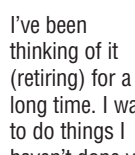


Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



Nato has never, ever, ever been as strong as it is today. Never.

US President — Joe Biden



I've been thinking of it (retiring) for a long time. I want to do things I haven't done yet.

Singer-actor — Lucky Ali



These hands, they've hit more golf balls than anyone else.

Golf legend — Gary Player

In a very short span of time, six of the 12 issues between Assam and Meghalaya have been settled.



Union Home Minister — Amit Shah





## FIRST COLUMN

### THE BIMSTEC FOCUS MUST BE SHARPER

India faces a tricky situation as it is the largest economy in the grouping



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

**B**IMSTEC is a complex acronym for the Bay of Bengal Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic cooperation among 7 countries in South and Southeast Asia. The length of the acronym apart, a rudderless leadership in the past from seven countries which constitute BIMSTEC has ensured that it never got the clout, that regional platforms like ASEAN have. BIMSTEC held its fifth summit in Sri Lanka this week. It as a platform for economic growth, prosperity and trade for the region was conceived to be a carve out from SAARC and ASEAN, given the apprehensions, many of the participating countries have with the two blocks. Five members of SAARC and two members of ASEAN form the seven countries which constitute BIMSTEC currently. In the 25 years of existence, the summit, in Sri Lanka for the first time, tried to provide an architectural framework for BIMSTEC. It has for the first time insti-



tutionalised the future roadmap, by agreeing to have yearly foreign affairs minister's meeting and summits every two years. The member-countries are home to nearly a quarter of the human population and have nearly \$4 trillion combined GDP. They have a huge potential for growth and large market potential, as has been evidenced by nearly doubling of Bangladesh and Nepal's GDP during the period BIMSTEC has been in existence. Sadly, BIMSTEC had no role to play in this growth story because unlike ASEAN, it does not have a free trade agreement amongst its members. One of the issues discussed in Colombo was a quick conclusion to a free trade agreement for bringing increased prosperity to citizens. However, the legacy challenges of mistrust amongst BIMSTEC partners and the rise of non-democratic forces in national politics (Myanmar) could stall the process. The political leadership addressing BIMSTEC cooperation have to realise that pushing a free trade agreement is going to be a domestic exercise, where their own political opponents would create roadblocks.

This is a tricky situation for India as it is the largest economy in the grouping and has a unique share of voice amongst the partners (without China or Pakistan presence). India is also not part of any regional economic cooperation framework such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This leaves India with the only choice of forging many bilateral trade and economic cooperation agreements with the regional players, leaving out potential access to large seamless free trade market. In this regard India needs to emulate the Indo-Pacific Economic Strategy being currently collated by President Joe Biden led US government, as a tool for increasing access and influence in the region. The nuanced contours of the US strategy are still under development however a broad statement of purpose, vision, goals and clear threats have been identified. India has always maintained a bipartisan, strategically nonaligned approach towards its foreign policy. However, defining a vision, mission and its proposed approach towards Indo Pacific region could help in achieving the targets and open up new inroads for regional cooperation. India needs regional partners such as BIMSTEC and ASEAN for its goal of achieving a \$5 trillion economy. These countries also form an influential axis in India's overall Indo-Pacific strategy, QUAD framework and current government's focus on neighbourhood first policy. China is a constant threat to the democratic sovereign countries in South Asia. It has used economic and military coercion to undermine the sovereign status of many nations in the Indo Pacific belt of Asia. The only bulwark against China for many of these smaller countries is an economically powerful, democratic India, which vouches for a rules-based global order. India will have to don the mantle of being the elder sister in BIMSTEC without being overtly assertive.

*(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)*

# Address root cause of train accidents

While focusing on safer coaches to limit fatalities, thorough investigations into accident causes and implementation of corrective measures mustn't be ignored



SUDHANSHU MANI

**R**eaders would recall that nine passengers died and nearly forty were injured following the derailment of several coaches of Up Bikaner-Guwahati Express on January 13 at Domohani in Mainaguri area of West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district. The derailment caused many of the twelve coaches which derailed, to capsize or climb over another coach. This accident had brought into focus once again, the issue of avoidable fatalities in an accident by switching over to a safer coach design on all faster services such that even if a derailment does occur, in spite of all the precautions and measures, the damage it causes to the affected coaches should be so controlled that it causes minimal casualties.

Indian Railways (IR) principally employs two types of coaches — the old ICF-type and the newer LHB-type. The latter coaches are designed with a coupler, which gets strongly interlocked with the coupler of the adjacent coach, preventing relative sideways and vertical movements of the coaches with respect to each other and, therefore, coaches do not climb or capsize, even if there is a derailment. The ICF-type coaches have no such restraining arrangement, causing them to mount each other or capsize individually when subjected to a thrust in case of a derailment. At the same time, the more recent Vande Bharat Train 18 type coaches are even safer with their semi-permanent type couplers, anti-climbing feature and safer structural designs. I had recommended in this column that ICF-type coaches should be scrapped in a greater haste and to increase the pace of manufacture of LHB- and Train-18- type coaches to replace them. It is possible, thanks to some measures taken by railway production units, particularly Integral Coach Factory since 2016, that IR can be geared to manufacture more than 9000 coaches per year. Once we replace the ICF coaches on faster services in a period of 3 to 4 years, the balance can be relegated to inferior services which can then complete their full useful life without putting lives of passengers to any significant danger of fatalities in case of an accident.

The coach production programme issued by IR has a plan for manufacturing 8429 coaches, falling short of the possible 9000 or more. Although it is not explicitly spelt out, it would help faster replacement of ICF coaches, and therefore, a good step towards improving safety. The pitfall is that this plan envisages 1200 Vande Bharat Train sets and another 52 Cargo-liner and freight EMU coaches whereas the actual achievement would be far less. Even if IR manages to manufacture around 500 against these 1252, it would not be a mean achievement, considering that not one coach of Vande Bharat coach has been built since their first turn-out in October 2018, more than three years back. It is strongly hoped that the shortfall of these 700-plus coaches would



EVEN COMPLEX PROBLEMS HAVE SIMPLE SOLUTIONS WHEREAS THIS SEEMED TO A SIMPLE PROBLEM WITH A SIMPLE SOLUTION; THE SOLUTION SOUGHT, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO BE A COMPLEX ONE, WITH UNNECESSARILY DUPLICITY BORNE OUT OF UNCLEAR INTENTIONS. THE RAILWAYS HAS MANAGED WELL TO KEEP ITS RECORD LARGELY ACCIDENT-FREE

*(The writer is a retired General Manager of Indian Railways and an independent rail consultant. The views expressed are personal.)*



be made up through manufacture of more LHB coaches by correcting the course in mid-year. This would ensure that the pace of replacement of ICF coaches is not vitiated too badly.

The safety record of IR has improved in recent years and the number of fatalities is much lower. Greater stress on upkeep of track and allied infrastructure has certainly helped. Due to this focus on trying to have more and more of safer coaches to limit the loss of life in case of a derailment, primacy of thorough investigation into cause of accidents and implementation of corrective measures should not be ignored due to any complacency.

The cause of the accident was reported as a traction motor of the locomotive falling down and causing the locomotive wheels to lift and derail followed by derailment of twelve trailing coaches; such an event is very rare and largely limited to a particular type of motor on electric locomotives. The traction motor is stoutly secured in the bogie and the accident indicated a serious manufacturing defect compounded by improper examination of the fitment of traction motor on the bogie during maintenance. Subsequent examination of data revealed that the culprit seems to be the nose stay lug of this motor and its weld failure has caused ten cases of motor getting detached in recent years whereas its indicated failures during checks number in hundreds.

This key aspect, whether the manufacturing alone or both design

and manufacturing need improvement, it is expected, would be a part of the findings of Commissioner of Rail Safety (CRS), who has been entrusted with the inquiry. Some aspects of the follow-up related to the accident in question are somewhat disturbing.

There have been some instructions which give the impression that some officers are trying to jump the gun and attempting to divert the issue. First, in a knee jerk reaction, a top Railway Board executive passed bizarre instructions immediately after the accident, calling out for Loco Pilots to check the condition of traction motor mounting while taking over charge and even during halts in the middle of a train-run, never mind that a routine check by a Loco Pilot can hardly detect a failure of fabrication or weld, and it unnecessarily stresses them out. There may be need to institute a one-time examination of this fitment on all locomotives of this series on a pit by maintenance staff but it is not a defect which is within the purview of a Loco Pilot to assay, particularly when he would be without the benefit of a locomotive standing on an inspection pit. A Loco Pilot, who carries the burden of safety of hundreds of lives when in-charge of a train should be freed from such impractical and disquieting duties.

After that came the news report of the CRS flagging railways' failure in ensuring mandatory safety inspection of locomotive of the ill-fated train. He observed that the locomotive in question was run-

ning continuously for 18,000 km after the last trip inspection whereas it should have undergone inspection after 4,500 km as per stipulations. It would appear that the trip inspection time interval has been kept at 4500 km as a matter of supreme caution by IR whereas modern locomotives, not today but for more than two decades, are good for working 30 to 40 thousand kilometres without any inspection. In fact, many locomotives on IR easily work for this range of distance without any checks and even if we assume that these passenger locomotives need closer examination, there can never be a case to examine their traction motor mounting every 4500 kilometres. Experts say that overdue schedule running of the locomotives, per se, cannot be the cause of an accident and our operations are such that overdue running is frequently unavoidable. The matter can certainly be taken up for systematic improvements but linking it with the derailment would only tend to obfuscate the real cause of this tragic event.

Even complex problems have simple solutions whereas this seemed to a simple problem with a simple solution; the solution sought, however, seems to be a complex one, with unnecessarily duplicity borne out of unclear intentions. IR has managed well to keep its record largely accident-free and such red herrings by certain executives may cause it to fritter away this advantage. This should not be allowed to happen.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE 'ROZGAR BUDGET' WILL SET A TREND, AND OTHER PARTIES WILL ALSO BE FORCED TO TALK ABOUT EMPLOYMENT. — DELHI CHIEF MINISTER ARVIND KEJRIWAL



THE AAP GOVERNMENT IS RUNNING AWAY FROM THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT... IT'S TRYING TO FOOL PEOPLE. — LEADER OF OPPOSITION RAMVIR SINGH BIDHURI

# Maj Bakshi checkmates the dragon

Painted on a sweeping canvas with broad strokes of the pen, he seamlessly integrates the complex world of military affairs, politics & international relations

**A**n explosive, mind blowing account of a single man's unbounded initiative to checkmate the Dragon...," so reads the blurb on the reverse jacket of Major Bakshi-The Dragon's Nemesis, by Sudip Talukdar, author, military analyst and journalist. The book, published by Garuda Prakashan, is an unusual yet gripping story in contemporary Indian fiction, focusing on very real dangers posed by our northern neighbour.



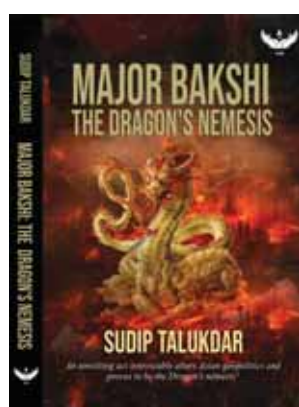
LOV VERMA

The narrative begins innocuously enough. Major Bakshi, a veteran of fifty counter terror operations and a recipient of Mahavir Chakra, is distressed by the 'rowdy' behaviour of some 'Bollywood celebs' he is hosting for a TV programme in a forward area. Not only do his polite requests to

*(The reviewer is a former Secretary, Government of India. The views expressed are personal.)*

maintain decorum fall on deaf ears, but his uniform is mocked as a 'joker's costume'. But when he is manhandled, an indignity that crosses all bounds of toleration, matters really get out of hand. He promptly marches the entire protesting team to the waiting transport and sends them away, unceremoniously.

Dumped into the most backward rural pocket of central India, dubbed as a 'black hole,' by a livid brigade commander, the infantry officer finds himself among a bunch of Army discards, doomed to a miserable existence. The Major, made of sterner stuff, rebounds from the colossal setback, turning the punishment posting into an opportunity. He goes about forging the demoralized group into one of the world's most feared guerrilla forces,



with a resolute will and grim determination. Notwithstanding daunting odds, he imparts cutting edge combat skills to the written-off soldiers and moulds them into warriors of steel, preparing them for the most dangerous and daring mission of their lives. One that is capa-

ble of inflicting terrible vengeance on an enemy like China! Is it his sharp strategic sense at play or just pure luck? Or even his connect with Shamanic Powers, from the world beyond. This is the author's second novel after Proxy War: The Counter Moves, which focused on terror networks from across the border and how the Army delivers a coup de grace.

Painted on a sweeping canvas with broad strokes of the pen, the book seamlessly integrates the complex world of history, military affairs, politics and international relations, into a gripping narrative that never loses sight of its goal, heading inexorably towards a shattering denouement.

Major Bakshi does have so many intriguing aspects to his

persona. The setback in love life and the ensuing trauma prompt him to take up the calling of arms. The master of tactics and ambush is not only a ruthless task master but also equally compassionate, often to a fault, who loves his men and seeks to help them in a thousand and one ways. He is also instrumental in eliminating dozens of the most dreaded terrorists, applying their own methods. The book has a real-life war veteran in a fictional role as a lieutenant general and army commander, who has been given the mandate to checkmate the aggressive Northern neighbour. He brings his formidable experience and expertise to bear on the undertaking. China has been bullying India with impunity, a fall-out of the policies being pursued in the post-

independence years. Successive political dispensations have fared no better, either behaving like passive spectators or witting before its military might, even though the Indian Army is prepared to give the Dragon a befitting reply, as borne out by events at Nathu La, Somdorong and lately at Galwan.

How the book came to be written makes for an interesting story. One day, just out of the blue, the publisher asked the author to write about China, not long after his debut novel Proxy War-The Counter Moves, appeared on the bookshelves. Being totally clueless and unprepared, he somehow racked his brains for ideas, completing the task in seven short months. He wove a plot around whatever knowledge he had acquired about geopolitics,

strategic matters, military life, officers and men who had served with his father in war and peace and lastly the urge to punish the Northern neighbour.

Lt Gen PG Kamath, former Commandant of Army War College and strategic affairs analyst, observes: "The book has in places discussion that is taking place among the veterans and planners. It is so realistic that it well could be held in the decision-making process in the corridors of power. The author appears to be well informed in geo-strategy and has a clear idea of power-play indulged by countries. The shenanigans of different countries and the concept of proxy war have been abundantly and exquisitely brought out in the book."



# US, Filipino forces hold combat drills on beach facing China

AP ■ CLAVERIA

With assault weapons ready, US and Filipino marines sprang from amphibious vehicles and transport helicopters to defend an island from potential aggressors in a war exercise and show of American firepower staged on Thursday in the northern Philippines.

The exercise - held in far-flung Claveria town across the sea from China and Taiwan - fits into a strategy unveiled in February by the Biden administration to considerably broaden US engagement in the Indo-Pacific region by strengthening a web of security alliances and partnerships, with an emphasis on addressing China's growing influence and ambitions.

Watched by invited journalists, the mock combat ended with the allied forces successfully securing the island before it could be seized by invaders in a clear warning to would-be aggressors in a region with multiple trouble spots.

"We should indeed improve our preparation for external aggression," said Philippine regional military commander Maj. Gen. Lawrence Mina, who spoke with reporters as the marines took combat positions on the sandy beach and a narrow trench under the scorching summer heat.

"It's high time because we never know if we'll get embroiled in the unfolding events that we're hearing in the international scene," he said. "At least we're ready."

The beach landing and coastal defense maneuvers were part of one of the largest combat exercises in years between the longtime treaty allies that began Monday and would include live-fire drills, aircraft assaults, urban warfare and civic projects mostly in northern and the western Philippines, which faces the disputed South China Sea.

Col. Timothy Brady Jr., who heads the US 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment, said he was "very pleased" with the outcome of the mock beach maneuvers, which started in the nearby coastal town of Aparri.

"Certainly, the objective of what we're doing is demonstrating the strength of the alliance as well as the commitment to



regional security," Brady said.

Called Balikatan - Tagalog for shoulder-to-shoulder - the annual exercises will run up to April 8 with nearly 9,000 navy, marines, air force and army troops, including 5,100 American military personnel, to strengthen their joint fighting capabilities and readiness "for real-world challenges," according to US and Philippine military officials.

First staged in 1991, the Balikatan exercises are anchored on the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, which commits the United States and the Philippines to come to each other's aid in case of an attack.

When President Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016, he threatened to scale back US military activities in the country as he nurtured closer ties with China and Russia but walked back on many of his threats, including a move to abrogate a defense pact that would have restricted American forces from largescale combat exercises in the country.

China's "coercion and aggression spans the globe, but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific," the strategy paper said, citing Beijing's "economic coercion" of Australia, the intensifying pressure on Taiwan, bullying of neighbours in the East

and South China seas and the conflict along the Line of Actual Control with India. "Integrated deterrence will be the cornerstone of our approach," the strategy paper said.

"We will more tightly integrate our efforts across warfighting domains and the spectrum of conflict to ensure that the United States, alongside our allies and partners, can dissuade or defeat aggression in any form or domain."

Last week, US Indo-Pacific commander Adm. John C. Aquilino said China has fully militarised at least three of several islands it built in the South China Sea, arming them with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment, and military aircraft in an increasingly aggressive move that threatens all nations operating in the disputed waters.

"I think over the past 20 years we've witnessed the largest military buildup since World War II by the PRC," Aquilino, using the initials of China's formal name, told The Associated Press in an interview on board a US Navy reconnaissance aircraft that flew near Chinese-held outposts in the South China Sea's Spratly archipelago, one of the most hotly contested regions in the world.

# 7 hurt in Arkansas tornado as storms move into Deep South

AP ■ ARKANSAS

Severe storms that included at least two confirmed tornadoes injured several people on Wednesday, damaged homes and businesses and downed power lines in Mississippi and Tennessee after they spread damage in Arkansas, Missouri and Texas overnight before moving to the Deep South.

No deaths had been reported from the storms as of Wednesday evening, officials said. About 185,000 customers were without electricity Thursday morning in the wake of the storm along a band of states: Mississippi and Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio and Michigan, according to power outage.us, which tracks utilities. But widespread damage was reported in the Jackson, Tennessee, area as a tornado warning was in effect.

"Significant damage" occurred to a nursing home near Jackson-Madison County General Hospital and the Madison County Sheriff's Office in Jackson, said Madison County Emergency Management Director Jason Moore.

In Nashville, Tennessee, panelling fell five stories from the side of a downtown hotel Wednesday evening and onto a roof of a building below.

The fire department warned the debris could become airborne as high winds continued, and some hotel guests were moved to other parts of the building due to concerns that the roof would become unstable. No injuries



were immediately associated with the collapse.

A warehouse roof collapsed as the storms moved through Southaven, Mississippi, near Memphis, police said. The building had been evacuated and no injuries were reported.

The Mississippi Senate suspended its work as weather sirens blared during a tornado watch in downtown Jackson. Some employees took shelter in the Capitol basement.

Rander P. Adams said his and his wife, Janice Delores Adams, were in their home near downtown Jackson when severe weather blew through during a tornado warning Wednesday afternoon. He said their lights flashed and they heard a loud whistling noise.

As his wife tried to open their front door, a large window exploded a few feet from her.

"The glass broke just as if someone threw a brick through it," he said. "I advised her then, Let's go to the back of the house." Adams said the storm toppled trees in a nearby park, and a large tree across the street from their house split in half. "We were blessed," he said.

"Instead of falling toward the house, it fell the other way."

# China, Solomons ink draft of controversial security pact

AP ■ BEIJING

China and the Solomon Islands have signed a draft version of a security pact that could see Chinese police and other forces take up duties in the Pacific Island nation, drawing concerns from traditional partners New Zealand, Australia and the United States. The Solomon Islands government on Thursday said the draft agreement had been initiated by representatives of the two sides and will now "be cleaned up and await signatures of the two countries' foreign ministers."

The agreement aims to "respond to Solomon Islands' soft and hard domestic threats."

Solomon Islands will continue to roll out the implementation of its national security strategy and uphold its foreign policy of Friends to all and enemies to none," a government news release said.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare on Tuesday rejected concerns that regional safety would be jeopardized by the treaty.

Sogavare called such concerns "utter nonsense," adding that "I find it very insulting... To be branded as unfit to manage our sovereign affairs."

China has likewise dismissed questions about the agreement.

In its statement, the Solomon Islands said it would continue to "work with all partners in providing a safe and secure nation where all people are able to co-exist peacefully." It thanked Australia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Fiji for committing personnel to safeguard security on the islands.

Under the terms of the

draft agreement, China could send police, military personnel and other armed forces to the Solomon Islands "to assist in maintaining social order" and for a variety of other reasons. It could also send warships to the islands for stopovers and to replenish supplies, leading to speculation about the possibility of China establishing a naval base on the islands.

Deepening concerns, the draft agreement stipulates that China would need to sign off on any information that is released about joint security arrangements, including at media briefings.

The Solomon Islands, home to about 700,000 people, switched its diplomatic allegiance from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019 - a contributing factor to riots in November last year between residents of different islands within the country.

Australian police have been in the capital, Honiara, maintaining peace since then under a bilateral security treaty established in 2017. It provides a legal basis for the rapid deployment of Australian police, troops and associated civilians in the event of a major security challenge. Chinese police are already on the islands conducting a training mission.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described the possibility of Chinese military forces stationed on the Solomon Islands as "the potential militarisation of the region." Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said reports of the pact were "a reminder of the constant pressure and threats that present in our region to our own national security."

# Nepal Min supports demand to declare country Hindu State

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

A senior minister in the Nepal government on Thursday extended his support to a demand to declare Nepal a Hindu State, saying if the majority of the population are in favour, it can be done through a referendum.

Minister for Tourism and Culture Prem Ale, addressing the opening of the two-day Executive Council meeting of the World Hindu Federation in Kathmandu, said the demand to declare Nepal a Hindu state can be considered and if such demand comes he "will play a constructive role".

Minister Ale was responding to the demand raised by the World Hindu Federation here during the programme. More than 150 representatives from 12 countries, including Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka,



Malaysia, United States, Germany and UK, are attending the two-day Executive Council Meeting. "As the present five-party coalition government enjoys close to two third majority in Parliament, the demand to declare Nepal a Hindu state can be put into referendum," he pointed out.

"Although our Constitution has declared the country as a secular state, if the majority of the population are in favour of a Hindu state, then why not declare Nepal a Hindu

state through referendum," he asked?

Nepal was declared a secular state in 2008 after the success of the people's movement of 2006 that saw the abolition of monarchy. Hinduism is the largest religion of Nepal. During the programme, World Hindu Federation International President Ajay Singh demanded that Nepal be declared a Hindu state as the country is inhabited by a huge majority of Hindu population.

"I was surprised to learn that the erstwhile Hindu state Nepal was suddenly declared as a secular one," he pointed out.

"If some countries can be declared as Islamic states and still adopt democratic system and other countries can be declared as Christian states and still adopt democratic system, then why not Nepal be declared as a Hindu democratic country?" he questioned.

# US says no letter sent to Pak

## 'Rejects charges of involvement in no-confidence motion against PTI Govt'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/WASHINGTON

The US has asserted that it did not send any letter to Pakistan on the current political situation in the country as it sought to refute allegations of America's involvement in the no-confidence motion against the Imran Khan-led government, according to a media report on Thursday.

Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday effectively lost majority in Parliament after Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), a key partner of the ruling coalition, joined the ranks of the Opposition, which had tabled a no-confidence motion against his government in the National Assembly. Khan has been claiming that the Opposition's no-confidence

motion against him was the result of a "foreign conspiracy" because of his external policy and funds were being channelled from abroad to oust him from power.

On Wednesday, the PTI-led government confirmed that its allegation about a foreign conspiracy against the prime minister was based on a diplomatic cable received from one of the country's missions abroad. The government initially offered to share the letter with the chief justice of Pakistan, but later the prime minister also briefed his cabinet members about the contents of the letter, the Dawn newspaper reported.

A group of journalists were then provided with minutes of the cabinet meeting at their interaction with the prime minister.

# Concerned China asks all parties in Pak to stay united over development

PTI ■ BEIJING

China, Pakistan's all-weather ally on Thursday reacted guardedly to the potential defeat of Prime Minister Imran Khan's government in Parliament, urging all political parties in the country to stay united in the interest of stability and development. "China is committed to non-interference policy," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here while replying to a question about whether Beijing is concerned that any change of leadership in Pakistan could impact its close strategic ties with Pakistan.

"As an all-weather strategic cooperative partner, friendly neighbour of Pakistan, China sincerely hopes that all parties

in Pakistan will stay united and uphold the major interest of development and stability," Wang Wenbin added.

Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Khan on Wednesday effectively lost majority in Parliament after Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), a key partner of the ruling coalition, joined the ranks of the Opposition, which had tabled a no-confidence motion against his government in the National Assembly.

Khan has been claiming that the Opposition's no-confidence motion against him was the result of a "foreign conspiracy" because of his external policy and funds were being channelled from abroad to oust him from power.

As political crisis gripped

Pakistan, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told visiting Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a close confidant of Prime Minister Khan that Beijing has agreed to rollover USD 4.2 billion Pakistan debt due to be paid this week. Qureshi is currently visiting China to attend the Neighbourhood Countries Foreign Ministers conference on Afghanistan.

"I am immensely happy to share that the Chinese FM has given a nod of approval on the rollover of commercial loan as well," Qureshi was quoted as saying by Pakistan daily Dawn.

The USD 4.2 billion debt, which was maturing this week, has been rolled over providing major financial relief to Pakistan, the daily reported.

# Khashoggi murder: Prosecutor seeks end to trial in Turkey



AP ■ ANKARA

The prosecutor in the case against 26 Saudi nationals charged in the slaying of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi made a surprise request Thursday that their trial in absentia be suspended and the case be transferred to Saudi Arabia.

The panel of judges made no ruling on the prosecutor's request but decided that a letter should be sent to Turkey's Justice Ministry seeking its opinion on the possible transfer of the file to the Saudi judicial authorities, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported. Trial was adjourned until April 7.

The private DHA news agency reported that the prosecutor told the court that in a letter dated March 13, the Saudi chief public prosecutor's office requested that the proceedings in Turkey be transferred to the Kingdom and that international warrants issued by Ankara against the defendants be lifted.

the prosecutor said that because the arrest warrants cannot be executed and defense statements cannot be taken, the case would remain inconclusive in Turkey.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice is hereby given to the General public that Mr. Hitesh Chopra S/o. Mr. Purduman Krishan Chopra is the owner of A Built Up Ground Floor of House No. O-12-A, Out of Kharsa No. 61, Land Measuring area 50 Sq. yds. Situated in the Area of Village Nanglajabo, Abadi Known as New Mahaur Nagar, New Delhi. vide registered relinquishment deed dated 23.09.2021. All persons are hereby informed that Mr. Yogendra Shukla & Mr. Adalat Prasad Shukla are purchasing this property from Mr. Hitesh Chopra S/o. Mr. Purduman Krishan Chopra vide a registered Sale Deed & has approached Fullerton India Home Finance Company Ltd to take a Loan for the same. If anybody has any charge/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

Mrs. Prasoon Lata, Advocate  
SG Associates (Law Firm)  
Unit No 7, Basement, Plot No C 78,  
Sector 2, Noida, UP 201301.  
E-MAIL: sgassociatespl@gmail.com,  
Ph: 7011172784, 8130200837

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

**ICICI Bank** Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset / Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Deepesh Srivastav, Uddesh Srivastav, Poonam Srivastava, House No. 227, Patparganj, Village Mayur Vihar Phase 1, Delhi, A/c No. LBLUC00004651250	House Built Over Plot No. B-17A, Kharsa No. 386 Minjumla, Gram Buhar, Ward Haiderganj, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	07/01/2022 Rs. 22,26,343/-	08/09/2021

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : April 01, 2022  
Place: Delhi/NCR  
Authorized Officer  
ICICI Bank Limited

**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida-201301 (U.P.)  
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

**E-TENDER NOTICE**

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: [www.noidaauthorityonline.com](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.com) & <http://letender.up.nic.in> Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

**A) Fresh- Tender Work:**

S. No.	JOB NO.	NAME OF THE WORK	Amount (Rs. Lacs)
1.	63/CGM/Sr.M(E&M)-III/2021-22	Annual Maintenance of Park light in different parks in sector-46 & 47, Noida	36.23
2.	64/CGM/Sr.M(E&M)-III/2021-22	Internal Electrification of newly constructed community centre in sector-51, Noida.	40.14

The above tenders can be uploaded by date 18.04.2022 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 19.04.2022 at 11.00 AM.

Principal General Manager  
NOIDA

**CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA**

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
(Moradabad Division)  
Notice Inviting E-Tenders

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager/Freight Services, Moradabad Division, Northern Railway invites E-Tenders from Registered Lease Holders of Moradabad Division registered under the Modified Comprehensive Modified Lease Policy 2014 (CPLP-2014) in the appropriate category, for the contract of Long term leasing of SLR/SLRD Space in the following trains (Regular train as well as the corresponding Special train no. mentioned against it) originating from various stations over Moradabad Division, for a period of 5 years. The invited tenders shall be governed by the Modified CPLP-2014, read with its amendments issued by Railway Board from time to time. The lease shall be valid for a period of five years. One packet open tenders are invited through E-Tendering i.e. [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) for following trains:-

S. N.	Regular Train No.	Special Train No.	Originating Station	Terminating Station	SLR capacity (in Ton)	Compartments (SLR Space) to be leased	Scale rate of Train	Frequency / No. of Days of run in a week	Reserve price per compartment (in Rs.) per trip	EMD (in Rupees) per Compartment
1	14631	14631	DDN	ASR	4	F-I, F-II, R-I	P	Daily-07	6133.2	100000
2	14120	14120	DDN	KGM	3.9	F-I	P	Tue, Thu, Sat	4547.79	100000
3	54342	04374	DDN	SRE	4	F-I, F-II, R-I	P	Daily	2687.6	100000
4	54077	04303	BE	DLI	4	F-I, F-II, R-I	P	Daily	3937.6	100000
5	54352	04376	BE	ALJN	4	F-I, F-II, R-I	S	Daily	1512	100000
6	54311	04365	BE	MB	4	F-I, F-II, R-I	S	Daily	1226.8	100000
7	14609	14609	RKSH	SVDK	3.9	F-I	P	Daily	7571.46	100000
8	14887	14887	RKSH	BME	4	F-I, F-II, R-I	R	Daily	19230.8	100000
9	12037	12037	KTW	DLI	3.9	F-I	P	Daily	3648.84	100000
10	19020	19020	HW	BDS	4	F-I	R	Only Monday	24528	100000
11	55303	05363	MB	KPV	4	F-I	P	Daily	2578	100000
12	55321	05365	MB	RMR	4	F-I	P	Daily	1992.4	100000
13	55309	05367	MB	RMR	4	F-I	P	Daily	1992.4	100000
14	54312	04366	MB	BE	4	F-I	P	Daily	2453.2	100000
15	54383	04333	GJL	NBD	4	F-I	P	Daily	2344	100000
16	54392	04394	GJL	ALJN	4	F-I	P	Daily	3359.6	100000
17	18478	18478	YNRK	PURI	4	F-I	R	Daily	32180	100000
18	14230	14230	YNRK	PYGS	4	F-I, F-II, R-I	P	Mon, Wed, Fri	8477.20	100000

Each Compartment of SLR unit, with capacity of 3.9/4 tonnes will be treated as an individual tender. The contract will be valid interchangeably for both train numbers i.e. Regular train no. and Special train no. (Running in lieu of regular train). Any bidder desirous of submitting a tender will need to submit separate e-tender for each compartment mentioned in the above list, and will accordingly have to pay tender cost and EMD for participating in the tenders. Cost of tender document for each compartment/SLR space is Rs. 1,180/- and EMD for each Compartment is Rs. 1 Lac per compartment/SLR space. Tenders are invited up to 14:00 hrs. of 28.04.2022, which will be opened on the same day.

Serving Customers With A Smile

698/2022



# Mykolaiv death toll touches 20



AP ■ KYIV

The Ukrainian emergency services say the death toll after a Russian missile strike Tuesday on the regional government headquarters in the southern city of Mykolaiv has risen to 20.

The emergency services said rescuers had now found 19 bodies in the ruins since the strike devastated the government building Tuesday morning. One other person died in hospital. The regional governor accused Russia of waiting until people arrived for work before striking the building.

Emergency services said they are still working at the scene. In other development of the day, Greenpeace says its activists from the Nordic countries and Russia have blocked the transfer of Russian oil

between two large tankers sailing in northern Denmark.

Greenpeace said swimmers and activists in kayaks and boats from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia placed themselves between the supertankers to block the transfer of 100,000 tonnes of Russian oil in waters in northern Denmark.

The environmental organization called for an embargo of Russian fuels to stop the funding of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

It said in a statement Thursday that "every time Russian oil or gas are purchased, (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war chest grows, and so far at least 299 supertankers with fossil fuels have left Russia since the start of the war in Ukraine."

Despite some countries

declaring a ban on the arrival of Russian vessels to their ports, Russian coal, oil and gas is still arriving via ships registered in other countries, Greenpeace said.

Rome, Italian Premier Mario Draghi says Europe is pushing for a cap on gas prices with Russia because its payments are financing the war in Ukraine.

Draghi told foreign reporters Thursday that the prices that Europe is paying are out of line with the global market. "We, Germany and Italy, along with other countries that are importers of gas, coal, grains, corn ... Are financing the war. There is no doubt," Draghi said.

"For this reason, Italy along with other countries are pushing for a cap on the price of gas. There is no substantial reason that the price of gas is so high for Europeans."

# Convoy heads to Mariupol to attempt evacuation

AP ■ KYIV

A convoy of buses headed to Mariupol on Thursday in another attempt to evacuate people from the besieged port city, while Russia pressed its attacks in several parts of Ukraine ahead of a planned new round of talks aimed at ending the fighting.

After the Russian military agreed to a limited cease-fire in the area, the Red Cross said its teams were travelling to Mariupol with relief and medical supplies and hoped to help pull civilians out of the beleaguered city on Friday.

Previous attempts at establishing a similar humanitarian corridor have fallen apart.

Russian forces, meanwhile, shelled suburbs of the capital that Ukraine recently took control of, a regional official said. New attacks in the area where Moscow had promised to de-escalate further undermined hopes of a resolution to end the war on the eve of a new round of talks.

Food, water and medical supplies have all run low during a weeklong blockade and bombardment of the city.

Civilians who have managed to leave have typically done so using private cars, but the number of drivable vehicles left in the city has also dwindled and fuel stocks are low.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which is helping run the evacuation, said its teams have already left for Mariupol.

"It's desperately important that this operation takes place," the Red Cross said in a statement. "The lives of tens of thousands of people in Mariupol depend on it."

As the new evacuation attempt was announced, evidence emerged that a Red Cross warehouse in the city had been struck earlier this month amid intense Russian shelling of the area.

In satellite pictures from Planet Labs PBC, holes can be seen in the warehouse's roof, along with a painted red cross on a white background.

The aid organisation said no staff have been at the site since March 15.

Talks between Ukraine and Russia were set to resume Friday by video, according to the head of the Ukrainian delegation, David Arakhamia, six weeks into a bloody war that has seen thousands die and a staggering 4 million Ukrainians flee the country. But there seemed little faith that the two sides would resolve the conflict soon, particularly after the Russian military's about-face and its most recent attacks.

# UK imposes 14 new sanctions on Russian 'propagandists'

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government announced on Thursday 14 new sanctions on Russian propagandists and State media, who it said spread lies and deceit about Russian President Vladimir Putin's "illegal invasion" of Ukraine.

The latest sanctions list includes Sergey Brilev, described as a famous TV anchor on Russia state-owned media Rossiya and propagandist for Putin. Having previously lived in the UK, Brilev will no longer be able to access any of his UK assets or continue business deals.

The UK is also directly sanctioning State media organisations, targeting the Kremlin funded TV-Novosti who own RT, formerly Russia



Today, and Rossiya Segodnya who control news agency Sputnik.

"Putin's war on Ukraine is based on a torrent of lies. Britain has helped lead the world in exposing Kremlin disinformation, and this latest batch of sanctions hits the shameless propagandists who push out Putin's fake news and narratives," said UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, who is in India on Thursday for talks.

"We will keep on going with more sanctions to ramp up the pressure on Russia and ensure Putin loses in Ukraine. Nothing and no one is off the table," she said.

Following UK media watchdog Ofcom's revocation of RT's broadcasting licence recently, the latest set of sanctions are aimed at ensuring the channel will not be able to find its way back on UK televisions, and will prevent companies and individuals operating in the UK from doing business with Russian state propaganda vehicles RT and Sputnik, and key figures in those organisations.

The UK government said "disinformation is part of the Kremlin playbook and is used by Putin's regime to obscure the truth of his unjust invasion."

# Putin's war in Ukraine strategic blunder, says White House



PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine has been a "strategic blunder" that has weakened Russia and left it "increasingly isolated" on the world stage, according to the White House.

At a press conference on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Kate Bedingfield said the US has

information that Putin felt misled by the Russian military, which has resulted in persistent tension between the president and his military leadership.

"We believe that Putin is being misinformed by his advisors about how badly the Russian military is performing and how the Russian economy is being crippled by sanctions because his senior advisors are too afraid to tell him the truth," she said.

"So, it is increasingly clear that Putin's war has been a strategic blunder that has left Russia weaker over the long term, and increasingly isolated on the world stage," she said.

Bedingfield said the Russian leadership made an aggressive push toward Kyiv at the beginning of the invasion, but is now publicly trying

to redefine the goals of their invasion to be different than they were at the outset. When asked about some declassified American intelligence information that Putin had bad information from his military, she replied: "I think putting forward this information simply contributes to a sense that this has been a strategic error for them."

"Again, I'm not going to characterise what they are thinking. I'm certainly not going to characterise how they may or may not use this information to make decisions. That's not my place. But I do think that making this information public contributes to an understanding that this has been a strategic failure for Russia," the US official said.

# Kremlin: US officials don't understand Putin

AP ■ MOSCOW

The Kremlin has expressed "regret" and "concern" over US officials' reports that the Russian president is being misinformed by advisers about his military's performance in Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Thursday that "neither the State Department nor the Pentagon possess the real information about what is happening in the Kremlin."

"They simply don't understand what's going on in the Kremlin, they don't understand President Putin, they don't understand the mechanism of decision-making, they don't understand the way we work," Peskov said.

"It is not just regrettable, it elicits concern, because this complete lack of understanding leads to erroneous decisions, tragic decisions that could have very bad consequences," he added.

US intelligence officials said Putin is being misinformed by advisers about his military's poor performance in Ukraine, according to the White House. The advisers are scared to tell him the truth, the intel says.

White House communications director Kate Bedingfield said Wednesday the US believes Putin was being misled not only about his military's performance but also "how the Russian economy is being crippled by sanctions because, again, his senior advisers are too afraid to tell him the truth."

# Zelenskyy: More aid needed to resist Russians



AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked the White House for pledging an additional \$500 million in direct aid, but said he was open with US President Biden about Ukraine needing more to resist the Russian invasion.

"If we really are fighting for freedom and in defense of democracy together, then we have a right to demand help in this difficult turning point," Zelenskyy said in his nighttime video address to the nation Wednesday. "Tanks, aircraft, artillery systems. Freedom should be armed no worse than tyranny."

Prior to Wednesday's announcement of \$500 million in aid, the Biden administration had sent Ukraine about \$2 billion in humanitarian and security assistance since the start of the war last month. That's all part of the \$13.6 billion that Congress approved earlier this month for Ukraine as part of a broader spending bill.

Zelenskyy said the negotiations with Russia were continuing but for now, they were

only "words without specifics."

About the supposed withdrawal of Russian forces from Kyiv and Chernihiv, Zelenskyy said: "We know that this is not a withdrawal but the consequences of being driven out. But we also are seeing that Russia is now concentrating its forces for new strikes on Donbas and we are preparing for this."

Meanwhile, as the United States prepares to accept up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees following Russia's invasion of their country, existing communities in cities like Sacramento and Seattle are already mobilizing to provide food, shelter and support to those fleeing the war.

The federal government hasn't said when the formal resettlement process will begin, but Ukrainian groups in the U.S. are already providing support to people entering the country through other channels, including on visas that will eventually expire or by flying to Mexico and crossing over the border.

"No refugee is waiting for you to be ready for them," said Eduard Kislyanka, senior pastor at the House of Bread

church near Sacramento, which has been sending teams of people to Poland and

preparing dozens of its member families to house people arriving in California.

**UJVN Limited**  
H.O.: "UJWAL", Maharani Bagh, G.M.S. Road, Dehradun-248006  
Telephones: 0135-2763898, Fax: 0135-2763598  
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvn.com

Letter No: 110 Date: 31/03/2022

**e-short term Tender Notice**

Office of the Executive Engineer (E&M-II LWR), Vaysi Project, Dakpathar, UJVN Ltd. invites online bid from interested party's Brief summary of tender is given below

**NIT No: 01/EE(E&M-II LWR)/VP/2022-23**

**Name of work:** - Hiring of Tractor & Hydraulic trolley with driver for shifting of trash at Vyasi Project Dam site, Juddo, Vikasnagar.

**Estimated cost:** Rs. 21,23,078.00 (GST Extra)

**Date of Availability of bid document:** 01.04.2022 from 16:00 Hrs on website

**Last date for submission of :** 15.04.2022 upto 17:00 Hrs

**bids on website**

For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal "http://uktenders.gov.in"

**Executive Engineer (E&M-II LWR)**

"AVOID WASTEFUL USE OF ELECTRICITY"

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Be it Known to public at large that my client **AMRIT PAL SINGH S/o Balwant Singh R/o D-146, Flat No. 103, F/F, Front Side Sai Aangan Bharat Vihar, N.S.I.T, Dwarka, South West Delhi, Delhi-110078**, have disowned his son **HARJEET SINGH S/o Shri Armit Pal Singh** from all his moveable and immovable estate. My client and his estate shall not be responsible in any manner for any act/ deed done by his son in any person dealing with him shall deal at his/her own risk & cost thereof and further shall be dealt with as per the law **AMIT BATRA (Advocate)** 26B1, Desh Bandhu Gupta Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005, Contact No: 988066199

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

My client, Home Plus Finance Pvt. Ltd., D-28/29, Najafgarh Road, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi is in the process of advancing a loan to Mrs. Rita Devi & Mr. Sukhnath Ray, against mortgage of Property No. J-22, (25 sq. yds.), part of Kharsa No. 142 & 143, Village Gonda Gujran Khadar, Block-J, Gali No. 2, Kartar Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi.

Mrs. Rita Devi has represented that she is the sole owner in possession of the said property on the basis of General Power of Attorney, Agreement to Sell & Will dated 03.02.2021 having purchased the same from Mr. Asnok Tripathi and she is executing the Sale Deed of same property in favor of her husband Mr. Sukhnath Ray. If anybody, person, body corporate has any right, lien or claim whatsoever on the said Property or objection to its mortgage, then he/she/it may contact the undersigned with documentary proof of claim within 15 days of publication of this notice, otherwise it shall be deemed that either there are no claims or the same have been waived off. No claim shall be entertained thereafter and my client shall proceed to advance the loan by mortgaging the said property.

**Vishal Chopra, Advocate**  
NARANG & Associates  
D-28, Jangpura Extension,  
New Delhi-110014.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mr. Sanjay Duggal & Mr. Rajeev Duggal are claiming owners of Property bearing No. A-210, area measuring 122.35 sq. Mts. Situated in Residential Colony Sector 7, TIA, Surya Nagar, Ghazabad, Tehsil & District Ghazabad (the said property) after demise of their parents late Mr. Tink Raj Duggal & Mrs. Raj Duggal as legal heirs as per SHC, who was owners of the said property by virtue of Freehold deed dated 21.05.2008, registration No. 13624. All persons including all other legal heirs are hereby informed that Mr. Sanjay Duggal & Mr. Rajeev Duggal want Sell Entire Ground Floor of the said property to Mr. Harneet Singh who is taking home loan from ICICI Bank Ltd. for purchase of the Ground floor of the said property, if anybody has any objection/s on the ownership / Sale & Mortgage, litigation and any kind of objections, kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

**Kumar & Associates (Advocates & Consultants)**  
206, 3rd Floor, 21, Shweta Plaza, New Rohtak, N. Delhi-13  
Ph. 011-41112927-28, kumarassociates.advocates@gmail.com

**NOTICE**  
**Form No. INC - 26**

Before the Regional Director, Northern Region, New Delhi

In the matter of the Companies Act, 2013, Section 13(4) of Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 30(6) (a) of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014.

In the matter of Mansi Marketers Private Limited having its registered office at D-279, Nirman Vihar, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi East - 110 092, CIN: U74130DL1996PTC078913 - Petitioner

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the company proposes to make application to the Central Government under section 13 of the Companies Act, 2013 seeking confirmation of alteration of the Memorandum of Association of the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Extra ordinary General Meeting held on 31/03/2022 to enable the company to change its Registered office from "National Capital Territory of Delhi" to "State of Uttar Pradesh". Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the company may deliver or cause to be delivered or send by registered post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and grounds of opposition to the Regional Director, B-2 Wing, 2nd Floor, Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, New Delhi - 110003 within Fourteen days from the date of publication of this notice with a copy to the applicant company at its registered office at D-279, Nirman Vihar, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi East - 110092.

For and on behalf of Mansi Marketers Private Limited  
**Anupama Sharma**  
Director - DIN :00123890

Place : Delhi  
Date : 31/03/2022

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to inform all concerned that Mrs. Harjeet Kaur Narula W/o Late Sh Mohinder Singh Narula & Anuradha Narula W/o Sh. Avinash Singh Narula R/o B-148, Sector-31, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, (U.P.) who is the joint allottee of property No. Plot No. 148, Block-B, Sector -31, Noida (U.P.) Harjeet Kaur Narula passed away on 29/12/2020. Her Registered Will was executed in favour of Sh. Avinash Singh Narula S/o Late Sh Mohinder Singh Narula R/o B-148, Sector-31, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, (U.P.) which is registered in Sub Registrar-V, Delhi/New Delhi dated 07/01/2009. It is therefore informed to all concerned that in place of Mrs. Harjeet Kaur Narula W/o Late Sh Mohinder Singh Narula in the said Property No. Plot No. 148, Block-B, Sector-31, Noida (U.P.) the name of Mr. Avinash Singh Narula S/o Late Sh Mohinder Singh Narula R/o B-148, Sector-31, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, (U.P.) is going to be substituted. If any person has/ have any objection he/she may file his/her objection alongwith sufficient proof/ evidence in the Residential Department of the Noida Authority within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

**Avinash Singh Narula**

**सार्वजनिक सूचना**

ग्रेट नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण क्षेत्र के अन्तर्गत M/s Rajhans Infratech Pvt.Ltd. के भूखण्ड संख्या-GH-088 सेक्टर-01 ग्रेट नोएडा पर दिनांक 29.08.2018 को पुनरीक्षित मानचित्र स्वीकृति प्रदान की गयी थी। तदनुसार बिल्टड द्वारा जून पुनरीक्षित मानचित्र स्वीकृति (Revised Sanction) हेतु दिनांक 29.11.2021 को ऑन-लाईन के माध्यम से आवेदन किया गया है, जिसका आवेदन संख्या - SCR-12312 है। जिसमें पूर्व स्वीकृत भवन मानचित्र के डिजाइन व अन्य कतिपय संशोधन किया जा रहा है। अतः प्रत्येक आवेदियों द्वारा अपनी consent दी गई है या नहीं के सम्बन्ध में अपार्टमेंट और अपनी आपत्ति दर्ज करवा सकते हैं। इस सम्बन्ध में बिल्टड द्वारा प्रस्तुत संशोधित declarations एवं मानचित्र का परीक्षण किसी भी कार्यदिन में सुबह 9:30 से सांय 6:00 बजे के मध्य नियोजन विभाग के displayed में नक्शे में किया जा सकता है। मानचित्रों में उपरो अपार्टमेंट एक्ट-2010 के प्राविधानों के अन्तर्गत के प्रस्तावित संशोधन की घोषणा के सम्बन्ध में अपार्टमेंट स्वामियों / संघ को नोटिस जारी करने के 30 दिन के अन्दर आपत्तियाँ आमंत्रित की जाती है।

अतः उपरोक्त के निवृत्तार्थ अपनी आपत्तियाँ लिखित रूप से अपने आवेदन पर, नाम, पता एवं दूरभाष नम्बर के साथ कार्यालय समय व कार्यादिन में ग्रेट नोएडा प्राधिकरण के मुख्य प्रशासनिक कार्यालय, भूखण्ड संख्या- 1 नॉलेन पार्क- 04, ग्रेट नोएडा में स्थित वरिष्ठ प्रबन्धक (बास्टुड) विभाग में निर्धारित अवधि अर्थात सूचना प्रकाशित होने के 30 दिवसों में प्राप्त करायी जा सकती है।

महाप्रबन्धक (निर्णय/बास्टुड)  
ग्रेट नोएडा प्राधिकरण

**SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE**

**ICICI Bank** Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

**Whereas**

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand/ Notice/ Amount in Demand (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Rupam Khare/ Shalini Singh/ LBDEL00004036565	Flat No- A 308, Tower- K 10, Koyal Enclave Code 847 Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs. 11,59,682/-	Delhi/ NCR
2.	Seema Bhandari/ Sanjay Bhandari/ LBGHZ00001246637	F 603, 6th Floor Plumeria Garden Estate, Greater Noida/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs. 10,88,512/-	Delhi/ NCR
3.	Sudhir Kumar Chauhan/ LBDEL00001409345	Flat No-F-1, F.F Plot No-B-1/17 DLF, Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	June 19, 2021/ Rs.10,07,128/-	Delhi/ NCR
4.	Rajesh Shukla/ Suman Shukla / Prakash Shukla/ LBND000001257864	Flat No -204, Plot No-9, Gautam Sahkari Awas Samiti Ltd Sec-6, Vasundhara Awasiya Yojana Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs.10,53,403/-	Delhi/ NCR
5.	Buland Akhtar/ Shahnaj Ansum/ LBDEL00001692983	Flat No- B-256, Block-B, LIG Flats, Sec-19, Noida/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs. 7,78,491/-	Delhi/ NCR
6.	Bhagat Singh Gosain/ Sharda Gosain/ Samir Dass/ LBDEL0000778492	House No- 44 A, Abhay Khand-1, Indrapuram, Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	June 19, 2021/ Rs. 6,72,786/-	Delhi/ NCR
7.	Gopinath Nayak/ Aratee Nayak/ LBDEL00001727736/ LBAUR00002375917	H.No- 135 Block-D, Sector-Beta-1 G.B.Nagar, Uttar Pradesh/ March 29, 2022	June 19, 2021/ Rs. 17,49,229/-	Delhi/ NCR
8.	Deepak Malik/ Nisha Malik/ LBDEL00001722412/ LBGHZ00001747100	Plot No-778, Sec-3, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	June 19, 2021/ Rs. 13,06,952/-	Delhi/ NCR
9.	Prashant Mishra/ Devika Sharma/ LBDEL00005044172	Flat No-1402, 14th Floor, Sunshine, Helios - Tower-B, Plot No-GH-005B, Sector-7B Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar 201301/ March 29, 2022	August 16, 2021/ Rs. 1,04,33,847/-	Delhi/ NCR
10.	Ashok Kumar Gaur/ Simmi Gaur/ LBND000002871312	Flat No- 104, 1st Floor, Tower T2, Panchsheel Hynish, Plot No GH-08A, Sec-01, Greater Noida, Noida/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs. 19,63,678/-	Delhi/ NCR
11.	Abhishek Madan/ Sonia Madan/ LBDEL00003053874/ LBDEL00003053873	Flat No 692, 6th Floor, 6th Avenue, Block- N, GC 06, Gaur City, Plot No- GH-01, Sec 4, Greater Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, 201301/ March 29, 2022	June 19, 2021/ Rs. 34,86,918/-	Delhi/ NCR
12.	Santosh Kumar Srivastava/ Renu Srivastava/ LBND000004142292	Flat No M-172/ F-3, 1st Floor Upto Ceiling Level (without Roof Rights) Back Side Portion, Pratap Vihar Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs.17,06,905/-	Delhi/ NCR
13.	Ravi Kumar/ Pratiksha Goyal/ LBND000004857927	Flat No-1102, Floor-11, Tower-4, Wave Dream Homes Group Housing, GH-6A Sector-5, Wave City, Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs. 20,61,769/-	Delhi/ NCR
14.	Sanjay/ Kaushalya/ LBDEL00002351297	Flat No- C6-102, 1st Floor, Tower-C6, Prateek Grand City, Plot No-4/BS-01 And BS/05, Siddharth Vihar Nh-24 Ghaziabad/ March 29, 2022	July 06, 2021/ Rs. 15,89,200/-	Delhi/ NCR

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

**Date : April 01, 2022**  
**Place: Delhi/ NCR**  
**Authorized Officer**  
**ICICI Bank Limited**

# Ukrainian YouTube brothers reach out to Japanese to end war

AP ■ TOKYO

Starting out with funny videos and chat over Mario Kart racing games, two Ukrainian brothers have added a somber tone to their YouTube channel popular with young Japanese with updates from their country that bring the harsh realities of war closer to Japan. The Russian invasion of Ukraine began just after the duo, Sava Tkachov, 26, and his younger brother Yan, 20, celebrated the second anniversary of their YouTube debut with subscribers exceeding 2 million for their Sawayan Channel and Sawayan Games that Sava

hosts. The first word of war came from their father, a business consultant who had returned to Kyiv two months ago just before Russian troops rolled in and has stayed since to help defend his country. The siblings' YouTube content, which used to be full of pranks, jokes and action videos, has become more serious.

Worried about their 53-year-old father and friends in Ukraine, the brothers in early March announced on their channel that they planned to volunteer as defenders too. It triggered a wave of reactions, some supporting and others criticizing them.

# NATO: Russia repositioning, not scaling back

AP ■ BRUSSELS

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says Russia does not appear to be scaling back its military operations in Ukraine but is instead repositioning forces to the eastern Donbas region.

Russia promised during talks in Istanbul on Tuesday that it would de-escalate operations near Kyiv and Chernihiv to "increase mutual trust and create conditions for further negotiations." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the West were skeptical.



# IOC to release 6,000 MT diesel to help ease power crisis in Sri Lanka

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The Indian Oil Corporation will release 6,000 metric tonnes of diesel to Sri Lanka as it pitches in to mitigate the spike in power cuts in the island nation, which is facing an unprecedented economic and energy crisis caused due to shortage of foreign exchange, officials here said on Thursday.

Power cuts lasting over 13 hours came to be in place on Thursday, the longest cut since 1996 when a strike by the state power entity employees caused



a 72-hour black out.

The Government on Wednesday extended the nationwide daily power cuts from seven hours to 10 due to the non-availability of fuel to

generate hydro-electricity.

In a bid to reduce the power cuts, the government has directed the state fuel entity, Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), to purchase diesel from LIOC, the Lankan subsidiary of IOC.

The CEB officials said the LIOC has agreed to release 6,000 MT of diesel to generate thermal power so that the power cuts could be reduced by two hours.

Sri Lanka has been facing a seven-hour power outage since the beginning of the month.

A sudden rise in prices of

key commodities and fuel shortage forced tens of thousands of people to queue for hours outside petrol filling stations. All essentials are in short supply due to import restrictions forced by the forex crisis.

India recently announced to extend a USD 1 billion line of credit to Sri Lanka as part of its financial assistance to the country to deal with the economic crisis following a previous USD 500 billion line of credit in February to help it purchase petroleum products.

Economic relief package

from India has provided temporary solace.

"A shipment under the Indian credit line will be coming tomorrow (Friday) night. The Ceylon Electricity Board will get fuel from April

We can reduce power cuts to some extent after that," Power Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi told reporters. Meanwhile, angry citizens have been holding silent protests across the country for weeks against what they say is the government's mishandling of the economic and fuel crisis.

# Investors' wealth surges over ₹59.75 lakh cr in FY22

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth jumped over ₹59.75 lakh crore in the 2021-22 fiscal, helped by a largely buoyant trend in domestic stocks with benchmark index Sensex surging over 18 per cent during the period.

Braving many headwinds in the latter part of the current fiscal, Sensex closed the 2021-22 financial year with a gain of 9,059.36 points or 18.29 per cent.

Mirroring optimism in equities despite worries related to geopolitical tension, inflation concerns, FII selling, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms rallied by ₹59,75,686.84 crore to ₹2,64,06,501.38 crore in the entire 2021-22 fiscal.

"The positive sentiment continued for most of the year led by strong economic and earnings recovery on the back of easing COVID waves.

"However, equity markets lost their sheen in the last quarter, owing to geopolitical tensions and inflation concerns, especially in developed economies. Nonetheless, it has been a good year for the markets and managed to end with healthy gains in FY22," Ajit Mishra, VP-Research, Religare Broking, said.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies had jumped to an all-time high of over ₹280 lakh crore on January 17 this year.

Analysts said that easing of restrictions, strong vaccination drives and less severe COVID waves abated concerns regarding the pandemic.

"Moreover, strong support from the government and central bank (keeping interest rates low & adequate liquidity) to revive the economic growth helped markets inch higher," Mishra added. The BSE Sensex reached its all-time high of

62,245.43 on October 19 last year.

Sunil Nyati, Managing Director of Swastika Investmart Ltd, said, "FY22 remains good for the Indian equity market despite lots of headwinds.

The first half was very good while the market entered into consolidation in the second half combined with high volatility. The beauty of the second half of FY22 is the strong resilience of domestic investors amid lots of global headwinds and large FIIs' selling."

Highlighting major factors driving the equity markets, Nyati said,

"The first half was dominated by Covid 3rd wave, unlocking, strong earnings recovery, however in the second half, the market had to deal with tight monetary policy, high inflation, geopolitical tension, and one of the highest-selling by the FIIs, but the market has shown strong resilience amid lots of worries."

The 30-share BSE barometer declined by 115.48 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 58,568.51 in choppy trade on the last day of the 2021-22 fiscal on Thursday.

On the market outlook, Nyati said, "We managed to climb all the walls of worries and are ready to outperform in FY23, however high inflation, rising interest rates may cause near-term volatility. Apart from inflation, any surprise on the Covid front could be a major risk for the market, he added.

"Market sentiments saw improvement and one of the reasons can be large investor participation in the primary markets. The phenomenal move in the secondary market combined with the list of well-known companies going public boosted investors' confidence and attracted noticeable traction," Mishra added.

# ONGC to open Vindhyan Basin in MP for gas production

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ONGC, which opened seven out of India's eight oil and gas producing basins, is on the way to open another basin, Vindhyan as it details out commercialisation of a gas discovery in Madhya Pradesh.

An exploratory well in Son valley sector in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh district discovered gas, and on tests confirmed commercially available volumes, the company said in a statement.

"Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is on its way to commercialize another Basin — the Vindhyan Basin. This would be the ninth producing Basin of India (and) the eighth by ONGC," it said.

The firm had in December 2020 opened the eighth Indian Basin - the Bengal Basin, when commercial oil production started from Ashok Nagar discovery.

India has 26 sedimentary basins, covering a total area of 3.4 million square kilometers spread over land and sea. Of these, 7 basins - Krishna Godavari, Mumbai Offshore, Assam Shelf,

# Govt more than doubles gas price; ONGC, Reliance to get record rates

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Thursday more than doubled the price of domestically produced natural gas for the six months beginning April 1 on the back of a spike in global energy rates.

The price of gas from regulated fields of state-owned ONGC and Oil

India Ltd will rise to a record USD 6.10 per million British thermal unit from the current USD 2.90, according to a notification issued by the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC). The rate paid for difficult fields like deepwater will rise to USD 9.92 for April-September from USD 6.13 per mmBtu, it said.

Rajasthan, Cauvery, Assam-Arakan Fold Belt and Cambay - have commercially producing oil and gas discoveries. Bengal got added to the list in December 2020.

Besides, there are five basins - Saurashtra, Kutch, Vindhyan, Mahanadi and Andaman — which are believed to hold hydrocarbon potential but so far do not have commercially demonstrable discovery. Other basins have very little prospectivity for hydrocarbons.

"Exploratory well Hattat#3 was drilled with the objective to establish commer-

cial potential through detailed testing to acquire reservoir-specific data. The Well Hattat#3 is in the Son valley sector of Madhya Pradesh.

"On testing, the well produced over 62,044 cubic meters per day of gas, thus confirming the production potential of Proterozoic Basin for the first time in India," the statement said.

ONGC Director (Exploration) R K Srivastava personally supervised the testing activities at the well-site on this historic occasion on March 29, 2022.

# Centre extends stock limit on oilseeds by 6 months

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has extended a stock limit on oilseeds and edible oils by six months to December 31, 2022, in an attempt to check hoarding and arrest rising prices in view of the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war resulting in supply restrictions in import of edible oils. This will come into effect from April 1.

India is the world's biggest importer of edible oils and prices of cooking oils have risen sharply because of a rally in global prices. The stock limit was earlier applicable until June 30.

A notification from the Ministry of Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution's Department of Food and Public Distribution published on Wednesday, extended the date from March 31 to December 31.

Domestic prices have been impacted by the high prices of

edible oils in the international market. Majority of India's import of sunflower oil comes from Ukraine. The shortage in the global supply chain has had an impact on Indian markets too.

The government had claimed that it formulated a multi-pronged strategy to ensure that the prices of essential commodities such as edible oils, remain controlled. Measures like rationalisation of import duty structure, launching of a web-portal for self-disclosure of stocks held by various stakeholders, have already been taken.

Under this amendment, the stock limits for edible oils are 30 quintals for retail and 500 quintals for wholesale while the same for oilseeds will be 100 quintals and 2,000 quintals, respectively. In both cases, the time for processors is 90 days of storage/production capacity.

"The above decision was taken after deliberations at the highest level on the upward price trends of all edible oils owing to the current geo-political situations across the globe. The pressure on sunflower oil supplies from Ukraine has had a rub on effect on the export policy of Indonesia, affecting palm oil imports; also, it was compounded by crop loss concerns in South America, impacting soybean oil supplies due to which the international prices of soybean oil has shown a large upward trend. International Prices of Soybean Oil increased by 5.05% over the month and by 42.22% over the year. The international prices of palm oils, both crude and refined, have decreased over the week and over the month and starting January, 2022 have showed a substantial increasing trend," the ministry said in a statement.

# Women-led MSMEs in India rise 75% to 8.59 lakh units in FY22: Govt data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of women-led micro, small and medium enterprises in India has increased substantially by over 75 per cent in FY22 to 8.59 lakh units, against 4.9 lakh units in the previous fiscal, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

"While 4.9 lakh women led MSMEs registered on the portal during the year 2020-21, about 8.59 lakh women led MSMEs registered during the year 2021-22 (up to 28.03.2022)," Minister of State for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha. The government

replaced the erstwhile process of filing of Udyog Adhaar Memorandum for registration of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with Udyam Registration in July 2020.

"The number of women led MSMEs registered on Udyam Registration Portal has witnessed a substantial increase," Verma said.

Moreover, as per data available with the Reserve Bank of India, as of March 31, 2021, out of a total number of 211.65 crore accounts in scheduled commercial banks, 70.64 crore accounts belong to female account holders, the minister stated in the reply.

# Canara Bank pares its stake in debt resolution firm IDRCL to 5 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Public sector lender Canara Bank on Thursday said it has reduced its stake in India Debt Resolution Company Ltd (IDRCL) to 5 per cent.

The bad bank or the National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL) will acquire bad loans from banks to help clean up their books, while the IDRCL will handle the debt resolution process of

these loans.

With the current round of preferential allotment by IDRCL, equity stake of Canara Bank has now reduced to 5 per cent from previous holding of 14.90 per cent, the bank said in a regulatory filing.

Public sector banks will hold 51 per cent stake in NARCL and 49 per cent in the debt management company - IDRCL.

# Prices of EVs to be equal to petrol cars in 2 years, says Nitin Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prices of all electric vehicles (EVs) will be equal to the cost of petrol vehicles in the country within two years, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said in Lok Sabha on Thursday.

Gadkari also said MPs can buy electric vehicles once a charging station is installed in Parliament premises.

"I will assure all the honourable members that within two years the cost of electric

two-wheelers, electric three-wheelers and electric four-wheelers will be equivalent to the cost of petrol vehicles and the country will change," he said during Question Hour.

The minister said the government's policy is import substitute, cost-effectiveness, pollution-free and indigenous production.

"Due to petrol and diesel costs, we are facing crucial problems. Already we have seen the situation. So, this is the only alternative fuel, I mean, green

hydrogen, electricity, ethanol, methanol, bio-diesel, bio-LNG and bio-CNG. Sir, we will work in that direction," he said. He requested Speaker Om Birla to provide proper space to start electric charging stations in all Parliament parking places so that MPs can buy electric cars. "They can come here and charge their cars here, in the Parliament premises. In every government premises, we expect to give the facility of electric charging in the parking system," he said.

In a lighter vein, Birla said

it can be provided on a payment basis. The minister said there is good development concerning charging stations and the Ministry of Power has issued charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. There are revised consolidated guidelines and standards to accelerate the e-mobility transition in the country, he said. He said the National Highways Authority of India is developing wayside amenities every 40 kilometres and it is trying to use solar or wind power for that purpose.

# Rupee surges 23 paise to 75.67 against US dollar in early trade

Mumbai: The rupee advanced 23 paise to 75.67 against the US dollar in the opening trade on Thursday, supported by positive domestic equities and a fall in crude oil prices. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 75.67 against the US dollar, registering a rise of 23 paise from the previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee dropped by 17 paise to close at 75.90 against the US dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.14

per cent to 97.92. Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures fell 4.54 per cent to USD 108.30 per barrel after reports surfaced that US President Joe Biden is preparing to order the release of up to 1 million barrels of oil per day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve to control energy prices. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund on Wednesday said that India has received a record number of foreign direct investments during the last few years despite the

COVID-19 crisis, and has quite a few safeguards in place to mitigate the risks from capital flows. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share Sensex was trading 152.24 points or 0.26 per cent higher at 58,836.23, while the broader NSE Nifty surged 44.40 points, or 0.25 per cent, to 17,542.65. Foreign institutional investors remained net buyers in the capital market on Wednesday as they purchased shares worth Rs 1,357.47 crore, according to stock exchange data.

PTI

# Sensex, Nifty decline due to profit taking, close FY22 with over 18 pc gains

PTI ■ MUMBAI

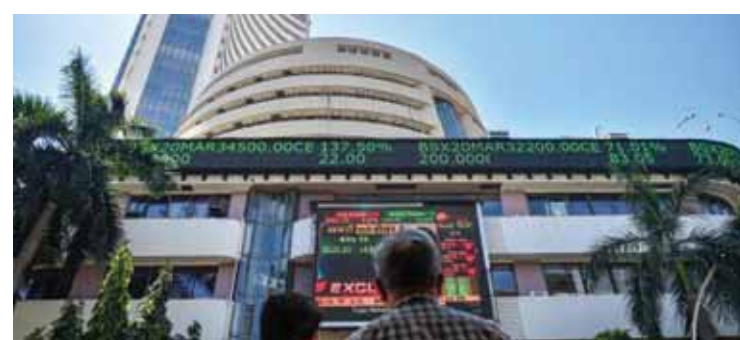
Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty pared their early gains to settle lower in choppy trade on the last day of the 2021-22 fiscal on Thursday mainly due to profit-taking in Reliance Industries, Infosys and HDFC Bank after a three-day rally.

Ending its three-day winning run, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 115.48 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 58,568.51 amid the expiry of monthly derivatives contracts. During the day, it touched a high of 58,890.92 and a low of 58,485.79.

The broader NSE Nifty declined by 33.50 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 17,464.75 with 30 of its stocks ending with losses.

For 2021-22 fiscal, the BSE Sensex jumped 9,059.36 points or 18.29 per cent while the Nifty rallied 2,774.05 points or 18.88 per cent.

"Even as markets ended the last day of the financial year in a rather quiet mood, it has delivered a 19 per



cent return this year on the Nifty with two sectoral indices - metals and media returning over 50 per cent this year.

"On the broader market as well, both the midcap-100 and smallcap-100 delivered over 25 per cent return this year. Such returns in a year when FPIs have pulled out big money highlights the confidence of the Indian investor amidst a slew of headwinds," according to S

Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities.

Among the 30-share pack, Reliance Industries fell the most by 1.46 per cent. Wipro declined by 1.44 per cent, Dr Reddy's by 1.04 per cent and Sun Pharma by 0.60 per cent.

HDFC Bank, UltraTech Cement and Infosys also ended down.

On the other hand, HUL rose the most by 1.66 per cent, followed by Mahindra & Mahindra by 1.59 per

cent, IndusInd Bank by 0.93 per cent, Bharti Airtel by 0.80 per cent, ITC by 0.66 per cent and Titan by 0.5 per cent.

Axis Bank, which announced the acquisition of the India retail business of US-based Citi, spurred by 1.39 per cent.

In the previous trade, the 30-share BSE barometer index surged 740.34 points or 1.28 per cent to settle at 58,683.99. Similarly, the NSE Nifty climbed 172.95 points or 1 per cent to settle at 17,498.25.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap index gained 0.31 per cent and the midcap jumped 0.29 per cent.

"Investors followed global market cues, which were mostly weak as most of them had rallied in the last few sessions on fall in crude oil prices and expectations of some solution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. After seeing sharp gyrations during the week, investors exercised caution with a negative bias on the expiry day," said Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities

Ltd.

Harsh Parekh, Technical Analyst, Bonanza Portfolio, said "Indian equity indices opened today on a positive note on the back of a weak US dollar and FPI turning buyers. But indices turned volatile in afternoon trade and ended the three-day winning run."

In Asia, equity exchanges in Shanghai, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower, while Seoul settled with gains. Markets in Europe were mostly trading lower.

Stock exchanges in the US ended on a negative note in the overnight session.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude tumbled 5.09 per cent to USD 107.68 per barrel on reports that the US was considering releasing a record 180 million barrels of oil from strategic reserves.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were buyers as they bought shares worth Rs 1,357.47 crore on a net basis on Wednesday, according to stock exchange data.

# Axis Bank shares jump nearly 2 pc after Citi deal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Axis Bank gained nearly 2 per cent in morning trade on Thursday, after the company said it will acquire US-based Citi's consumer business in India for Rs 12,325 crore. The stock jumped 1.82 per cent to Rs 763.90 on the BSE. At the NSE, it gained 1.67 per cent to Rs 763. Axis Bank on Wednesday said it will acquire US-based Citi's consumer business in India for Rs 12,325 crore in one of the largest deals in the Indian financial services space, which will help it close the gap with larger peers like ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank.

The two lenders signed a definitive agreement for the sale, which will involve the third largest private lender taking over Citi's credit cards, personal loans and wealth man-

agement businesses that are focused on the affluent segment. "Axis Bank has grown organically all these years and has scaled well.

But our aspirations are bigger. This deal gives us that strategic thrust to close the gap between us and some of our peers," its chief executive and managing director Amitabh Chaudhry told reporters.

Apart from a consideration of Rs 12,325 crore or USD 1.6 billion, which will be paid using the balance sheet strength, the deal also involves an equity requirement of Rs 3,450 crore for the loan book of over Rs 27,400 crore which will get transferred and also a payout of up to Rs 1,500 crore in integration cost, which will be paid by Axis to Citi for servicing the business till the merger gets complete.



# Qatar's WC gets real as Doha hosts tourney draw

AP ■ DOHA

The countdown towards the most controversial World Cup in history really begins on Friday as the draw for Qatar 2022 takes place in Doha, less than eight months before the start of the tournament itself.

As pandemic restrictions ease, some of football's biggest names will be there for the draw at a Doha convention centre among the skyscrapers of the city's West Bay district, as holders France and their rivals find out who they will face in the group stage of the first World Cup to be held in November and December.

The dust has still not settled on qualifying, with final matches the three berths to be decided in play-offs in June.

Seedings for the draw are based on the latest FIFA world rankings published on Thursday, and the seven highest-ranked qualifiers, including France, are in Pot One along with the host nation, despite Qatar being one of the lowest-ranked participants.

The tiny Gulf state of under three million people stunned the planet when it won the right to host the World Cup at a vote in 2010, leading to accusations of vote-buying -- which were hotly denied -- and questions over the country's suitability.

Off-field issues The obvious issue was the extreme heat in June and July, when the World Cup is traditionally held, and so the decision was taken to move the tournament to the northern hemisphere winter.

Then there has been the criticism of the working con-



ditions of hundreds of thousands of migrant labourers in the country, including those who built the stadiums. That led to the threat from some countries of a boycott.

For all the issues, there is excitement as a World Cup approaches, and FIFA announced on Wednesday that over 800,000 tickets had been snapped up so far.

Seven of Qatar's eight World Cup stadiums are brand new. Most will be reduced in size after the tournament, while one will even be dismantled altogether.

This week organisers have been eager to show off the gleaming infrastructure as the world's media descend on Doha.

There will though be inevitable questions about the fate of the migrant workers, however much FIFA and local organisers would prefer the talk to be solely about football.

The last 32-team tournament Even the draw itself cannot be separated from bigger issues beyond football.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine threw the European play-offs to decide the final three of UEFA's 13 qualifying places into some chaos.

Russia were suspended from all international football until further notice, preventing them from featuring in the play-offs.

Ukraine's play-off semi-final against Scotland was postponed until June, with the winner of that match facing Wales for a place in Qatar.

England will certainly be there, with their manager Gareth Southgate dismissing talk of a boycott.

Canada will be there too, for their first World Cup since 1986, but Italy are the biggest absentees from the draw after their disastrous defeat by North Macedonia last week ruled them out again, just like in 2018.

Their next chance to qualify will be in 2026, by which time the World Cup will have been expanded to a bloated 48 teams.

For all the controversy surrounding Qatar's World Cup, at least it features 32 sides, split into eight groups of four, surely the perfect number for football's global showpiece.



## Mexico, USA clinch World Cup berths

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

The United States and Mexico booked their tickets to the World Cup finals in Qatar on Wednesday after securing the results needed to claim the last two automatic qualifying places from the CONCACAF region. The USA were beaten 2-0 by Costa Rica in San Jose to finish third in the standings while Mexico eased past El Salvador 2-0 in Mexico City to finish second overall.

Costa Rica finished qualifying in fourth place and will face New Zealand in a playoff for a World Cup berth. Canada, who completed their successful qualifying campaign with a 1-0 defeat in Panama on Wednesday, had already qualified for the World Cup on Sunday.

Both the US and Mexico had all-but sealed qualification after wins on Sunday meant only a freak set of results in Wednesday's final round would see either side relegated to a playoff place. Costa Rica needed to beat the US by six goals or more in San Jose to have a chance of qualifying.

Two second-half goals in eight minutes by Juan Vargas and Anthony Contreras raised hopes of a miracle for the home fans, but the United States regrouped to close out the game, qualifying ahead of Costa Rica on goal difference.

"I'm extremely proud of this group," US star Christian Pulisic said after Wednesday's defeat.

"It's a bit of a weird feeling right now because I hate to lose so much. But I'm really proud and I can't wait to

go to the World Cup.

The United States qualification comes after their shock failure to reach the 2018 World Cup in Russia, when an upset defeat to Trinidad and Tobago shattered their campaign.

Mexico ended their sea-saw qualifying campaign with a victory which ensures they will continue their record of appearing at every World Cup since the 1994 tournament.

Mexico took the lead when Uriel Antuna jabbed home from close range on 17 minutes after a rebound from a Nestor Araujo header.

Wolves striker Raul Jimenez then doubled the Mexican lead from the penalty spot to leave 'El Tri' on course for Qatar.

In Wednesday's other qualifying game, Jamaica defeated Honduras 2-1.

## F1 returns to Las Vegas after four-decade absence

AP ■ LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas will host a night-time Formula 1 Grand Prix along its iconic Strip in 2023 with the sport's top official describing the event as "an incredible moment".

The race returns to the city for the first time since 1982 and will become the third grand prix in the United States on next year's F1 calendar, alongside Miami and Austin.

"This is an incredible moment for Formula 1 that demonstrates the huge appeal and growth of our sport with a third race in the US," said Stefano Domenicali, the president of Formula 1.

"Las Vegas is a destination known around the world for its excitement, hospitality, thrills, and of course, the famous Strip. There is no better place for Formula 1 to race than in the global entertainment capital of the world."

The race will take place at night, on a Saturday in November.

The track will be 3.8 miles (6.12km) long from start to finish with top speeds estimated to be over 212 mph (342 km/h).

It will take in the city's most famous landmarks, hotels and casinos.

There will be 50 laps with three main straights and 14 corners, including a high-speed cornering sequence and a single chicane section.

"Iconic Las Vegas and Formula 1, the pinnacle of motorsport, is the perfect marriage of speed and glamour," said Greg Maffei, president of F1's owners Liberty Media.

Las Vegas twice hosted F1 races in 1981 and 1982 on the car park of Caesar's Palace after Watkins Glen in upstate New York lost its rights after two decades.

The Miami Grand Prix debuts this year on May 8 while the United States Grand Prix takes place at Austin, Texas on October 23.

The famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway previously played host to the US Grand Prix between 2000 and 2007.

This year will be the first time since Dallas and Detroit in 1984 that the United States has staged two races.



## Barca thrash Real Madrid in front of record crowd

AP ■ BARCELONA

A world record crowd for a women's football match of 91,553 saw Barcelona cruise into the Champions League semi-finals by thrashing Real Madrid 5-2 at Camp Nou on Wednesday to seal an 8-3 win on aggregate.

The crowd figure surpassed the previous record for a women's game when 90,185 watched the 1999 World Cup final between the United States and China at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

It also smashed the previous record attendance for a club fixture, set in March 2019 as 60,739 supporters saw Barca beat Atletico Madrid



at the Wanda Metropolitano.

Barcelona were eager to give the fixture as much visibility as possible.

The club's 147,000 members were allowed 24 hours to book up to four free tickets, with only an administration charge due of 2.50 euros. Non-members were then able to buy tickets for between 9 to 15 euros.

The reigning European champions advance to the semi-finals where they will face the winners of Arsenal and Wolfsburg, who play their second leg on Thursday, after the opening game in London finished 1-1. Barca now own seven wins out of seven in competitive meetings against Real Madrid.

## Confident India eye best-ever finish at Jr WC

PTI ■ POTCHEFSTROOM

The presence of three Olympians, including skipper Salima Tete, will certainly be an advantage for the Indian hockey team when it competes at the FIH Women's Junior World Cup, beginning here on Friday.

Apart from Tete, midfielder Sharmila Devi and striker Lalresiami were part of the senior team which finished fourth at the Tokyo Olympics.

The Indian team will begin its campaign in Pool D against Wales on Saturday before taking on formidable Germany on Sunday.

The Indians will then take on Malaysia in the final pool match before



the quarterfinal round which starts on April 8.

The 20-year-old Salima is a vital cog in the Indian midfield. She has already proved her capabilities in

the successful Olympics campaign.

Her swiftness is a treat to watch. She mesmerised with her brilliant runs in the bronze medal match

against Great Britain, earning three penalty corners, albeit in a losing cause.

Lalresiami, the first woman Olympian from Mizoram, is a nimble-footed striker, known for quick and poaching movements inside the opposition circle.

The 20-year-old Sharmila, also an energetic forward, has impressed all with her brilliant runs from both the flanks during the Olympics. She also scored a goal in India's pool stage match against Great Britain.

The coveted quadrennial tournament, which was originally scheduled for December, was postponed due to the Omicron threat in South Africa.

"There is a lot of excitement among the players.

Everyone has worked so hard for this moment and used the postponement to gain better exposure, improve as a team so we can put up our best performance here," said Tete, who had led the U-18 team to a silver medal at the Youth Olympics in 2018.

Highlighting the team's preparations, the Indian skipper said: "Coming here early has helped us tremendously. We have been able to get a good amount of training sessions here which has helped in acclimatising to the weather." "It gets very warm and humid during the day. It definitely helped to have our last camp before coming here in Bhubaneswar where we trained in quite hot conditions."



## Kiran, Maisnam & Mithun in last 16

PTI ■ ORLEANS (FRANCE)

The Indian trio of Kiran George, Meiraba Luwang Maisnam and Mithun Manjunath progressed to the men's singles pre-quarterfinals after contrasting wins in the second round of the Orleans Masters Super 100 badminton tournament here.

While George stunned Netherland's third seed Mark Caljouw 19-21 21-16 23-21, qualifier Meiraba got rid of eighth seed Toby Penty of England 21-16 21-16 and Manjunath prevailed over compatriot Siddharth Pratap Singh 21-14 21-10 in another second round match.

George, who had won the Odisha Super 100 event in January, will face Indonesian qualifier Christian Adinata, Meiraba meets Hong Kong's Chan Yin Chak and Manjunath takes on second seeded Dane Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus next.

Ashwini Bhat K and Shikha Gautam eked out a 21-23 21-12 21-10 win over Danish pairing of Amalie Schulz and Christine Busch to set up a fight against French duo of Flavie Vallet and Emilie Vercelet.

Men's doubles pair of PS Ravikrishna and Sankar Prasad Udayakumar also made it to the pre-quarterfinals with a 19-21 21-11 21-12 win over German pairing of Marvin Datko and Patrick Scheiel.

Among others, top seed B Sai Praneeth and women's singles players Anupama Upadhya and Ira Sharma also entered the third round on Wednesday night.

Mixed doubles pairing of Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto, seeded seventh, also crossed the opening round hurdle.



## Swiatek cruises into Miami Open semi-finals

AP ■ MIAMI

Iga Swiatek's dream season continued as she defeated Petra Kvitova 6-3, 6-3 in the Miami Open quarter-finals to close in on a third successive WTA 1000 crown.

The new world number one won the title in Doha and then Indian Wells and now has an excellent chance of becoming only the fourth woman in history to win the Sunshine Double -- triumphing in California and Florida in the same year -- following Steffi Graf (1994 and 1996), Kim Clijsters (2005) and Victoria Azarenka (2016).

Swiatek, who has now won 15 successive WTA tour matches, is the form player in the women's

**Czech star Kvitova was on the backfoot once she was broken in the first set as Swiatek's excellent hitting, especially from the back of the court**

game at the moment and American Jessica Pegula, who reached the last four earlier in the day after fifth seed Paula Badosa was forced to retire because of illness midway through the first set, will have her work cut out attempting to stop the Polish 20-year-old when they meet on Thursday for a place in the final.

Czech star Kvitova was on the backfoot once she

was broken in the first set as Swiatek's excellent hitting, especially from the back of the court, and her serve ultimately proved the difference.

The two-time Wimbledon champion fought hard, but Swiatek was able to maintain her aggressive, attacking game and when she broke for 3-2 in the second set it was always going to be an uphill battle for the 32-year-old now ranked 32nd in the world.

"I want to use the confidence I have had since the start of the year and I am on a roll," Swiatek said after winning in one hour and 14 minutes at Hard Rock Stadium.

"I am just so happy I can compete against legends like Petra. I knew I

had to keep up with the pace as she plays fast and I think my first serve was the key."

Pegula goes into her second WTA 1000 semi-final well rested after her round of 16 match against Anhelina Kalinina only lasted a set before the Ukrainian retired.

The same fate then befell Spain's fifth-seeded Badosa in the quarters on Wednesday, as she conceded the contest with the score at 4-1 to the American.

Pegula, whose parents own the Buffalo Bills NFL franchise, has spent just three hours and 22 minutes on court in her four matches so far and said: "I've definitely played really, really clean tennis the last two sets.

## Ruud topples Zverev to reach last 4

AP ■ MIAMI

Casper Ruud beat Alexander Zverev 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 to reach the Miami Open semi-finals on Wednesday and compound a difficult start to the year for the world number four.

The Norwegian will meet Argentine surprise package Francisco Cerundolo for a place in Sunday's final after the 23-year-old, playing in his debut ATP Masters event and ranked 103rd in the world, made the last four when Italian Jannik Sinner was forced to retire because of a blister on his right foot at 4-1 down in the first set.

Cerundolo is lowest ranked Miami semi-finalist in tournament history, surpassing Sebastian Grosjean who was ranked 74th in 1999.

Ruud will compete in a



hard court semi-final at this level for the first time after reaching the same stage on clay at the Masters 1000 events in Monte Carlo, Madrid and Rome in the last couple of years. For Germany's Zverev, however, an early exit in Indian Wells was followed by more disappointment in Florida.

Ruud, the sixth seed from Norway came into the tournament having never won a match in Miami but found himself up against the inconsistent second seed, who recovered impressively from a shaky start only to run out of steam by the end of an entertaining tussle at Hard Rock Stadium.





# INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE 2022

12

IPL is the best league in the world and with every teammate of yours you get to learn a lot about the game, so I am loving picking the brains of Shikhar Dhawan

—BHANUKA RAJAPAKSA

## 1ST IPL WIN FOR LUCKNOW

### points table

Po.	TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1.	RR	1	1	0	0	2	3.050
2.	DC	1	1	0	0	2	0.914
3.	PBKS	1	1	0	0	2	0.697
4.	GT	1	1	0	0	2	0.286
5.	KKR	2	1	1	0	2	0.093
6.	LSG	2	1	1	0	2	-0.011
7.	RCB	2	1	1	0	2	-0.048
8.	CSK	2	0	2	0	0	-0.528
9.	MI	1	0	1	0	0	-0.914
10.	SRH	1	0	1	0	0	-3.050

### boundary meter

4s 162

6s 90

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Kevin Lewis, who looks up to Chris Gayle for inspiration, batted, or rather, belted the ball like the legendary Jamaican to power Lucknow Super Giants to an incredible win over Chennai Super Kings in the IPL on Thursday.

Lewis blazed away to an unbeaten 23-ball 55 as LSG, from a hopeless situation, overhauled an imposing target of 211 with three balls to spare.

Openers KL Rahul (40) and Quinton de Kock (61) laid the foundation with a rollicking stand but the increasing required run rate made the task extremely difficult for LSG. However, Lewis had other ideas and along with the talented Ayush Badoni, who played his part with a nine-ball 19, made it look quite easy in the end.

The script changed completely in the blink of an eye as Lewis and Badoni smashed Shivam Dube



for 25 runs in the penultimate over to bring the equation down to nine from the last six balls.

For sure, handing the ball to Dube to bowl the 19th over will be debated for a while.

In all, Lewis hit six fours and three sixes as first-timers LSG recorded their maiden win in the lucrative league. Badoni hit two maximums, which turned out to be crucial in the context of the final result. Earlier, leg-spinner Ravi

Bishnoi (2/24) did a tremendous job with the wet ball in difficult conditions, even as Robin Uthappa turned back the clock with his beautiful yet brutal assault to propel CSK to a strong total.

Rahul and de Kock were off to a flyer, punishing the CSK bowlers into submission. The duo was at its destructive best, dealing only in four and sixes and at one point it looked like they were going to finish the game in quick time.

But Dwaine Pretorius (2/31) was right on his mark as he got rid of Rahul before Dwayne Bravo (1/35) engineered Manish Pandey's dismissal to bring the defending champions back in the game.

Pretorius struck once again, accounting for compatriot de Kock as CSK continued to put pressure with good fielding.

Then, Lewis joined forces with Badoni to do the job for LSG. With just nine required in the

last over and Mukesh Choudhary bowling a couple of wides, Badoni smashed a six to level the score and then took his side over the line.

Earlier, Uthappa scored a fluent 50 off 27 balls to give CSK a solid start before Dube made 49 off 30 deliveries, while skipper Ravindra Jadeja (17 off 9) and MS Dhoni (16 off 6), who slammed two fours and a six, provided the final flourish.

Uthappa looked like a man on a mission as he slammed Avesh Khan (2/38) for back-to-back boundaries off the first two balls of the innings.

With the ball coming nicely onto the bat, he smashed it all over the park.

CSK were dealt a blow when a direct hit by Bishnoi from backward point marked the end of Rituraj Gaikwad (1), who was well short of the crease in the third over.

But Uthappa, and new man Moeen Ali (35), continued the assault by dealing only in fours and sixes. The Super Giants bowlers had no answer for the duo as CSK raced to 73 for one at the end of the Powerplay.

In all, Uthappa slammed eight fours and one maximum, while Moeen hit four boundaries and two sixes during his 22-ball stay.

It was Bishnoi again who gave the second breakthrough when he trapped Uthappa leg before with a quick delivery, soon after the batter reached his fifty.

Dube picked up from where Uthappa left, cracking three boundaries off Dushmantha Chameera (0/49), who struggled with his line, in the ninth over. It was a bad day for the Sri Lankan as he repeatedly fumbled with the ball in the field, giving away easy boundaries.

With the bowlers struggling after getting nothing from the wicket, sloppy fielding made matters worse for LSG.

Dube and Ambati Rayudu (27), then, shared a 60-run stand to keep CSK on course for a big total.

## KKR face power-packed Punjab Kings today

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Kolkata Knight Riders are expected to continue with their risk-taking approach despite mixed returns when they take on Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

KKR head into Friday's game at the back of a three-wicket loss against RCB though managed to make the game close after a below-par total.

Punjab began their campaign with a win but they would expect a better bowling effort after conceding more than 200 runs in their first game. South Africa speedster Kagiso Rabada is expected to play after completing his three-day quarantine and that will give a big boost to the Punjab attack.

Batting at the Wankhede, where the track is relatively fresh, has not been easy as seen in the two games played at the venue so far.

It may be early days in the two-month long IPL but the toss is already playing a significant role in the game's outcome with dew coming into picture in the second half of the game.

Kolkata's openers, Ajinkya Rahane and the attacking Venkatesh Iyer perished cheaply against RCB and the duo would be looking to provide a strong start to the team.

While skipper Shreyas Iyer, who has been in good form despite the failure against RCB, would be an important cog in the wheel, but would need support from the likes of Nitish Rana.

For left-handed Rana, consistency would be the key.

Apart from the duo, the responsibility in the middle order needs to be shouldered by Sam Billings, Sheldon Jackson and the big-hitting Andre Russell.

On the bowling front, pacer Umesh Yadav was splendid in both the games with the new ball.

Experienced Kiwi bowler Tim Southee, who replaced Shivam Mavi and picked up three wickets, too has a key role to play upfront.

The concern for Kolkata would be the form of spinner Varun



Chakaravarthy, who needs to hit the straps quickly.

For Punjab, a lot would rest on how their top three - skipper Mayank Agarwal, flamboyant Shikhar Dhawan and Sri Lankan Bhanuka Rajapaksa, who played a match-winning cameo against RCB, perform.

While head coach Anil Kumble would expect more contributions from the middle order, the likes of Odean Smith and Shahrux Khan proved their mettle when they steered the side home against RCB and would be keen to be among the runs again.

It remains to be seen if Under-19 World Cup star Raj Bawa, who failed on IPL debut, gets another chance.

Punjab bowlers came up against a marauding Faf Du Plessis in the first game and the likes of Sandeep Sharma, Arshdeep Singh and Odean Smith would need to up their game against KKR.

The eight overs from spin duo of Rahul Chahar and Harpreet Brar could also make a difference in the game.

Teams (From): Kolkata Knight Riders: Aaron Finch, Abhijeet Tomar, Ajinkya Rahane, Baba Indrajith, Nitish Rana, Pratham Singh, Rinku Singh, Shreyas Iyer, Ashok Sharma, Pat Cummins, Rasikh Dar, Shivam Mavi, Tim Southee, Umesh Yadav, Varun Chakaravarthy, Aman Khan, Andre Russell, Anukul Roy, Chamika Karunaratne, Mohammed Nabi, Ramesh Kumar, Sunil Narine, Venkatesh Iyer, Sam Billings, Sheldon Jackson.

## Fit-again Surya joins MI ahead of IPL fixture against Rajasthan

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Having recovered from his finger injury, star India batter Suryakumar Yadav has joined the Mumbai Indians ahead of their second IPL game against Rajasthan Royals, the five-time champions said on Thursday.

Surya, who was undergoing rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy after suffering a finger injury during the home series against West Indies last month, missed MI's IPL opener against Delhi Capitals on March 27.

"Suryakumar Yadav exited his mandatory quarantine and joined the team (on Wednesday) for the gym session in the company of his mates Kieron Pollard, Ishan Kishan and Jasprit Bumrah... The mood in the camp is upbeat," MI said in a statement.

"The team underwent a strength and conditioning session yesterday under the watchful eyes of Paul Chapman. The session involved weight and fitness training, with the focus on working on core fitness and building strength."

Mumbai Indians had lost to Delhi Capitals by four wickets in their IPL opener at the Brabourne Stadium here.

Mumbai failed to defend 178 as Delhi shot off the target in just 18.2 overs, thanks to an unbroken 75-run stand between Axar Patel and Lalit Yadav for the seventh wicket.

Star India pacer Jasprit Bumrah had a lacklustre outing, leaking 43 runs from 3.2 overs and it was their English debutant Tymal Mills who impressed returning with figures of 3-0-26-1.

Mills struck in his very first over for MI,



removing Delhi captain Rishabh Pant.

Death bowling all about mindset: Mills As someone who employs a lot of variations to win the battle in the slog overs, Mills said it's about mindset.

"Bowling at the death is a lot about the mindset. You need to want to bowl the difficult overs when the pressure is on. It is something that I enjoy," the English pacer said.

"I understand that I am not gonna come out on top every time but when I do, it is a great feeling."



## Powar term ends as India Women coach

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian women's team head coach Ramesh Powar's contract has expired at the conclusion of the side's campaign in the ICC World Cup and he might have to reapply for the post as per BCCI rules.

The disastrous World Cup campaign could also lead to a radical shift in women's cricket, with National Cricket Academy (NCA) head VVS Laxman taking an active part in mentoring the next batch of the country's cricketers. The team failed to make the semifinals of the ongoing tournament.

Powar had replaced WV Raman, who had guided the team into the T20 World Cup final in 2020. "Powar's contract was till World Cup. There is no provision for extension. So the entire process starts with applications and interviews. Powar can certainly reapply and CAC (Cricket Advisory Committee), as per the constitution, will take a call," a senior BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity. Eyebrows were raised after Raman wasn't given a second term after a good show with the team and Powar, who had a chequered history with skipper Mithali Raj, was brought back. "The CAC takes the call and if they felt Ramesh would do better than Raman, it was their call. The board can't interfere," the source said.

## Elgar, Bavuma shine on Day 1

AP ■ DURBAN

South Africa were 233 for four when bad light stopped play after being sent in to bat. South African captain Elgar made 67 in an opening partnership of 113 with fellow left-hander Sarel Erwee (41) but Bangladesh fought back before Bavuma and Kyle Verreynne steadied the innings with an unbeaten fifth wicket partnership of 53. Bavuma, playing in his 50th Test, made 53 not out and Verreynne was unbeaten on 27. It was Bavuma's 18th half-century. He has hit a single century. The Bangladesh bowlers failed to take advantage of a well-grassed pitch at



the start of the match, bowling too many loose deliveries as South Africa scored 60 runs without loss in 13 overs

in the first hour. But the tourists came back strongly, taking three wickets between lunch and tea and keeping

the run rate down. Off-spinner Mehidy Hasan played a key role for Bangladesh, bowling 26 overs in the day and taking one for 57. He bowled 22 overs in his first spell, which enabled captain Mominul Haque to rotate his fast bowlers in short spells.

Mehidy's outstanding contribution of the day, however, was a sensational run-out. Fielding at backward point he sped across the ground to make a diving stop when Bavuma drove into the covers. He picked the ball up cleanly and threw down the stumps from a kneeling position to dismiss Keegan Petersen, who had looked in good form in making 19.

## Babar, Imam star in Pakistan's win

AP ■ LAHORE

Skipper Babar Azam and opener Imam-ul-Haq smashed brilliant centuries to help Pakistan pull off their highest ODI run-chase in a six-wicket triumph over Australia in Lahore on Thursday. Azam hit an 83-ball 114 and Haq notched a 97-ball 106 as Pakistan chased down a stiff 349-run target with six balls to spare to level the three-match series at 1-1. Ben McDermott cracked a maiden ODI hundred in Australia's imposing total of 348-8 on a flat

Gaddafi Stadium pitch.

The victory is Pakistan's first over Australia since Melbourne in January 2017. In between, they had lost 10 consecutive one-day internationals. Pakistan's win sets up an intriguing final match at the same venue on Saturday. Australia won the first match by 88 runs on Tuesday, also in Lahore.

Haq, who hit six boundaries and three sixes, put on a robust 118-run opening stand with Fakhar Zaman (67) off 111 balls to set the platform for the chase. Zaman smashed seven bound-

aries and two sixes during his 64-ball knock before he was bowled by Marcus Stoinis.

Undeterred, Haq completed his ninth hundred off 90 balls before he holed out at long-off in spinner Adam Zampa's 35th over. Haq added 111 for the second wicket with Azam off 92 balls. Azam reached his 15th ODI century with a single off Cameron Green, reaching the mark off 73 balls. He added 80 for the third wicket with Mohammad Rizwan before he was caught off Nathan Ellis with 40 needed

## Wyatt, Ecclestone fire England to another World Cup final

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

Danielle Wyatt made the most of the luck that came her way enroute to a memorable hundred as defending champions England showed their big-match temperament with a 137-run win over South Africa to enter the Women's World Cup final here on Thursday.

Wyatt (129 off 125), who was dropped five times, struck a maiden World Cup hundred before Sophia Dunkley produced a fine 60 off 72 balls to take England to an imposing 293 for eight after South Africa chose to bowl.

South Africa, who had reached the last-four stage as the second best team from the league stage and also eliminated India from the competition, crumbled under the pressure of a knock-out game.

They could never recover from

the body blow received in the second over of the chase when pacer Anya Shrubsole (2/27) had tournament's leading run-getter Laura Wolvaardt caught and bowled. Their innings ended at 156 in 38 overs.

Left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone completed the job for England by cleaning up the lower-order, ending with six wickets for 36 runs in eight overs. She had also hit an unbeaten 24 off 11 balls to take England close to the 300-run mark.

With five wins on the trot after three losses that had them staring at an early exit, England's juggernaut is well and truly rolling as they stand on the cusp of a fifth title.

Their final and familiar opponents Australia, on the other hand, are eyeing a record-extending seventh crown.

"That was a complete perfor-

mance from us, something we were searching for a little bit. Really chuffed that the girls have brought their best cricket when everything's on the line," said England skipper Heather Knight referring to their comeback after a disastrous start to their tournament campaign.

"I think the knockout cricket that we have been playing for the last four games has helped us."

On meeting the undefeated Australia in the final on Sunday, she added: "We will go in as underdogs. We have put a lot of energy in the last few weeks and need a one last push and hopefully we can do that on Sunday."

It was a brilliant display of swing bowling from Shrubsole that broke the backbone of South Africa batting in the run chase.

Wolvaardt's opening partner Lizelle Lee was Shrubsole's second



wicket as the out-of-form batter flicked it straight into the hands of the mid-wicket fielder, ending her forgettable campaign in the ICC event.

After Kate Cross removed Sune Luss with a beauty that seemed to nip back in sharply, the writing was on the wall for South Africa, who paid the price for their sloppy fielding early on in the game.

Their decision to chase in a high-pressure game was also debatable. However, it was still a good run for South Africa in the competition.

"We needed to bring our best performance today and we didn't and we are feeling it. We needed to be clinical today and we weren't, it is time to keep on working," said South Africa skipper Sune Luss.

I still think we had a great campaign and we are not taking anything away from that."