

**OPINION 6**  
BANGLADESH STILL IN  
THROES OF TERRORISM

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## Russia welcomes India as mediator

Modi bats for end to Ukraine row; Russia hails India for its free foreign policy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday evening and held detailed talks about the Ukraine situation.

A press release from the Prime Minister's Office said Modi called for an end to violence even as Lavrov briefed him on the situation in Ukraine, including peace negotiations. The meeting lasted for 40 minutes.

The meeting came after the Russian Foreign Minister and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar held a comprehensive discussion on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Modi's meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister is significant. The Prime Minister has not met any other visiting



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during their meeting in New Delhi on Friday PTI

Ministers in the past two weeks, including those from the UK, China, Austria, Greece and Mexico.

"Prime Minister reiterated his call for an early cessation of violence, and conveyed India's readiness to contribute in any way to the peace efforts," said the press statement.

Earlier, India called for

sustained dialogue and diplomacy to end the Ukraine conflict even as Russia praised it for following an independent foreign policy and promised to supply whatever India wanted to buy from Russia.

Also, Russia favoured India for playing the role of mediator in resolving the Ukraine crisis. These points were the main

highlights of the talks between Sergey Lavrov and S Jaishankar.

India has so far abstained from voting against Russia at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on the issue of the Ukraine conflict.

Continued on Page 2

## Nitish won't go anywhere, to stay as CM, says JD(U)

'Kumar's RS entry news fake, he will complete his 5-yr tenure'

PNS ■ PATNA

The Janata Dal (U) has vehemently denied reports that Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has any intention to move to the Rajya Sabha or take up any other Constitutional posts and hand over the reins of power to the BJP in Bihar.

"Kumar will complete his five-year-tenure and is not going anywhere," senior leaders of the JD(U) asserted on Friday.

The clarification came after a section of media sought to interpret Kumar's casual remarks made during an informal interaction with journalists two days back that he would not contest the next Lok Sabha polls and the Rajya Sabha was "the only House" he has not been a member of.

His remarks gave grist to the rumour mills that were churning stories for several weeks that Kumar would move to the Rajya Sabha and then be put up as NDA vice-presiden-



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar with Bihar Assembly Speaker Vijay Kumar Sinha during the last day of Budget session of the Assembly, in Patna on Thursday PTI

tial candidate. "Oh dear! Respectable Kumar has got the mandate to serve the people of Bihar for five years. This means he is not going anywhere. He is the Chief Minister and will continue in the capacity," tweeted Upendra Kushwaha, the JD(U)'s parliamentary board chief.

Sanjay Kumar Jha, the Minister for the Information and Public Relations Department who is also a national general secretary of the party, saw the rumour surrounding the CM as a "propaganda" that will "yield little". "I'm intrigued at the

rumour that CM @NitishKumar is contemplating going to the Rajya Sabha! This is mischievous, and far from the truth. Kumar has the people's mandate to serve Bihar and will continue to do so for the full term as Chief Minister. He is not going anywhere!" Jha tweeted.

"Kumar was the face of the NDA in the 2020 Bihar Assembly elections, and people voted this alliance to power. His unwavering commitment to serve people & ability to transform #Bihar are sacrosanct. I urge all to desist from such propaganda, which shall yield little," he said in another tweet.

## Imran: Powerful country backing India angry over my Russia visit

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Ahead of Sunday's no-trust motion against him, Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday said a "powerful country", which is supporting India, is angry with Pakistan because of his recent visit to Russia to meet President Vladimir Putin.

Addressing the Islamabad Security Dialogue, Khan emphasised that an independent foreign policy was crucial for the country, and said the reason why Pakistan could not touch its peak potential was its dependency syndrome on other powerful nations.

"A country without an independent foreign policy remains unable to secure the interests of its people," he said.

Khan said taking independent decisions while keeping high the interests of a nation was extremely important rather than submitting to the will of other countries in exchange for foreign aid.

Referring to the US, Khan said a "powerful country" had expressed displeasure over his recent visit to Russia. "On the other hand, it is supporting its ally India which imports oil from Russia," he rued.

Khan's comments came a day after Pakistan summoned the acting US envoy in Islamabad over a "threatening" letter and an alleged "foreign-funded plot" against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Government led by Khan.

Continued on Page 2

## Nepal PM arrives on Modi invite; talks today



BJP president JP Nadda presents the book 'Integral Humanism' by Deendayal Upadhyaya to Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, during their meeting at BJP headquarters, in New Delhi on Friday PTI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to age-old historical ties between the two countries, Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba arrived here on Friday for a three-day visit.

He is accompanied by his wife Arzu Deuba and a high-level delegation.

He will hold summit talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday to take stock of the relations between the two neighbours. The two leaders

will also explore ways to further enhance cooperation in the fields of trade, connectivity, and electricity besides people-to-people relations.

Modi and Deuba will "virtually" flag off the first passenger train service on the broad-gauge line between India and Nepal on Saturday. The 35-km long rail line will connect Jaynagar in Bihar and Kurtha in Nepal.

It is the first visit abroad by Prime Minister Deuba since he assumed office in July last year. He is here at the invitation of Modi. "A fond welcome to a special friend. PM of Nepal @SherBDeuba arrives in India for an official visit from 01-03 April 2022," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said in a tweet.

The summit with Modi will take place on Saturday at the Hyderabad House here. Besides official engagements in New Delhi, the Nepalese Prime Minister will visit Varanasi.

Continued on Page 2

## Online can augment your offline learning, Modi exhorts students



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' programme in New Delhi on Friday PTI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asked students not to get stressed as they have successfully overcome exams earlier as well and urged parents and teachers not to impose their unfulfilled dreams and aspirations on children.

Interacting with students in

the fifth edition of "Pariksha Pe Charcha", Modi said technology is not a bane and should be used effectively as he took questions from them as well as teachers on several issues. Students sought from him tips to overcome distractions in the form of WhatsApp and YouTube.

Continued on Page 2

## CAPSULE

**MARKAZ TO REOPEN DURING RAMZAN: HC**  
New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Friday allowed the re-opening of certain areas of Nizamuddin Markaz, which has remained shut since March 2020 after congregation during Covid-19 breakout, to enable devotees to offer prayers during the month of Ramzan.

**NCLT ALLOWS MCA TO TAKE OVER GYMKHANA**  
New Delhi: The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Friday allowed the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to take over the control of the Delhi Gymkhana Club by nominating 15 persons to be appointed as the directors who will manage the affairs of the Company.

**YOGI EXEMPTS AYODHYA TEMPLES OF LOCAL TAXES**  
Ayodhya/Balrampur/Gorakhpur: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday visited the temple town of Ayodhya and asked the city's municipal corporation not to impose commercial taxes on temples and other religious shrines.

## Parliament breached Constitutional norms on MCD Bill: Delhi Speaker

SAURAV GUPTA ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel on Friday took exception to the passage of a Bill in Parliament to reunify three Municipal Corporations of Delhi (MCD) into one. "It was against the spirit of Constitution and federal structure for Parliament to interfere in the subject of local bodies," he said.

Addressing a Press conference here, Goel said, "The Centre should have not proposed the unification Bill at the time when the State Election Commission was going to announce the poll schedule."

"The trifurcation of the civic body was done during the former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit regime, and it was done through a democratic process. The Malhotra Committee had recommended splitting it into five corporations. In the Delhi Assembly,

the Amendment Bill was brought, and it was divided into three civic bodies," he said.

"As a Speaker, I have my protocol, but it seems this move of reunification has been done only to delay the municipal polls," Goel said. Without naming anyone, the Speaker said for the past 11 years they enjoyed the trifurcation of the civic bodies. Now, when the elections were about to happen, they feared defeat and found a way to escape, he said.

"In the history of politics, those parties who tried to delay the elections got wiped out at the time whenever polls took place in the State or Centre," Goel added. The Speaker also criticised the DDA, the Delhi Police and the Service Department for their failure to reply to the Assembly queries.

Goel said they will approach the court to ensure these departments are answerable to the State Government.

## Record GST collection in March at ₹1.4 L cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GST collections soared to an all-time high of ₹1.42 lakh crore in March as the fiscal year-end frenzy to meet targets saw strong sales and crackdown on evasions brought in more taxes.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection rose 15 per cent annually in March, the finance ministry said on Friday.

With the record collection, the Centre's GST mop-up has exceeded the revised budget target of ₹5.70 lakh crore set for the previous fiscal ended March 31, 2022.

The previous high for collection of revenues from goods sold and services rendered was in January 2022 at over ₹1.40 lakh crore. The average monthly gross GST collection in the last quarter (January-March) stood at ₹1.38 lakh crore.

Detailed report on P10

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# Yogi gives cops 100 days to improve law & order, image

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday directed the Home department to set priorities under the 100-day action plan and take action expeditiously. Yogi Adityanath said that from April 2, under Mission Shakti Abhiyan, women's safety should be monitored more effectively and actively by conducting special campaigns in schools, colleges, markets and crowded places. The chief minister was addressing a high-level review meeting convened in connection with the 100 days action plan of the Home department at his official residence here late on Thursday night. He said that security, law and order and good governance were the priority of the state government. As per the chief minister's directive, security arrangements should be further improved at all the religious centres and important places of the state. Besides, in the coming one year, proper establishment of police lines should be ensured in all the districts. Police officers of all levels should do foot patrolling daily and the patrolling of PRV-112 should be conducted effectively on a regular basis and the traffic system should be made more efficient.

A clean environment should be created in the police stations and proper arrangement for seating and drinking water should be made for the general public. Public grievances should be dealt with priority. The image of the police in the general public should be further improved. The chief minister said that taking strict action against criminals and mafia, demolition and confiscation of illegal properties should be ensured. He said no concession should be made to mining, liquor, animal, forest and land mafias, including professional criminals.

Yogi said all senior officers should make field visits. He said that the work of setting up fire service at all tehsil headquarters should be completed by including it among the priorities of 100 days. He said that action should be taken by effectively operating the functioning of the Anti Corruption Unit and Vigilance Unit. The chief minister said that the women beat police officers posted at each gram panchayat and ward level should take action for publicity of women crime control and development schemes through inter-departmental coordination. He said crime should be

controlled by establishing dialogue with village watchmen in rural areas. He directed the officials to complete the construction works expeditiously for the establishment of three PAC Women Battalions. While directing that the proceedings of prosecution of crimes related to women should be expeditious and effective, Yogi said that regular reviews should be done in this regard in coordination with the district monitoring committee. He said that there should be mutual coordination in the working of Intelligence, Special Task Force and Anti-Terrorists Squad. The chief minister said that accountability of police officers at every level should be fixed. And work should be done by adopting the policy of zero tolerance towards crime and criminals and corruption.

While identifying top 10 criminals at each police station and district level and directing police to take strict action against them, Yogi said that reviews should be done regarding the charge-sheets and action should be ensured under the UP Gangsters Act and Goonda Act. The chief minister said action should be taken to control crime by emphasising on the use of technology.

# UP CM exempts Ayodhya temples, religious shrines from civic body taxes

PTI ■ AYODHYA/ BALRAMPUR/ GORAKHPUR (UP)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday visited the temple town of Ayodhya and asked the city's municipal corporation not to impose commercial taxes on temples and other religious shrines. On his first visit to Ayodhya after assuming charge of the state for the second term, Adityanath also reviewed the preparation for the upcoming Ram Navami Mela in the temple town. Around 10 lakhs devotees are expected to participate in the fair that would be held after two years due to the Covid pandemic.

At Ayodhya, Adityanath also offered prayers at the Hanumangarhi temple and paid a visit to the construction site of the Lord Ram temple. The chief minister also visited the Balrampur district later and offered prayers in three temples there. He will have a night halt at the Devi Patan temple there and leave for Siddharthnagar on Saturday. A report from Gorakhpur, meanwhile, said CM Adityanath will observe a nine-day fast during 'Chaitra Navratri' beginning Saturday and will perform special puja there for peace, prosperity, health and happiness in the state and nation. In the temple town, Adityanath asked the Ayodhya Municipal Corporation not to take commercial tax from temples and other religious shrines. The municipal corporation must not charge house tax, water tax, sewer tax from monasteries, temples, 'dharmsalhas' and charitable organisations at commercial rates as all these institutions do charity work and public service, the CM said.

The chief minister asked the civic body to take only financial cooperation from religious shrines in the form of token monetary contributions. The CM also directed the Ayodhya Municipal Corporation to make a proposal regarding this and get it approved by the government. After the foundation-laying of the Ram temple in August 2020, this will be the first Ram Navami Mela after the Covid pandemic and the CM asked officials to organise this fair with grandeur and make special efforts for bringing Ayodhya on the world map. While reviewing the preparations for the Mela, Adityanath, in his address, said the construction of the Ram temple has started and thousands of devotees will come to Ayodhya every day from all over India. "Keeping this in view, create an enchanting atmosphere and decorate Ayodhya in such a way that the devotees find the whole atmosphere full of Ramayana era," he said. During his visit, the CM met Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust president Mahant Nritya Gopal Das and senior seer of Bhaktmaal Mahant Kaushal Kishor. The report from Gorakhpur said that while keeping the nine-day fast during Chaitra Navratri, the CM will perform special puja for the peace and prosperity in the state and nation. On Saturday, along with the worship of Maa Shailputri, Durga Saptshati Paath will begin in Shakti temple on the first floor of the Gorakhnath temple Math, Dwarika Tiwari of the temple said.

Acharya Ramanuj Tripathi, also of the Gorakhnath temple, said on the day of Ashtami on April 9, Nisha Pujan will be performed at the night and Kanya Pujan will be held on the Navmi which is on April 10. He hoped that the chief minister and Gorakshpethdhishwer Yogi Adityanath might participate in the temple's Kanya Pujan programme.

# Better Covid mgmt, vax drive prevented Omicron wave in India: Health Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Better Covid-19 management and a massive vaccination drive prevented the Omicron wave in India while it caused numerous deaths in other countries, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya told the Lok Sabha on Friday. Responding to a supplementary question in the house on the role of ICMR, Mandaviya said the ICMR has from time to time guided the country and helped in vaccine-related research leading to India having its own indigenous vaccine. "It was under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guidance that India saw best Covid management and largest vaccination drive... While Omicron caused numerous deaths in other countries, India sailed through Omicron wave because of vaccination," Mandaviya said during Question Hour. India faced Omicron threat in December 2021-January 2022. However, the impact of Omicron in India was considered less severe compared to the earlier Delta variant. The cumulative vaccine doses administered in country so far under nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 184.31 crore.

# Punjab Govt's one-sided resolution on Chandigarh has no meaning: Khattar

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Hitting back over the issue in which the Punjab legislative Assembly passed a resolution to transfer Chandigarh to the State, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said on Friday that Chandigarh is and will remain the capital of both States. Talking to the media in Gurugram, Khattar said that apart from the issue of Chandigarh, there are several other differences between Haryana and Punjab. He said that the Central Government has decided to implement the Central Service Rules in the interest of employees of Chandigarh. He alleged that the Punjab Government is misleading the public on this issue. "The Chandigarh employees would be greatly benefited by this decision. Earlier, the employees had to depend on the Punjab government for every order. If there were orders from the Center for allowances or other benefits, earlier Punjab used to issue notifications. After this it would be applicable in Chandigarh," Khattar said. Now the notifications that the Center will make will

be directly applicable to the employees. He said that the Punjab government has not yet given the benefit of the 7th Pay Commission to the employees whereas Haryana had implemented it in 2016 itself. The employees were also deprived of this till now, but now after the implementation of the new rules, they will get its benefit. Khattar informed that Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh came into existence through the Punjab Reorganization Act passed in the year 1966. There is a provision in this Act that 60 per cent of employees of Chandigarh will be from Punjab and 40 per cent of employees will be from Haryana. Since that time Chandigarh is the capital of Haryana and Punjab," he said. The CM said that not only Punjab and Haryana but the people of Himachal Pradesh should also ask for their shares in Chandigarh. "In one case, the Supreme Court had also given Himachal Pradesh the right to over 7.19 per cent of Chandigarh's land under the Punjab Reorganization Act. It is a different matter that Himachal Pradesh has made its capital in Shimla," Khattar said.



The bus lane discipline enforcement drive being implemented at Outer Ring Road's Vikas Marg, in New Delhi on Friday. RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

# Imran: Powerful...

The US diplomat was summoned hours after the country's top decision-making body on national security voiced concern over the issue during a meeting chaired by Khan on Thursday. Prime Minister Khan met President Putin in the Kremlin on February 24, the day the Russian President ordered a "special military operation" against Ukraine. Pakistan's ties with Russia have moved past the bitter Cold War hostilities in recent years and the chill in the relations between Pakistan and the US has further pushed the country towards Russia

and China. US President Joe Biden is yet to make a customary call to Prime Minister Khan since he assumed office in January 2021. In his speech, Khan said his government has pursued an independent foreign policy. "How come a country can interfere in the affairs of an independent State," he said. "But not to blame them, as it is our fault because we gave them this impression." He said for its own interest, Pakistan's elite threw the nation to the altar and put its self-respect at stake. Last month, Pakistan abstained from voting in United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution calling on Russia to stop the war against Ukraine, and urged that the conflict be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. Khan has been claiming that the Opposition's no-confidence motion against him was the result of a "foreign conspiracy" because of his independent foreign policy and funds were being channelled from abroad to oust him from power. The 69-year-old embattled prime minister on Wednesday effectively lost majority in Parliament after Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), a key partner of the ruling coalition, joined ranks of the Opposition, which had tabled a no-confidence motion against his government in the National Assembly. The crucial vote on no-confidence motion will take place on Sunday.

gaining new prestige", the Prime Minister said. Underlining the flexibility that NEP provides in the choice of subjects, Modi said proper implementation of NEP will open new venues. "People find ways to criticise what a Government does. I am happy that NEP is being welcomed by everyone. This is not made by Government but country's citizens, students and teachers for the future of the country," he added. Modi noted that the policy was not made by the Government but by the citizens, the students, and teachers for the development of the country. Earlier, physical education and training were extracurricular activities. "But now these have been made a part of education and are

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// सर्व संबंधित को सूचना //

भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन और जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय द्वारा जारी ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन, 2006 (यथा-संशोधित) के तहत सर्व संबंधित को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेसर्स भिरौद सोपड माईन (प्रो. सुश्री सुमन बंजारे), ग्राम-भिरौद, तहसील-चारागा, जिला- उत्तर बस्तर कोकर (छ.ग.) में स्थित खसरा क्रमांक 111, कुल क्षेत्रफल- 9 हेक्टेयर में रेत खदान (गौण खनिज) क्षमता-1,80,000 घनमीटर/वर्ष के पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृति हेतु, लोक सुनवाई बाबत छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल में आवेदन किया गया है। उक्त परियोजना के संबंध में आपत्तियाँ/सुझाव/विचार टीका-टिप्पणियाँ, इस सूचना के जारी होने के दिनांक से 30 दिवस के भीतर क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, जगदलपुर (छ.ग.) के कार्यालय में कार्यालयीन समय में प्रस्तुत की जा सकती है। इस परियोजना के लिए लोक सुनवाई दिनांक: 05/05/2022 दिन-गुरुवार, समय- प्रातः 10:00 बजे, स्थान-ग्राम पंचायत कार्यालय के पास स्थित खेल मैदान, ग्राम-भिरौद, तहसील- चारागा, जिला- उत्तर बस्तर कोकर (छ.ग.) में नियत की गई है। ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन, 14 सितम्बर, 2006 (यथा- संशोधित) के अनुसार संबंधित व्यक्तियों के अवलोकन/पटन हेतु ड्राफ्ट ई.आई.ए. रिपोर्ट, कार्यपालक सार हिन्दी एवं अंग्रेजी भाषा तथा सी.डी. (साफ्ट कॉपी), डायरेक्टर, भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, जोर बाग रोड, नई दिल्ली, एकिकृत क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, अरण्य भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर में रखी गई है। यह भी सूचित हो कि:-

- लोक सुनवाई के दौरान सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों को फिजिकल/सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन करना अनिवार्य होगा।
- लोक सुनवाई के दौरान सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों द्वारा मार्क का उपयोग किया जायेगा तथा समय-समय पर सेनेटाईजर का उपयोग किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।
- लोक सुनवाई स्थल पर बैठक व्यवस्था में पर्याप्त दूरी रखना अनिवार्य होगा।
- कोराना वायरस के नियंत्रण एवं रोकथाम हेतु भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, नई दिल्ली द्वारा जारी ओ.एम. दिनांक 14/09/2020 एवं शासन द्वारा जारी समस्त दिशा-निर्देशों का अक्षरशः पालन किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।

सदस्य सचिव  
छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल,  
नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

# Online can augment your offline learning, Modi exhorts students

From Page 1

"It is not the medium but the mind that is the problem," he said, adding that whether it is online or offline when the mind is involved in studies distractions won't bother students. New modes of learning should be taken as an opportunity, not as a challenge. Online can augment your offline learning," the Prime Minister said. Students can use the "online" medium to gain knowledge and execute it offline, he added. Modi also stressed going "inline" (staying

with one's own self) and staying away from being "online" or "offline". He advised students to celebrate exams as festivals and without any stress. "You are not giving exams for the first time. In a way, you are exam-proof. Thus, do not be stressed. Remember that you have successfully overcome exams before." He suggested students stay relaxed and natural in their daily routine. "There is no point in trying to copy others." The Prime Minister said he feels 50 years younger when he is interacting with young students. "I try to learn from

you by associating with your generation. As I connect with you I get a glimpse of your aspirations and dreams and try to mould my life accordingly. This programme is helping me grow. I thank you all for giving me time to help myself and grow," Modi said. "This is my favourite programme but due to Covid, I couldn't meet you. This gives me special happiness as I am meeting you after a long time," Modi told the audience at the Talkatora Stadium drawing a round of applause. To a question, he noted that the National Education Policy

# Nepal PM arrives on Modi invite; talks today

From Page 1

This is his fifth tenure as the Prime Minister of Nepal. He had met Prime Minister Modi on November 2, 2021, on the sidelines of COP 26 in Glasgow. The Ministry of External Affairs said India and Nepal enjoy age-old special ties of friendship and cooperation. The last Head of State visit from Nepal was in May 2019, when then Prime Minister K P Oli participated in the swearing-in ceremony of Modi and the Union Council of Ministers. Before that Modi had visited Nepal in August 2018 for the 4th BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu, which was preceded by a State visit to Nepal in May 2018.

# Russia welcomes...

From Page 1

In his opening remarks at the talks, Jaishankar said the meeting was taking place in a "difficult international environment quite apart from the pandemic". He also said India has always been in favour of resolving differences and disputes through dialogue and diplomacy. On his part, Lavrov said the ties between India and Russia were "very sustainable" during many "difficult times" in the past and that he did not have the slightest of doubts about continued cooperation. He said the strengthening of ties with India has been a key priority of the Russian foreign policy. With India emerging as a prominent player in the context of the Ukraine war, Lavrov said he is all for New Delhi stepping in to resolve the conflict. "India is an important country. If India sees to play that role

which provides resolution of problems...If India is with its position of just and rational approach to international problems, it can support such a process," he said on the possibility of India becoming a mediator between Moscow and Kyiv. Lavrov also took exception to the use of the word "war" and termed it as a "special operation targeting military infrastructure in Ukraine". "The aim is to deprive the Kyiv regime from building the capacity to present any threat to Russia," he said. In an apparent reference to the US and its allies, he said, "We are interested in having a balanced world order which makes it sustainable." "These days our western colleagues would like to reduce any meaningful international issue to the crisis in Ukraine...We do not fight anything and we appreciate that India is taking this sit-

uation in the entirety of effect and not just in a one-sided way," he added. "I believe that Indian foreign policies are characterised by independence and the concentration on real national legitimate interests. The same policy is based in the Russian Federation and this makes us, as big countries, good friends and loyal partners," Lavrov said. His remarks came in the backdrop of the US cautioning about consequences over attempts to "circumvent" American sanctions against Moscow. "I have no doubt no pressure will affect our partnership... They (US) are forcing others to follow their politics," the Russian minister said when asked if US pressure on India will affect India-Russian ties. With sanctions imposed against Russia and its impact on trade and defence on India, Lavrov said Russia has devel-

oped a system to engage in trade in national currencies with countries like India and efforts to move away from the dollar-based payment system will intensify. He said Russia is exploring ways to bypass impediments for bilateral trade with its allies and partners. Lavrov said a Rupee-Rouble payment system for trade with India was put into place earlier and it could be strengthened further. "More and more transactions will be done using national currencies and bypassing the dollar-based system," he told reporters. Asked about India's plan to buy discounted Russian oil, Lavrov said Moscow is ready to provide anything that New Delhi wants to buy. He said Russia is committed to continuing with India its cooperation in the defence sector. Russia is the biggest supplier of defence equipment to India and Lavrov said the two countries would

use a Rupee-Ruble mechanism to trade oil, military hardware and other goods. "I have no doubt that a way would be (found) to bypass the artificial impediments which illegal unilateral sanctions by the West create. This relates also to the area of military-technical cooperation," he said. "If India wants to buy anything from us, ready to discuss and reach mutually acceptable cooperation. We will be ready to supply to India any goods which it wants to buy from us. We are ready to discuss. Russia and India have very good relations," Lavrov said. Asked how Moscow can support New Delhi to meet security challenges, he said, "Talks are characterised by relations which we developed with India for many decades. Relations are strategic partnerships... This was the basis on which we have been promoting our cooperation in all areas."

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# NCLT allows Govt to take over Gymkhana club

## Centre-nominated 15 people to be appointed as Directors on the General Committee of the club

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Friday allowed the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to take over the control of the Delhi Gymkhana Club by nominating 15 persons to be appointed as the directors who will manage the affairs of the Company. In a 149-page order passed by a two-member bench of the NCLT, headed by President Justice Ramalingam

Sudhakar and Member Narender Kumar Bhola said there was "sufficient material" for holding that it is a case of mismanagement for the affairs of the club on a petition moved by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs under Sections 241 and 242 of the Companies Act, 2013 alleging that the affairs of Delhi Gymkhana Club were being conducted in a manner prejudicial to public interest. "...We find that there is



sufficient material for holding that it is a case of mismanagement for the affairs of the company and the general council members of each financial year have been propagating the same violations year after year and some have been continuing from one period to another giving cre-

dence to the stand of the Govt, that the club is run in the nature of "parivadvaad" which cannot be countenanced in the light of provisions of the Companies Act. The continued conduct of the governing body of the company whose acts are prejudicial to the public interest and against the

interest of the company justify that the company of this kind should be wound up," said the NCLT in its order while referring to some members continuing to be part of the previous general committee for a long period.

The NCLT order directed the ministry of corporate affairs to take all the actions for restructuring of the respondent no 1 (Delhi Gymkhana Club) in terms of memorandum and articles of Association and take corrective measures, which are in violation.

Further, the Tribunal asked the present administrator or any other person, who are in charge of the affairs of the club, to "hand over the charges to the newly appointed directors forthwith." The new directors of the general

committee appointed by the government in terms of this order shall file a report before this tribunal immediately after taking over charge of the club," it said.

The order also allowed the prayer of the central government to nominate 15 persons to be appointed as Directors on the General Committee of the club. Earlier, the NCLT had allowed the ministry to nominate 15 persons as directors on the club's general committee as well as manage the affairs of the club.

In April 2020, the government through the Ministry of Corporate Affairs had moved NCLT seeking to supersede the club's general committee.

In its petition before the NCLT, the ministry said that pursuant to several complaints

received by it, the affairs of M/S Delhi Gymkhana Club Ltd were inspected by it under Section 206(5) of the Companies Act.

During the course of the investigation, the ministry alleged that there was rampant mismanagement by the General Committee of the Club, in violation of the Articles of Association and the Companies Act. The ministry has also alleged that the general committee of the Club was acting on behalf of a few chosen members.

It was also alleged that the membership of the club is being given in a completely partial and undemocratic manner and several other violations of the Companies Act were also alleged by the Union of India. According to the allegations, 30.34 per cent of

the total expenditure of the Club has been incurred towards catering consumables, wine, beverages and cigarettes. On the other hand, the Delhi Gymkhana Club objected to the maintainability of the petition on the ground of want of opinion by the Government of India under Section 241 of the Companies Act and that there is no public interest as it is restricted to the cause of few members of the club.

The NCLT found that the club is generating no income from any sports activities which is the primary objective of the club as per its memorandum of Association. Delhi Gymkhana Club was incorporated on July 14, 1913 as a non-profit company with the objective to promote sports and pastimes under license from the Central Government.

## HC asks Delhi Police to file probe status report

### BJYM attack on residence of CM Arvind Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police was asked by the Delhi High Court on Friday to file a status report in connection with the alleged attack by Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) workers on the residence of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal earlier this week.

A Bench of Acting Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and Navin Chawla, hearing a petition by AAP MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj concerning the incident, granted time to Delhi Police to file its status report in connection with the ongoing investigation in a sealed cover. "Some took law into their hands. An element of fear was sought to be created. That is evident. The police force was inadequate...They did try to stop them but they were outnumbered," the court observed.

Delhi Police, represented by Additional Solicitor-General Sanjay Jain, told the court that the police has registered an FIR on its own in relation to the attack and is taking all steps to address the safety concerns.

He added that all the evidence, including the CCTV footage from cameras around the Chief Minister's residence as well as the arterial roads towards it, would be preserved. "Delhi Police will set up a meeting with the Chief Minister's secretariat. We don't know if they are feeling any apprehension," said Jain who claimed that instant petition was "misconceived."

He added that eight people have already been arrested in relation to the case and an investigation is underway. Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for the petitioner, urged the court to issue a notice on the petition and pass a direction for the preservation of CCTV footage of the incident. Senior advocate Rahul Mehta, also appearing

for the petitioner, objected to the registration of an "unnamed" FIR when there are videos to show the presence of a Member of Parliament. "This is too premature," the court stated.

Bhardwaj, in his petition through advocate Bharat Gupta, has sought the constitution of an SIT to probe the alleged attack and argued that the vandalisation of the official residence of the Chief Minister appears to have been carried out with Delhi Police's tacit complicity.

"On March 30 several BJP goons, in the garb of a protest, launched an attack on official residence of the Delhi Chief Minister. Videos and photographs show that these goons casually walked through the security cordon (maintained by Delhi Police), kicked and broke boom barrier, broke CCTVs cameras with lathis, threw paint on gate of residence and almost climbed over gate, while Delhi Police personnel simply looked on, doing little to stop the protestors," the plea alleged.

## Vandalism outside Delhi CM residence will encourage anarchists: House Speaker



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel on Friday said act of vandalism during a protest outside residence of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal would "encourage anarchist elements" and "misguide" young generations of country.

Addressing a press conference in Assembly premises, he appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "condemn it in strongest words". Activists of the BJP's youth wing BJYM, led by its president Tejasvi Surya, had staged a protest outside Kejriwal's residence here on Wednesday demanding his apology for allegedly "mocking"

Kashmiri Pandits in backdrop of "The Kashmir Files" film. Goel said, "I had met CM day this incident happened. CCTV (cameras) and barriers were damaged, and yellow paint was sprayed on walls. And, it was led by an MP, nothing can be more condemnable than that." "This kind of incident will encourage anarchist elements and misguide the young generations of this country," the Speaker said.

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had alleged on Wednesday that activists of BJYM had attacked and damaged CCTV cameras as well as security barriers at Chief Minister's residence in Civil Lines area.

Police registered a case against unidentified people in connection with incident. Eight people were arrested in connection with incident, officials had said on Thursday. The Delhi Police on Friday told high court here that it had taken suo motu cognisance of the alleged vandalism and registered an FIR.

## MK Stalin visits Delhi Govt school

### Will develop model school in my State too, am inviting Delhi CM to visit it: TN CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lauding the Delhi Government for developing world-class schools and Mohalla Clinics, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said that he will develop a model school in his State on the lines of Delhi and invited Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to visit them.

Stalin along with his Delhi counterpart visited a Delhi Government school where officials briefed the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister on the change in the education system in the national Capital under the AAP Government.

"We will develop a world-class model school in Chennai. I am inviting Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to visit it in

advance," he said. On this occasion, Kejriwal said: "Only education can help build a better society and an empowered nation; come let's bring an education revolution together."

The Delhi Government would love to share their experiences with the Tamil Nadu Government and will learn from their works too." Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that Stalin's Delhi visit would motivate both States to bring reforms in their education system.

"If we work together to improve our education system by learning from each other, we then we can bring an unprecedented transformation in the country," he added.

Stalin visited Rajkiya Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya in Delhi. During this event, schoolchildren welcomed him with flowers. He also met the children of Deshbhakti class and got to know their experience.

During his visit to the school Stalin tried to understand how the all-round devel-

opment of children was being ensured there. On this, the officials apprised him that the Delhi Government was spending about 25 per cent of the total budget of the State on education.

Kejriwal told his Tamil Nadu counterpart that his Government focused on improving school infrastructure in the first few years.

"We have sports facilities, including swimming pools. One cannot even think of swimming pools in Government schools. We have a very good infrastructure," he said. "In the second stage, we started sending all principals and teachers for training. They are now full of energy and confidence. And now we are focusing on the content being taught in the schools," he said.

The CM also tweeted, "I am very delighted that Thiru MK Stalin visited Delhi Government's schools and Mohalla Clinics today. This country can only progress if we all learn from each other's good ideas."

## PICTALK



The Delhi Police Commissioner, Rakesh Asthana, on Friday pipped Surender Singh Yadav on his promotion to the next higher rank as Special CP at a ceremony held today at Police Headquarters in the city. PNS photo

## Khattar inaugurates Huda City Centre underpass, flyover, FOBs

Gurugram: Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar inaugurated the Huda City Centre underpass, flyover and two-foot overbridges (FOB) built near the Signature Tower and Iffco Chowk on Friday. Meant to reduce traffic snarls at the Huda City Centre junction, the projects were opened to the public on the same day.

The underpass, built at a cost of Rs 52.52 crore, is 750m long and will pave the way for a seamless commute from the Signature Tower to Subhash Chowk, while the 269.5-metre-long flyover will improve connectivity between Hussain Marg and the sector road.

"This is another achievement and a proud milestone for Gurugram. The Huda City Centre is one of the busiest and most important traffic junctions of the city which sees heavy vehicle flow and pedestrian



movement. The new underpass and flyover will facilitate a smooth traffic stream at this critical location and eradicate traffic congestion and jams," Khattar said. The Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) official said the underpass has two lanes designed for vehicular speed of 40 kmph. "The underpass and the flyover will reduce the move-

ment of vehicles and there will be less congestion. A FOB will also provide for smooth movement of pedestrians," he said. Khattar also inaugurated the water supply distribution network of Zone-8 from Sector 111 to Sector 115 in Gurugram. The project which cost approximately Rs 10 crore will by 2031 provide safe drinking water to over 93,000 residents in area.

## Notorious snatcher held, accomplice absconding

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has nabbed a notorious snatcher for allegedly snatching the mobile phone from a tea seller while he was on his way to open his stall in north Delhi's Burari area.

The accused has been identified as 22-year-old Aman, who was involved in seven cases and he was released from jail in December, 2021. Police said that he along with his associate Ashish, who is absconding, committed the offence in the early hours of March 28.

The incident took place when 56-year-old Yagender Kumar, resident of Swaroop Nagar, was on his way to open his tea stall in Burari. When he reached the 100 Foota Road, two bike-borne men snatched his mobile phone and fled away, police said. According to



Sagar Singh Kalsi, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), North district, the victim could not make a police control room (PCR) call and went to his tea stall but the same evening, his son called the police after he reached home from his workplace.

## Noida man held for raping step-daughter, booked under POCSO Act

PTI ■ NOIDA

A 47-year-old man was arrested in Noida on Friday for allegedly raping his 12-year-old step-daughter and was booked under the stringent Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, police officials said. The arrest followed six months after an FIR was lodged at the Phase 3 police station in the case on the complaint of the girl's mother, the officials said.

The mother had filed a complaint on September 1 last year saying that her daughter had gone missing after which an FIR was lodged under Section 363 of (IPC), a police spokesperson said. "The child was recovered on September 4 last year after which her statement was recorded and she went through medical examinations which suggested rape. IPC Section 376 (rape) and provisions of POCSO Act too were added in FIR after this," the spokesperson said.

## Noida Police arrests 2 criminals involved in several robberies

PNS ■ NOIDA

Following a brief exchange of fire, the Noida police arrested two alleged criminals involved in several cases of robbery. The gunfight took place late on Thursday evening during a police check in the Phase 2 area of the city.

Police said that the accused have been identified as Sumit and Danish, both residents of Gautam Buddha Nagar District. According to Elamaran G, the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Central Noida, the accused were on a motorcycle. On being asked to stop for inquiry, they sped away.

"The police party chased them and a gunfight ensued in which both of them got injured and were held," Elamaran said. "Two illegal firearms along with some ammunition and seven stolen mobile phones were recovered from their possession, the police said. SR

## Mechanic dies after blast in AC compressor

Gurugram: A 45-year-old technician, who used to repair air-conditioners, died in a compressor blast on Friday morning, an official said. The incident occurred in Manohar Nagar near Pataudi Chowk in Gurugram. The deceased was identified as Sanjay. The victim was asleep when the incident took place. According to people who lived in the same locality, a loud explosion was heard and they rushed to check its source. Devender Kumar, a Fire brigade official said they got a call from locals that a fire broke out in a house. They took 2 hours to douse the flame. The victim sustained severe burns injuries after the compressor of an AC unit exploded. The cause of the explosion is not known yet, he added. SR

## Delhi High Court allows re-opening of Nizamuddin Markaz for Ramzan

### No Tablighi activities, lectures allowed, only prayers can be offered, says court

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday allowed the re-opening of certain areas of the Nizamuddin Markaz, where the Tablighi Jamaat congregation was held in March 2020 amid the Covid-19 pandemic and has remained shut since then, to enable devotees to offer prayers during the month of Ramzan.

Justice Jasmeet Singh, who was hearing a plea by the Delhi Waqf Board seeking a direction to open mosque for the holy month, clarified that no "Tablighi activities" and lectures can take place on the premises and only prayers can be offered. "It is directed that for Ramadan, namaz and religious

prayers shall be permitted to be offered on the ground floor and four floors at Masjid Bangle Wali. This arrangement is only for the month of Ramzan culminating with Eid Ul Fitr," ordered the court. "Religious prayers and namaz (are allowed) but no Tablighi activities. Let's not dilute it. There will be no lectures. Prayers can be made. But no lectures," the court stated.

It added that the instant permission was in continuation of the March 16 order which imposed various conditions for reopening of the premises for Shab-e-Bharat.

The court further directed installation of CCTV cameras at the entry, exit and stairs of each floor of premises and said that it shall be responsibility of markaz management to ensure that cameras are fully functional during period of Ramzan. For Shab-e-Bharat, court had removed the 100-person limit for one floor and said it has been agreed that

management of the mosque will ensure that Covid-19 protocols and social distancing will be followed while allowing devotees to enter the mosque to offer namaz. Lawyer Rajat Nair, appearing for Delhi Police and Central Government, opposed the grant of permission to offer prayers on fourth floor and said that mosque was only restricted to ground floor which is borne out of site plan.

"If there are more floors, there is more space... If there is a reason (to oppose opening of fourth floor), tell us. More surface area, better it is. More area is always conducive," the court remarked.

The judge stated that as per joint inspection report, the fourth floor was part of the masjid area and present observations are only prima facie and subject to adjudication. The Central Government lawyer also said that no "Tablighi activities" and lectures can be permitted in markaz and only prayers are allowed.

## Army truck driver held for running over cyclist

NEW DELHI: A day after a 26-year-old man died allegedly after being run over by a vehicle when he lost control of his bicycle and fell on the road, the Delhi Police has arrested an army truck driver on Friday.

The driver has been identified as Sepoy OM Prakash (46), a resident of Jind district in Haryana.

Kanwar Arora was allegedly run over by the army truck in a posh central Delhi area on Thursday after he lost control of his bicycle, fell down and came under the rear wheel of the truck of Sena Bhawan.

According to Amrutha Guguloth, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), New Delhi district, the vehicle belongs to Defence Headquarters Security troops, KG Marg, B-Block, Defence Complex. Prakash is presently posted at Defence Headquarters Troops. "The offender has been arrested.

## Man held for fake Insta accounts, stalking

NEW DELHI: Delhi Police has arrested a 22-year-old man for allegedly creating fake accounts on Instagram, stalking dozens of people and threatening them in the national Capital. The accused has been identified as Mithun Tiwari, a resident of Anand Parbat in Delhi. According to Manoj C, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Southwest district, on March 17, a woman complained to the police that a man, who had created multiple accounts on the social media platform, had been stalking her, and threatening to kidnap her and make her photographs viral after she turned down his proposal. "Acting on complaint, the police analysed the stalker's Instagram accounts and found them linked them to Tiwari. He was arrested," said the DCP. Tiwari is well-versed in handling social media accounts.



# 'Need to create umbrella institution'

**Time to bring CBI, SFIO and ED under one roof: CJI**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Justice NV Ramana on Friday said there is an immediate requirement for the creation of an independent umbrella institution, so as to bring various agencies like the CBI, SFIO and ED among others under one roof.

"Unfortunately, our investigative agencies still do not have the benefit of being guided by a comprehensive law. Need of the hour is the creation of an independent and autonomous investigative agency," the CJI said.

He suggested the creation of an overarching umbrella

body to also avoid multiplicity of procedures and streamline functioning of police agencies as also regaining public trust.

Justice Ramana articulated this in an address at the 19th DP Kohli Memorial Lecture "Democracy: Role and Responsibility of investigative agencies" and also backed modernization as well as accountability of the investigative agencies.

Kohli was the founder director of CBI.

Underscoring reform and modernization of the police apparatus, Justice Ramana said, "Reform of the police system is long overdue in our country. The Ministry of Home Affairs has itself recognized the glaring need of the same in the 'Status Note on Police Reforms in India.'"

"Police reforms have been on the agenda of Governments almost since independence but even after more than 50 years, the police is seen as selective efficient, unsympathetic to



the under-privileged. It is further accused of politicization and criminalization. In this regard, one needs to note that the basic framework for policing in India was made way back in 1861, with little changes thereafter, whereas the society has undergone dramatic changes, especially in the post independence times," he quoted from the Home Ministry's status report.

This body, he said, is required to be created under a statute, clearly defining its powers, functions and jurisdictions. Such a law will also lead to much needed legislative oversight.

It is imperative for the

organization to be headed by an independent and impartial authority, to be appointed by a committee akin to the one which appoints the Director of the CBI. The head of the organisation can be assisted by deputies who are specialists in different domains. This umbrella organisation will end multiplicity of proceedings, he said.

A single incident these days gets investigated by multiple agencies, often leading to dilution of evidence, contradiction in depositions, prolonged incarceration of innocents. It will also save the institution from being blamed as a tool of harassment. Once an incident is reported, the organisation should decide as to which specialised wing should take up investigation.

"One additional safeguard that needs to be built into the scheme, is to have separate and autonomous wings for prosecution and investigation, in order to ensure total indepen-

## CJI's quip over invitation from CBI Director

"When the Director, CBI, Subodh Kumar Jaiswal came to invite me for this Lecture, I told him very frankly that I may have to express some critical opinions about the functioning of the police in India. Hope he has not invited trouble by inviting me," CJI Ramana said in his beginning remarks at the event.

A provision in the proposed law for annual audit of the performance of the institution by the appointing committee will be a reasonable check and balance, the Chief Justice said, highlighting the need for police bodies to reclaim social legitimacy and public trust. "The first step to gain the same is to break the nexus with the political executive," he added.

# Two decades on, EMRS scheme yet to be completed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Many schools under the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) scheme, which was started in 1997-98, are yet to be completed even after more than two decades, a Parliamentary panel has pointed out.

The project was launched to impart quality education to Scheduled Tribes (ST) children in remote areas to enable them avail of opportunities in high and professional educational courses and get employment in various sectors.

Of the 288 schools sanctioned in 1997-98, only 244 schools could be made functional. A data furnished by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment showed that the construction work of only 202 schools has been completed till date and the construction work of 20 schools is yet to begin, whereas construction work of 66 schools is targeted to be completed by October, 2024.

The data showed that the original target, which aimed

that 452 new Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) including 12 Eklavya Model Day Boarding School (EMDBS) would be set up in the remaining 462 sub-districts by the year 2022 is nowhere near completion and the target year stands revised as 2025 now.

"Out of 452 schools proposed to be sanctioned as per the phasing plan between 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, only 350 schools could be sanctioned and the remaining 102 schools are remaining to be sanctioned as the location for these schools is yet to be finalised. The construction work of only 100 schools could begin till date whereas the construction work of 332 schools is to begin by March 2022, which has just passed", the data showed.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment, headed by Rama Devi, tabled its report on Friday, it is disappointing that very few schools have their own build-

ings as only 20 schools have been made functional from own buildings. 103 schools are functioning from alternate buildings since 2018-19 till 2021-22.

The report said that the Committee was quite apprehensive with regard to the achievement of target even by March 2025 as construction of 252 schools is yet to begin. The Committee have been made to believe by the Ministry that after establishment of National Educational Society for Tribal Students (NESTS) on revamping of the Scheme.

"The Committee are surprised to note that 3 States namely Bihar, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have still not signed MoU and are reluctant to shift to CBSE Board and are insisting on continuation of State Board Curriculum in the schools set up in their States whereas the norms stipulate that all the EMRSs set up are to be affiliated with CBSE in order to grant better sum per child studying in these schools," the report said.

# BJP crosses 100-seat mark in Upper House

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Winning four Rajya Sabha seats out of 13 for which polls were held on Thursday the BJP has for the first time crossed the 100-mark in the upper house.

The BJP won four Rajya Sabha seats from three Northeastern states — Assam, Tripura and Nagaland and also became the first party to achieve the feat after 1988.

After the recent round of election the BJP's tally now stands at 101.

The BJP achieved this feat after winning four seats out of 13 for which polls were held on Thursday. The saffron party alliance partner United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) won one Rajya Sabha seat from Assam at the expense of Congress, which fell victim to alleged

cross voting.

The BJP has also increased its members' tally in the Upper House from the region.

The Congress' strength has reduced by five seats in the recent round of the Rajya Sabha polls.

With the BJP crossing the 100-mark in the Rajya Sabha, the opposition has been put out of the race for the Vice President election in August this year. The elections for the two Rajya Sabha seats in Assam and one in Tripura were held on Thursday.

BJP candidate and its women wing state president S. Phangnon Konyak was elected unopposed to the lone Rajya Sabha seat in Nagaland, making her the first woman from the state to get a berth in the Parliament's Upper House.

# Sonia calls meet to discuss party strategy in House

**All Congress parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha will attend the meeting in the central hall of Parliament scheduled on April 5**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With almost two weeks to go for the remaining part of the Budget Session in Parliament, Congress president Sonia Gandhi has convened a meeting of the Parliamentary Party on Tuesday to discuss the current political situation, strategy in both Houses of Parliament and the way forward to corner the government on range of issues including price rise and diplomatic relations.

Congress has been seeking to corner the Government on the issue of rising inflation and hike in prices of petrol, diesel and LPG gas, besides the economic situation in the wake of

the Russia-Ukraine war.

All Congress parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha will attend the meeting in the central hall of Parliament scheduled on April 5. While Sonia is being noticed as being vocal and raising issues herself frequently after facing the heat of party colleagues over massive assembly poll debacle recently, this is the first meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party after the assembly elections results.

Earlier she had convened a meeting of Congress Working Committee to discuss on the poll debacle and to own up the responsibility for the humiliating defeat. While another round of CWC is to be held anytime this month, a Chintan Shivir has also been proposed later this month or early next month. In between a meeting of the State Congress chiefs and general secretaries were conducted last week to develop strategy to strengthen the party and to do a series of protest on

price rise across the country.

The CWC had unanimously decided that party president Sonia Gandhi should continue in the post till organisational polls after she expressed readiness to "make any and every sacrifice" in the party's interest.

Meanwhile the party has extended the March 31 deadline for its nationwide membership drive to April 15. The membership drive that started on November 1 last year is both in online and physical mode and was to continue till March 31. The membership has crossed 1.2 crore, according to a party source.

"The Congress president has approved the proposal of the AICC GSs and Incharges for extension of the special membership drive for 15 days. The drive will now close on April 15, 2022, without affecting the schedule of Organisational Elections approved by the CWC," AICC general secretary, organisation, KC Venugopal said.

# Govt rules out teaching regional languages in Army school

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Friday ruled out teaching regional languages in Army Public Schools as it will put an unnecessary burden on students as they have to frequently change cities because of the nature of the service of their parents.

Giving this information in the Lok Sabha, Minister of state for Defence Ajay Bhatt said Army Public Schools (APS) were established to cater to education requirements for the wards of Indian Army Personnel who hail from diverse backgrounds and regions of the country.

"Unlike other schools with students from the immediate and extended locality, all 136 Army Public Schools are enrolled primarily with wards of Indian Army personnel, who have been transferred-in from another location," he explained in a written reply.

Due to the nature of service, Indian Army personnel are transferred frequently, at short notice, and mostly in the middle of the academic calendar and at times in field locations away from their families, the minister noted.



"The relatively limited period of stay of families with serving personnel in station and frequent transfer necessitated standardisation of the languages i.e. English, Hindi and Sanskrit which was undertaken since the inception of the schools in 1950," he mentioned.

The change of regional language in the middle of an academic session will place an unnecessary educational burden, in addition to emotional turmoil due to academic instability that Army wards have to endure when transferred into a new environment every few years, Bhatt said.

# 14.6% dropout rate at secondary level in schools: UDISE+

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2020-21 latest annual report has mentioned dropout rate for secondary level education to 14.6 per cent. At the peak of the covid pandemic with school closures, 247 million children were affected in India.

Besides there has also been a rise in School Dropout Rates of girls in India which pose an alarming situation as per a report by UNICEF "With the current situation, we might be risking a lost generation of children who may never return to school. The impact on girls is disproportionately worse," said Yasumasa Kimura, UNICEF India Representative. It further said at least 38 per cent of respondents

of a poll conducted on International Women's Days said they knew of a girl who had dropped out of school. While 33 per cent youth respondents said that the girls who had dropped out were engaged in domestic work, 25 per cent reported that the dropouts had got married.

"This is indeed a matter of grave concern. It is critical that we work towards transitioning all children back into learning. UNICEF is supporting the Government of India in back-to-school campaigns, awareness and outreach initiatives and learning recovery programmes at schools and in the communities. We must not only bring children back to school but also focus on putting strong remedial learning initiatives in place to ensure retention and continuity of learning," said Kimura.

# Only 10 State ready to set up courts in rural areas: Baghel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha was on Friday informed that only 10 States have come forward to set up courts in rural areas under the Gram Nyayalaya Act to provide access to justice to people at their doorsteps.

Giving this information, Union Minister S P Singh Baghel regretted that 15 states had considered the scheme but only 10 have so far opted for it.

He was replying to a question from BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi who had said 4.5 crore cases are pending in different courts and of them over 87 per cent pendency cases are in the lower courts and there is need to expand the role of Gram Nyayalaya to deliver quick justice.

At present, a total of 258 Gram Nyayalayas (rural courts) are functioning even as notifications had been issued for the setting up of 476 Gram Nyayalayas, he added.

The Gram Nyayalaya Act 2008 stipulates for establishment of courts at intermediate panchayat level to provide access to justice to people at their door steps.

The minister said it is not mandatory for the states to implement the Act.

"It (implementation of the Act) is advisory," he said.

Sarangi had sought to know from the government about the steps being taken to set up Gram Nyayalayas in the country, stressing that there is an "urgent need" to increase the capability of the country's justice delivery system.

# RS members urge Govt to bring down high prices of medicines, fuel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rising prices of essential medicines and fuel figured prominently in the Rajya Sabha on Friday. Members, who flagged these issues, urged the Government to immediately intervene and provide succor to the poor.

Raising the issue of high prices of medicines, two Rajya Sabha members also claimed the government was insensitive towards the common people.

John Brittas (CPM) said prices of more than 800 medicines are being increased by 11 per cent effective April 1 which will adversely impact the common man, and urged the government to withdraw the hike.

Priyanka Chaturvedi (Shiv Sena) too joined the issue and

urged the central government to provide relief on the front.

"I'm sad because the life of the common man is becoming tough and much more difficult. Today's April 1 and already the people are reeling under the price rise and every day petroleum price is going up.

"But today... Another unfortunate thing is going to happen. The wholesale price of drugs of more than 800 items, which are essential for our survival, is being increased by 11 per cent," Brittas said.

Terming the hike as unprecedented, the CPM member pointed out that there has never been such a steep increase in the prices of drugs in the past.

Emphasising that people's health budget has already gone up, Brittas said an increase in prices of common illnesses, like fever, infections, heart disease,

and anaemia, would further impact them.

The member told the House that he too was ill and availed medical care because of the CGHS facility. "But think about the vast chunk of the population who doesn't have any social security or health insurance. What is their plight?" he wondered and urged the government to roll back the steep hike.

Chaturvedi pointed out that while petrol, diesel, cooking fuel and even food are already costly, medicines too have become dearer. She said the cost of living is increasing every day.

In a circular dated March 25, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority had said based on the wholesale price index, the annual change in the WPI works out as 10.76607 per cent

during the calendar year 2021 over the preceding year.

Among other issues, Shanta Chhetri (TMC) demanded minority status for Hindus in Meghalaya. She cited the Centre's assertion in the Supreme Court that states can consider granting Hindus minority status if they deem so.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in the House, Chhetri said the Centre has told the Supreme Court that states can consider granting Hindus the minority status if the community is not in a majority within their jurisdiction.

If Hindus are in minority in a particular state they should be able to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice in keeping with the rights granted to the minority by the Constitution as per the Centre, she said.

# Major floods increased in 3 yrs in India

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In what could be called as the impact of climate change and is a cause of concern for the authorities, the number of States in the country reporting extreme floods has increased in just the last three years.

More worrying is that even States from Southern India are becoming prone to this weather unpredictability induced by global warming.

The data tabled in Parliament by the Union Minister of Jal Shakti recently reveals that in addition to existing flood prone States Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, extreme floods (water level above previous Highest Flood Level) were witnessed in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan due to excess to large excess rainfall in these states combined with extremely heavy rainfall in short dura-

tion. Sharing these disturbing facts, Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Bishweshwar Tudu in a written reply in Lok Sabha said that floods are natural calamities that the country faces almost every year, in varying degrees of magnitude.

"The occurrence of floods can be attributed to various factors, including wide variations in rainfall both in time and space with frequent departures from the normal pattern, inadequate carrying capacities of rivers, river bank erosion and silting of river beds, landslides, poor natural drainage in flood prone areas, snowmelt and glacial lake out-bursts, etc."

The Central Water Commission (CWC), which is the nodal agency entrusted with the task of flood forecasting and early flood warnings, has issued flood forecasts for 331 forecasting stations (199 river level forecast stations & 132 dam/ barrage inflow forecast stations).



"These stations cover 20 major river basins in 23 States & 2 Union Territories," said the Minister According to experts, climate change has already started worsening the frequency, intensity, and impacts of some types of extreme weather events. For example, sea level rise increases the impacts of coastal storms and warming

can place more stress on water supplies during droughts.

A report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in last August said a disaster related to a weather, climate or water hazard occurred every day on average over the past 50 years — killing 115 people and causing USD 202 million in losses daily.

It pointed out that the number of disasters has increased by a factor of five over the 50-year period, driven by climate change, more extreme weather and improved reporting. But, thanks to improved early warnings and disaster management, the number of deaths decreased almost three-fold.

# Nishank asked to vacate bungalow allotted to Scindia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate of Estate (DOE) has asked former Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank to vacate 27, Safdarjung Road, a bungalow that was officially allotted to Union Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia last year. Since Pokhriyal is no longer a minister, he is not entitled for a Type VIII bungalow.

This would be the fourth eviction in the past few days by the DoE that saw Lok Janshakti Party president and Lok Sabha MP Chirag Paswan removed from 12 Janpath bungalow, BJP Lok Sabha MP Ram Shankar Katheria removed from 7 Moti Lal Nehru and BJP minister P C Sarangi from 10 Pandit Pant Marg.

Sources in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs said that former education minister 'Nishank' has been

served thrice show cause notice for refusing to vacate a bungalow allotted to him when he was minister.

According to the guidelines of the DoE — the department under the housing ministry responsible for allocating government houses — a former minister must vacate the official bungalow allotted to him when he was minister after a month of leaving office. But despite repeated reminders, the sources alleged, Pokhriyal continued to cite various reasons for not vacating the bungalow, forcing the housing ministry to issue the show cause notices.

Nishank had earlier cited health reasons for not vacating the house. "We have shown other alternative bungalows earmarked for MPs under the



general pool but he did not like them," added the official, who did not want to be named.

The corner bungalow near Safdarjung's Tomb was home to the Scindias for years. It was earlier allotted to Scindia's late father, Madhavrao Scindia, when he was a Union minister. Jyotiraditya Scindia occupied the bungalow till 2019.



# CBI gets custody of Deshmukh, Waze in corruption case

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Two special courts here on Friday granted CBI the custody of former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh, his two aides and dismissed police officer Sachin Waze for investigation in a corruption case registered against them.

NCP leader Deshmukh (71) and his aides Sanjeev Palande and Kundan Shinde are currently in judicial custody in a money laundering case being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). They are lodged in the Arthur Road jail in the city.

The Central Bureau of Investigation had filed an application before additional sessions judge D P Singhade for their custody.

The judge on Thursday issued a letter of request to the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act court, which hears ED cases, to transfer Deshmukh and the other two to the custody of the CBI.

The CBI had also sought the custody of Sachin Waze. Waze was arrested in March 2021 by the National Investigation Agency in the Antilia bomb scare-Mansukh Hiran murder case. Following which, judge D P Singhade had sent a similar letter of request to the special NIA court.

Waze is currently in judicial custody at Taloja Jail in neighbouring Navi Mumbai. The special PMLA and NIA courts on Friday directed, in separate orders, the superintendents of respective jails to hand over the custody of the four accused -- Deshmukh, Palande, Shinde and Waze -- to the CBI.

Former Mumbai police commissioner



Param Bir Singh had alleged that Deshmukh, then home minister, had given a target to police officers to collect Rs 100 crore per month from restaurants and bars in the city.

Deshmukh denied the allegations but stepped down from his post after the Bombay High Court directed the CBI to register a case against him.

Incidentally, the Supreme Court on Friday rejected a plea by the Maharashtra government challenging an order of the Bombay High Court dismissing its petition seeking an SIT to probe the corruption case against Deshmukh.

## K'taka HC refuses expeditious hearing of hate speech petition against BJP leaders



PTI ■ BENGALURU

The High Court of Karnataka on Friday refused out-of-turn expeditious hearing of a petition seeking Government action against BJP leaders, including Union Minister of State for Agriculture Shobha Karandlaje and Karnataka Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister K S Eshwarappa and others for alleged hate speech. The court said the petition would be heard on its turn.

Mohammed Khaleelulla, the petitioner, has claimed in the petition that there "being capricious and eccentric speeches spewing abhor, inviting hate against Muslim community in particular within the society by patriarchs and leaders holding authorities in the State and Central Governments," action should

be initiated against Eshwarappa, party leaders C T Ravi, former minister M P Renukacharya, Prathap Simha and Rishikumara Swamy (Kali Swamy), Pramod Mutalik, Basanagouda Patil Yatnal, Shobha Karandlaje, Tejasvi Surya, Sulibele Chakravarthy and others.

The petitioner from Mandya, claims that these political leaders and private persons were making inflammatory anti-Muslim speeches creating disparity within the society and developing bitterness between communities.

The petition lists dozens of media reports and videos of the alleged hate speeches.

Apart from the Karnataka government law and home departments, the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs has also been named as respondent in the petition

## BAGTUI BURNING, MASS MURDER CASE Bengal Police suspends SDPO for spilling beans on negligence

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal police have started departmental proceedings against Rampurhat Sub-divisional Police Officer Sayan Ahmed days after he dropped hints before the Central Bureau of Investigation officials about alleged lack of diligence on the part of his senior officers in handling the Bagtui burning and mass murder case.

At least nine people including 7 women and two children had died on March 21 when their houses were set ablaze by the rival gangs of ruling Trinamool Congress launching a retaliatory attack within hours of — Bhadu Sheikh — a deputy pradhan of the Bagtui village in Birbhum district being bombed to death.

The police administration on Friday suspended the SDPO and started departmental inquiry against him, inside sources said adding the officer had earlier told the CBI sleuths that his senior officers --- including the district Superintendent of Police --- had summoned him at a state guest house and directed him to concentrate on a different case at the time when houses were being set ablaze by the miscreants.

The inspector in-charge of the Rampurhat police station had already been suspended a day after the incident. The



CBI had questioned him earlier. According to sources Ahmed had advised his senior officers about the gravity of the situation but was told to follow the orders of his superiors that included scanning of some CCTV footages of the murder of a local village deputy pradhan Bhadu Sheikh hours before the mass burning of the houses.

Hours after his murder the angry supporters of Bhadu Sheikh had allegedly set the houses afire and murdered the nine victims.

The decision of the State police to start departmental proceedings the suspended officers comes at a time when the CBI had decided to send the samples of those killed for

DNA testing, sources said.

Meanwhile, there was nightlong bombing at Sashan in North 24 Parganas in the northern suburbs of Kolkata, sources said adding bombs were hurled and several houses were attacked by the rival groups of the TMC. No one was however injured sources said.

The police immediately swung into action and recovered huge quantity of arms and ammunition including bombs and bullets from Sashan and Habra area of the district sources added. In the past one week the police have recovered about 500 bombs after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee directed the men in uniform to recover arms and bombs.

# Ultras taking refuge in masjids, madrassas: Security forces

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The top brass of the Indian Army and officers of Jammu and Kashmir police on Friday flagged the issue of terrorists taking refuge in masjids and madrassas prior or after the act of committing terror activities in an attempt to create communal disturbance during a joint security conference at Awantipore.

The recent terror attacks on civilians and security forces personnel were also discussed in detail during the crucial security meeting.

According to a Srinagar based Defence spokesman, "the alarming trend of the terrorists taking refuge in Masjids and Madrassas prior or after the act of committing terror activities in an attempt to create communal disturbance was discussed during the conference".

The security Conference was chaired by the Corps Commander, Chinara Corps to discuss security related issues in the Valley. It was attended by all senior Army including GOCs, Sector Commanders and COs as well as senior police officers in Kashmir Division including the IGP, DIGs North, Central and South Kashmir, SSPs and SPs of all districts.

According to the Defence spokesman, "the forces also voiced concern on children of young age being manipulated by people with nefarious designs with drugs and false narratives. The Corps Commander and the IGP urged the parents to reach out to their children and help arrest this regressive evil.

During the high level conference a detailed discussion was also held on the smooth conduct of the Amarnath yatra beginning June 30. Defence spokesman said, "The yatra this year is expected to draw a large number of pilgrims as it is being resumed after a gap of two years due to the COVID restrictions. The agencies deliberated on the safety measures to be put in place and synergised efforts at ensuring a smooth flow of traffic of yatis and provision of administrative and medical assistance from available resources".



Meanwhile, a joint team of security forces Friday also neutralised a Lashkar-e-Tayyeba terrorist in Turkwangam area of Shopian.

According to a defence spokesman, "the Security forces established an initial cordon around the houses in the village where the terrorist was suspected to have been hiding. At around 10:30 pm, the terrorist opened fire on the cordon parties from one of the houses. The security forces reacted immediately by returning fire and tightening the cordon around the house where the terrorist was hiding. While the cordon was being tightened, the terrorist lobbed a grenade on the security forces causing injuries to two soldiers of the Indian Army, who were subsequently evacuated to 92 Base Hospital, Srinagar".

"Fire continued to be exchanged throughout the night into the intervening morning of 01 Apr 22. The terrorist was subsequently neutralized. A thorough search of the house was conducted in the morning and on finding no other terrorists, the operation was called off. Warlike stores have been recovered from

the encounter area", Defence spokesman added.

The slain terrorist has been identified as Muneeb Ahmad Sheikh son of Shah Mohd Sheikh resident of Tak Mohalla Shopian, affiliated with proscribed terror outfit LeT.

As per police records the killed terrorist was a categorized terrorist and part of groups involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on Police/SFs and civilian atrocities. Meanwhile, security forces also busted a terror module of proscribed terror outfit JeM by arresting 03 terrorist associates in Pulwama. According to a police spokesman the terrorist associates have been identified as Owais Altaf son of Altaf Hussain Ganai resident of Jandwal, Aqib Manzoor son of Manzoor Ahmad Mir resident of Gudoor and Waseem Ahmad Pandit son of Gh Mohammad Pandit resident of Karimabad Pulwama.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the arrested trio was involved in providing logistics and transportation to terrorists in the district, police spokesman added.

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Eight more people, including the alleged mastermind in the Class 12 English exam question paper leak case, were held on Friday, taking the total number of arrests to 34, the Uttar Pradesh Police said.

The UP Board's English language exam paper was cancelled in 24 districts on Wednesday after the paper was leaked, prompting Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to order stringent action, including invoking the National Security Act, against the culprits.

Among the Friday arrests, the alleged mastermind, Mulayam Chauhan, and three of his accomplices were nabbed by the police in Nagra and four others by a team in Sikandarapur.

Confirming the arrests, Deputy Superintendent of Police at Rasra, Shivnarayan Vaishya, said, "A team of Nagra police has arrested one Mulayam Chauhan, who is said to be the mastermind behind the English question paper leak. A total of seven other suspects have been arrested by our teams. They will be produced before a magistrate."

The police teams had earlier arrested 26 people,

including Ballia's District Inspector of Schools Brajesh Kumar Mishra and three journalists.

The DIOs and one of the arrested journalists, Ajit Ojha, were sent to judicial custody on Wednesday after they were produced before the chief judicial magistrate. The remaining accused were produced before the judicial magistrate on Thursday and they were remanded to 14 days' judicial custody.

Police have lodged three FIRs at the Ballia City Kotwali, Nagra and Sikandarpur police stations. The fresh exam will be held on April 13, according to an official statement.

Meanwhile, controversy also arose over the arrest of some journalists in the paper leak case as some locals claimed that the cops also held the whistleblower.

The locals claimed that Digvijay Singh and Ajit Kumar Ojha, the journalists working with a leading Hindi daily newspaper, had broken the news of the paper leak of the English subject of Intermediate, forcing the authorities to cancel the paper. The local administration, however, arrested those journalists, accusing them of being involved in the gang which leaked the paper.

## BSP expels three leaders

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Bahujan Samaj Party has expelled its three leaders, including a former legislator, for indulging in indiscipline, a party leader said on Friday.

BSP's Mathura district president Yogesh Kumar said two-time MLA Rajkumar Rawat and two other BSP leaders, SK Sharma and Sonpal, were

expelled from the party on Thursday.

Kumar, however, did not mention the period of the expulsion of the three leaders.

Kumar said these leaders did not even attend the party's recent meeting in Lucknow, convened to examine the reasons for electoral losses.

He said Rawat was elected from the Gokul assembly con-

stituency in 2007 and the Govardhan assembly constituency in 2012.

Sharma had joined BSP just before elections and had contested the recent assembly poll from the Mathura constituency while Sonpal had contested from Chhata constituency. Sharma, however, claimed he had resigned from the BSP membership on March 11 itself.

## Centre returns UP Govt proposal on Scheduled Castes list review

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Union Government has returned the proposal for inclusion of 'Koli/Hindu Julaha community' in the Scheduled Castes list of Uttar Pradesh as a synonym of 'Kori'.

The UP Government had sent the proposal over a year ago to the Centre.

Official sources said the Centre had returned the proposal for review by the state government.

The Centre examined the proposal in accordance with the laid down modalities and it was not supported by the registrar general of India (RGI).

Sources said the proposal had been returned to the state government with a request to review or further justify the recommendation in the light of observations of the RGI.

The RGI has laid down modalities for deciding claims

for modification – inclusion, exclusion, correction – in the lists of Scheduled Castes under which the state government concerned has to initiate the proposal with full justifications. Only the Union government has the authority to include or delete any caste and tribe from the list of Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Several numerically small castes included in Other Backward Classes list have been demanding their inclusion in SC list. Mulayam Singh Yadav-led Samajwadi party government in 2004 had included 17 OBC castes in SC list. And then it made the recommendation to the Union Home ministry.

The then government had also amended the UP Public Services Act and included the 17 castes in SC list. This law provides for the reservation of OBCs and SCs in government

services, educational institutions and other state supported institutions and other bodies.

The next government headed by Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party had repealed the amendment in the Act.

The Union government had rejected the proposal of Mulayam Singh Yadav government citing the data from anthropological studies, saying these 17 castes do not qualify the terms laid for determining untouchability.

Several organisations representing various castes listed under OBC had also approached the Allahabad High Court for their inclusion in Scheduled Caste list. The Allahabad High Court, in a recent order in March, had directed the UP government to decide within four weeks about the inclusion of Rajbhar and a few other castes in the SC list.

## SC pulls up ED for sealing properties, asks probe agency to take remedial measures

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Friday pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for proceeding to seal some properties and taking its "symbolic possession" despite the matter being listed for hearing today and asked the probe agency to take corrective action to "undo that mischief".

The top court noted that pursuant to its March 28 order, the petitioners had served the copy of petition on the central agency on March 30 and it was clearly mentioned in the order that the matter would be heard on April 1. A bench of Justices A K Khanwilkar and A S Oka was informed by the counsel appearing for the petitioners that they had served the copy of petition to the central agency and on March 31, the

ED went across the properties and tried to seal them and they have also taken the "notional possession".

"That order (of March 28) clearly records that the matter will be taken on April 1, 2022. Despite that, the officials of the respondent (ED) proceeded to seal the properties in question and take symbolic possession on March 31," the bench observed.

The top court, which was hearing a petition against a March order passed by the Bombay High Court, noted that the basic question involved in the matter is whether the provisional attachment order of June 3, 2021 ceases to be in force on expiry of 180 days.

It said if that issue is answered in favour of the petitioners, then no action could be taken by the authority on the basis of such order.

## Coast Guard operations get boost with new interceptor boat based at Karaikal

PTI ■ CHENNAI

In a major fillip to Coast Guard operations in the vast coastline of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, interceptor boat ICGS C-436 was on Friday 're-based' at Karaikal in a welcome ceremony.

The interceptor boat, fitted with state-of-the-art navigation and communication equipment, has sensors and machineries capable of operating in tropical sea conditions and carrying out close coastal surveillance, a defence release said.

The ship would give a major fillip to Coast Guard operations and shall be deployed in the Area of Responsibility (AoR) of Indian Coast Guard Station Karaikal. The sustenance and reach, coupled with the latest and modern equipment and system, provides it the capability to perform the role of an eagle eye on nefarious activities.

On the boat's maiden entry to the base port in Karaikal, a welcome ceremony was held in which District Collector, Nagapattinam (Tamil Nadu), Arun Thambiraj and officers of the Coast Guard participated.

The commanding officer of ICGS Karaikal, Coast Guard ships, officers and Enrolled Personnel (EPs) of Coast Guard, representatives from stakeholders of Coastal Security and Marine Pollution were present in the welcome ceremony.

Indian Coast Guard Ship C-436, Interceptor Boat (IB) is the 36th boat of its series and was commissioned at its base port Krishnapattanam in Andhra Pradesh in 2018.

The boat is 27.63 metres in length and has been designed and built indigenously. It is designed to carry a high-speed inflatable boat for boarding operations, search and rescue, law enforcement and maritime patrol.

## 'Advantage Assam' has attracted over ₹87,500 cr investment: Min

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Investment of over Rs 87,500 crore has come to the state as a result of the "Advantage Assam" summit organised by the government in February 2018. Industries and Commerce Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said in the assembly on Friday. Of this, projects worth over Rs 9,700 crore have been commissioned, while projects of another Rs 59,000 crore are "ongoing", he said.

Making a statement in the House on the benefits reaped from the business event, Patowary said, "Most states of the country host such investment summits and are praised for it. Assam too organised such an investment meet and we also were able to attract much investment due to it." Patowary said projects worth Rs 87,512.39 crore have come to the State.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Oil slick

### India defends its decision of doing business with Russia in self-interest

New Delhi sees through the blow-hot-blow-cold posturing of the West over its stand on Russia. That the posturing continues and takes on patronising tones is irksome. India's stand is consistent and reflects three things: Primacy to national interest, concern for disrespect of Ukraine's territorial integrity and honouring longstanding relationships with all. It is in neither camp — the West's or Russia's. It does not support war and calls for resolving the crisis through dialogue. India's Prime Minister has had conversations with all *dramatis personae* in *l'affaire* Ukraine. And yes, it is in India's national interest to buy discounted fuel from Russia. And yet, the West is playing bad-cop-good-cop with India. March began with US President Joe Biden using the word "shaky" to describe India's position on Russia. Last week, it was US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland telling India that it is important to the US that India joins it in re-evaluating "where we are with Russia" and "it's important that we do it together". Now it is Deputy NSA for International Economics Daleep Singh saying there are "consequences" to countries that actively "attempt to circumvent or backfill the sanctions". However, in Washington, State Department spokesperson Ned Price is singing a different tune. He admits that countries have "their own relationship with the Russian Federation". It is a fact of geography and that "is not something that we are seeking to change". The US is only interested in seeing that "the international community is speaking in unison", he insists.



On the rupee-rouble trade, Price's reply was priceless: "That is all well and good. We understand that." India finally seems to have decided to call a spade a spade, understandably because this one-sided diplomatic sparring is neither positive nor reassuring. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar told visiting UK Foreign

Secretary Liz Truss that India is watching for some time "what looks almost like a campaign on this issue" — with reference to India buying discounted Russian oil. He minces no words pointing out that Europeans are among the biggest buyers of Russian gas while India's purchases are minimal. The message India seems to have conveyed is why single out India when Europe is doing the same thing. The fact is that it is the US and Europe that are caught on the wrong foot over Russian gas. Sanctions have impacted domestic gas prices in the US (which faces midterm elections shortly). The US is releasing a million barrels of oil daily to fight the spikes and domestic inflation. In Europe, Germany cannot wean away from Russian gas, sanctions or no sanctions. Russia is threatening to cut off gas supply if European buyers do not pay in roubles. Germany, in turn, is thinking of rationing gas supply internally. Technical difficulties stop the US from replacing Russia as the supplier. And the UK is thinking of permitting fracking again. So, the problems clearly lie elsewhere, not with India.

## PICTALK



The Pamban railway bridge during its inspection by the railway officers, in Ramanathapuram

PTI

## Need for caution

### Baffling as it sounds, the PMs of India and Pakistan have been threatened hours apart

Now, this is as spooky as it gets. Within hours of each other, we were confronted with two confounding news items, both related to the health and well-being of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart, Imran Khan. The pieces of dark news sent shockwaves not only through the Indian subcontinent but across the world. Understandably, Indian security agencies went into a tizzy after the Mumbai branch of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) received an anonymous e-mail threatening to "bombard" Narendra Modi and "kill more than 20 million (Indian) people". The email's author, who claimed that the plan was ready and just waiting to be put into action, purportedly said that he would commit suicide so that the conspiracy could not be exposed. There's already hush-hush talk of at least 20 sleeper cells — who are said to be in the possession of 20kg RDX — having been activated since February 28 for the 'job'. This is not the first time the security apparatus has received mail threatening



to eliminate Modi. In 2020, the NIA had received a three-word email that issued a direct threat to the PM, stating "Kill Narendra Modi". In 2018, too, a plot to assassinate the Prime Minister in a "Rajiv Gandhi-type" attack was revealed in a letter to the Pune Police.

Meanwhile, India's "independent foreign policy" came in for some fulsome praise by none other than the embattled Pakistan Premier who said the country is "looking for its best interests", referring to India's move to buy Russian crude at subsidised rates as the energy market suffers due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. However, hours earlier, Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhary said their security agencies have reported a "plot" to carry out Imran's assassination. Interestingly, this development comes just a day after the Pakistan Prime Minister said that a foreign nation had sent a message that he needs "to be removed" or Pakistan will suffer consequences, lending credence to claims that there was a conspiracy to assassinate the Pakistani Premier over his refusal to "sell the country". A no-confidence vote against Imran's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Government is scheduled in the National Assembly for April 3. A few leaders of both the countries have already been assassinated, so there's an urgent need to bring to book troublemakers who plan to disrupt peace on the subcontinent.

# Bangladesh still in throes of terrorism

## The Sheikh Hasina Government has largely been successful in bringing the culprits to book but the threats of violence are far from over



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

The Sylhet Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal sentenced four persons to death for killing writer-blogger Ananta Bijoy Das, in Sylhet, Bangladesh, on May 12, 2015. Of the four — Abul Khaer Rashid Ahmed, Abul Hossain alias Abul Hussain, Haranur Rashid and Faisal Ahmed — Abul Khaer is in custody. The rest are absconding. The judgment is significant. It focuses on the violent challenge that extremist Islamist terrorist organisations pose to Bangladesh and its secular, democratic humanist civil society, including bloggers who are often atheists decrying religion.

Militant fundamentalist Islamist parties like the Jama'at-e-Islami Bangladesh (Jama'at) and associated organisations like Razakars, al-Badr and al-Shams, which collaborated with, and participated in, the horrific atrocities perpetrated by the Pakistani Army during the 1971 Liberation War, crawled into the woodwork, as some of their leaders fled abroad, after Bangladesh's liberation on December 16, 1971. They resurfaced following Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination on August 15, 1975, and were actively promoted by the regimes of the two military dictators, Generals-turned-President Ziaur Rahman and HM Ershad, and the pseudo-civilian Governments which wielded power periodically, that followed. The support continued under the two Governments headed by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia (1991-96 and 2001-06) — the second in coalition with the Jama'at.

The elements clustered around the Jama'at and allied organisations received a boost from the Mujahideen's victory over Soviet forces occupying Afghanistan (December 27, 1979 to February 15, 1989) and the victory of the Taliban, which was formed in 1994 and came to rule almost the whole of Afghanistan from September 1997. Organisations like the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami-Bangladesh (HUJIB), Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) unleashed



violence on a massive scale that shook Bangladesh.

The United States and other western countries, which had become extremely uneasy since the late 1990s over the medieval, retrogressive policies of the Taliban Government in Afghanistan, and the al-Qaeda's terrorist strikes against the US and other western countries, pressed hard on Begum Zia's Government to act. More serious efforts followed the ascent to power of the second Awami League-led Government, with Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister, in 2009. The resultant measures caused some subsidence in lawlessness, and the terrorist organisations to go underground.

Two terrorist organisations that rose to salience in their place and made their existence known are Ansar-al-Islam, earlier known as Ansarullah Bangla Team, affiliated to Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), and Daesh affiliated to the parent Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They have played a major role in the murder of bloggers, which began with the killing of Ahmed Rajib Haider in Dhaka on February 15, 2013. The attacks on bloggers



THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE, A MAJORITY OF THEM STUDENTS AND YOUTH, BEGAN COLLECTING AT DHAKA'S SHAHBAG INTERSECTION. THE GATHERING BECAME MASSIVE AND THE MOVEMENT SPREAD TO OTHER PARTS OF BANGLADESH

followed a series of developments that began with an amendment of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973 enacted for investigation into the activities — and prosecution of — persons guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes under international law, during the Liberation War. The Act was amended in 2009 and two International Crimes Tribunals were established in 2010 and 2012 respectively to try war criminals and collaborators. Jama'at and allied organisations, whose leaders had collaborated with the Pakistanis and perpetrated unspeakable atrocities themselves, sprang into violent opposition which grew in spread and intensity as sentences were announced.

Others, however, felt that the sentences were not harsh enough. Matters came to a head when Abdul Quader Mollah, assistant secretary, Jama'at, was sentenced to life imprisonment on February 5, 2013, on six counts of crimes against humanity. While the Jama'at reacted violently, large-scale protests broke out demanding the death sentence to Mollah and others convicted of war crimes. Raising these demands, thousands of people,

a majority of them students and youth, began collecting at Dhaka's Shahbag intersection. The gathering became massive and the movement spread to other parts of Bangladesh. Finally, Bangladesh's Supreme Court overturned the verdict and sentenced Mollah to death. He was hanged in a Dhaka jail on December 12, 2013.

Opponents of the war crimes trials responded with murder. As seen above, machete-wielding activists of the Ansarullah Bangla Team (subsequently Ansar-al-Islam), killed blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider, who had been active in the Shahbag gathering, in Dhaka on February 15, 2013. Other killings followed. Those murdered included not only bloggers but LGBT activists, Shias, Hindus academics — indeed, all opposed to religious bigotry and supportive of humanism, secularism and rationalism. Professor Ali Riaz wrote in 'Bangladesh: Islamism, Militancy, Democracy Deficit and Where to Next?' in *Al Jazeera* (June 28, 2016), "At least 49 people have been killed in the last 17 months." The objective was simple — to create a climate of terror in which nobody would speak out against the warped worldview of fundamentalist terrorists and allied organisations.

Resolute counter-terrorist operations, galvanised by the dastardly attack on the Holy Artisan Bakery in Dhaka on July 1, 2016, in which 20 persons, including 18 foreigners and women, were savagely killed along with five terrorists killed by Bangladesh Army commandos, have caused the violence to ebb. Nevertheless, it continues — the anti-Hindu riots from October 13 to 19 last year, during which at least 11 persons, including seven Hindus, were killed, was clearly the work of Islamist terrorist organisations. Sheikh Hasina's Government, which took stern action, needs to be vigilant.

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### ROUGH DAYS FOR THE AIADMK

Sir — This has reference to 'The golden jubilee pangs of AIADMK' (March 31). The charismatic and yet ruthless bonded subservience enforced relentlessly by Jayalalitha over her cadre during her undisputed reign had left a torn legacy. Amma had controlled the party's funds, every single MLA/office bearer, executive power as well as the public sentiment. Sans a demarcation between party and the executive and in a bid to usurp the sceptre, the three emergent heirs Sasikala, EPS and OPS had fallen out among themselves. The absence of the dynasty of Amma is now seen to underscore its much-debated utility in Indian politics.

And the current goings-on in the AIADMK have been posing a Catch-22 situation for its three factions. Sasikala's incarceration did provide the party an opportunity to bifurcate the party and executive functions for a while. But this détente ended with the return of Sasikala to active politics. And all this time, the rival DMK marshalled its resources, smoothened its own internal rifts and swept away the State in the last election and its subsequent triumph in local body elections has left the AIADMK dispirited.

R Narayanan | Navi Mumbai

### WELCOME MOVE TO RELAX AFSPA

Sir — It's good news for the North-East when the Government announced reduction of disturbed areas under the contentious AFSPA in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur from April 1, a decision welcomed by the political leadership of the three States but greeted with cautious optimism by others, who wanted the draconian law to be repealed in entirety. It is to be noted that reduction in areas under AFSPA is the result of the improved security situation and fast-tracked development and also several agreements were signed with militant groups to end insurgency.

As we are aware, AFSPA has been in force for decades in the three northeastern States to assist the armed forces operating there to tackle insurgency as the Act empowers security forces to conduct

## Imran on a sticky wicket



Ironically, Pakistanis have inured themselves to military rule, given the fact that even democratically elected Governments are arbitrarily taken over by military Generals at the drop of a hat. Cricketer-turned-politician and Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan faces the same dilemma; it is yet another instance of the military shenanigans as a couple of allies, including the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in the Imran Khan-led Tehreek-e-Insaf Party Government have not only withdrawn their support to the Government but

also shifted allegiance to the Opposition grouping, effectively making Imran face the no-confidence motion in the National Assembly. Simultaneously, Pak Army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa also harbours grudge against Imran over the ISI chief's appointment.

However, the Pakistan PM has refused to buckle under the gratuitous dross and decided instead to "play till the last ball" like the bold cricketer that he has been. In his address on the no-confidence motion, Imran bared his heart out in calling PML(N) chief Shehbaz Sharif, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto and PDM president Maulana Fazlur Raman "the three stooges playing in the hands of foreign powers". The world powers are eagerly awaiting the developments taking place in Pakistan. On the face of it, the sword of Damocles is hanging on Imran's head. Whether or not he survives, the no-confidence motion and time will tell! Let's wait and watch.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

operations and arrest anyone without a warrant besides giving immunity to the security personnel even if they shoot someone dead. Manipur's human rights activist Irom Chanu Sharmila waged the most remarkable fight against the law with her 16-year hunger strike before giving up her peaceful resistance on August 9, 2016. The disturbed area notification under AFSPA was completely removed from Tripura in 2015 and Meghalaya in 2018.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

### AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Sir — The convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities has specially looked into many crippling human disabilities and deformities so that our brothers and sisters can integrate themselves into the mainstream and pro-actively participate in deliberations. In addition to technology, education and employment play major parts in securing the people with physical and mental disabilities. A developmental disorder that it is, a person with autism

tends to withdraw into a shell due to impaired ability to communicate with the surroundings. Also termed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), speech and non-verbal interaction is seriously hampered in autism, compelling the affected person to go through repetitive behaviour.

Diagnosable as early as one year, proper scientific intervention can mitigate the developmental problems to a large extent. The wide spectrum of autism also means an individual can live with the two extremes — seriously challenged or perfectly normal. The puzzling ways of autism, which often goes undetected till later life, have made the disorder a professional challenge. There are specific milestones in a child's developmental curve, and parents should know what to expect of their little ones at the appropriate stages. The aim of professionals is to improve the child's quality of life.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

## SOUND BITE

We must accelerate our efforts to boost intra BIMSTEC trade.

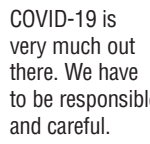


External Affairs Minister — S Jaishankar



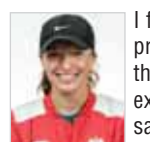
We doubt Russia's seriousness. There's what it says and there's what it does.

US Secretary of State — Antony Blinken



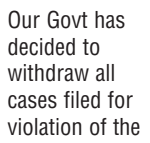
COVID-19 is very much out there. We have to be responsible and careful.

Actor — Shruti Haasan



I feel more prepared...so there's more excitement and satisfaction.

WTA World No. 1 — Iga Swiatek



Our Govt has decided to withdraw all cases filed for violation of the lockdown order.

Maharashtra Home Minister — Diip Walse Patil

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





## FIRST COLUMN

### THE UKRAINE CRISIS & NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY

As the sole superpower, the US is expected to display greater diplomatic wisdom



NILOFAR SUHRAWARDY

Chances of the Ukraine crisis serving as Washington's trump card leading to diplomatic isolation of Russia are extremely limited. Similarly, escalation of the crisis is least likely to help Russia emerge as a master strategist. If India and Pakistan can agree to disagree on several controversial issues and display wise nuclear diplomacy, what ails major nuclear powers - US and Russia - from exercising nuclear diplomacy without using Ukraine as a pawn? Yes, India and Pakistan have been fairly controversial as permanent enemies. There are issues, particularly Kashmir, they are least likely to ever agree upon. Not surprisingly, when they chose to pursue their respective nuclear proliferation drives, United States and American media in general opposed them strongly. The United States was acutely apprehensive of India and Pakistan taking to MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) path by pursuing nuclear



proliferation drive. US failed to secure both India and Pakistan's signature to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It may be noted that Pakistan stayed away from being a signatory to NPT on the ground that India was not inking it. India and Pakistan are certainly well-versed at hurling verbal missiles at each other, a trait frequently indulged in as part of their respective national electoral campaigns. Certainly, regional history is not devoid of bilateral conflicts they have actually indulged in and/or have been at the verge of resorting to. What stands out significantly is that nuclear diplomacy has restrained the two from being engaged in actual conflict.

The highlight of this diplomacy was the six-point accord reached between the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq in December 1985, during latter's visit to Delhi. It was inked during Indian Prime Minister's visit to Islamabad in December 1988. The two countries agreed in principle not to attack each other's nuclear installations. The agreement came into force on 27 January 1991. Under the agreement, the two countries, on first January of every calendar year, are to inform each other of Nuclear Installations and Facilities to be covered by the agreement. The first such exchange of lists took place on January 1, 1992. This year marked the 31st "consecutive exchange" of such lists. True, the same thirty-one years have witnessed tensed Indo-Pak ties over Kargil "war" in 1999 and Mumbai terror strikes (November 2008). They did not however reach the stage of any open conflict. Indo-Pak nuclear diplomacy, resting on their bilateral understanding of nuclear deterrence defies fears raised earlier about their nuclear-status leading to MAD in South Asia. Russia cannot be spared criticism for its moves against Ukraine. Neither can these be justified by citing incidents of American indulgence in more aggressive moves in name of Arab Spring and its Afghanistan policy.

Diplomatically speaking, importance of a superpower's role should rest in limiting escalation of bilateral, multilateral and other differences to stage of any crisis. As the sole superpower, the US is expected to display greater diplomatic wisdom. United States is apparently more concerned about ensuring decrease in power and strength of Russia as well as that of its key ally China. Language used by Washington as well as American media appears to be more focused on hurling diplomatic missiles at Russia and its leaders. United States is certainly targeting Russia with probable purpose of securing Kremlin's diplomatic isolation and strengthening its own diplomatic stature. Prospects of this decreasing suffering of Ukrainians are virtually non-existent. Russia has not yet lost diplomatic support of its allies. Till Ukraine-crisis lasts, the Ukrainediplomacy cannot be viewed as a success. If India and Pakistan can wisely exercise nuclear diplomacy, why can't United States and Russia display greater diplomatic wisdom regarding Ukraine crisis?

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

# Yogi must plan well to fulfil promises



VIRENDRA SINGH RAWAT

The UP elections were no different with regard to the populism template but the freebies can cost the Yogi 2.0 Government upwards of ₹50,000 crore

Populism is a global phenomenon, especially in democratic countries; and it gets disproportionately amplified during elections. By definition, populism could be summed up as catering to the basic needs and aspirations of the common people. It is characterised with public announcements even if it means giving scant attention to the underlying fiscal prudence or economic viability. Nonetheless, populism entails a cost. The schemes and projects drafted in populist rhetoric could be made possible only through adequate funding and planning.

The 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections were no different with regards to the time-tested populism template. In India, populist announcements are known to have played a key role in determining polling outcomes. The electorate are believed to gravitate to a political party which makes superlative and fancy pre-poll promises.

Now that Yogi Adityanath 2.0 Government has re-taken the reins of UP, the tough task of walking the tightrope between fiscal mathematics and populist waitlist has befallen the monk chief minister.

By doing simple calculations based on the 2022 UP manifesto of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or 'Lok Kalyan Sankalp Patra', it is evident that the new Government would require a substantial budgetary allocation of more than ₹50,000 crore to fulfill its string of populist announcements and sops. Interestingly, the opposition parties especially the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress had also promised the moon to the UP voters. However, their defeat at the hustings saved them from the complexities of drawing up an action plan to fulfill the respective election plank.

Meanwhile, the schemes included in the BJP manifesto pertained to all key sectors viz. agriculture, social security, dairy, sugarcane, infrastructure, skill development, employment etc. The estimated expenditure on these heads would be in addition to the common public welfare programmes being run by the state Government.

Sample this: The BJP, in its manifesto, had promised to pump in Rs 25,000 crore in developing a robust network of cold chain and warehouses for the grading of major horticultural crops so that farmers get remunerative prices. The scheme would be known as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Agri-infrastructure Mission. Similarly, ₹10,000 crore will be spent on another mega infra scheme, while nearly ₹5,000 crore would be spent on facilitating farm irrigation.

To further sweeten the deal, the saffron outfit had promised to undertake a massive ₹5,000 crore modernisation scheme to upgrade the state sugar mills. This is aimed at enriching the UP sugar value chain given the fact that more than 4 million farm households are directly associated with the sugarcane farming and allied activities. Since, the manifesto was hammered out in the backdrop of the farm stir, the document reflected an evident agricultural footprint.

Moreover, budgetary allocations would also be required for other schemes includ-



ALTHOUGH ON PAPER, THE STATE APPEARS TO BE IN A FAIRLY COMFORTABLE FINANCIAL POSITION, YET THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY BEEN RUNNING A SLEW OF FLAGSHIP INFRA PROJECTS, INCLUDING EXPRESSWAYS, AS WELL AS PUBLIC WELFARE SCHEMES, INCLUDING FREE RATION ETC THAT EATS AWAY A MAJOR PORTION OF THE REVENUES

(The writer is a Lucknow-based financial and political journalist. The views expressed are personal.)



### HERE ARE SOME KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS MADE BY THE BJP IN ITS MANIFESTO

#### Farmers:

(1) Free electricity for farmers for agriculture in the next five years.

(2) ₹25,000 crore 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Agri-Infrastructure Mission' to set up cold chain centres, godowns, processing units across the State.

(3) Formulation of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for wheat and rice.

(4) ₹5000 crore to be spent on modernisation of sugarcane mills. Payment to sugarcane farmers within 14 days and, in case of delay, payment to be done with interest.

(5) As many as 6 'Mega Food Parks' to be developed in the State.

#### Women empowerment:

(1) Under 'Mukhya Mantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana', financial aid will be hiked from ₹15,000 to ₹20,000.

(2) Financial assistance of up to ₹1 lakh for marriage of girls belonging to poor families.

(3) Two free LPG cylinders for women under 'Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana' every Holi and Diwali.

(4) In public transport, free commute for women passengers above 60.

(5) ₹1000 crore to be used for 'Mission Pink Toilet', while monthly stipend for widows to be hiked to ₹1500.

(6) CCTV cameras to be installed at public places and near educational institutes. 3000 Pink Police booths to be set up.

(7) Under UPPSC, number of women in Government jobs to be doubled.

#### Education:

(1) 'Mission Kayakalp' to be launched to make furniture such as table and benches in primary schools.

(2) Modernisation of 30,000 secondary schools, as well as colleges, of the State.

(3) With modern infrastructure and world-class facilities, universities, including Aligarh's Raja Mahendra Pratap University and Maharaja Suheldev University in Azamgarh.

(4) Digital research institutes will be set up in Lucknow and Noida.

₹2 trillion of the State's own tax collection apart from ₹1.26 trillion as its share in central taxes. Besides, non-tax revenue and central scheme support kitty was calculated at more than ₹23,400 crore and ₹95,000 crore respectively. Although, on paper, the State appears to be in a fairly comfortable financial position, yet the government has already been running a slew of flagship infra projects, including expressways, as well as public welfare schemes, including free ration etc that eats away a major portion of the revenues.

The UP Interim Budget had esti-

mated almost ₹90,000 crore of credit line from different sources during 2022-23. The public debt has to be kept under check apart from provisioning for current debt servicing.

The surging oil prices following the Russia-Ukraine war and the pandemic hit economic recovery are two major areas of concerns for any Government. Hence, the Government would need a dexterous planning on the budgetary front with adequate provisions put in place to swiftly adjust its receipts and expenditure equation in unforeseen exigent situations.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE RUSSIAN SIEGE IS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY, WHICH IS HAPPENING IN FRONT OF THE WHOLE PLANET.

— UKRAINE PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKIY



WE FEEL THAT BOTH SIDES HAVE LEGITIMATE CONCERNS... BUT THE DELEGATIONS MUST PUT AN END TO THIS TRAGEDY.

— TURKISH PRESIDENT RECEP ERDOGAN

# Hungary elections: Fooled again?

Can the Opposition unite in time to defeat Victor Orban?

Russian President Vladimir Putin may not be able to save himself, but he may already have saved another despot, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban. There's an election in Hungary next Sunday, and it looks like Orban may actually win it. A month ago he was trailing the opposition badly, but then Russia invaded Ukraine.



GWYNNE DYER

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'The Shortest History of War'. The views expressed are personal.)

(The Viktor, some people call him) despite the free elections. They don't need to be rigged in advance, because Orban controls almost all the media that the voters get their information from. And he doesn't even need to win a majority of the votes, because the election districts are gerrymandered in his favour.

He eliminated the 'liberal' media by making them unprofitable (no government advertising, expensive lawsuits, etc.), and then getting rich friends to buy them up at bargain prices and sing his praises in them. Over 90% of the Hungarian media are pro-Orban, although there is no formal censorship.

Orban's greatest success was extending citizenship to over a million ethnic Hungarians who live as minorities in surround-



ing countries - and also giving them access to generous Hungarian social benefits. They may never have been to Hungary, but they make up one-tenth of the electorate, they take the money - and 95% of them vote for Fidesz.

In the media, there is a ceaseless torrent of hate propaganda against minorities (Jews, Roma, and gays) and especially immigrants. For a dozen years the country has been told that

Fidesz is their only defence against an Islamised Hungary where real Hungarians would be an oppressed minority, although no sane Muslim would ever voluntarily choose to live there.

A depressingly large number of Hungarians, mostly older, poorly educated or rural, believed the whole package, but Orban's victories also depended on the fact that the opposition parties were chronically at war with one another. This time he

was in serious trouble, because all six of them had managed to come together and back the same candidate.

They couldn't agree on much else, so the challenger they chose was a rather colourless centre-right politician called Peter Marki-Zay. Nevertheless, enough people were fed up with the cronism and the lies that by a month ago Fidesz and the opposition alliance were running neck-and-neck. And then Russia invaded Ukraine.

That should have been a disaster for Orban, who rivals Donald Trump in his fanboy adulation of Putin. He even had to slam into reverse gear and let 450,000 Ukrainian refugees into the country. That's only a fifth as many as Poland has taken, but it's thirty times as many as the United Kingdom

has accepted so he's safely in the middle of the European pack.

He was just as quick in switching his foreign policy narrative. Instead of holding off the Muslim hordes, now he was keeping Hungary out of the war in Ukraine. "The opposition has lost its mind," he said in rally on 15 March.

"They would walk into a cruel, bloody and protracted war and they want to send Hungarian troops and guns to the front-line. We can't let this happen. Not a single Hungarian can get caught between the Ukrainian anvil and the Russian hammer."

It's all nonsense, of course. The opposition coalition never said any such thing, and Hungary is a member of the NATO alliance, which constantly declares that under no cir-

cumstances will it get directly involved in the war in Ukraine. Hungary couldn't send troops into Ukraine even if it wanted to.

But it worked. By mid-March Fidesz was leading the opposition alliance by a clear 8%, although more recent polls have shown Orban's lead narrowing. For a people with a reputation for being clever, even cunning - 'the only people who can go into a revolving door behind you, and come out of it in front of you' - Hungarians are embarrassingly naive.

Could this be a clue to why some countries get seduced by these manipulative would-be autocrats while others do not? Are Americans more naive than the Canadians? Are Russians more easily fooled than Ukrainians? Food for thought, but I've said enough.



# Strike on Russian oil depot reported as talks resume

AP ■ KYIV

Emergency relief and evacuation convoys for the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol remained in doubt Friday following reports of Russian interference, while Russian officials accused Ukraine of flying helicopter gunships across a border between the two countries and striking an oil depot.

The governor of Russia's Belgorod region said the alleged airstrike caused multiple fires and two people were injured. A Kremlin spokesman said the incident on Russia's territory could undermine negotiations between Russian and Ukrainian representatives that resumed by video link Friday. "Certainly, this is not something that can be perceived as creating comfortable conditions for the continuation of the talks," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov replied when asked if the strike could be viewed as an escalation of the war in Ukraine.

It was not immediately possible to verify the claim that Ukrainian helicopters targeted the oil depot or several nearby businesses in Belgorod also reported hit. Russia has reported shelling from Ukraine before, including an incident last week that killed a military chaplain, but not an incursion of its airspace.

The negotiations follow a meeting of Russian and Ukrainian delegations in

Turkey on Tuesday where Ukraine reiterated its willingness to abandon a bid to join NATO and offered proposals to have its neutral military status guaranteed by a range of foreign countries.

The head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, wrote on social media that Moscow's positions on retaining control of the Crimean Peninsula and expanding the territory in eastern Ukraine held by Russia-backed separatists "are unchanged."

The International Committee for the Red Cross said complex logistics were still being worked out for the operation to get emergency aid into Mariupol and civilians out of the city, which has suffered weeks of heavy fighting with dwindling water, food and medical supplies.

"We are running out of adjectives to describe the horrors that residents in Mariupol have suffered," ICRC spokesperson Ewan Watson said Friday during a U.N. Briefing in Geneva.

"The situation is horrendous and deteriorating, and it's now a humanitarian imperative that people be allowed to leave and aid supplies be allowed in."

He said the group sent three vehicles toward Mariupol and a frontline between Ukrainian and Russian forces but two trucks carrying supplies were not accompanying them. Dozens of buses organised by Ukrainian authorities to



bring people out of the city had not started approaching the dividing line, Watson said.

On Thursday, Russian forces blocked a 45-bus convoy attempting to evacuate people from Mariupol after the Russian military agreed to a limited cease-fire in the area, and only 631 people were able

to leave in private cars, the Ukrainian government said.

Russian forces also seized 14 tons of food and medical supplies trying to make it to Mariupol, Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said.

The city has been the scene of some of the worst suffering

of the war. Tens of thousands of residents managed to leave in the past few weeks through humanitarian corridors, reducing the population from a pre-war 430,000 to an estimated 100,000 by last week. But continued Russian attacks have repeatedly thwarted aid and evacuation missions.

"We do not see a real desire on the part of the Russians and their satellites to provide an opportunity for Mariupol residents to evacuate to territory controlled by Ukraine," Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to the mayor of Mariupol, wrote Friday on the Telegram messaging app. In the past few days,

the Kremlin, in a seeming shift in its war aims, said that its "main goal" now is gaining complete control of the Donbas, where Mariupol is located. The Donbas is the predominantly Russian-speaking industrial region of eastern Ukraine where Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukrainian forces since 2014 and have declared two areas as independent republics.

Western officials said there were growing indications Russia was using its talk of de-escalation in Ukraine as cover to regroup, resupply and re-deploy its forces for a stepped-up offensive in the east.

Russian forces have subjected both Chernihiv, a besieged and blockaded city in northern Ukraine, and the capital of Kyiv to continued air and ground-launched missile strikes despite Moscow saying Tuesday it planned to reduce military activity in those areas.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian forces have retaken the villages of Sloboda and Lukashivka, which are south of the besieged northern city of Chernihiv and located along one of the main supply routes between the city and Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, according to Britain's Defense Ministry.

Ukraine has also continued to make successful but limited counterattacks to the east and northeast of Kyiv, the ministry said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Russian withdrawals in the

country's north and center were just a military tactic to build up strength for new attacks in the southeast.

"We know their intentions," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation. "We know that they are moving away from those areas where we hit them in order to focus on other, very important ones where it may be difficult for us."

Hours later, Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov wrote on Telegram early Friday that the fire at the oil depot "occurred as a result of an airstrike from two helicopters of the armed forces of Ukraine, which entered the territory of Russia at a low altitude." The depot run by Russian energy giant Rosneft is located about 35 kilometers (21 miles) north of the Ukraine-Russia border.

Separately, Ukraine's state power company, Energoatom, said Russian troops pulled out of the heavily contaminated Chernobyl nuclear site in northern Ukraine early Friday after receiving "significant doses" of radiation from digging trenches in the exclusion zone around the closed plant.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it could not independently confirm the exposure claim. Energoatom gave no details on the condition of the soldiers it said were exposed to radiation, and it did not say how many were affected. There was no immediate comment from the Kremlin.

**LANDMARK THE HOMES 81**  
SECTOR-81, GURUGRAM (HARYANA)

**PROJECT APPROVED UNDER HARYANA GOVT. AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICY 2013**

Online applications are invited from general public for booking and allotment of 165 residential apartments in Affordable Housing Project in the name of "LANDMARK THE HOMES 81" proposed to be developed by M/s SRV Automotives Pvt. Ltd., as per terms and conditions of the policy prescribed by the Town & Country Planning Department, Govt. of Haryana vide notification no. PF-27/48921 dated 19.08.2013 and amendment thereof (details available at the department website i.e. www.tcpharyana.gov.in).

**PROJECT DETAILS:**

1. Project ID:	84
2. Colonizers/Developers:	M/s SRV Automotives Pvt. Ltd.
3. Project Approvals:	License No. 4 of 2021 Dated: 02.03.2021 Building Plans Sanctioned Vide Memo No. ZP-1466/SD (DK)/2021/12887 DATED 02.06.2021. RERA Registration No: 36 of 2021, Dated: 16.07.2021
4. Location:	Sector 81, Gurugram, Haryana
5. Project Area:	5.0 Acres comprising a total 694 nos. of apartments out of which remaining/surrender 165 nos. of apartments are available. 8 nos. of apartments are reserved for management quota. Community Facilities: One Community Hall of 2046.83 sq. ft. & One Aanganwadi cum creche of 2023.63 sq. ft.
6. Facilities:	Gated Entry, Security Post, Drop off Zone, Ample Parking, Kids play area, Water body, Badminton Court, Lawn tennis, Commercial Complex

**7. Details of Apartments offer for Public:**

Unit Type	Unit Carpet Area @ 2000 (Sq.ft)	Unit Balcony Area @ 1000 (Sq.ft)	Total price of Unit (Rs.)	At the time of Online Application (Rs.)	No. of Units
Unit-3 (2BHK) (4 units under MQ)	559.82	179.33	2451264	117562.20	61
Unit-4 (2BHK) (4 units under MQ)	566.61	124.16	2479746	118988.10	57
Unit-6 (1BHK)	348.04	85.34	1547121	73088.40	38
Unit-7 (1BHK)	398.86	85.34	1760552	83760.60	9

8. Applicable GST and cesses, levies & fees etc. shall be charged over & above the said total price of the unit.

9. **Payment Terms:**

- I. With online application: Booking amount i.e.5% of Total Price of unit
- II. On Allotment: 20% and 12.5% of due installment of unit (installment shall be equivalent to the amount payable by other allottees)
- III. Balance: 62.5% of the Total amount payable in five equal half yearly instalments over a period of 2.5 years. Any default in payment will bear penal interest as provided in Rule 15 of the HRERA, rules, 2017.

10. **Parking:** Two wheeler parking with each apartment.

11. **Broad Specification of Apartment:**  
Flooring: Vitrified/Ceramic Tiles, Wall Finish: Oil Bound distemper, Kitchen Details: SS Single bowl Sink, Granite top platform, Balcony Flooring: Anti Skid Tiles, Railing: M.S Steel, Window/External Door: UPVC/MS/Aluminum or equivalent, Door: Flush Doors, Bathroom Fittings: Chinaware or equivalent, C. P. Fittings: Modern & elegant, Electrical: ISI marked products for wirings, switches & circuits.

12. **Application Timelines:** Application will be filled online by registration on <https://edraw.tcpharyana.gov.in/tcp-dms/home> starting from 02<sup>nd</sup> April 2022 and last date of submission of online application form is 02<sup>nd</sup> May 2022.

13. **ELIGIBILITY:**

1. Any person can apply but an applicant in a specify colony shall make only one application. 2. Any Person can apply, however, the PMAY beneficiaries, which include their spouse or dependent children, identified by the Urban Local Bodies Department, Haryana under "Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna - Housing for all programme shall be granted preference in allotment. First Priority shall be given to the identified beneficiaries of the said town followed by other PMAY beneficiaries of the state of Haryana. Thereafter, for the remaining flats, Persons which include their spouse or dependent children who do not own any flat/plot in any HUDA developed colony/sector or any licensed colony in any of the urban areas in Haryana, UT of Chandigarh and NCT Delhi shall be given next Preference in allotment of flats. Any successful applicant under this policy shall not be eligible for allotment of any other flat under this policy in any other colony. In case he/she is successful in more than one colony, he/she will have choice to retain only one flat. All such applicants shall submit an affidavit to this effect. 3. PAN Card & Aadhaar Card is mandatory.

14. **ALLOTMENT CRITERIA:**

1. The allotment of apartments shall be done through online draw in the presence of Committee consisting Deputy Commissioner or his representative (at least of the cadre of Haryana Civil Services), Senior Town Planner (Circle office), DTP of the concerned District and the representative of concerned colonizer. 2. After fixation of date for online draw, an advertisement shall be issued by the Developer informing the applicant about the details regarding date/time and venue of the online draw in the same newspaper in which the original advertisement was issued. For detailed criteria and time frame to be adopted for scrutiny and allotment, the applicant may also refer to the details in the affordable housing policy 2013 notified by No. PF-27/48921 dated 19.08.2013 (available at the department website i.e., [www.tcpharyana.gov.in](http://www.tcpharyana.gov.in))
2. In the event the purchaser(s) wants to avail a loan facility from any bank, financial Institution or his/her employer to facilitate the purchase of the flat, the developer shall facilitate the process but shall not be held liable for any delay in payment or refusal to grant the loan to purchaser(s).

**M/s SRV Automotives Private Limited, CIN: U70100DL2005PTC134174**  
**Corp. Office: Landmark House, Plot No. 65, Sector 44, Gurugram, Haryana – 122003**  
**Please Contact – 8929887878**

# China rejects sanctions as Ukraine war tops summit agenda

AP ■ BRUSSELS

China on Friday renewed its criticism of Western sanctions against Russia, as top European Union officials sought assurances from Beijing that it would not help Moscow circumvent the economic measures imposed in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

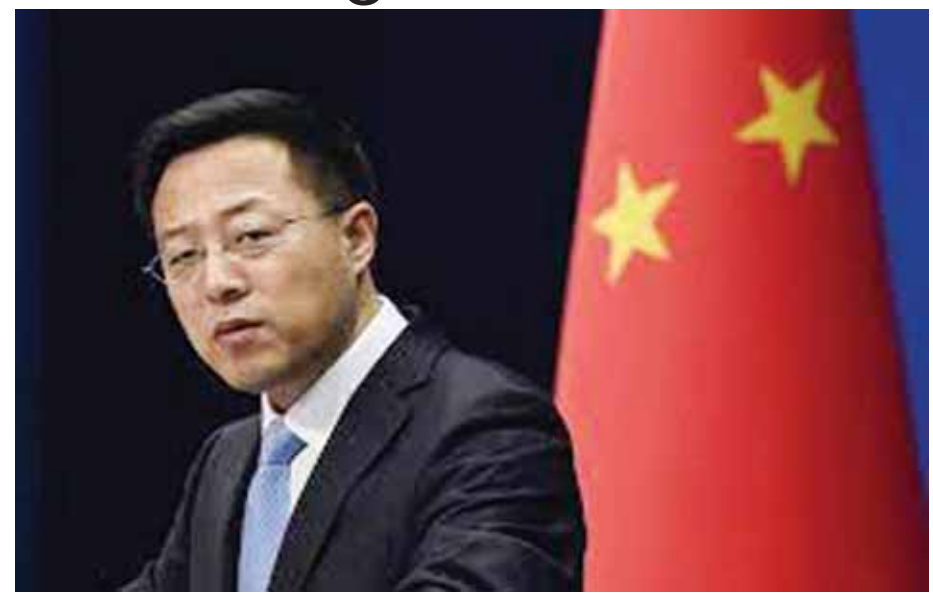
The Chinese Foreign Ministry also laid blame for the war in Ukraine at least partially on the United States for pushing to expand the NATO military alliance closer to Russia's borders. Twenty-one of the EU's 27 countries are also NATO member states.

At a virtual summit, European Council President Charles Michel, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell were seeking signs from Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang that Beijing would help to end the war.

"China disapproves of solving problems through sanctions, and we are even more opposed to unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction that have no basis in international law," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said at a daily briefing as they met.

Zhao said when it came to Ukraine, Beijing would not be forced to "choose a side or adopt a simplistic friend-or-foe approach. We should, in particular, resist the Cold War thinking and bloc confrontation."

"As the culprit and leading instigator of the Ukraine crisis, the US has led NATO to engage



in five rounds of eastward expansion in the last two decades after 1999," he said, adding that NATO membership almost doubled from 16 to 30 countries, and pushed "Russia to the wall step by step".

China says it is not taking sides in the conflict but it has declared a "no limits" partnership with Russia and refuses to condemn the invasion. Beijing routinely amplifies Russian disinformation about the conflict, and does not refer to it as an invasion or a war in keeping with Russian practice.

Prior to the summit, EU officials said they would look for signs Beijing is willing to cooperate on bringing an end to the war. The meeting takes place amid rising negative sentiment within the bloc fuelled by China's aggressive foreign policies and trade practices.

Underlying the EU's expectations for China is the possi-

bility of penalties against Chinese companies that undermine measures taken against Russia. EU officials point out that 13.7% of China's total trade is done with the 27-nation bloc, and 12% with the United States, compared with just 2.4% with Russia.

Officials said they also wish to emphasize the impact the war is having on the availability of fertilizer and global energy and food prices, which are hitting the poorest countries in Africa and the Middle East hardest.

Other topics include China's travel ban on members of the European Parliament; Beijing's economic boycott of EU member Lithuania over its Taiwan relations; the fate of a stalled investment agreement; and civil and political rights under China's authoritarian Communist Party regime.

Beijing has dismissed

European criticisms as biased and driven by an anti-China agenda being pursued by its chief global rival, the United States.

Beijing also sanctioned some European Union lawmakers last year after the EU, Britain, Canada and the United States launched coordinated sanctions against officials in China over human rights abuses in the far western Xinjiang region. The European Parliament responded by saying it will not ratify a long-awaited business investment deal as long as the sanctions remain in place. Rights groups have also urged the EU to take a more assertive stand with China over repression in Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong and elsewhere and the persecution of Chinese dissidents including Sakharov Prize winner Ildar Abdulaev and Chinese-Swedish publisher Gui Minhai.

## UN atomic energy chief to visit Chernobyl

AP ■ VIENNA

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency says Russian forces' departure from the decommissioned Chernobyl power plant is "a step in the right direction" and the UN nuclear watchdog plans to be there "very, very soon".

IAEA director-general Rafael Mariano Grossi says he will head a support mission to Chernobyl, the site of the 1986 nuclear disaster, and that further nuclear safety missions to Ukraine will follow.

Grossi spoke Friday after visits to Ukraine and Russia. He said Russian nuclear and foreign ministry officials didn't discuss with him why Russian forces left Chernobyl.

## Russia 'real threat' to Australia as well, says Zelenskyy

AP ■ ADELAIDE

In his speech to the Australian Parliament on Thursday evening, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy made an emotional appeal.

He also appealed to Australia's own interest in containing Russian aggression.

The appeals had a purpose: to persuade Australia to do more to support Ukraine against the Russian invasion.

One of Zelenskyy's techniques was what the classical philosophers called "pathos": awakening emotions in the hearts of his audience to prepare them to form the desired opinion.

What matters, he said, is "the dream of bringing back a peaceful life".

For first-generation Australians who have fled wars in other countries, the images might be viscerally familiar. But they are beyond the experience of most people in Canberra or elsewhere in Australia.

Zelenskyy was asking his audience to see the Russian invasion of Ukraine through the eyes of Ukrainians and to feel (rather than intellectualise) the urgency of acting.

In speeches to other parliaments, Zelenskyy has gone further. He has tailored his appeal to their particular history. To the parliament of Japan, a country with its own experience of a nuclear accident, he spoke about Russia's seizure of Chernobyl.

To the Israeli Knesset, he

quoted former prime minister Golda Meir, who was born in Kyiv: "We intend to remain alive".

With Australia, Zelenskyy did not need to reach far back into history. He reminded his audience about a recent episode. In 2014, Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine shot down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17.

They killed almost 300 people, including 38 Australians.

The reminder about MH17 was an appeal not only to the emotions of Australians, but also to their interests. It reinforced Zelenskyy's message that if a great power like Russia starts to use violence to achieve goals - instead of peaceful means like law, diplomacy, and trade - then no one is safe.



# Protests at SL Prez house over economic crisis, 45 arrested



PTI ■ COLOMBO

At least 45 people were arrested and a curfew briefly imposed in most parts of Colombo city after hundreds of protesters gathered outside the residence of Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa demanding his resignation for failing to address the worst economic crisis in the island nation.

A foreign exchange crunch in Sri Lanka has led to a shortage of essential goods such as fuel. Cooking gas, and power cuts that last up to 13 hours a day. On Thursday protesters shouted slogans, directing their ire against what they perceive as the Rajapaksa regime's gross

mismanagement that has exacerbated Sri Lanka's foreign-exchange woes.

They also demanded President Rajapaksa's resignation. According to the police, in the protest several, including five policemen, were injured while vehicles were set on fire as a spontaneous expression of public anger over the current economic crisis turned violent.

"As of now 45 people have been arrested. Five policemen were injured while a police bus, a Jeep and two motorcycles were burnt. The protesters had also caused damage to a police water cannon truck," a senior police official said.

A curfew was imposed at midnight on Thursday covering

most parts of the Colombo district and the suburban police division of Kelaniya but was lifted at 5 am on Friday morning.

In the Kelaniya area, protesters had blocked the main Colombo-Kandy road.

Sri Lanka is currently experiencing its worst economic crisis in history. With long lines for fuel, cooking gas, essentials in short supply and long hours of power cuts the public has been suffering for weeks.

Rajapaksa has defended his government's actions, saying the foreign exchange crisis was not his making and the economic downturn was largely pandemic driven where the island's tourism revenue and inward remittances waning.

# China deal won't include military base, says Solomon Islands

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Seeking to counter international fears over its new security alliance with China, the Solomon Islands said Friday it won't allow China to build a military base there.

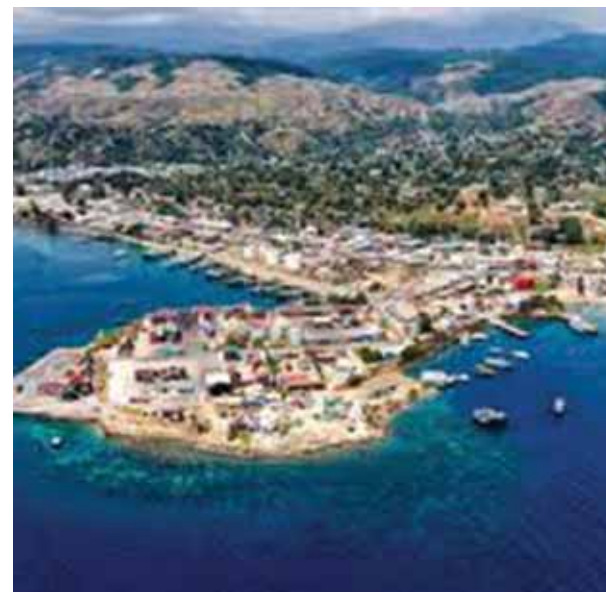
But that insistence will do little to ease concerns about the pact from the nation's traditional partners that include New Zealand, Australia and the United States.

The leader of neighbouring Micronesia added his voice to those expressing trepidation by invoking the bloody battles of World War II and warning that the pact could again see the South Pacific region become a battleground for much larger powers.

The Solomon Islands government said Thursday a draft agreement of the new security pact had been initiated by representatives from the Solomons and China and would be "cleaned up" and signed.

In a statement Friday, the Solomon Islands government said that "contrary to the misinformation promoted by anti-government commentators" the agreement did not invite China to establish a military base.

"Government is conscious of the security ramification of hosting a military base, and it will not be careless to allow such initiative to take place under its watch," the statement said.



The statement seemed to more emphatically rule out the possibility of a base after Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare had earlier told parliament it had no intention of asking China to build a base.

Sogavare said his nation sought only peace and prosperity, citing its foreign policy mantra: "We are friends to all and enemies to none." He said it wasn't a secret deal but a sovereign issue.

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, which had led to speculation about the possibility of China establishing a naval base on the South Pacific islands.

Micronesia President David Panuelo wrote a letter to Sogavare saying Micronesia had "grave security concerns" about the "novel and unprecedented" arrangement.

He said the two small nations had become battlegrounds during World War II and that it could happen again as China, the US and Australia asserted themselves in the region.

"And is it plausible that, once the spheres have been carved out, that our concerns about climate change - today's problem - would manifest into all-too-real concerns about a war in our backyards, with our people, our islands, as the playground for children playing as adults?" Panuelo wrote to Sogavare.

Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton said Friday while it respected the Solomons' sovereignty, the deal showed that China was acting aggressively in the region.

"We need to be very cautious here because the Chinese are incredibly aggressive, the tactics that they're deploying into small island nations are quite remarkable," he told Sky News.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern this week described the possibility of Chinese military forces stationed on the Solomon Islands as "the potential militarisation of the region." And the US State Department said Washington did not believe China's security forces and methods needed to be exported.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Thursday that "relevant parties should see the China-Solomon Islands security cooperation objectively and rationally and stop making irresponsible remarks."

"Attempts to provoke,

obstruct and undermine China's friendly relations with the island countries is not popular and will not succeed," Wang told reporters at a daily briefing.

"China-Solomon Islands cooperation does not target any third party and is not in conflict with Solomon Islands' cooperation with other countries. Instead, it complements the existing regional cooperation mechanisms in a positive way," he added.

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.

The Federated States of Micronesia is home to about 100,000 people. It has diplomatic relations and considers itself a "friend" of China, as well as having a close relationship with the US under a compact of free association.

# Plot to kill Pak PM Khan reported: Min

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry on Friday claimed that a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Imran Khan has been reported by the country's security agencies, ahead of Sunday's no-trust motion against the premier. Khan's security has been beefed up as per the government's decision after these reports, the Dawn newspaper quoted Chaudhry as saying.

His statement came a week after similar claims were made by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Faisal Wawda who had said that a conspiracy was being hatched to assassinate Khan over his refusal to "sell the country".

Wawda had made the remarks on ARY News show over a letter Prime Minister Khan had brandished at the PTI's March 27 show of strength here, claiming that it contained "evidence" of a "foreign conspiracy" to topple his government.

Wawda said that there was a threat to Khan's life. He, however, did not reveal

if the purported conspiracy to assassinate the premier was mentioned in the letter.

Wawda also said that Khan was told multiple times that bulletproof glass needed to be installed before his dais at the March 27 rally but he refused.

Information Minister Chaudhry's claims also come a day after Khan, during his address to the nation, vowed to foil "an international conspiracy" hatched against his government by the Opposition leaders and their alleged handlers ahead of the no-confidence vote in the National Assembly.

In a live address to the nation, 69-year-old Khan 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.

Prime Minister Khan linked the letter with the no-confidence motion against him by the Opposition in the National Assembly.

# Pope begs forgiveness of indigenous people for Canada school abuses

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis apologised and begged forgiveness Friday for the "deplorable" abuses suffered by Indigenous Peoples in Canada's church-run residential schools and said he hoped to visit Canada in late July to deliver the apology in person to all those who suffered from the Catholic Church's misguided missionary zeal.

Francis made the apology during an audience with dozens of members of the Metis, Inuit and First Nations communities who came to Rome seeking a papal apology and a commitment for the Catholic Church to repair the damage.

He said he hoped to visit Canada "in the days" around the Feast of St Anna, which falls on July 26 and is dedicated to Christ's grandmother.

er. More than 150,000 native children in Canada were forced to attend state-funded Christian schools from the 19th century until the 1970s in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their homes and culture. The aim was to Christianize and assimilate them into mainstream society, which previous Canadian governments considered superior.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

I Harvinder Singh S/o Late Sh. Kartar Singh R/o B-33 let Floor, Moti Nagar, New Delhi-110015 hereby inform to all that I am being Regd. Nominee in the "The Panchsheel Co-op House Building Society Ltd.", H. No. 110, Exchange Colony near Telephone Exchange, Zirakpur-140603 Distt. Mohali (Punjab). Membership no. 229, Plot no. 16, Sector-B have lost original membership receipts of Rs. 5110/- and Rs. 3000/- issued in 1985 in the name of my father Late Sh. Kartar Singh. I have applied for duplicate receipts. If any one has any objections please contact within 15 days to the secretary of aforesaid society.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

It is known to all that the Original Allottee of Residential Flat No.1729, Arun Vihar, Sector-37, Noida, Sh. Guru Datt Mangin S/o Late Radha Kishan Mangin and Smt. Kusum Mangin W/o Shri Guru Datt Mangin, both R/o 1729, Sector-37, Noida, U.P., have sold the said Flat on the basis of Registered General Power of Attorney to Sh. Jagdish Prasad S/o Sh. Mahanand R/o 1729, Sec-37, Noida, U.P. on 29/04/2002, and the Agreement to Sell of the same is in the name of Smt. Deepthi W/o Sh. Jagdish Prasad R/o 1729, Sector-37, Noida, U.P., which is not registered. Because the Agreement to sell is not registered, so with the help of this Public Notice it is informed that the transfer of this flat through General Power of Attorney goes in favour of Smt. Deepthi W/o Sh. Jagdish Prasad R/o 1729, Sector-37, Noida, U.P. If any one/ones has/have any objection he/she/they will submit his/her/their objection with proofs in the Group Housing Division of Noida Authority alongwith the proofs within the 30 days from the published of this Notice.

Jagdish Prasad S/o Mahanand

**Public Notice**

To be known to all that I, Sameer Mehta S/o Kasturi Lal Mehta R/o 24A, Pocket-B Siddhartha Extension Delhi 110014, Cont. 011-41023496, Email To: sameer@yahoo.com Allottee/purchaser of Flat no 216-A Pocket C Siddhartha Extension New Delhi 110014. Has applied for the conversion of aforesaid property demand cum allotment letter & other related papers & documents etc. of the aforesaid property have been lodged in police station date: 29/03/2022. Any person(S) claiming any right, interest having any objection or found in possession of original document may write/contact with above named person at above address within 15days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally contact Deputy Director (LAB) housing or director (H) D block 3rd floor Vikas Sadan INA, New Delhi.

**JM FINANCIAL**

**JM FINANCIAL ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANY LIMITED**  
(Formerly known as JM Finance Asset Reconstruction Company Private Limited)  
Corporate Identification No.: U67190MH2007PLC147287  
Regd. Office: 7th Floor, Cnergy, Appasaheb Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai - 400 025  
Authorised Officer: Vaibhav Shetty, email- vaibhavshetty@jmfinc.com, Mobile- +919820387460; Phone- +91 022 62241658/1674; Website: www.jmfincialarc.com

**APPENDIX - IV - A**

**E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provisions to Rules 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.**  
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited acting in its capacity as trustee of JMFARC -KVB- March 2016 - Trust (the "Secured Creditor"), the possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Kanur Vyasa Bank (Assignor Bank, which assigned the financial assets pertaining to Khemchand and Sons to JMFARC) on December 22, 2015, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on May 05, 2022 at 11.00 am, for recovery of Rs. 7,34,63,428.77 (Rupees Seven Crore Thirty Four Lakhs Sixty Three Thousand Four Hundred Twenty Eight and Seventy Seven Paise Only) as on Feb 28, 2022 due to the Secured Creditor from Khemchand and Sons (hereinafter referred to as "Borrower") and 1) Mr. Sushil Kumar Sharma, 2) Mrs. Vandana Sharma 3) Mrs Rama Devi, 4) Mr. Vijay Kaushik and 5) Khemchand Sharma (1, 2, 3 & 5 together collectively referred to as "Guarantors"). Detailed description of the property, its Reserve Price and Earnest Money Deposit shall be as follows:  
Detailed description of the property, its reserve price and earnest money deposit shall be as follows:

Sr. No.	Description of the Immovable Property	Reserve Price (in Rs.)	Earnest Money Deposit (in Rs.)
1	Vacant Residential Plot at Khasra no. 1364(0-15), 1365 (3-10) 1366 (1-10) 1367(0-5) measuring 270 sq yards at Mauza Kalyan Enclave-1, Tehsil & Dist Palwal (Haryana) in the name of Mr. Sushil Kumar Sharma	Rs. 48,00,000	Rs. 4,80,000

Encumbrances known, if any: Not Known  
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the Secured Creditor's website i.e. <https://www.jmfincialarc.com/assets-for-sale> and on <https://www.bankauctions.in>

Sd/-  
Authorised Officer  
JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited  
acting in its capacity as trustee of  
JMFARC - KVB- March 2016 - Trust

Date: April 02, 2022  
Place: Delhi

**IndoStar Capital Finance Limited**  
Registered Office - One World Center, Tower 2A, 20th Floor, Jupiter Mills Compound, Senapati Bapat Marg, Mumbai - 400013, India.  
Phone: 022-43157000 Web: [www.Indostarcapital.com](http://www.Indostarcapital.com)  
Auction Place/Branch Office At: M-5-A, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Mythri House Middle Circle, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001, India.

**Appendix-IV-A**  
**[Refer proviso to rule 8(6)]**  
**AUCTION-CUM-SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES**

Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrowers that the below described immovable properties ("Immovable Properties") mortgaged/charged to the Secured creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of IndoStar Capital Finance Limited (Secured Creditor/IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd.), will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" on 03.05.2022, for recovery of Rs. 45,89,673/- (Rupees Forty Five Lac Eighty Nine Thousand Six Hundred Seventy Three Only) due and payable to the Secured Creditor plus applicable Interest. Additional Interest costs and charges etc at contractual rate payable and due to the Secured Creditor from 1) Rudransh Gupta N-19, Lower Ground Floor, Greater Kailash-I, New Delhi-110048. 2) Mrs. Madhu Gupta W/O Krishan Murari Gupta, N-19, Lower Ground Floor, Greater Kailash-I, New Delhi-110048. 3) Mr. Krishan Murari Gupta N-19, Lower Ground Floor, Greater Kailash-I, New Delhi-110048. 4) The Village Shop, Through its Proprietor at 10, Hauz Khas, New Delhi-110016. 5) M/S CurioCity, Through its Proprietor at 10 Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi-110016. The reserve price will be Rs.43,75,000/- (Rupees Forty Three Lac Seventy Five Thousand Only).

Short description of the Immovable Properties with known encumbrance and certain terms of the sale:-

S. No.	Loan Account No.	Name of the Borrower/Co Borrower(s)	Demand Notice Amount & Date	Reserve Price (RP)	EMD (10% of RP) and Last date	Inspection Date & Time	Date of Auction & Time	Known Encumbrances, if any.
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)	(I)
1.	LSDEL0517 180002017	1) RUDRANSH GUPTA 2) MADHU GUPTA 3) KRISHAN MURARI GUPTA 4) THE VILLAGE SHOP 5) M/S CURIO CITY	₹ 1,76,825,594/- 01.01.2019	₹ 43,75,000/- (Rupees Forty Three Lac Seventy Five Thousand Only)	₹ 4,37,500/- (Rupees Four Lac Thirty Seven Thousand Five Hundred Only) & 02.05.2022	28.04.2022 Between 12:00 P.M. To 4.00 P.M.	03.05.2022 by 5.00 P.M.	Nil

**Details of the Immovable Properties**  
(i) All that "Entire Terrace consisting of 2 Rooms, 1 Passage, Mummy and One Temp. Toilet with ACC Sheets above Barsati/Second floor with no land rights situated at Plot No.158, Block-N, Greater Kailash-I, New Delhi-110048

**TERMS & CONDITIONS OF PUBLIC AUCTION:-**

1. Sale is strictly subject to the terms and conditions mentioned hereunder as also the terms and conditions mentioned in the offer/tender document to be submitted by the intending bidders.
2. The Immovable Properties will be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS, AS IS WHAT IS AND WHATEVER THERE IS BASIS" including known encumbrances, if any. The Immovable Properties under auction can be inspected on the date and time specified herein 28.04.2022 between 12.00 PM and 4.00 PM. Further, queries or clarification with respect to bid application form, submission of earnest money deposit (EMD), kindly contact Authorized Officer of IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd (contact details mentioned in clause(4)). The Auction can be conducted at branch level as well, in case, there would be any technical glitch or error in conducting auction.
3. We have also engaged local marketing Agency/service providers for doing marketing or searching the prospective bidders/purchasers which will also assist us in conclusion of auction process as per the provision of SARFAESI Act.
4. The lenders / offerors / prospective bidders/purchasers should submit their offer along with earnest money deposit (EMD) as referred in column (E) by way of demand draft or pay order "Offer for purchase of the immovable Properties/Property" so as to reach with or authorized officer/ person Mr. Supreet Singh, Mobile-9873018111 on or before the last date for submission of bids i.e. 02.05.2022 before 5.00 p.m. The amount of EMD paid by the successful bidder shall be adjusted towards the sale price
5. Offers that are not duly filled up or offers not accompanied by the EMD or offered after the above date and time prescribed herein will not be considered/ treated as valid offers, and accordingly shall be rejected. The EMD shall not carry any interest.
6. Along with offer document, the intending bidder shall also attach copy of the PAN card issued by the Income Tax department (or Form 60) and his/her identity proof and the proof of residence such as copy of the Aadhar card, Passport, Election Commission Card, Ration Card, Driving license etc.
7. The Immovable Properties shall be sold to the highest bidder/ offeror or, subject to acceptance of the bid by the secured creditor/auction sale committee of IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd. The online/intrase bidding for above immovable Properties will take place on schedule date and time as mentioned above schedule in column "G" and on the website of our IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd. However, the undersigned has the discretion to accept or reject any offer/tender without assigning reason.
8. All dues and outgoings, i.e., municipal taxes, maintenance/society charges, electricity and water taxes or any other dues including all overdue in respect of the said immovable Properties shall be paid by the successful bidder(s)/ purchaser.
9. The successful bidder/ purchaser shall have to pay 25% of the sale amount (inclusive of EMD) immediately upon acceptance of the officer in respect of the sale, failing which, the EMD will be forfeited.
10. The balance 75% of the sale price shall have to be paid within 15 days of conveying the confirmation of the sale to the successful purchaser by the authorized officer or such extended period as agreed upon in writing by and solely at the discretion of the secured creditor as per Rule-9 of the security interest (enforcement) Rule 2002. In the event of the default, in payment of the balance 75% of the sale price or any part thereof within the prescribed period, the amount deposited shall be forfeited and the secured creditor will be at liberty to sell the immovable properties once again and the defaulting purchaser shall forfeit all claims to the immovable properties or to any part of the sum already paid towards the purchase thereof.
11. The immovable properties described herein above shall remain and be at the sole risk of the successful purchaser in all respects including loss or damage by fire or theft or other accidents, and other risk from the date of the confirmation of the sale by the undersigned authorized officer the successful bidder shall not be entitled to annual the sale of any ground of whatsoever nature.
12. In case final bid amount/saying consideration of assets is Rs. 50.00 lacs or above, the successful bidder shall deduct and remit TDS @1% of bid amount from the sale consideration by giving PAN no. of borrowers as deducted which can be obtained from authorized officer/ bank after completion of the bidding and remaining 99% of sale consideration shall be payable to bank within stipulated time. Hence, the highest successful bidder is bound to deposit TDS @1% on purchase of repossessed assets on the PAN of the borrower as per section (194-IA) of the Income tax act 1961.
13. In such cases sale consideration of asset under auction is Rs 50.00 lacs or above the successful bidder/purchaser, on payment of entire sale consideration as above (net of TDS) and on completion of sale formalities, shall be issued a sale certificate for the immovable properties as per format prescribed under SARFAESI Act & Rules 2002 only upon receipt of challan-cum-statement in form no.26QB having remitted the TDS. The certificate for TDS in form 16B to be submitted to the bank subsequently.
14. It shall solely be the responsibility of the successful bidder to get the sale certificate registered. All expenses related to stamp duty, registration charges, transfer charges and any other expenses and charges in respect of the registration of the sale certificate issued in form at prescribed under the SARFAESI Act and rules 2002 for the above referred Immovable Properties shall be borne by the successful bidder/purchaser. The sale certificate has to be registered at the earliest as per state Law/ Rules regarding transfer else the purchaser has to get the request letter to the secured creditor mentioning the reason of delaying the registration.
15. The Authorized officer is not bound to accept the highest offer or any or all offers and IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd., as secured creditor, reserves its right to reject any or all bid(s) without assigning any reasons. In case, the bids are rejected, Authorized officer can negotiate with any of the tendered or intending bidder or other parties for sale of the immovable Properties by private treaty. Sale is subject to confirmation by the Secured Creditor/Auction sale committee of IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd. and as per amended Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule 2002.
16. No persons other than the intending bidders/offeror themselves, or their duly Authorized representative shall be allowed to participate in the auction/sale proceedings. However, the sale certificate shall be registered in favor of purchaser only in whose name bid application form has been submitted.
17. The Authorized officer reserves his right to vary any of the terms and conditions of the notice for sale, without prior notice, at his discretion & can also avail the services of marketing Agent or service Provider in selling the said repossessed mortgaged Immovable Properties against their professional fee which will be recovered from the borrower.
18. In case, all the dues together with all cost, charges and expenses incurred by the Secured Creditor are tendered by the above named borrower/co-borrower till one working day prior to the date of Auction then the Immovable Properties will not be sold and all the bids received from the prospective bidders shall be returned to them without any liability/claim against IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd.
19. This publication is also a notice of 30 days to borrowers/mortgagor of the assistance about holding of sale on above mentioned date if dues are not repaid in full
20. Tenders documents may be collected from local branch of IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale.
21. The borrowers/mortgagor are also hereby informed that they must take delivery of their personal house-hold belongings/articles lying inside the said mortgaged properties under the custody of IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd, if any within 15 days from the date of publication, with prior intimation of indoStar capital finance ltd failing which the IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd. shall have no liability/responsibility to the same and will dispose of at the risk of borrowers/mortgagor.
22. Special instruction: Bidding in the last moment should be avoided in the bidders own interest as neither the IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd will be responsible for any lapse/failure in order to ward in such contingent situations bidders are requested to make all necessary arrangement/alternatives back-up etc., so that they are able to circumvent such situation and are able to participate in the auction successfully. The auction sale will automatically get closed at the expiry time frame of auction sale as mentioned in column no-G. The Authorized Officer can exercise its discretion to extend the auction sale by 15 minutes.

Place: New Delhi  
Date: 01.04.2022

For IndoStar Capital Finance Ltd  
Rajat Sharma  
Authorized Officer

# Sole surviving Paris attacks suspect speaks in trial

AP ■ PARIS

The last surviving suspect from the 2015 Paris attacks has told a court he felt "ashamed" after failing to detonate his suicide belt on the bloody night of Nov. 13. "I didn't go all the way," Salah Abdeslam told a Paris court, showing no remorse. "I gave up trying to put on the (suicide) belt, not out of cowardice or fear. I didn't want to, that's all." He gave testimony this week as part of the trial into Paris' deadliest ever peacetime attack. With thousands of plaintiffs, this trial is the biggest in modern French history.

# 2 South Korean air force planes collide, killing 4

AP ■ SEOUL

Two South Korean air force planes collided in mid-air during training and crashed near their base on Friday, killing all four people aboard the aircraft, officials said. Both planes were KT-1 trainer aircraft - South Korea's first indigenously developed planes - that took off from an air force base in the southeastern city of Sacheon one after another for flight training.

# Iraqi cleric steps back, asks rivals to try to form Govt

AP ■ BAGHDAD

A powerful Iraqi Shiite cleric has said he was stepping back for the next 40 days and giving his Iran-backed rivals the chance to form the country's next government.

The surprising move by Muqtada al-Sadr comes against the backdrop of a persisting political deadlock in Iraq, five months after general elections. Al-Sadr's offer came in a tweet, in which he also called on his followers not to interfere "neither

positively nor negatively" as his rivals form the Coordination Framework, a coalition of Iran-backed Shiite parties, try to cobble together a Cabinet.

This translates into a nod to al-Sadr's rivals to pursue the cleric's Kurdish and Sunni allies in possible negotiations. There was no immediate response from the Coordination Framework to al-Sadr's offer. Iraqi political parties are at an impasse, and al-Sadr - the winner of the election - has been unable to form a coalition Government.



# GST collection rises to all-time high of ₹1.42 lakh cr in March

**New Delhi:** GST collections soared to an all-time high of Rs 1.42 lakh crore in March as the fiscal year-end frenzy to meet targets saw strong sales and crackdown on evasions brought in more taxes.



CGST and Rs 67410 crore for the SGST. Centre also released GST compensation of Rs 18,252 crore to States/UTs during the month," the ministry said.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection rose 15 per cent annually in March, the finance ministry said on Friday.

With the record collection, the Centre's GST mop-up has exceeded the revised budget target of Rs 5.70 lakh crore set for the previous fiscal ended March 31, 2022.

Deloitte India Partner M S Mani said the record GST collections have also been aided by the strong sales activity of corporates in March, as they raced to close the fiscal with high topline growth. This had a direct bearing on GST, which is a transaction tax.

The previous high for collection of revenues from goods sold and services rendered was in January 2022 at over Rs 1.40 lakh crore.

During the month, revenues from import of goods were 25 per cent higher while the revenues from domestic transactions (including import of services) were 11 per cent higher than the revenues from these sources in March 2021.

"While state-wise variations exist in terms of the growth in GST collections, it would be interesting to see an analysis linking the state-wise GDP growth with the GST collections during the same period," Mani said.

The average monthly gross GST collection in the last quarter (January-March) stood at Rs 1.38 lakh crore, against the average collection of Rs 1.10 lakh crore, Rs 1.15 lakh crore and 1.30 lakh crore in the first, second and third quarters, respectively.

Total number of e-way bills generated in the month of February 2022 was 6.91 crore as compared to 6.88 crore in January 2022 despite being a shorter month, which indicates recovery of business activity at faster pace, the ministry said.

NA Shah Associates Partner Parag Mehta said with further reduction in e-invoicing limits to Rs 20 crore from Rs 50 crore, there is bound to be substantial increase even in subsequent months.

"Coupled with economic recovery, anti-evasion activities, especially action against fake billers have been contributing to the enhanced GST. The improvement in revenue has also been due to various rate rationalization measures undertaken by the Council to correct inverted duty structure," the ministry said in a statement.

The government has settled Rs 29,816 crore to Central GST and Rs 25,032 crore to SGST from IGST as regular settlement. In addition, the government has settled Rs 20,000 crore of IGST on ad-hoc basis in the ratio of 50:50 between Centre and states/UTs in March.

The gross mop-up in April 2021 was over Rs 1.39 lakh crore, May (Rs 97,821 crore), June (Rs 92,800 crore), July (over Rs 1.16 lakh crore), August (over Rs 1.12 lakh crore), September (over Rs 1.17 lakh crore), October (over Rs 1.30 lakh crore), November (Rs 1.31 lakh crore), December (over Rs 1.29 lakh crore), January (Rs 1.40 lakh crore) and February (Rs 1.33 lakh crore). **PTI**

The gross GST revenue collected in March 2022 was Rs 1,42,095 crore, of which Central GST was Rs 25,830 crore, State GST Rs 32,378 crore, Integrated GST Rs 74,470 crore (including Rs 39,131

crore collected on import of goods) and cess was Rs 9,417 crore (including Rs 981 crore collected on import of goods).

Further in the month of March normally there is also a exercise being conducted by trade to regularise the mistakes etc and deposit the taxes which leads to higher recovery," Mehta added.

# Forex reserves down by USD 2.03 bn to USD 617.648 billion

**Mumbai:** Continuing their downward trajectory for the third consecutive week, the country's foreign exchange reserves declined by USD 2.03 billion to stand at USD 617.648 billion in the week ended March 25, RBI data showed on Friday.

In the week ended March 18, the forex kitty had declined by USD 2.597 billion to USD 619.678 billion. It had plunged by USD 9.646 billion to USD 622.275 billion in the week ended March 11.

During the reporting week, the fall in the reserves was mainly on account of a decline in the foreign currency assets (FCA), a major component of the overall reserves, as per weekly data by the Reserve Bank of India.

FCA dropped by USD 3,202 billion to USD 550.454 billion in the week ended March 25.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 1.23 billion to USD 43.241 billion in the reporting week, the data showed.

The special drawing rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) dipped by USD 44 million to USD 18.821 billion. **PTI**

# Biden tapping oil reserve for 6 months to control gas prices

**Washington:** President Joe Biden is ordering the release of 1 million barrels of oil per day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve for six months, the White House said Thursday, in a bid to control energy prices that have spiked after the U.S. And allies imposed steep sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.



The White House said Biden is also calling on Congress to impose financial penalties on oil and gas companies that lease public lands but aren't producing.

estimating that domestic production will grow by 1 million barrels daily this year and an additional 700,000 barrels daily in 2023.

And he intends to invoke the Defense Production Act to encourage the mining of critical minerals for batteries in electric vehicles, part of a broader push to shift toward cleaner energy sources and reduce the use of fossil fuels.

The markets reacted quickly with crude oil prices dropping about 4% on Thursday morning to under \$104 a barrel.

The actions demonstrate forcefully that oil remains a key vulnerability for the U.S. At home and abroad.

Still, oil is up from roughly \$60 a year ago, with supplies failing to keep up with demand as the world economy has begun to rebound from the coronavirus pandemic.

Higher prices have hurt Biden's approval domestically, while also adding billions of oil-export dollars to the Russian war chest as it wages war on Ukraine.

That inflationary problem was compounded by Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, which created new uncertainties about oil and natural gas supplies and led to retaliatory sanctions from the U.S. and its allies.

The release of reserves in the U.S. Would create pressures that could reduce oil prices, though Biden has already twice ordered releases from the strategic reserves without causing a meaningful shift in oil markets.

Biden has been in talks with allies and partners to join in additional releases of oil, such that the world market will get more than the 180 million barrels total being pledged by the U.S.

Part of Biden's concern is that high prices have not - so far - coaxed a meaningful jump in oil production.

Americans on average use about 21 million barrels of oil daily, with about 40% of that devoted to gaso-

line, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That total accounts for about a fifth of total global consumption of oil.

Domestic oil production is equal to more than half of U.S. Usage, but high prices have not led companies to return to their pre-pandemic levels of output. The U.S. is producing on average 11.7 million barrels daily, down from 13 million barrels in early 2020.

Republican lawmakers have said the problem rests with the Biden administration being hostile to oil permits and the construction of new pipelines such as the Keystone XL.

Democrats have countered that the country needs to move to renewable energy such as wind and solar that could reduce the dependence on fossil fuels and Putin's leverage.

Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mt., blasted Biden's action to tap the reserve without first taking steps to increase American energy production, calling it "a Band-Aid on a bullet wound."

Daines called Biden's actions "desperate moves" that avoid what he called the real solution: "investing in American energy production, especially oil and gas." Biden needs to stop appeasing the woke green activists and get oil and gas leases going again," Daines said.

The Biden administration has countered that increasing oil output is a gradual process and the release would provide time to ramp up production. It also wants to incentivise greater production by putting fees on unused leases on government lands, something that would require congressional approval. **PTI**

# Sebi slaps ₹51 lakh penalties on 18 entities in ATL case

**New Delhi:** Sebi on Thursday imposed penalties totalling Rs 51 lakh on 18 entities, including individuals, for misutilisation of IPO funds and certain other lapses with respect to the shares of Acropetal Technologies Ltd (ATL).

Further, the company has been slapped with a separate fine of Rs 2 lakh for providing wrong quarterly disclosures to NSE and BSE regarding utilisation of IPO proceeds.

ATL raised Rs 170 crore through an initial public offering (IPO) in February 2011. Sebi initiated a preliminary investigation into the company's IPO in February 2012 and later an extensive probe was conducted to ascertain whether there were any violations of regulations.

Eleven entities have been slapped with a fine of Rs 2 lakh each for "acting hand-in-glove with ATL and were party to the actions and deeds of ATL to divert the IPO money and not deploying the IPO proceeds for stated objects of issue as disclosed in the prospectus of ATL".

# Govt notifies ITR forms for 2021-22; seeks details of income from overseas retirement benefit a/c

**New Delhi:** The Income Tax department has notified forms for filing I-T returns for 2021-22 fiscal, which also seeks details of income from overseas retirement benefit accounts from taxpayers.



The Income Tax returns forms 1-5 have been notified by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

the form was the inclusion of income from a retirement benefit account maintained in a foreign country for the calculation of net salary.

ITR Form 1 (Sahaj) and ITR Form 4 (Sugam) are simpler forms that cater to a large number of small and medium taxpayers.

It also seeks details on whether or not the said retirement benefit account was maintained in a notified country under section 89A of the I-T Act. Taxpayers can also claim relief from taxation under section 89A on this income.

Sahaj can be filed by an individual having income up to Rs 50 lakh and who receives income from salary, one house property and other sources (interest, etc). ITR-4 can be filed by individuals, HUFs and firms with total income up to Rs 50 lakh and having income from business and profession.

This will pave the way for the government technology team to develop Excel utility well in time, helping the taxpayers for early filings. AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said. **PTI**

ITR-3 is filed by people having income as profits from business/ profession, while ITR-5 is filed by LLPs.

While the ITR-1 form has been kept broadly the same as last year, the new addition to

# ATF price hiked by 2 pc; commercial LPG price goes up by ₹250

**New Delhi:** Jet fuel prices on Friday were hiked by 2 per cent - the seventh straight increase this year - to an all-time high, reflecting a surge in global energy prices.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) - the fuel that helps aeroplanes fly - was hiked by Rs 2,258.54 per kilolitre, or 2 per cent, to Rs 1,12,924.83 per kl (Rs 112.92 per litre) in the national capital, according to a price notification by state-owned fuel retailers.

Meanwhile, rates of LPG used by commercial establishments like hotels and restaurants, was increased by Rs 249.50 to Rs 2,253 per 19-kg cylinder. However, prices of cooking LPG used in household kitchens were not changed. Rates of such gas were hiked by Rs 50 to Rs 949.50 per 14.2-kg cylinder on March 22. Likewise, there was no change in the price of petrol and diesel on Friday. Prior to the second pause in 11 days, auto fuel rates had gone up by Rs 6.40 per litre.

While jet fuel prices are revised on 1st and 16th of every month, LPG rates change once a month. Petrol and diesel prices are revised daily based on equivalent rates in the international market.

The increase in ATF price comes on back of the steepest ever hike 18.3 per cent (Rs 17,135.63 per kl) effected on March 16. ATF in Mumbai now costs Rs 111,690.61 per kl, while it is priced at Rs 117,353.71 in Kolkata and Rs 116,583.71 in Chennai.

Fuel prices have been increased in India because energy prices globally have risen on back of supply concerns following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and demand returning after being hit by the pandemic. India is 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs.

Jet fuel, which makes up for almost 40 per cent of the running cost of an airline, has this year surged to new highs. ATF prices have increased every fortnight since the start of 2022. In seven hikes beginning January 1, ATF prices have been increased by Rs 38,902.92 kl or almost 50 per cent. **PTI**

# Skill training in rubber, plastic sectors in TN

**PNS CHENNAI**

with the Rubber, Chemical & Petrochemical Skill Development Council (RCPS-DC).

In a significant development aimed at uplifting the skilling quotient across hundreds of units involved in rubber, chemical and petrochemical sectors, especially MSMEs, in Tamil Nadu, the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC) has joined hands

"We are privileged to come on board with TNSDC, the apex body mandated with strengthening the skilling ecosystem in the State," said Shewani Nagpal, COO of RCPSDC.

# Drillmec OK's 35 mn euro investment plan in energy transition

**PNS NEW DELHI**

The board of directors of Drillmec, a Piacenza-based company in the Oil and Gas sector, part of Indian infrastructure giant Meil Group has approved the investment plan for over 35 million Euros in the energy transition which includes initiatives in production of hydrogen through the most advanced technologies available such as electrolysis, pyrolysis and the design and construction of CO2 capture and storage systems and last but not least geothermal energy.

In this context, Drillmec has launched the company Idrogena, a start-up dedicated to the development and industrial production of a pyrolytic converter for the production of ultra-clean hydrogen.

The converter designed by the Idrogena team with personnel with over thirty years of experience in process engineering, through pyrolysis will produce hydrogen without the use of pollutants.

"We are pleased to announce this new initiative in our country which is consistent with our history, which is to innovate and develop responsible and safe technologies capable of incorporate energy, social and environmental needs," said Simone Trevisani, CEO of Drillmec SpA.

This revolution will allow the production of hydrogen without CO2 emissions, in fact among its strengths will be the ability to prevent the generation of carbon dioxide by producing in its place precious graphite used by large industrial sectors, such as the automotive, cosmetics and pharmaceutical ones.

# US added 431,000 jobs in March in sign of economic health

**Washington:** America's employers extended a streak of robust hiring in March, adding 431,000 jobs in a sign of the economy's resilience in the face of a still-destructive pandemic and the highest inflation in 40 years.

market reflects a robust rebound from the brief but devastating coronavirus recession, which wiped out 22 million jobs in March and April 2020 as businesses shut down or cut hours and Americans stayed home to avoid infection.

**Mumbai:** House economists at the State Bank of India (SBI) have called for a slew of reforms to incentivise regional rural banks, including granting them on-tap licence for conversion into Small Finance Banks (SFBs).

The Labor Department's report Friday showed that last month's job growth helped reduce the unemployment rate to 3.6%, the lowest level since the pandemic erupted two years ago. Despite the inflation surge, persistent supply bottlenecks, the damaging effects of COVID-19 and now a war in Europe, employers have added at least 400,000 jobs for 11 straight months.

But the recovery has been swift. Fueled by generous federal aid, savings amassed during the pandemic and ultra-low borrowing rates engineered by the Federal Reserve, U.S. Consumers have spent so fast that many factories, warehouses, shipping companies and ports have failed to keep pace with their customer demand. Supply chains have snarled, forcing up prices.

In September 2018, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed urban cooperatives and microfinance lenders to convert themselves into SFBs.

Inflation may be starting to weaken consumer spending, the main driver of the economy. Americans increased their spending by just 0.2% in February, down from a much larger gain in January.

As the pandemic has eased, consumers have been broadening their spending beyond goods to services, such as health care, travel and entertainment, which they had long avoided during the worst of the pandemic. The result: Chronically high inflation is causing hardships for many lower-income households that face sharp price increases for such necessities as food, gasoline and rent.

Leading Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) are much bigger than most of the SFBs even today, according to a note by Soumya Kanti Ghosh, the group chief economic adviser at SBI.

SFB -- AU Small Finance Bank -- which has business (deposits and advances) size of only Rs 70,588 crore as of March 2021.

initiated large scale reforms that coupled with capital infusion, helped them turn profitable. However, in FY05, 42 per cent of the RRBs still carried legacy losses.

**Mumbai:** The property tax collected by the Mumbai civic body for the fiscal 2021-22 increased by Rs 700 crore from the previous financial year and touched a record Rs 5,792 crore despite the coronavirus-induced pandemic as well as a tax waiver on homes of up to 500 square feet, an official said on Friday.



From a modest beginning of six RRBs with 17 branches covering 12 districts in December 1975, their number increased to 196 RRBs in 1987 but remained at the same level till 2005.

ward was the highest among all wards, the release said. The property tax collected in 2020-21 was 5,091 crore and the figure for 2019-20 was Rs 4,161 crore, it informed.

In FY95, the government

With the abolition of octroi some years ago, property tax is one of the BMC's biggest sources of income, officials pointed out. **PTI**



# TAA fit for Liverpool's quadruple quest



AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool's push for a historic quadruple has been given a boost by the return of Trent Alexander-Arnold after the influential right-back missed England's friendlies with a hamstring injury.

It had been feared Alexander-Arnold's injury could keep him out of next weekend's crucial Premier League visit to Manchester City, as well as the FA Cup semi-final against City and the Champions League quarter-final with Benfica.

However, Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp confirmed the 23-year-old could return as soon as struggling Watford's trip to Anfield on Saturday.

Liverpool trail City by just a point at the top of the Premier League and have already lifted one trophy this season with the League Cup in February.

Alexander-Arnold has been key to that success, already registering a career-high 17 assists this season.

Klopp also dismissed the suggestion he had deliberately held the player back from England's recent matches against Switzerland and Ivory Coast to keep him fresh for the final two months of the season.

"Trent wanted to go to the national team, just to make sure that everybody (is aware) but he couldn't," said Klopp told reporters on Friday.

"You can see the scans, with these pictures you cannot go anywhere. But sometimes injuries, thank God, are not

## Tottenham reaching Champions League would be miracle: Conte

AP ■ LONDON

Tottenham manager Antonio Conte believes it will be a "miracle" if his side qualify for next season's Champions League.

Spurs are three points behind fourth-placed Arsenal after battling back into the race to finish in the top four.

Manchester United sit one point adrift of Conte's men in fifth, with both teams having played a game more than the Gunners.

Tottenham can temporarily climb above Arsenal if they beat Newcastle by two goals on Sunday before their north London rivals visit Crystal Palace on Monday.

But Conte still believes it would be a miraculous feat for Tottenham to reach the Champions League after an inconsistent season that saw the Italian hired to replace the sacked Nuno Espirito Santo in November.

"Before it's right to underline that this target is very, very difficult. We are not the only team that wants to try to do this miracle," Conte told reporters on Friday.

"There's also Arsenal, that in this moment has an



advantage, and then there is United. United is the team that in this season are struggling a lot.

"There are a top four, who at this moment are stronger clubs than the others, for many reasons. Chelsea, Liverpool, City and United. Last season Liverpool struggled to reach a Champions League place.

"Then Liverpool have taken this place. And this season it depends on United. At the moment we are among the teams that have to try to stay very close and exploit if someone fails this season."

## Bruno signs new Man Utd deal

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Bruno Fernandes extended his contract at Manchester United till 2026 on Friday in a deal expected to make the Portuguese midfielder one of the club's highest earners.

Fernandes has been a key player for the Red Devils since joining from Sporting Lisbon in January 2020, scoring 49 goals and providing 39 assists in 117 appearances.

However, United need him to improve on his indifferent form this season if the club are to improve on their current sixth position in the Premier League and make a strong finish to the season to qualify for the Champions League.

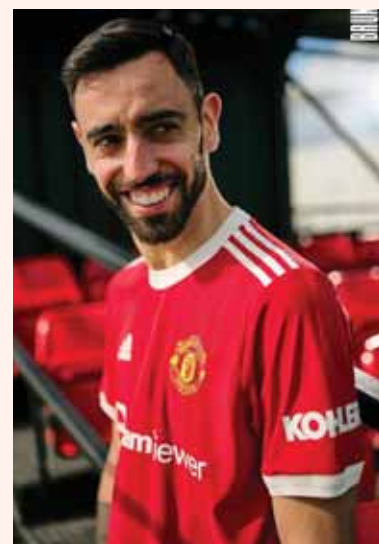
United also have an option to extend the deal by a further year to 2027.

"From the moment that I joined Manchester United, I have had a special relationship with the club and our amazing fans," said Fernandes.

"I grew up watching this team, dreaming of getting the chance to play here one day. That dream is now a reality and an honour."

Fernandes still had over three years to run on his previous contract, but has reportedly been given a pay rise to reflect his status at the club.

Despite the 27-year-old's best efforts, United have failed to win a trophy for the



past five years.

But Fernandes believes "the best is yet to come" from his time at Old Trafford. "There is so much more that I want to achieve here, and I know that is the same for the rest of the squad and staff," he added.

"More than anything, we want to give the fans the success that they deserve."

"We have shared some great moments over the last years, but the best is yet to come from myself and this team."

hear. Physically, he should be fine, now I have to make the decision about rhythm and these kinds of things."

Fears of injuries due to the demands on top players fuelled Klopp's campaign for the Premier League to fall in line with Europe's other major leagues and allow five substitutions per side.

Two years later, England's top-flight clubs belatedly agreed to that rule change

on Thursday, which will come into force for the 2022/23 season.

"It is top news for football and top news for the players," added Klopp.

"We have all spoken about it, that the games won't get less."

"With all the things we know, we try to help the players as much as we can but the games are always the most intense and everything we could do we should do."

## Fresh Haaland knock hampers Dortmund in Bundesliga race

AP ■ DORTMUND

Erling Haaland is again an injury doubt for Dortmund before Saturday's game against RB Leipzig with the hosts needing a win to stay in the Bundesliga title race and a capacity crowd expected for the first time in two years.

With seven games left, second-placed Dortmund need to end Leipzig's six match unbeaten run to keep pace with runaway leaders Bayern Munich, who start the weekend six points clear.

Haaland has only just returned from a leg injury, but it is "very questionable" he will play on Saturday due to an ankle knock after scoring twice in Norway's 9-0 rout of Armenia on Tuesday.

"He's twisted his ankle, the foot is swollen - fat and blue," said Dortmund coach Marco Rose.

Haaland has scored twice in each of his three games for Dortmund against fourth-placed Leipzig, most recently in last May's 4-1 German Cup final win.

For the first time since the pandemic hit Europe, Dortmund expect a capacity crowd of 81,000 at Signal Iduna Park.

"We can look forward to a great atmosphere and want



to use that to our advantage," said Rose.

Bayern were the last team to beat Leipzig, who have handed out 6-1 thrashings to both Greuther Fuertth and Hertha Berlin in recent weeks.

Leipzig head coach Domenico Tedesco expects Haaland to play.

"We plan for it and he will play - it's a top game, for them and us."

Bayern face a tricky away tie Saturday at Freiburg with the visitors waiting on the fitness of their star forward Robert Lewandowski.

He suffered a rib injury in Tuesday's win over Sweden as Poland qualified for the

World Cup. "We have to see how the rib reacts," Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann said on Friday.

"I expect him to be in the squad and play, but we won't take any risks," insisted Nagelsmann with one eye on Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final, first leg at Villarreal.

Nagelsmann is set to be without Joshua Kimmich, as his wife is due to give birth, and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, who is sidelined by Covid.

However, Leon Goretzka could make his first appearance since December, while Niklas Sule is also fit again.



## Osaka reaches Miami final

AP ■ MIAMI

Japan's former World Number one Naomi Osaka advanced to the WTA Miami Open final by rallying to defeat Olympic champion Belinda Bencic of Switzerland 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 on Thursday.

Bencic had won three of her four prior matches against the four-time Grand Slam champion, but Osaka fought back to reach her first final on the Miami hardcourts.

Neither player had dropped a set before the match but Bencic was impressive in opening exchanges to quickly put Osaka on the backfoot.

"I didn't feel like I fig-

## Djoker stays number 1 as Medvedev falls

AP ■ MIAMI

Daniil Medvedev missed a chance to reclaim the world number one ranking on Friday after falling to Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 at the Miami Open.

Medvedev fell from the top with a third-round loss to Gael Monfils at Indian Wells but would have taken back the spot from Novak Djokovic had he defeated Hurkacz, the defending Miami Open champion.

Instead, 10th-ranked



Hurkacz advanced to the semi-finals by ousting the reigning US Open champion and 20-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic stays number one.

Hurkacz, now 2-2 all-time against the Russian, faces either Carlos Alcaraz or Miomir Kecmanovic for a berth in Sunday's final.

ured her out at all and somehow I managed to win," Osaka said. "She's an amazing player. I wish I had her return."

Osaka, 24, will face either American Jessica Pegula or new world number one Iga Swiatek of Poland.

Osaka, who left Indian Wells in tears after being heckled by a fan, was similarly emotional at the end on Thursday, but in a happier way.

"I just wanted to say thanks to everyone. The atmosphere was really good," Osaka told spectators after the match.

"Damn, I'm always crying, but this tournament means a lot to me."

## Anand to support FIDE president Dvorkovich's re-election bid

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Five-time World Chess champion Viswanathan Anand on Friday confirmed that he will be actively supporting current FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich's re-election bid, an indication of his growing interest in being a part of game's administration in near future.

The FIDE Congress will be held in Chennai on the sidelines

of the Chess Olympiad to be held from July 28 to August 10.

Anand will not be contesting for any FIDE office-bearer's post but with India being awarded the hosting rights of 44th Chess Olympiad by the current dispensation, the Indian legend's public support is seen as a significant move.

"We have had a good discussion but we haven't decided yet in what role or capacity I will be



involved," Anand responded while replying query.

The World Chess Olympiad, organised since 1927, will be held

in India for the first time and in Asia after 30 years. Around 2000 participants from over 180 nations will fight it out for the top prize in the event to be held from July 28 to August 10.

Anand said that he will be working closely with Dvorkovich's team.

"I am willing and decided to work with this team. It is wonderful team led by Dvorkovich and they have done a lot for the

sport. As and when a decision is taken, I will let you know," he added.

"It's not about politics, it's about protecting the interest of players. As FIDE chief, I had to take some difficult decisions but all those were taken keeping players' interests in mind," Dvorkovich said.

"Yes, I am committed to run for a re-election and Anand will be a huge part of our team."

## India eye wins against Eng to climb to top spot

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Fairly well-placed after eight games, the Indian men's hockey team would look to annex the top position in the standings when it takes on England in a double-leg FIH Pro League tie, starting here on Saturday.

The second match of the tie will be played on Sunday.

Tokyo Olympic Bronze medallists India have so far played eight matches this season and are placed second in the standings, behind Germany (17 points), with 16 points.

The Indian team defeated South Africa 10-2, 10-2 before winning a game and losing one against France (5-0, 2-5) and Spain (5-4, 3-5).

Recently against Argentina, the Indians lost 2-2 (1-3 in shoot-out) before registering a thrilling 4-3 win in the second match.

Going into tie against



England, defence remains a major concern for the Indians as the backline wilted under pressure in every match.

On the contrary, India's forward line has been impressive, scoring as many as 42 goals in the eight games.

Mandeep Singh, in par-

ticular, has been at his best inside the opposition circle, scoring some important goals, including the last-minute match-winner against Argentina in their previous game.

Captain of the Olympic Bronze-medal winning side, Manpreet Singh is the backbone of India's mid-

field alongside Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Nilkanta Sharma and Sumit.

The presence of four world-class dragflicking options -- Harmanpreet, skipper Amit Rohidas, Varun Kumar and young Jugraj Singh -- hand India a clear edge over their opponents.

Jugraj has been a revelation since making his senior team debut, striking a brace in the second game against Argentina before providing the assist to Mandeep for the winner.

In their last meeting, India defeated England 3-1 in the quarterfinals of the Tokyo Olympics last year.

On paper and in world rankings too, India hold an edge over England. While the Indians are ranked fourth, the Englishmen occupy the seventh spot.

England, on the other hand, are placed seventh in the Pro League standings with six points from two wins and as many defeats.

## Sushila Chanu backs India to win Gold in Jr Women's Hockey WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

She captained India to a Bronze medal finish in the 2013 Women's Junior Hockey World Cup and veteran Sushila Chanu feels the Salima Tete-led side has the potential to go two steps further and claim a maiden Gold in the edition that begins on Friday.

The Indian team will begin its campaign in Pool D against Wales on Saturday in Potchefstroom, South Africa before taking on formidable Germany on Sunday.

The Indians will then take on Malaysia in their final pool match before the quarterfinal round which starts on April 8.

"This is a really tight-knit group with excellent understanding between each other on the field, and off field as well. They have trained together as a group for a long time, and even played practice matches against the senior



women's team in the national camp at SAI Bengaluru and Bhubaneswar in which they have contested well," Sushila said.

"The group also consists of players who have represented the senior team on the big stage like the Olympics. These reasons lead me to

believe that the Indian junior team is a strong contender for the Gold medal."

Sushila was referring to the trio of skipper Tete, midfielder Sharmila Devi and striker Lalremliami, who were part of the senior team that finished fourth at the Tokyo Olympics.

## Thomas & Uber Cup draw sets up some interesting matchups

AP ■ BANGKOK

The draws for Thomas and Uber Cup took place in the host city of Bangkok, Thailand on Friday.

Defending Thomas Cup men's champions Indonesia were drawn in Group A with South Korea, hosts Thailand and Singapore.

Denmark top Group B with China, France and Algeria while Group C is led by Chinese Taipei, followed by India, Germany and Canada.

Group D will feature Japan, Malaysia, England and New Zealand.

In the women's Uber Cup draw, defending champions China were drawn into Group B with rivals Chinese Taipei, Spain and Australia.

Group A is 2018 champions Japan, Indonesia, France and Germany. In Group C are hosts Thailand, Denmark, Malaysia and Egypt. Group D is topped by 2010 champions South Korea, followed by India, Canada and the United States. The 2022 Thomas and Uber Cup will take from May 8th-15th in Bangkok.







IT'S ALWAYS NICE TO HAVE SUCH HIGH QUALITY IN YOUR ATTACK. TO HAVE THEM AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT IS ANOTHER GREAT PLUS

— KUMAR SANGAKKARA

## Returning Suryakumar boosts MI's prospects against Rajasthan Royals

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians will have the returning Suryakumar Yadav's flamboyance in the middle-order as they look to bounce back against a confident Rajasthan Royals unit in the IPL here on Saturday.

The two teams head into the game at the DY Patil Stadium on the back of contrasting starts to the 15th edition of the tournament.

While five-time champions MI suffered a four-wicket defeat against Delhi Capitals in their lung-opener despite posting 177, Rajasthan mauled Sunrisers

Hyderabad by 61 runs in a dominant show. So far in this IPL, there has been a trend of winning the toss and bowling first and it is likely to continue.

Mumbai have two of the best openers in captain Rohit Sharma and Ishan Kishan, who blazed his way to an unbeaten 81 against DC, justifying his heavy price tag.

With a wide range of shots at their disposal, the duo can give the hosts a strong start, so vital in the scheme of things.

Suryakumar, who has joined the team after his recovery at the NCA, will likely bat at number three and has the ability to play match-winning knocks at any positions. He will be keen to get going quickly and justify the faith shown in him by the owners.

Mumbai's middle-order crumbled in the game against DC and one among

Anmolpreet Singh, Tilak Verma and Tim David would have to make way for Suryakumar.

Veteran all-rounder Kieron Pollard, who has a knack of hitting huge sixes, also perished cheaply against DC and he would be eager to get going against Royals.

More than their batters, the Mumbai bowlers are the ones who would need to step up as they were unable to defend 177, and considering Rajasthan's power-packed line-up, they would need to hit the right lengths.

The team would bank on pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah to deliver, but he also needs support from the others like of Basil Thampi and Daniel Sims.

The role of Muralugan Ashwin, who picked up two wickets on his MI debut, too would be crucial as he can effect breakthroughs and also put the brakes on the scoring rate. Meanwhile, Rajasthan ticked almost all the boxes in their game against Sunrisers and were ahead in both bowling and batting, even as fielding remains a cause for concern, having dropped catches.

The onus will be again on skipper Sanju Samson to lead from the front after he made a scintillating 55 in his team's opener.

The RR openers -- Yashashvi Jaiswal and Jos Buttler -- got starts against SRH but they will need to convert them into substantial scores.

The other batters including Devdutt Padikkal and Shimron Hetmyer also clicked and they would hope to repeat the show.

The Rajasthan bowlers, led by Prasad Krishna, were on target against SRH. They have a lethal attack in pacer Trent Boult and spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal.

# RUSSELL MANIA



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Umesh Yadav continued his dream run with a four-wicket haul before Andre Russell returned to his brutal best to fire KKR to an easy six-wicket win over Punjab Kings on Friday.

Umesh (4/23), coming into the season with just two games over two IPL seasons and going unsold initially at the auction, produced career-best T20 figures to help KKR dismiss Punjab for 137 in 18.2 overs.

It was supposed to be a straight forward chase but Rahul Chahar raised Punjab's hopes with a double wicket maiden to reduce KKR to 51 for four. However, Russell (70 not out off 31

balls) came out in the middle and changed the game with his barrage of sixes, eight in total, to make it a cake-walk in just 14.3 overs. He smashed three sixes off Odean Smith in an over that went for 30 runs.

No rope is long enough when Russell is going all guns blazing and he was in that kind of zone on Friday night. The Jamaican dasher fittingly ended the game with a couple of sixes off Liam Livingstone's friendly leg-breaks. It was KKR's second win in three games while Punjab suffered their first loss of the season after the win over RCB.

Earlier, KKR bowlers stifled a power-laden Punjab Kings batting line-up. With heavy dew setting in later half of the games, fielding first has

become a no-brainer this IPL and KKR skipper Shreyas Iyer called it right at the toss. Punjab, which had successfully chased 200 plus in their opening game, enjoyed a good powerplay that yielded 62 for 3 in six overs.

Veteran pacer Umesh, who has been proving his critics wrong this season, once again provided the breakthrough early in the game, removing opposition skipper Mayank Agarwal, who was found plumb in front after missing a rather straight and full delivery in the first over of the match.

Sri Lankan Bhanuka Rajapaksa (31 off 9) who had produced a match-winning knock in the first game, looked in sensational touch at the Wankhede Stadium.

### pointstable

Po.	TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1.	KKR	3	2	1	0	4	0.083
2.	RR	1	1	0	0	2	3.050
3.	DC	1	1	0	0	2	0.914
4.	GT	1	1	0	0	2	0.286
5.	LSG	2	1	1	0	2	-0.011
6.	RCB	2	1	1	0	2	-0.048
7.	PBKS	2	1	1	0	2	-1.183
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

### boundarymeter

4s	226
6s	124

In his brief stay in the middle, the top-order batter hammered three fours and as many sixes, mostly towards the mid-wicket region, leaving the spectators in awe. His breathtaking effort was perhaps the lone bright in an otherwise underwhelming innings.

Iyer impressed with his leadership. He brought back Umesh in the middle overs to ensure there was no fightback from Punjab. He also employed a slip in the 15th over and was rewarded for that with the wicket of Rahul Chahar. His new ball partner Tim Southee and KKR's retained spinners Varun Chakaravathy and Sunil Narine were also too good for the Punjab batters. Livingstone (19 off 16) could convert his start while India U-19 star Raj Angad Bawa found the going tough for the second game in a row. Kagisa Rabada (25 off 16), playing his first game of the season, saved Punjab the blushes by getting much needed boundaries to take the total close to 140.

## Ensured that smaller players can also be part of IPL media rights bidding process: BCCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The ones with deep pockets are expected to bid for IPL media rights but treasurer Arun Dhumal on Friday said the introduction of a non-exclusive package will also encourage smaller players to be part of the bidding process.

The BCCI has set a combined base price of approximately Rs 33,000 crore for the media rights for 2023-2027, the double of what Star India paid for the existing rights.

The base price of Package A (India sub-continent TV rights) stands at Rs 49 crore per game and 33 crore per game for Package B (India sub-continent digital rights).

For Package C (non-exclusive digital rights) the base price is Rs 16 crore per game. Package C will have only 18 games, including Play-offs and Final.

For Package D (Rest Of the World TV and digital rights), the base price has been set at Rs 3 crore per game.

"We don't speculate or set target for price. It is the market that decides the price. Our objective and job is to ensure a fair, transparent and inclusive ITT," Dhumal told PTI when asked about his expectations.

The cost to buy the bid document -- Invitation to Tender (ITT) -- is Rs 25 lakh.

"This is the property that entire sporting world is looking at eagerly. Whatever the markets feel is the right value, should come."

The likes of Britain-based investment company CVC and Manchester United owners had come to the bidding table for the two new teams in the IPL.

CVC eventually made the winning bid for Ahmedabad franchise and India's RPSG Group for Lucknow.

"The bidding for two new teams showed that IPL has become a global brand and is only going to grow in the future. I expect more interest from global players for media rights," he said.

Streaming giant Amazon is expected to pick up the ITT document.

"IPL is a global league, the idea is to make it more participatory from small to big players. There are few players for whom cricket may not be main the sport as of now but in their future plans, so they may not want to eat the whole cake but start with a small pie.

"This ITT ensures their participation either in a non-exclusive bundle or for international territories.



## Delhi Capitals test awaits Gujarat Titans

PTI ■ PUNE

They came out on top in the battle of newcomers but it will be a different ball game altogether for Gujarat Titans when they lock horns with Delhi Capitals in the IPL here on Saturday.

Both Gujarat and DC started their campaign in the 15th edition of the lucrative league with wins and they would look to continue in the same vein at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium.

Injury-plagued DC will gain strength further in both

**Gujarat vs Delhi**  
Live from 7:30 pm IST  
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

bowling and batting, with the likely inclusion of Lungi Ngidi, Mustafizur Rahman and Sarfaraz Khan, who have completed their three-day quarantine.

The trio's return will bolster the Delhi outfit against an opponent that gave enough indications of its ability to not just compete with the best but also pull off the result it desires. In their five-wicket defeat, K L

Rahul's Lucknow Super Giants came to know what the Titans are capable of.

So irrespective of the four-wicket victory over five-time champions Mumbai Indians in their tournament opener, DC know it too well that they just cannot afford to take the foot off the pedal.

The win against LSG first up is definitely a huge confidence booster, but in Delhi Capitals, Titans face a more seasoned opponents, who have established themselves as one of the top sides in recent years.

With a strong top-order

batting, besides a well-balanced bowling unit, the Capitals have all the tools required to embark on a winning run early on in the competition, so they certainly start as favourites against Titans.

Besides, the fact that DC managed to overcome the Mumbai challenge without a few key players, including flamboyant Australian all-rounder David Warner and Mitchell Marsh and South African duo of Ngidi and Anrich Nortje, only adds to their confidence and makes the win more praiseworthy.

While DC are going to

strengthen their playing XI by making useful additions, the Titans on the other hand may not like to tinker with the combination that gave them their maiden win in their very first appearance.

Australian recruit Matthew Wade, who was tasked with opening the batting alongside Shubman Gill, is eyeing a big one after failing to convert his 30 in the previous game into a more substantial contribution.

In the absence of their top pacers, Delhi's bowling left a lot to be desired in the opener and it will look to do much better against Gujarat.

## We can definitely beat Aussies on our day: Ecclestone

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

Tournament's leading wicket-taker Sophie Ecclestone has said that England are capable of beating the mighty Australia on their day, warning that her side entered the ongoing World Cup final without playing its best cricket. The final will be played at the Hagley Oval on Sunday.

"Beating the Aussies in the final, I can't really put it into words after the Ashes we had," she said.

"I really believe in this group and on our day we can definitely beat the Aussies - we've got a great

chance."

England have had a poor tune-up to the showpiece, losing the Ashes to their traditional rivals before suffering a defeat to the Aussies in their opening game of the World Cup. "I know if we play our best cricket and our batters bat the way they can and the bowlers bowl the way they can, we've got such a great unit as a team, so we'll just focus on ourselves and do the best we can," she said.

After losing three matches in a disastrous start to the tournament, England prevailed in five must-win games to reach final.



## IPL crowd capacity increased to 50%

PTI ■ MUMBAI

IPL's ticketing partner BookMyShow on Friday said that audience capacity for the current season has been increased to 50 per cent from April 6.

The Maharashtra government had initially allowed 25 per cent crowds at all the four venues - Wankhede stadium, Brabourne stadium in Mumbai, DY Patil stadium in Navi Mumbai and Maharashtra Cricket Association stadium in Gahunje in Pune.

"Ticket sales for the next set of matches are live even as the BCCI has announced an increase in stadium occupancy to 50%, which was earlier capped at 25% thereby extending the opportunity for many more fans across India and beyond to experience the IPL action live in the stadium," BookMyShow claimed in a media release.

The Maharashtra government had on Thursday decided to do away with all the COVID restrictions, from April 2 in the entire state.



## Harmer marks SA return with four-wicket Test haul

AP ■ DURBAN

Off-spinner Simon Harmer ended an absence of more than six years by taking four wickets and putting South Africa in charge on the second day of the first Test against Bangladesh at Kingsmead on Friday.

Bangladesh were 98 for four at the close in reply to South Africa's 367 all out. Harmer took four for 42 in 20 overs.

Harmer, 32, had not played in a Test match since November 2015.

He signed a Kolpak contract with English county Essex in 2017, making him ineligible to play for South Africa before the system came to an end in 2020.

Now classified as an overseas player for the county and again becoming available for his country, Harmer took 491 First-Class wickets during his time away from international cricket.

Harmer made the first breakthrough in the last over before tea when he bowled Shadman Islam for nine with the third ball of his second over.

He ended a 55-run stand between Mahmudul Hasan and Najmul Hossain by bowling Najmul for 38 with a superb delivery which drifted in and spun past the bat.

Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque fell without scoring in Harmer's next over, caught off bat and pad by a diving Keegan Petersen at silly point.

The experienced Mushfiqur Rahim was Harmer's fourth wicket, gloving a ball down the leg side to wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne.

Mahmudal, playing in his third Test, survived until the close, scoring 44 not out. Temba Bavuma top-scored for South Africa with 93, while fast bowler Khaled Ahmed took four for 92 for Bangladesh.

## I am 'spin-fast' bowler who prefers bowling at 100 kmph: Rashid

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rashid Khan has a fast bowler's mindset in a spinner's body with an uncompromising attitude when it comes to ripping his googlies and leg-breaks off the surface at nearly 100 kmph.

At 23, the Afghan spinner is the most sought-after T20 freelancer on the global league circuit with 436 wickets in 312 games.

Having started the season with an impressive 1/27 for Gujarat Titans, Rashid is extremely hopeful that he can replicate his Sunrisers Hyderabad form for the Hardik Pandya-led franchise.

So is Rashid an aggressive

fast bowler or 'scientist' ready to pull off new tricks?

"I am a spin-fast bowler because of the pace at which I bowl. It is very hard to spin the ball at that pace and for that I think that it requires a different kind of skill-set," Rashid said.

"The speed at which I bowl is somewhere between 96 kmph to 100 kmph. It is hard to generate turn at that pace but I would rather bowl at that speed than bring it down to 70 to 75 kmph.

"I have always been a big fan of bowling quick leg spin. I have just been trying different experiments with my bowling in the nets and it's really helping," he added.



### 'MYSTERY' IS IN CONSISTENCY

The term 'mystery spinner' is a loosely used jargon to describe any slow bowler that batters find difficult to read over a consistent period of time.

"I don't always consider myself a leg-spinner because, spinners use a lot of wrists and I don't use my wrists that much. I just use top of my fingers and so I am a finger spinner as well in that sense," he said.

The 'mystery' comes from consistency of being able to hit the right length which can sow seeds of doubts in a batter's minds.

"It's all about, being more consistent with line and length and whatever you are bowling -- be it flipper or leg-break. As

long as you have the good control over your skills and can bowl in right areas, it doesn't matter, if there is an element of mystery or not.

"If you hit the perfect length time and again, anyone can become a mystery bowler. My length on which I have worked hard makes me different from other leg-spinners."

For Rashid what has stood out for him is having that mindset where he is ready to deliver for the team in any given situation.

"Consistency is in having that kind of mindset. Yes, that I am capable of delivering it in every stage and hardwork and belief in skill sets is something I have always had," he said.