

## OPINION 6

THE MESS THAT PAK  
FINDS ITSELF IN TODAY

## WORLD 9

TALIBAN ANNOUNCES BAN  
ON POPPY PRODUCTION

## MONEY 10

DIESEL CROSSES ₹100 IN MP,  
AP IN LESS THAN 2 WEEKS

NEW DELHI, MONDAY APRIL 4, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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'DIDN'T KNOW  
HOW GOOD  
MOEEN WAS'  
12 SPORT

# Pak in turmoil as Assembly dissolved

Opp moves court as Imran calls for polls; SC bars State institutions from taking 'illegal' steps

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's beleaguered Prime Minister Imran Khan bowled a yorker at his rivals on Sunday by getting the presidential nod for the dissolution of Parliament, a move dubbed as "unconstitutional" by the Opposition parties which approached the apex court to legally challenge the decision which has pushed the coup-prone country into further political and constitutional crisis.

Later in the day Pakistan's Supreme Court barred all State institutions from taking any "unconstitutional" steps after the dismissal of the no-confidence vote in the National Assembly against Imran Khan and the subsequent approval of the President to dissolve the House at the advice of the embattled premier.

Khan was widely expected to lose the no-confidence motion moved by an alliance of Opposition politicians in the National Assembly — includ-



Pakistani paramilitary troops patrol near a billboard with the picture of Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan displayed outside the National Assembly, in Islamabad, Pakistan on Sunday

AP | PTI

ing more than a dozen defectors from his own political party. But in a surprise reprieve for the 69-year-old cricketer-turned-politician, the no-trust vote was dismissed as "unconstitutional" by Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri, leading to vociferous protests by the Opposition.

Khan, who had effectively lost majority in the 342-member National Assembly, made a brief address to the nation in which he said he has recommended dissolution of the House and sought fresh elections.

Khan, head of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)

party, congratulated the nation for the no-trust motion being dismissed, saying the Deputy Speaker had "rejected the attempt of changing the regime (and) the foreign conspiracy".

However, later in the day Pakistan's Supreme Court barred all State institutions from taking any "unconstitutional" steps after the dismissal of the no-confidence vote in the National Assembly against Khan and the subsequent approval of the President to dissolve the House at the advice of the embattled premier.

Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial said that all orders and

actions initiated by the Prime Minister and the President regarding the dissolution of the National Assembly will be subject to the court's order as he adjourned for one day the hearing of the high-profile case.

Pakistan President Arif Alvi had dissolved the National Assembly on advice of Khan, minutes after Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri rejected a no-confidence motion against the premier, who had effectively lost the majority in the 342-member Lower House of Parliament.

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## Lankan cops fire tear gas at students amid curfew

664 people held, Opp stages anti-Govt stir

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan police fired tear gas and water cannons at hundreds of university students during a protest in the central province despite a curfew on Sunday, as demands grew for appointment of an all-party interim Government to address the worst economic crisis that has plagued the country.

The Government's poor handling of the economic crisis where people currently endure long hours of power outages and scarcity of essentials has angered the public which planned country-wide protests on Sunday.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa issued a special gazette notification late on Friday night, declaring a public emergency in Sri Lanka with immediate effect from April 1. The Government also imposed a 36-hour curfew with effect from 6 pm Saturday to 6 am Monday.

The Government ordered internet service providers to restrict social media access, tightening curbs to prevent planned demonstrations calling for President Rajapaksa's ouster over soaring living costs and a foreign exchange crisis. The social media curbs were lifted at nearly 15 hours on Sunday.

Defying curfew orders, lawmakers from Sri Lanka's



A Sri Lankan police officer stands guard during the curfew in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Sunday

AP | PTI

principal Opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya staged an anti-Government protest in Colombo against President Rajapaksa's move to impose a state of emergency and other restrictions.

"We will protect democracy in Sri Lanka," Opposition legislator Harsha de Silva said.

The Opposition lawmakers marched towards Colombo's Independence Square, chanting slogans and carrying placards that read:

"Stop Suppression" and "Gota go home." Police officials set up barricades leading up to the Independence Square, which was built to commemorate Sri Lanka's independence in 1948.

In Central Province, hundreds of students from the University of Peradeniya took to streets to protest against the present state of affairs in the country. However, police installed barricades close to the university.

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## CAPSULE

## AUS BAGS 7TH WOMEN WORLD CUP TITLE

**Christchurch:** Australia bossed their way to a record-extending seventh Women's World Cup title with a crushing 71-run win over traditional rivals England, stamping their undisputed dominance in the tournament after a breathtaking hundred from Alyssa Healy in the final here on Sunday.

## 'UNEMPLOYMENT RATE DECREASING IN INDIA'

**Kolkata:** Unemployment rate in the country is decreasing with the economy slowly returning to normal, according to CMIE data. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's monthly time series data revealed that the overall unemployment rate in India was 8.10 per cent in February 2022, which fell to 7.6 per cent in March. On April 2, the ratio further dropped to 7.5 per cent, urban unemployment rate at 8.5 per cent and rural at 7.1 per cent.

## ANDHRA PRADESH TO HAVE 13 NEW DISTIS

**Amaravati:** The Andhra Pradesh Government has issued a gazette notification carving out 26 districts out of the existing 13. All the new districts would come into being from April 4, a gazette said.

## 6 KILLED IN US MASS SHOOTING, 10 HURT

**Sacramento (US):** Six people were killed and 10 injured in a mass shooting early Sunday as bars and nightclubs were closing in downtown Sacramento and police in California's state capital were searching for one suspect.

## 'No one will dare to displace Pandits on return to Valley'

We left because of extremism but now, we will go back as Bharat Bhakts: RSS chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hoping that the Kashmiri Pandits who were displaced from their homes in the Kashmir Valley in the 1990s will soon return as Hindus and 'Bharat Bhakts', RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday asserted that this time round "we will live in a way that nobody will dare to displace us."

Addressing the Kashmiri Hindu community via video conference on the last day of the Navreh celebrations in Jammu, Bhagwat said nobody can force the Kashmiri Pandits to leave, and if anybody tries to

do it, then s/he will have to face the consequences.

"We left (Kashmir) because of extremism but when we'll return now, we will go back as Hindus and 'Bharat Bhakts' with an assurance of our security and livelihood. We will live in a way that nobody will dare to displace us," said the RSS chief. He said the abrogation of Article 370 that accorded a special status to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) had paved the way for the return of Hindus to Kashmir.

"Earlier, I said that the issue of Kashmiri Pandits will be solved through public awareness and hindrances such as Article 370 must be removed. After 2011, in these 11 years, due to our collective efforts, there is no Article 370," Bhagwat said.

"We are (Kashmiri Pandits) bearing the brunt of getting displaced from our home in our own country for the last 3-4 decades. It's imperative that

we shouldn't accept defeat in this situation and face challenges," he further stressed.

On the recently released movie 'The Kashmir Files' that narrates the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley in 1990 in the wake of rising militancy there, the RSS leader said the film has exposed the tragedy faced by the Pandits.

"The movie 'The Kashmir Files' portrays the story of Kashmiri Pandits. Some people are in favour while some are against it. The movie has showcased an unfortunate reality of the drastic tragedy of Kashmiri Pandits which shocked all of us," he said. The movie has also been appreciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had praised the film-maker for bringing-out facts on the Kashmiri Pandit exodus from the erstwhile State of J&K. Modi had earlier met the director Vivek Agnihotri and the cast of the celluloid film.

## Covaxin supply through UN agencies suspended

Need manufacturer to improve its facilities, inspection deficiencies: UN

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that it has suspended supply through United Nations agencies of Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin, produced by India's Bharat Biotech, to allow the manufacturer to upgrade facilities and address deficiencies found in an inspection.

The Hyderabad-based vaccine maker has committed to address deficiencies in good manufacturing practices and is developing a corrective and preventive action plan, the WHO said, without specifying when the suspension will be lifted.

The WHO also asked countries that have received the



vaccine to take appropriate actions, according to the statement, but did not specify what the appropriate actions would be. The WHO said the vaccine is effective and no safety concerns exist, but the suspension of production for export will result in the interruption of Covaxin supply.

It said the suspension is in response to the outcomes of WHO post emergency use listing (EUL) inspection conducted from March 14 to 22,

and the vaccine maker has indicated its commitment to suspend production of Covaxin for export.

Bharat Biotech on Friday said it will temporarily slow down production of Covaxin across its manufacturing facilities as it had completed supply obligations and expected a decrease in demand.

As per the Government statistics, more than 308 million doses of Covaxin have been administered across India.

## ED files chargesheet against Punjab ex-CM Channi's nephew in sand mining case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a prosecution complaint (chargesheet) against the nephew of former Punjab Chief Minister, Charanjit Singh Channi, and another accused person in an illegal sand mining case on money laundering charges. The chargesheet has been filed against Channi's nephew, Bhupinder Singh alias Honey, and his aide Kudaratdeep Singh alias Lovie, before a designated Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Jalandhar.

The court of Special PMLA judge Rupinderjit Chahal has fixed April 6 as the next date of hearing in the matter.

Officials said the chargesheet was filed on March 31 under various sections of the PMLA against Honey and Kudaratdeep. Honey was arrested on the intervening night of

February 3 and 4 by the ED, and as per rules, a chargesheet was required to be filed within the stipulated 60 days to deny the accused default bail.

Before the arrest, the agency had on January 18, conducted raids against Honey and others at 10 locations. The agency had seized about ₹7.9 crore in cash from Honey's premises and another ₹2 crore in cash from one of his aides, identified as Sandeep Kumar. The searches and the arrests were made by the ED in the run up to the Assembly polls. Following the seizures during the searches, the agency summoned Honey for questioning multiple times, before finally arresting him on February 3.

The ED, on court orders, kept Honey in its custody till February. He was subsequently remanded to judicial custody and he continues to be in jail.

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## Curfew still on in Karauli, SIT formed to probe clashes

**Jaipur:** Curfew remained clamped in Karauli in Rajasthan on Sunday while more than a dozen people were arrested and a special investigation team (SIT) formed to probe the communal clashes that broke out in the district during a motorcycle rally taken out to celebrate the Hindu new year.

Incidents of arson and vandalism were reported on Saturday after stones were pelted at the rally when it was passing through a Muslim-dominated locality, according to police. At least 35 people were injured in the violence.

Mobile internet remained suspended on Sunday and police said they were examining videos of the violence that have been shared on social media.

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Nepal PM Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife Arzu Rana Deuba with UP CM Yogi Adityanath, in Varanasi on Sunday

PTI

## Airstrike hits Odesa, world leaders shocked by Russian war crimes

**Kiev:** On a day British Prime Minister Boris Johnson congratulated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for successfully pushing back Russian forces from key regions in the country, including the capital city of Kyiv, an airstrike hit Odesa on Sunday. Meanwhile, the mayor of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and French and German leaders condemned alleged war crimes by Russia. Sunday's strike came two days after Russia launched three missile attacks on the strategic Ukrainian port city, the country's military said.

In a social media post, the Operational Command South of the Ukrainian military said Sunday's airstrike hit the city's infrastructure.

Some additional missiles were intercepted by the Ukrainian air defence. According to preliminary data, there were no reports of casualties from the strikes.

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## Subways, solar fence for safety of elephants

To be build for tuskars to cross railway tracks between Coimbatore in TN, Palakkat in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ COIMBATORE

Wild elephants living on the area bordering Tamil Nadu and Kerala will soon be elevated to a class of their own! Exclusive subways for the pachyderms to cross the railway tracks between Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu and Palakkat in Kerala are on the anvil.

This stretch of the railway tracks have earned the dubious name of 'graveyard of elephants' because of the speeding trains running over the animals. According to a spokesman of Southern Railway, eight elephants have been killed during the last two years alone when they were hit

by the trains.

Ramesh, popularly known as 'Elephant Ramesh' because of his affection for the tuskars, however put the death toll in the last two years to 18. "I don't know how they reached the figure of eight. Many accidents go unreported and there is severe shortage of forest staff on both sides of the border," said Ramesh, who works as an unofficial ranger of the forest in this stretch.

The Coimbatore-Palakkat stretch passes along the periphery of the Western Ghats and it is common for wild animals, especially the elephants, to cross the tracks in search of drinking water and food. "In addition to this, passengers throw remains of food on to the

railway tracks and this draws the attention of the animals," said the railway spokesman.

Since both sides of the tracks have thick wild growth, the animals remain ignorant of the approaching trains. "The loco pilots sound the alarm or blow the sirens, but most of the time the elephants miss out these warning signals," said the railway spokesman.

Despite many measures adopted by the Railway, the death toll continued to be on the wrong side and this led the Railway officials to chalk out an out-of-the-box idea. Yet another innovation to prevent the elephants from "trespassing" into the tracks is solar fence and solar lights.

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# Maha BJP prez praises MNS chief for Gudi Padwa address

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a clear indication of the ongoing efforts by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to forge an alliance with the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) for the crucial Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) polls, State BJP president Chandrakant Patil on Sunday heaped praise on MNS chief Thackeray's Gudi Padwa address not only came as music to the ears of the ordinary Hindus but it also brought back the late Sena chief Bal Thackeray.

Talking to media persons at Kolhapur in western Maharashtra, Patil said, "The views expressed by Raj Thackeray at his Gudi Padwa speech came as a huge comfort to the ordinary Hindus. In fact, his address brought back the memories of late Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray".

While agreeing with the stand taken by Raj, Patil said, "Respecting other religions does not mean imposing restrictions on the Hindus. Does treating all religions with the same respect mean that we respecting Muslims and others do not respect Muslims? You respect our aartis, while we will respect your azaan (prayers) at mosques".

During his Saturday's Gudi Padwa address, the MNS chief had among other things said that if the state government did not take any steps to stop the practice of azaan being played on loudspeakers from mosques, his party workers would play Hanuman Chalisa before mosques.

Holding Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar responsible for spread of caste politics in Maharashtra, Raj had said that it was after the formation of the

NCP in 1999 that caste politics gained currency in the state. "It was only after the formation of the NCP in 1999 that caste politics spread in a big way in the state. Yes. Caste politics excited even before that

"Till the time we do not get over caste politics, we will never be Hindus. But, after the formation of the NCP, Pawar sought to create enmity between one caste and another," the MNS chief had said.

Slamming the MNS chief for his remarks at Gudi Padwa address at Shivaji Park on Saturday evening, Shiv Sena's chief spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut said: "More than anything else, Raj Thackeray was echoing the views of the BJP. Ironically, the MNS chief had become a loud Speaker for the BJP".

Alluding to Raj's criticism of Sharad Pawar, Raut said: "Raj is saying that Pawar saheb

spread caste politics in Maharashtra. If that is the case, why Raj go to Pawat saheb to seek the latter's advice? Raj's whole speech of Raj appeared to be a programme sponsored by the BJP".

Maharashtra's deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, who is the nephew of Sharad Pawar, also hit out at the MNS chief for accusing Sr Pawar of spreading caste politics in the state. "If he has issues with Pawar saheb, why did Raj Thackeray heap lavish praise on the NCP chief when he conducted his (Pawar's) public interview in Pune a few years back?," Ajit Pawar asked.

Patil's praise of Raj Thackeray should be seen in the context of the efforts by both the BJP and MNS to cosy up to other in recent weeks. There is strong likelihood that both the parties might join hands to fight the BMC elec-

tions to be held in September this year.

For many years since they formed an alliance in the late eighties, the Shiv Sena used to rule the BMC in alliance with the BJP. However, after the Shiv Sena broke its alliance with the BJP at the state and national levels and formed the government in alliance with the NCP and Congress in the state in the last week of November 2019, the saffron alliance broke at the BMC. Currently, the Shiv Sena rules the BMC on its own.

It may be recalled that the BMC polls held in 2017 had thrown up a hung house. The Shiv Sena had emerged as the single largest party with 84 seats in the 227-member BMC, followed by BJP- 82, Congress- 31, NCP- 9, MNS- 7 and others — 14. During the first two and a half years in power, the Shiv Sena increased its strength to 94, by inducting among

others seven corporators from the Raj Thackeray-led NCP.

However, after it aligned with the NCP and Congress in the state in November 2019, the ruling Shiv Sena has been enjoying the support of the two parties for the past two years.

Given that all the three constituents of the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) nurse the ambition of expanding their base in Mumbai, it is not clear as yet whether the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress will contest the 2022 BMC polls as an alliance.

Despite the fact that it had won as many as 92 seats in the 227-member civic body in the 2017 polls, the BJP — which is the principal Opposition party in the state — will have a tough time in the 2022 BMC polls. No wonder, ahead of the 2022 civic polls, the BJP is cosying up to the MNS, which had won seven seats in the 2017 polls.

## Inspired by Raj Thackeray, party workers set up loudspeakers at party office

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Inspired by a threat handed by MNS chief Raj Thackeray against the use of loud speakers for playing azaan from mosques, his party workers on Sunday set up a loud speaker in front of the party office at Ghatkopar in north-east Mumbai, only to be ordered by the police to remove it and pay a fine for violation of sound rules.

During his Saturday's Gudi Padwa address, the MNS chief had among other things said

that if the state government did not take any steps to stop the practice of azaan being played on loudspeakers from mosques, his party workers would play Hanman Chalisa before mosques.

Apparently enthused by the MNS chief's speech, the MNS leader Mahendra Bhanushali installed a loud speaker in front of the party's office. The local police arrived on the scene, removed the loud speaker and imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 the local MNS leader for the violation.

## Search begins in BJP for new UP party chief

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the induction of BJP state president Swatantra Dev Singh in the Yogi Adityanath Cabinet 2.0, the search for his successor has begun in the ruling party.

Sources in the Bharatiya Janata Party indicate that the next State president of the party is likely to be from western Uttar Pradesh.

Former energy minister and MLA from Mathura, Shrikant Sharma, is said to be the front runner for the post. Mathura falls in the Braj region of western UP.

Besides Sharma, there are many contenders for the post including MLAs, MPs and MLCs. The sources said if a leader has failed to find a berth in the Yogi Adityanath cabinet it does not necessarily mean that the person has been penalised or is being marginalised in the party.

"The BJP is a cadre based party with collective leadership where equal opportunity is

given to all," said a BJP leader, and added, "There are several leaders in the organisation and the government and party will utilise their potential."

Apart from these, Lok Sabha MP Subrata Pathak, who gave a jolt to the Samajwadi Party's stronghold in Kannauj, and Lok Sabha MP from Basti Harish Dwivedi are also being considered in the race for the post of BJP state president.

However, among all these leaders, Shrikant Sharma is considered to be the front runner as he comes from the Braj region. During the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, Keshari Nath Tripathi was the president of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, while during the 2009 Lok Sabha elections; Ramapati Ram Tripathi was in command of the party in UP.

During the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the party's Brahmin leader Laxmikant Bajpai, from Meerut, was the party president while during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Mahendra Nath Pandey was the face of the party in UP.

## Another setback to Azam as SWB takes possession of waqf properties from him

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In yet another setback to Samajwadi Party MLA Mohammad Azam Khan, the UP Shia Waqf Board has taken possession of several waqf properties from him and has handed them over to Rampur's royal family, a Shia Muslim.

Azam Khan, who was elected to Lok Sabha from Rampur in 2019, and to UP assembly in March 2022, is presently lodged in Sitapur district jail in connection with over 100 cases pertaining to theft, criminal intimidation, fraud and encroachment.

According to Shia Waqf Board Chairman Ali Zaidi, after the formation of the SP government in the state in 2012, many waqf properties were 'encroached' upon by then Waqf Minister Mohammad Azam Khan and they have been returned to the original owners after due investigation. He said this decision was taken in the last meeting of the Shia Waqf

Board on March 31.

Zaidi said that during his tenure, Khan had illegally encroached upon seven 'alal aula' (succession-based) waqf properties of the royal family, including the fortified mosque and an 'imambara'. He said Azam Khan did this by directing Wasim Rizvi, the then chairman of Shia Waqf Board, and made an outsider Waseem Khan the caretaker of these properties. Once this was done, Azam Khan demolished the Shaukat Ali Bazar built on these properties in May 2013 despite a stay order by the court.

Zaidi said after the reorganisation of the Shia Waqf Board in November last year, an inquiry was conducted into the complaints of illegal occupation of the waqf properties of the royal family, on the basis of which Waseem Khan was removed and Haider Ali Khan alias Hamza Miyan, the grandson of Begum Noorbano of the royal family, was made the caretaker.

## 2 killed in LPG cylinder blast in Pratapgarh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two people were killed and five others were seriously injured in an LPG cylinder explosion in Pratapgarh district, police said on Sunday. According to Station House Officer of Kondhaur police station, Bachche Lal, the incident occurred late on Saturday night at the residence of Ashfaq, a firecracker seller.

The blaze started when a spark from a cutter machine (used for cutting tiles) fell on the stock of firecrackers kept in the house. An LPG cylinder kept in the house also caught fire and exploded, the SHO said. Two men, identified as Shakeel (48) and Sandeep Patwa (24), were killed in the incident, he said, adding that five people were grievously injured.

The injured were referred to the SRN Hospital in Prayagraj for treatment, while the bodies of the deceased were sent for post-mortem, the officer said.

## Unemployment rate decreasing as economy reopened this year: CMIE

**The data showed that the urban unemployment rate was 8.5% in March while rural unemployment is 7.1 per cent**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After the reopening of the economy, the unemployment rate in the country is decreasing with the economy slowly returning to normal. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's (CMIE), a think-tank that does research and primary data collection, revealed that the overall unemployment rate in India was 8.10 per cent in February 2022, which fell to 7.6 per cent in March.

The data showed that the urban unemployment rate was 8.5 per cent in March while rural unemployment is 7.1 per cent. Haryana, Jammu and

Kashmir and Rajasthan were among the top states where unemployment was hovering around 25 to 26 per cent while Karnataka and Gujarat registered the least unemployment rate at 1.8. Per cent each in March, 2022.

The CMIE data showed that on April 2, the ratio further dropped to 7.5 per cent, with urban unemployment rate at 8.5 per cent and rural at 7.1 per cent. In February, the urban employment rate was 7.55 per cent and rural unemployment at 8.35 per cent. The unemployment at the national was 6.57 per cent in January.

According to the data, Haryana recorded the highest unemployment rate in March at 26.7 per cent, followed by Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir at 25 per cent each, Bihar at 14.4 per cent, Tripura at 14.1 per cent and West Bengal at 5.6 per cent. Karnataka and Gujarat registered the least unemployment rate at 1.8. Per cent each in March, 2022.

In April 2021, the overall unemployment rate was 7.97 per cent and shot up to 11.84 per cent in May last year.

"Continued fluctuation in unemployment reveals the volatility of the job market condition and lack of good quality regular jobs. It is due to bad quality or temporary jobs; millions of people join in the workforce in a month, but lose their jobs in the next," said Dr Kariman Singh of Magadh University.

Retired professor of economics at Indian Statistical Institute Abhirup Sarkar said that though the overall unemployment rate is falling, it is still high for a "poor" country like India. The decrease in the ratio shows that the economy is getting back on track after being hit by COVID-19 for two years, he said. "But still, this unemployment rate is high for India which is a poor country. Poor people, particularly in rural areas, cannot afford to remain unemployed, for which they are taking up any job which comes in their way," Sarkar said.

## Pak Assembly....

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Chief Justice Bandial took notice of the political situation and a three member Bench held the initial hearing despite the weekend and issued notices to all the respondents, including President Alvi and deputy Speaker of the NA, Suri.

The court ordered all parties not to take any "unconstitutional" measures and adjourned the hearing until Monday.

Chief Justice Bandial said that all orders and actions initiated by Khan and the President regarding the dissolution of the NA will be subject to the court's order.

Earlier, the Opposition had demanded the top court to intervene and Shehbaz Sharif, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, announced his party's decision to challenge the dissolution of the NA.

"We are going to challenge the ruling by the deputy speaker and advice by the Prime Minister to dissolve Parliament in the Supreme Court," he said.

## 26 officers found guilty in magisterial investigation of Aligarh liquor case, report sent to Govt

PNS ■ ALIGARH

A magisterial inquiry has been completed in the district in connection with the death of 106 people due to consumption of spurious liquor last year. This incident shook the entire state. In the case, the ADM administration has sent its report to the Government through DM.

In the investigation, 26 officers-employees associated with the Police and Excise Department have been found guilty. Action has been recommended against all of them. Now a decision will be taken on all these from the Government level.

In the district, on May 28, 2021, five people died after consuming alcohol from village Karsua in Lodha. It was learned that people bought liquor from the village contract and the condition worsened after consuming it.

After this, in the villages of

Khair, Rait, Andla, Jawan, Hebatpur, Fateh Nagaria, Nandpur Pala, Pachpeda, Sangor etc., the process of death of people due to alcohol consumption started. More than 22 people died on the very first day.

Even after this, the chain of deaths did not stop for 10 consecutive days. 106 people died due to alcohol consumption in the entire district including Quarsi, Gandhipark area of the city.

In this case, 33 cases were registered by the police in Khair, Lodha, Pisawa, Gabhana, Jawan, Mahuakheda, Quarsi etc. About 85 people, including Rishi Sharma and Munish Sharma, the main accused in the liquor scandal, have been arrested by the police and sent to jail. The matter is going on trial in the court. Property worth crores has also been confiscated from the accused from the police administration level.

## 100 hospitalised after food poisoning from buckwheat flour

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

About 100 people were hospitalised on Sunday after consuming items made from buckwheat flour in Haridwar district. The persons who started complaining of health issues after consuming the buckwheat flour have been admitted to the district hospital, Mela hospital and some private hospitals in the district.

The Haridwar district magistrate, chief medical officer, Haridwar MLA Madan Kaushik, chief development officer and other departmental officials concerned visited the patients in the hospital to check on their condition. The district magistrate Vinay Shankar Pande and the chief medical officer have issued advisory for the treatment of the patients.

On the first day of Chaitra Navratri on Saturday, many of the people who were fasting consumed buckwheat flour in the evening. According to sources, they soon started complaining of health issues includ-

ing vomiting, dizziness, nervousness, diarrhea and weakness. The family members of such persons brought them to the district hospital where they were admitted for treatment of food poisoning.

The number of persons complaining of food poisoning after consuming buckwheat flour increased further on Sunday and during the morning, there were 37 such patients in the district hospital, 20 in Bhoomanand hospital and about 40 in the Mela hospital. In addition to these patients, some have also been admitted in private hospitals.

The district administration sprung into action after receiving information about the high number of food poisoning cases. District magistrate Vinay Shankar Pande issued guidelines to district hospital chief medical superintendent Dr CP Tripathi and the Mela hospital chief medical officer Dr Rajesh Gupta for providing necessary treatment and facilities to the victims of food poisoning.

## FORDA urges PM for implementation of Central Act for Protection of Doctors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drawing the attention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi over incidents of harassment and violence against doctors, the Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) has urged him for the implementation of a Central Act for Protection of Doctors.

The FORDA in a letter to the Prime Minister said, "Observing the alarming trends, we had submitted representations on multiple occasions requesting the implementation of a Central Act for protection of doctors as well as for setting up an Indian Medical Service (IMS) cadre to curb such incidents in the future. Unfortunately, there has been no positive response from the concerned authorities yet."

They also cited the recent suicide case of a lady doctor — Archana Sharma — in Rajasthan's Dausa district, who was accused of murder after one of her patients died. The

incident had triggered protests all across the country particularly amidst doctors fraternity.

"The tragic incident of suicide by Archana Sharma in Dausa is one such incident wherein the doctor was harassed by local leaders and goons to an extent that she was compelled to take the extreme step. Subsequently, another incident of harassment by a bureaucrat was reported from Dehradun wherein Nidhi Uniyal resigned from her job at a Government medical college," the letter said.

The doctors association also pointed out that during Covid-19 pandemic doctors worked relentlessly and left no stone unturned in providing the best possible services during which many of their colleagues also succumbed to the disease.

The FORDA also requested the Prime Minister to take necessary measures to prevent incidents of harassment and violence against doctors.

## ED files chargesheet....

From page 1

Honey's money laundering case is linked to an alleged illegal sand mining case registered at Rahon Police station of Nawanshahr district on March 7, 2018. Honey's associate Kudratdeep of Ludhiana and 25 others were booked by Punjab Police. Kudratdeep's questioning by the ED revealed that Honey was the main facilitator in the sand mining scam. The ED had earlier said Honey had told them that the money seized belonged to him and that he used to take bribes from officials in lieu of giving them their choice of transfers and postings.

"Bhupinder Singh has explicitly stated in his statement...all the cash which was seized from his residential premises at Ludhiana (Rs 4.09 crore), Sandeep Kumar's premises at Ludhiana (Rs 1.99 crore) and from the Homeland House Premises at Mohali (Rs 3.89 crore) actually belonged to him. He admitted to having generated the money through mining-related activities, including clearance of mining files and transfer of officials," the agency had said in a statement.

## Airstrike hits Odesa...

From page 1

Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said country's forces have destroyed an oil refinery and three storage facilities for fuel and lubricants near Odesa with high-precision sea- and air-based missiles. The facilities supply fuel to a group of

Ukrainian troops in the Mykolaiv direction, Konashenkov said on Sunday during a briefing.

Meanwhile, the mayor of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, has expressed shock at what he called "cruel war crimes" committed by Russian soldiers in the town of Bucha northwest of the capital.

## Curfew still on in....

From page 1

"Around 30 people were detained and a dozen of them have been arrested. A special investigation team led by an Additional Superintendent of Police has been formed to probe the incidents," DIG Rahul Prakash, who is camping in Karauli, said.

"Curfew is continuing. Some vendors will be allowed to sell essentials like vegetables and milk in the presence of police," he said, adding that an assessment of losses and damage is underway.

The violence has sparked a fresh war of words between the ruling Congress in the State and the BJP. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot alleged that an environment of religious polarisation had been created in the

country after the BJP-led NDA came to power at the Centre and blamed it for such incidents.

"The atmosphere which has created in the country after the NDA Government came to power, I believe that the Prime Minister himself should appeal to the countrymen that this polarisation in the name of religion and caste is not justified and is not in the interest of the country," he said.

"Unfortunately, the incident that happened yesterday in Karauli and even today, there was a fight in Beawar over a small issue and one person was killed. If religions (of the persons involved) are different then in the name of religion, people polarise and make it an issue," he told reporters in Barmer.

## Lankan cops fire....

From page 1

University students accompanied by their lecturers proceeded towards the Galaha Junction, and tensions boiled over when they attempted to remove the barricades set up by the police, News 1st channel reported.

Police and riot police used water cannons to disperse the crowd and thereafter fired tear gas, it said, adding that the situation is tense in the region.

In Western Province, a total of 664 people were arrested for violating the curfew and trying to stage an anti-Government rally.

Opposition lawmakers, led by their leader Sajith Premadasa, had set off on a march towards the iconic Independence Square in

Colombo, defying a weekend curfew imposed by the Government on Saturday, ahead of the planned protest for Sunday.

"We are protesting the Government's abuse of the public security ordinance to deny the public's right to protest," he said.

The protest was organised by social media activists against the ongoing economic crisis and hardships heaped on people due to shortages of essentials.

A 53-year old man, who was protesting outside the private residence of President Rajapaksa over the long power cuts in the country due to the ongoing economic crisis, got electrocuted after he climbed a electricity pole, police said.

## Subways, solar fence....

From page 1

"Solar lights of higher lux with a minimum power of 7W have been found to be effective in warding off the animals. An audio alarm system too has been developed by the Signal Branch of Palakkad Division to distract the elephants from the tracks," said the spokesman.

He said the trial runs with alarm system, 7W lights and audio alarm system gave us positive reports.

Since the death of elephants affect both the States, the Railway approached the Forest Department of Tamil Nadu and Kerala with requests to deploy forest watchers to monitor the tracks during night hours. Tamil Nadu Forest Department had informed the Railways that they should pro-

vide motivational training to the staff thus elected. The State is likely to appoint forest watchers soon though Kerala developed cold feet and cried off from the move to appoint forest watchers.

Though there was a proposal to bring down the speed of trains in this stretch, Railway officials expressed their helplessness. "We should move at a speed of 45 km while negotiating the curves and gradients. But if the speed is brought down further, there is possibilities of major mishaps," said the railway man.

Two judges of the Madras High Court will undertake an inspection trip in the Coimbatore-Palakkad stretch to oversee the preparations to minimise mishaps in the railway tracks.



# Rai to chair high-level meeting on air pollution today



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai will chair a multi-department high-level meeting on air pollution on Monday to plan a campaign against open burning of garbage, fires at landfill sites and dust pollution, officials said on Sunday.

The meeting will be held at the Delhi Secretariat around noon and senior officials from the environment department, Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, fire ser-

vices, Public Works Department, Delhi Development Authority and municipal corporations will be in attendance. Rai had on Wednesday directed the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) to impose a fine of Rs 50 lakh on the East Delhi Municipal Corporation and take action against officials responsible for a massive fire at the Ghazipur landfill site. He had said the government will plan a campaign against open burning of garbage and fires at landfill sites.

# Ghazipur locals continue to gasp for fresh air

**Living in shadow of national Capital's tallest garbage mountain**

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Asthma, recurrent chest infections, breathing difficulties and other respiratory illness are common in families living in the shadow of Delhi's tallest garbage mountain, Ghazipur landfill site, with frequent fires leaving them gasping for breath.

A regular issue in election manifestos and often the subject of political blame game, Ghazipur dumping yard has been a long-standing problem with residents around the area complaining of serious health hazards. A fire at the dumping yard that broke out on March 28 could be doused

over 50 hours, forcing the locals to stay indoors. While no casualty was reported in the blaze, a thick blanket of smoke engulfed the adjoining areas.

Jummal, a 55-year-old woman, who lives near the landfill site in East Delhi's Ghazipur, said she suffered from asthma and has had frequent respiratory infections for the last nine years.

"I have stopped stepping out of my house ever since I developed health problems.

When the fire broke out on March 28, we were gasping for breath. We could only close our windows and stay indoors.

There was no other option for us," Jummal said. She added that they "tried reaching out to the authorities concerned several times but received no response." Eyewitnesses told PTI that during the recent fire incident, the residents were "either staying indoors or rushing to the hospitals". Riyazuddin, who has been living in Ghazipur

since 1983, said everyone in his family suffers from some ailment as he blamed frequent fires and constant foul smell in the area for their health problems.

"My wife developed asthma because of the toxic air here. The MCD has never paid attention to our problems. Politicians only visit the area during the elections. They approach us for votes and make huge promises, yet problem persists," he said. The Ghazipur landfill falls under the jurisdiction of the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC).

Most parents in the area said they were concerned for the safety and health of their children as they fall sick quite often because of the polluted air and the smell that grips the area. They said their children often develop allergies and infections. "My children have been suffering from allergies

and breathing problems. When the dumping yard caught fire, all of us were wearing masks even inside our houses. We are used to it but we worry about our kids," said Asin, a resident of Ghazipur.

Another resident Shabnam claimed that her youngest daughter, Sabina, has been undergoing treatment for respiratory infections at a government hospital for more than a decade now.

"The authorities concerned never took any action to resolve their issues. Politicians never visit the area after winning elections," she said.

For years, residents of Ghazipur have been demanding to put a stop on dumping of garbage in the area and relocate the landfill site. The locals said they have lodged several complaints and staged protests to have their demands met. "Nothing has worked out.

The situation has been worsening with each passing day. A few years ago, two people were killed after a

portion of the garbage dump collapsed. Nothing has been done about this dumping yard," Mohammad Furqan, another resident of Khatta, said. According to data shared by the Delhi Fire department, a total of 16 fire incidents — 12 at Bhalasa and four at Ghazipur — were reported last year. Fifteen such incidents took place in 2020, while 37 similar fire incidents were reported in 2019, the data stated.

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai directed the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) to submit a report on the recent incident within 24 hours. In April last year, the DPCC had imposed a fine of Rs 40 lakh on the EDMC after a fire broke out at the Ghazipur landfill site.

# UGC warns students against taking admission in programmes offered by Annamalai University

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has warned students again taking admission in any programme offered by the Annamalai University in Tamil Nadu through distance learning mode, saying the varsity doesn't have required approvals from the higher education regulator.

"It has come to the notice of UGC that Annamalai University is running the distance education programmes and admitting students in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes without approval of UGC in gross violations of all conditions laid down under the UGC (Open and Distance Learning) Regulations, 2017 and its amendments from time to time and UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programme and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020," UGC Secretary Rajnish Jain said.

According to norms, no higher educational institution can offer any open and

distance learning programmes and admit learners unless they are granted recognition by the Commission. "The Annamalai University was only recognised to offer any programme in ODL mode till academic session 2014-15 and no further recognition has been accorded to it to offer any programme through ODL mode.

Accordingly, all ODL programmes offered by the university now are invalid and the university is solely responsible for the career consequences of the students, if any, arising out of the same.

"General public, students and other stakeholders are cautioned through this public notice not to take admission in any programme offered by Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu through ODL mode.

Taking admissions in such programmes may jeopardise the career of students, in absence of required recognition," Jain said. There was no reaction available from Annamalai University on the issue.

# Physically challenged girl raped, accused arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 16-year-old physically challenged girl was allegedly raped by a man in Northwest Delhi area. Police said that the incident occurred on Saturday and the accused was arrested on the same day.

According to a senior police official, a police control room (PCR) call was received around 8.45 am on Saturday morning stating that a teenage girl has been raped in area following which police rushed to the spot.

"The victim was immediately taken to hospital for treatment and accused, who used to reside in a nearby shanty at Sarai Pipal Thala, was arrested on Saturday evening," said senior police official. "The police have registered an First Information Report (FIR) under relevant sections of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Indian Penal Code (IPC) at Mahendra Park Police station," the official added.

# 'NDMC made net surplus of nearly ₹535 cr in 2021-22'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Maintaining a continuous streak for last few years as a financially well governed municipal organisation, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has declared its provisional results for financial year 2021-22 with a net surplus of ₹534.71 crores, said a senior official.

According to a senior NDMC official, "This year's result shows a significant growth in receipts on both revenue and capital account. The revenue receipts, at ₹3494.21 crores are 4.73 per cent more than its revised estimates for year and 11.76 per cent more than actuals of previous year.

The capital receipts, at ₹524.87 crores are also 9.84 per cent more than revised estimates. The total receipts are ₹4019.08 crores, 5.37 per cent more than revised estimates for year." "The major contribution comes from property tax collections which stand at highest ever figure of ₹942.32

crores, 36.41 per cent more than previous years' collection and 47.6 per cent more than the collections in 2018-19. This is in spite of the fact that NDMC has not increased its property tax rates for the last five years.

During the year, the civic body had initiated a drive which focused on realization of past arrears and also launched a new portal for the convenience of added tax payers," he informed.

"These results have been achieved in an otherwise less encouraging economic scenario in last two years affected by COVID 19. NDMC had not increased the tax rates as also extended various reliefs and time extensions to their residents during pandemic.

Some important initiatives like separating DISCOM (electricity distribution) budget, innovative IT initiatives like blockchain and paperless working as also facilitating contractors to submit paperless bills are strengthening organization and resulting in improved performance," he concluded.

# 50% Hindus will convert to Islam if Muslim becomes PM: Priest Yati

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Yati Narsinghanand, the head priest of the Dasna Devi temple, stoked yet another controversy on Sunday with his comment that "50 per cent of Hindus will convert" in 20 years if a Muslim became the Prime Minister of India. Meanwhile, a few Delhi based journalists, who had gone to cover the event, were allegedly man-handled there, however, denied the claim that they were detained.

Hindu Mahapanchayat was organised at Burari grounds here for which the Delhi administration had not granted permission. Several other Hindu supremacist leaders also attended the Sunday event. Narsinghanand is currently on bail in connection with the Haridwar hate speech case.

"Only in 2029 or in 2034 or in 2039 a Muslim will become the prime minister. Once a Muslim will become the PM, 50 per cent Hindus will convert, 40 per cent will be killed and the remaining 10 per cent will either live in



People participate in the Hindu Mahapanchayat at Burari Ground in New Delhi on Sunday  
RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

refugee camps or in other countries in the next 20 years. This will be the future of the Hindus. If you want to avoid this future, then become a man and take up arms," Narsinghanand is seen saying in a video of the Mahapanchayat which is being circulated on social media.

Sharing a tweet by one of the journalists who alleged that two young Muslim men from the media were assaulted by a Hindu mob at the Mahapanchayat and were also taken into custody, Usha Rangnani, the Deputy

Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district took to Twitter to say nobody was detained.

"Some of the reporters, willingly, on their own free will, to evade the crowd which was getting agitated by their presence, sat in PCR Van stationed at the venue and opted to proceed to Police Stn for security reasons. No one was detained. Due police protection was provided," she stated in the tweet.

"For spreading misinformation, due necessary action shall be initiated against such persons," she tweeted.

# Gang duping people through Chinese loan app busted, 8 held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the arrest of eight people, including a woman, the Delhi Police on Sunday claimed to have busted a gang of extortionists, who had duped several people in crores through a Chinese loan Application fraud.

According to K P S Malhotra, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of Special Cell, a complaint was received by the police in which a woman alleged that she was being abused and threatened by some unknown persons.

"The complainant said that the accused were sending her morphed and vulgar photographs to her family, friends and relatives through social media. She had taken a loan from one Loan App, namely Cash Advance (Danakredit) and she repaid the same in time. Despite repayment of the loan, she started getting threat calls and messages on WhatsApp from Cash Advance employees," said the DCP.

It was further observed by the complainant that the alleged scammers were using the profile picture of a highly 'senior police officer'.

"A case under sections 354A, 509, 384, 385, 419, 420 and 120-B of the Indian Penal Code at the Special Cell police station and investigation was taken up," said the DCP.

"During the investigation, the police team established money trails of alleged transactions and it was found that the money was being trans-

ferred in a current account which had been opened in the name of Balaji Technology. Further it was found that the name of Balaji technology was used at a shop of bike repair. The proprietor of the account was found in the name of Rohit Kumar, a resident of Rajeev Nagar, Delhi," said the DCP adding that in the account approximately Rs 8.45 crore were credited in just 15 days and the same was transferred to other accounts simultaneously.

"Subsequently, the police on March 13 conducted coordinated raids at Pitampura and Rohini in Delhi and Rohit Kumar, Vividh Kumar, Puneet and Manish were arrested.

On their instance, another accused Puneet Kumar, his wife Divya who was also found involved in the case were arrested. Later on the next day, accused Krishana alias Ravi Shankar was arrested from Jodhpur, Rajasthan on March 14," said the DCP.

"Krishana is the main mastermind in India. It was further found that all the cheated amounts are being sent to China through cryptocurrency by accused Krishana. Crypto accounts of three Chinese nationals have been identified where the cheated amount was sent through cryptocurrency," said the DCP.

"During further investigation, another raid was conducted at Gurugram, Haryana and one accused, namely Sumit was arrested, who used to make calls to victims through a fraudulently obtained WhatsApp number," said the DCP.



People protect themselves from scorching heat on a hot day

RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

# Delhi Cong protests against Govt for fuel, gas prices hike

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Sunday staged a protest in east Delhi's Trilokpuri area against the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Central Government for constant rise in fuel and gas prices.

The protest, part of the opposition party's 'Mahangai Mukht Bharat' campaign, was led by Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Chaudhary Anil Kumar.

Addressing a large number of party workers and local residents, Kumar said that the poor and the common

people, who were distressed and devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic due to loss of jobs and livelihood, now find themselves at a dead end, as the regular fuel price hike has disturbed household budgets.

Kumar said that Prime Minister Modi had failed to provide jobs, but at least he should check price rise by lowering the prices of petroleum products, and reducing the excise duty.

He said that when Congress was in power at the Centre, it gave subsidies to the tune of Rs 1,60,000 crores to return to the people the money collected in excise

duty. "The Modi Government has collected over Rs 7 lakh crore in excise duty in the past eight years, but stopped all subsidies," he added. "Constant increase in fuel and natural gas prices broke the backbone of the public.

Rates of petrol, diesel are being raised everyday, having a cascading effect on other commodities as well, which is making daily consumables costlier," a Congress protester said.

The Congress leaders said that a cooking gas cylinder, which cost Rs 450 in 2014, was costing Rs 950 now, which gives a clear picture about

Modi's 'development' model. He said that the 'development and progress' that took place in the past eight years was only that of Modi's cronies, big industrialists, BJP leaders and workers, and not the struggling common people.

Kumar said that the ordinary people's plight could be gauged from the fact a kilo of lemon was now selling for Rs 250 while a bottle of cooking mustard oil cost Rs 200, which was a far cry from the days when a kg of lemon cost just Rs 25. The protesters raised slogans against the central government, holding it



responsible for "sharp" increase in the prices of oil and natural gas. Kumar said the Centre has increased

prices of petrol, diesel, CNG, PNG and even the domestic gas cylinder just after the polls in five states were over.



# TMC to push for Women’s Reservation Bill in RS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) is all likely to bring a motion in the Rajya Sabha for the long-awaited Women’s Reservation Bill in the last week of the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament.

The Bill seeks to reserve one-third seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. The TMC’s push for the Women’s Reservation Bill is seen as a political move by the party, led by TMC chief and the only woman Chief Minister presently Mamata Banerjee, and which has 34 per cent women MPs in its parliamentary team.

“The TMC Government in West Bengal recognizes the important role our women play in the development of our society and growth of the nation. It is committed to providing 33% reservation to them



in Parliament and state legislative assemblies,” stated TMC member Derek O’ Brien who could move the motion in the Rajya Sabha on Monday under Rule 168 of the House.

The notice mentions India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2021 primarily on account of the significant decline in the share of women among ministers, which halved, from 23% in 2019 to 9.1% in 2021. The share currently stands at 14%.”

The notice further says, India’s rank has steadily deteriorated over the years in Inter-Parliamentary Union’s Women in National Parliaments Rankings. In 1998, India ranked 95th. As of March 2022, India ranks 144th out of 184 countries.

“The Union Government has its own priorities. It wants to push criminal identification bill and MCD legislation. We are asking them, why women empowerment is not on their agenda?” O’Brien mentioned.

The current Lok Sabha has 15% women MPs while the

Rajya Sabha has 12.2%. The Trinamool leader remarked that it is lower than the global average of 25.5%, adding that only 8% of the total MLAs are women across all states in India.

Last week, in a written reply in the Lok Sabha, union Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijiju said that gender justice is an important commitment of the Government and added that Women’s Reservation Bill needs consensus among all political parties before bringing it into Parliament for amendment in the Constitution.

The Women’s Reservation Bill, first introduced in Parliament in 1996, came closest to passage in 2008 when the Rajya Sabha cleared the legislation but the then United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government didn’t bring it to the Lok Sabha amid a lack of consensus among its allies.

# CBI registers case against 9 NHAI officials, recovers ₹1.1 cr in searches at 22 locations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered a case against nine officials of National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) including General Managers, Project Directors, Managers, besides 13 others including private persons, private companies and unknown officials/persons and recovered ₹1.1 crore as also gold/jewellery during searches at around 22 locations.

It was alleged that during the year 2008-2010, the projects Surat-Hazira Port Section of NH-06, Kishangarh-Ajmer-Beawar Section of NH-08 and Varanasi Aurangabad Section of NH-02 were awarded by NHAI to the Consortium of private companies and accordingly, Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) were formed for execution of these three projects, the CBI said in a statement.

“It was further alleged that during execution of these three projects, the said NHAI Officers accepted money from

private companies. It was also alleged that the cash/money so accepted/delivered was facilitated by subcontractors of said private company by falsification of their books of accounts,” the agency alleged.

Searches were conducted at around 22 locations including in Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh at the residential/office premises of the accused persons.

The searches led to recovery of cash of ₹1.1 crore, fixed deposit receipts (FDRs) worth ₹49.1 lakh, gold/jewellery worth ₹4.5 crore from the premises/lockers operated so far and certain incriminating documents. Multiple property documents in the name of NHAI officers were also found, it said adding further investigation is continuing in the case.

The accused persons



whose premises were searched include the then General Manager (DK II), NHAI, LP Padhy, the then GMs (Tech) and Project Directors, NHAI, CK Sinha and Vibhav Mittal, the then Project Directors, NHAI, DP Soni, SK Gupta and Suraj Prakash, the then Manager (Technical), NHAI, Anil Kumar Jain and then Managers (Technical), NHAI, KM Sharma and Neeraj Gaur.

The private accused persons include the then CFO of ICIECPL, Guillermo Garcia Moliz, then Chief General Manager (Construction) of ICIECPL, Jose Luis Murillo Esteban, then Project Administration Manager (Cost Controller-Surat) of ICIECPL,

Eva Garrido Roda, then Deputy Project Head, of ICIECPL, Manuel Merino Gomez, then Head-Administration of ICIECPL, Gustavo Munoz Lopez, then Deputy Project Manager of ICIECPL, Javier Hidalgo and Cost Controller of ICIECPL, Alberto Lorenzo.

In addition, Proprietor of Kamal Construction, Surat, Chhedi Ram Bhavan Yadav, Partner(s) of Goyal Construction Company, Jaipur, Chhedi Ram Bhavan Yadav, Isolux Corsan India Engineering and Construction Pvt Ltd, Soma Isolux Surat Hazira Tollway Private Limited (through its Director PR Rao), Soma Isolux Varanasi Aurangabad Tollway Private Limited (through its Director PR Rao), Mahadeo Construction Company. Varanasi (through its Managing Director Anoop Kumar) and unknown officials and unknown others have also been named as accused in the case.

# AI reduces its flights to Lanka as crisis deepens

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the Sri Lankan economic crisis deepens, Air India has decided to reduce its India-Sri Lanka services from 16 flights per week to 13 flights per week from April 8 due to less travel demand. Other Indian carriers are also planning to reduce frequency to Sri Lanka.



Colombo sector will now operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays from April 8 to May 30. AI 284 on the Colombo-Delhi sector will operate on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from April 9 to May 31.

After Air India, other Indian carriers are going to take a call on calibrating their Sri Lanka flights’ frequency this week as the demand has fallen sharply. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) in its summer schedule has approved 128 flights to

and from India to Sri Lanka.

Indians topped the island’s tourist arrivals in 2021 with over 56,000 visitors. Tourism picked up in February after Sri Lanka resumed visa-on-arrival facilities for foreign tourists, including those from India. The travel agents and aviation sector are worried a lot who were hoping to improve the financial health of the sector after the reopening of the economy and decreasing cases of COVID-19 after the Sri Lankan government imposed an emergency in the Island.

# Indo-France first phase Naval drills conclude

## 2nd phase next month

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up co-operation in the maritime domain, the first phase of the annual naval exercise Varuna-2022 between India and France lasting five days saw intense drills involving frontline warships of both the navies. The drill ended on Sunday and the second phase will take place next month.

Giving details here, officials said the sea phase of Indo-France bilateral naval exercise, Varuna 2022 off the coast of Goa had an expanded scope. It included surface gun firings on practice targets, advanced anti-submarine and air defence exercises, and other tactical maneuvers that cover a broad spectrum of maritime operations.

Having grown in content and complexity since its inception in 1993, the exercise provides the two navies an opportunity to learn from each other’s best practices. It focuses on operational level interaction between them to enhance mutual cooperation at sea, underscoring their shared commitment to regional security.



During the current phase, the Indian Navy was represented by indigenously built stealth destroyer, INS Chennai, with integral Sea King Mk 42B helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft P81 and Dornier, and the MiG 29 fighter aircraft. The French Navy deployed the La Fayette class frigate, FS Courbet and submersible support vessel, FS Loire.

The units undertook cross deck landings by integral helicopters, showcasing a high level of interoperability between them. Gun firing and underway replenishment procedures were also exercised between ships.

All exercises planned during Varuna 2022 aimed to

enhance common understanding of the two navies on the conduct of joint maritime security operations.

Announcing the schedule of the exercise early last week, officials had said “These units will endeavour to enhance and hone their operational skills in maritime theatre, augment inter-operability to undertake maritime security operations and demonstrate their commitment to promote peace, security and stability in the region as an integrated force.”

It is the 20th edition of the Varuna series of exercises and it has become a vital part of strategic ties between the two countries.

“The exercise has been a principal driver for opera-

tional-level interactions between the two navies and has underscored the shared commitment of both nations to security, safety and freedom of the global maritime commons,” the statement said.

French Navy Chief Admiral Pierre Vandier visited India this week during which he held talks with his Indian counterpart Admiral R Hari Kumar focusing on mechanisms to ensure peace and stability in the Indian Ocean amid rising Chinese presence in the region.

The visit by the French Navy Chief came over a month after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Paris. During the visit, Jaishankar said India looks at France as a “trusted” partner in countering myriad security challenges from the seabed to space and from cyber to oceans.

The maritime cooperation between India and France has witnessed a major expansion in the last few years. The Indian and French navies in April last year too carried out a mega wargame in the Arabian Sea. The French Navy deployed its nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, and its entire carrier strike group in that exercise, reflecting growing congruence in naval ties.

# Army chief's 3-day Singapore visit to enhance military ties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Singapore will review the entire gamut of bilateral defence ties during Army Chief General M M Naravane’s three-day visit there commencing on Monday. He will hold parleys with the top military brass there to explore ways to further enhance relations by way of joint exercises.

Giving details of his visit, officials said here on Sunday, Naravane will lay a wreath on Monday at the Kranji War Memorial. The Army Chief is scheduled to call on with the Minister of Defence, Chief of Singapore Army and other senior dignitaries where he will discuss avenues for enhancing India-Singapore defence relations.

The Army Chief will also visit the Infantry Gunnery Tactical Simulation and Wargame Centre, Regional disaster response Coordination Centre, Info Fusion Centre and the Changi Naval Base.

## राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन, मध्यप्रदेश

(लोक स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण विभाग, मध्यप्रदेश शासन)

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भोपाल, दिनांक 31.03.2022

### विज्ञापन

मध्यप्रदेश राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन द्वारा जिला चिकित्सालयों में स्थापित डी.ई.आई.सी. केन्द्रों के सुचारु क्रियान्वयन हेतु राष्ट्रीय बाल स्वास्थ्य कार्यक्रम के अंतर्गत म.प्र. राज्य के मूल निवासियों से संविदा अली इंटरवेशन कम एजुकेंटर के 44 पद एवं संविदा ऑडियोलॉजिस्ट एण्ड स्पीच थेरेपिस्ट के 38 पद हेतु आवेदन आमंत्रित करता है। उपरोक्त संविदा पदों हेतु किए जाने वाले सेवा अनुबंध 31 मार्च 2023 तक के लिए होगा, जिसे आगामी वर्षों की वार्षिक कार्ययोजनाओं में स्वीकृति अनुसार नवीनीकृत किया जा सकेगा।

क्र.	पदनाम	रिक्त पद	मासिक मानदेय	अनिवार्य शैक्षणिक योग्यता / वांछनीय शैक्षणिक योग्यता	आयु सीमा
1	संविदा अली इंटरवेशन कम सेसल एजुकेंटर	44	15000/- रुपा प्रतिमाह	Qualification: Special B.ed with diploma in mental retardation Desirable - • PHD in Clinical psychology. • Computer foundation Course from recognized Institute	21-40 वर्ष अधिकतम आयु सीमा में (अनुसूचित जाति, अनुसूचित जनजाति, अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग, नि:शक्त जन/महिलाओं (अनारक्षित/ आरक्षित) अधिकतम आयु सीमा में 5 वर्ष की छूट (01.01.2022 की स्थिति में)
2	संविदा ऑडियोलॉजिस्ट एण्ड स्पीच थेरेपिस्ट	38	20000/- रुपा प्रतिमाह	Qualification: • Bachelors in Audio Speech Language pathology OR • B.sc.(speech and Hearing) special B.Ed (Audiology & Speech) OR • Diploma in Hearing Language & Speech (DLHS) OR • Diploma (Audiolog & Speech) (Any and above) Desirable: • PHD (Audiology) • Computer foundation Course from recognized Institute	21-40 वर्ष अधिकतम आयु सीमा में (अनुसूचित जाति, अनुसूचित जनजाति, अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग, नि:शक्त जन/महिलाओं (अनारक्षित/ आरक्षित) अधिकतम आयु सीमा में 5 वर्ष की छूट (01.01.2022 की स्थिति में)

आवेदन सेम्स लिमिटेड के वेब पोर्टल [www.sams.co.in](http://www.sams.co.in) के माध्यम से किया जा सकता है। आवेदन के लिए लिंक दिनांक 11.04.2022 से उपलब्ध की जाएगी। ऑनलाईन जमा करने की अंतिम तिथि 11.05.2022 है। ऑफ लाईन आवेदन किसी भी स्थिति में मान्य/ स्वीकार नहीं किए जाएंगे।

2. पद हेतु आरक्षण निम्नानुसार होगा -

पद का नाम	कुल पद	अनारक्षित 27%		आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर वर्ग 10%		अनुसूचित जनजाति 20%		अनुसूचित जाति 16%		अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग 27%		रिक्तियों में मध्यप्रदेश की मूल निवासी दिव्यांगजन अभ्यर्थियों हेतु आरक्षित पदों की संख्या 6%			
		ओपन	महिला	ओपन	महिला	ओपन	महिला	ओपन	महिला	ओपन	महिला	खी. एच. एच.	एच. एच.	ओ. एच. डी.	
संविदा अली इंटरवेशन कम सेसल एजुकेंटर	44	9	4	3	1	6	3	5	2	7	4	1	0	2	0
संविदा ऑडियोलॉजिस्ट एण्ड स्पीच थेरेपिस्ट	38	8	4	2	1	5	2	4	2	7	3	1	0	1	0

- दिव्यांगजन का आरक्षण क्षैतिजिक (Horizontal) के आधार पर 6 प्रतिशत का प्रस्ताव तैयार किया गया है। नि:शक्तजनों के लिए कुल रिक्तियों में से 6 प्रतिशत पद दिव्यांगजन के लिए आरक्षित हैं, जिस श्रेणी का दिव्यांगजन पदों के लिए चयनित होगा उसे उसी श्रेणी हेतु मान्य किया जाएगा। यह पद प्रत्येक श्रेणी की बिना वर्ग/ ओपन नियुक्तियों में सम्मिलित है।
- निर्धारित प्रारूप में नहीं किए गए अथवा अपूर्ण आवेदन स्वयं निरस्त माने जाएंगे।
- अंतिम तिथि के पश्चात प्राप्त होने वाले आवेदन पर विचार नहीं किया जाएगा।
- मिशन संचालक, राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन म.प्र. किसी भी आवेदन को बिना कारण बताए स्वीकृत/निरस्त करने अथवा प्रक्रिया करने का अधिकार होगा।

मिशन संचालक  
राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन मध्यप्रदेश

जी-11052/22

# CBI no more caged parrot: Law Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI is no more a “caged parrot” but is truly performing its duty as India’s top criminal investigating agency, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju asserted, saying there was a time when people sitting in the government sometimes used to become a problem in investigations.

He also said that the challenges some of officers had faced in the past are “no more in existence”.

In a tweet on Sunday, Rijiju said, “CBI is no more ‘Caged Parrot’ but truly performing its duty as India’s top criminal investigating agency”. He also shared a short video of his address on Saturday at the first-ever conference of investigating officers of the CBI. In his address, Rijiju said that “there used to be a time, I remember very well, that the people who sit in the Government, sometimes they become a problem in the inves-

tigation”.

He said today there is a Prime Minister who himself is playing a lead role in the crusade against corruption.

“I know the difficulties when people in power are involved in corruption; when their compliances which are difficult to be met with... It becomes difficult for the CBI. Then we have heard some unsavoury remarks from the judiciary in the past. We have come a long way now,” the minister said.

During a hearing of the coalfield allocation case in 2013, the Supreme Court had described the CBI as a “caged parrot”.

Addressing the 19th D P Kohli Memorial Lecture of the CBI on April 1, Chief Justice of India N V Ramana had said the CBI’s credibility has come under deep public scrutiny with the passage of time as its actions and inactions have raised questions in some cases.

# New Covid variant XE found in UK, more transmissible: WHO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the health havoc caused by the BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron which is spreading rapidly in many parts of the countries in Asia and Europe, a new Covid variant, XE, has been found in the UK, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in its latest report. The new mutant may be more transmissible than any strain of Covid-19, the health body said.

XE is a “recombinant” which is a mutation of BA.1 and BA.2 Omicron strains. Recombinant mutations emerge when a patient is infected by multiple variants of Covid. The variants mix up their genetic material during replication and form a new mutation, UK experts said in a paper published in British Medical Journal.

“Early-day estimates indicate a community growth rate

advantage of 10 percent as compared to BA.2, however, this finding requires further confirmation,” the global health body added.

Britain’s health agency said that XE was first detected on January 19 and 637 cases of the new variant have been reported yet.

According to reports, the new variant is 10 per cent more transmissible than the BA.2 subvariant, which is already the most contagious. As per the WHO, BA.2, which is a subvariant of the Omicron strain, is the most dominant strain of the virus, being 86 per cent of all sequenced cases attributed to it.

While XE only accounts for a small fraction of the cases, its extremely high transmissibility could mean that it becomes the most dominant strain in the near future.

The global health body noted that until they can detect “significant differences in

transmission and disease characteristics, including severity”, XE will remain categorised as a part of the Omicron variant.

“WHO continues to closely monitor and assess the public health risk associated with recombinant variants, alongside other SARS-CoV-2 variants, and will provide updates as further evidence becomes available,” the report continued. Meanwhile, the BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron is spreading rapidly across the globe. Some 4.9 million people in the UK are estimated to have had Covid-19 in the week ending March 26, or 600,000 more than the previous week, the latest survey by the Office for National Statistics said.

US and China also reported a surge in Covid cases driven by the BA.2 variant. China reported nearly 104,000 domestic Covid infections in March, with 90 percent of the recent cases found in Shanghai or northeastern Jilin province.

# ‘Delta more infectious for children younger than age 5’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Compared to the Covid-19 Omicron variant, Delta variant has been more infectious for children younger than age 5. According to a new research from the Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) School of Medicine, kids who are infected with the Covid-19 Omicron variant have less risk of severe health outcomes than those infected with the Delta variant.

The study, published Friday in JAMA Pediatrics, is the first large-scale research effort to compare the health outcomes of coronavirus infection from Omicron to Delta in

children 4 and younger — the age group not yet able to be vaccinated.

The findings show that the Omicron variant is 6-8 times more infectious than the Delta variant. The severe clinical outcomes ranged from a 16 per cent lower risk for emergency room visits to 85% less risk for mechanical ventilation. And about 1.8 per cent of children infected with Omicron were hospitalised, compared to 3.3 per cent with Delta.

The Case Western Reserve-led team analysed the elec-

tronic health records of more than 651,640 children in the United States who had medical encounter with healthcare organisations between 9/2021-1/2022-including more than 22,772 children infected with Omicron in late December and late January — to more

than 66,000 children infected when Delta was prevalent in the fall. The study also compared the records of more than 10,000 children immediately before the detection of Omicron in the U.S., but when Delta was still predominant.

Children younger than 5 are not yet eligible for Covid-19 vaccines and have a low rate of previous SARS-CoV-2 infections, which also limits their pre-existing immunity.

The team examined clinical health outcomes for pediatric patients during a 14-day window following SARS-CoV-2 infection. Among the factors they reviewed were: emergency room visits, hospitalizations,

ICU admissions and mechanical ventilation use.

Further demographic data analysis found that children infected with Omicron were on average younger-1.5 years of age versus 1.7 years-and had fewer comorbidities.

“The major conclusion to our research was that many more children were infected with Omicron when compared to Delta, but the children who are infected are not impacted as severely as were children infected with the Delta variant,” said Pamela Davis, the Arline H. and Curtis F. Garvin Research Professor at the Case Western Reserve School of Medicine.



# Court martial against Captain for staged encounter in J&K

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Army has initiated general court martial proceedings against a Captain for the killing of three men in a staged encounter in Amshipura in south Kashmir in July 2020 after a Court of Inquiry found that troops had "exceeded" powers vested under the AFSPA, officials said here on Sunday.

The three men hailing from Rajouri district of Jammu region -- Imtiyaz Ahmed, Abrar Ahmed and Mohammed Ibrar -- were killed in a remote hilly village in Shopian district on July 18, 2020 and labelled as "terrorists".

However, as doubts were raised on social media over the killings, the Army promptly constituted a Court of Inquiry which found prima facie evidence that the troops had "exceeded" powers vested under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

Maintaining its highest standards and commitment to ethical conduct of anti-military operations, the court martial proceedings were then initiated against Captain Bhoopendra Singh, they said.

The Court of Inquiry was followed by the Summary of Evidence, which was completed in the last week of December 2020. Subsequently, the Army had issued a statement saying "the process of recording the Summary of Evidence has been

completed. The same is being examined by the authorities concerned in consultation with legal advisors for proceeding further."

"The Indian Army is committed to ethical conduct of operations," it had said.

The officials said the captain was facing court martial proceedings for violating the powers vested under the AFSPA and for not following the Do's and Don'ts of the Army as approved by the Supreme Court.

The Army had also called Mohammed Yusuf, the father of Abrar Ahmed, from Rajouri for deposing in the court martial proceedings. "I have been here for the last one week and the Army authorities have asked for the missing report about my son which I have provided. We are being looked after by the Army and I am confident that I will get justice," he said.

Immediately after the news about the fake encounter spread, the Jammu and Kashmir Police had constituted a Special Investigation

Team which filed a charge sheet against three people, including Captain Singh, for "staging a fake encounter" in the higher reaches of Shopian district and killing three men.

The charge sheet had alleged that Captain Singh had provided wrong information to his superiors and the police about the recovery made dur-



ing the staged encounter. The other two named by the police in its charge sheet are Tabish Nazir and Bilal Ahmed Lone, both civilians.

"By staging the encounter," the three accused 'have purposefully destroyed evidence or real crime that they have committed and also have (been) purposefully projecting false information as part of a criminal conspiracy hatched between them with the motive to grab' cash rewards, it said.

The Army had, however, denied that its captain staged the encounter for cash reward, saying there was no such system for its personnel for any acts in combat situations or otherwise in the line of duty.

"The evidence was destroyed by accused Captain Singh," the charge sheet said, adding he along with the other two accused set fire to a shelter where the encounter had been staged.

The SIT charge sheet gave details of forensic analysis of

the crime scene which was photographed "from all possible perspectives". The FSL (Forensic and Scientific Laboratory) team recovered vital evidence that was seized.

The charge sheet submitted by the SIT listed 75 witnesses in support of its findings and also provided technical evidence, including call data records of the accused persons.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha had visited the families in Rajouri in 2020 and conveyed to them Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message that the government stood with the aggrieved families, and they would be taken care of with all support from the government.

The identity of the three youths was subsequently confirmed through a DNA test. The bodies were handed over to their families in Baramulla in October 2020 and were later buried in their native village in Rajouri.

# UP Board English paper leak case mastermind arrested

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a major breakthrough, the Ballia police claimed to have arrested the mastermind of the UP Board's Class 12 English question paper leak case on Sunday.

The mastermind was among eight people arrested in connection with the case, police said on Sunday. With their arrest, the total number of people held in connection with Wednesday's English paper leak climbed to 46.

Following the leak, the exam was cancelled in 24 districts of the state including Ballia. The district inspector of schools of Ballia is among those arrested.

Station House Officer of Rasda police station of Ballia, Rajeev Singh, said on Sunday, "The mastermind of the paper leak case, Nirbhay Narayan Singh, who is manager of a private inter college, has been arrested along with seven others." Three other suspects have been arrested by the Sikandarpur police of the district, including a teacher of a government primary school.

Sources confirmed that Nirbhay Narayan Singh is the manager of Maharaji Devi Memorial Inter College. He took out the paper and got it printed outside. Later the paper was solved by two English teachers. One of the teachers was identified as Avinash Gautam, a English teacher in Subash Chandra Inter College in Tadibadagain in Nagra area of Ballia.

The solved copies were written by Mulayam Chauhan, Brijesh Chauhan and Manish Chauhan. Singh later sold the solved copies at



the rate of Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 per student.

Nirbhay Narayan Singh and another accused Rajeev Prajapati also sent scanned copies to other people on social media.

Prajapati, also arrested on Sunday, owned a computer centre.

Police confirmed the recovery of solved paper along with money extorted from students. Police confirmed that money was received in the bank account of the mastermind through a paytm transaction. So far four managers, three principals, 10 teachers, five private coaching teachers and three clerks have been found to be involved in the paper leak.

The cancelled exam will now be held on April 13.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had directed the Special Task Force of the Uttar Pradesh Police to investigate the matter. He had also asked officials to slap the National Security Act (NSA) on those found involved in the paper leak.

# LeT modules busted in J&K's Bandipora, five held

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Two Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) modules were busted and five militant associates were arrested in Jammu and Kashmir's Bandipora district, police said on Sunday.

Based on specific information, police along with security forces arrested four terrorist associates in the north Kashmir district, a police spokesman said.

He identified them as Irfan Ahmad Bhat, a resident of Ashtangoo, Irfan Ahmad Jan, a resident of Qazipora, Sajad Ahmad Mir and Shariq Ahmad Mir, both residents of the Arin area of Bandipora.

Two Chinese grenades and incriminating material were recovered from their possession, the spokesman said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that they were involved in providing mobile sim cards and logistic support to active terrorists in the district, he said.

A case under relevant sections of law has been registered and further investigation into the matter is in progress, the spokesman said.

In another incident, police along with security forces arrested one terrorist associate at a checkpoint in the Rakh Hajin area of Bandipora.

He has been identified as Irfan Aziz Bhat, a resident of Hajin, the spokesman said.

One Chinese grenade was recovered from his possession, he said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the arrested accused was in close contact with Pakistan-based terrorist Umar Lala and was directed to carry out terror attacks in the Hajin area, the spokesman said.

Bhat was also in contact of the killed terrorist Saleem Parray of Hajin, he said.

A case has been registered and further investigation into the matter is underway, police said.

# 2 migrant workers injured in terror attack in Pulwama

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Two migrant workers were critically injured in a fresh targeted strike by 'unidentified' terrorists in the South Kashmir district of Pulwama late Sunday evening.

According to preliminary reports, one of the critically injured migrant workers has been rushed to Srinagar while the other one was undergoing treatment in Pulwama district hospital till the time of filing the report. According to police, unidentified terrorists opened

indiscriminate firing on the driver and conductor of a poultry vehicle in the Litter area of Pulwama late Sunday evening around 7.10 pm. The duo received bullet injuries in the chest and leg. The migrant workers have been identified as Dheeraj Dutt and Surinder Singh, both residents of Pathankot.

Police has registered a case in this regard under relevant sections of law. The entire area has been cordoned and search in the area was going on to track down the footprints of the terrorists.

# Maoist posters criticising CM on Silver Line found in Kerala

PTI ■ KOZHIKODE

A few purported handwritten Maoist posters criticising Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on the SilverLine railway project were found in Kozhikode district on Sunday, police said.

The Maoist posters, found in Mattikkunnu area near Thamarassery in the district, criticised the Left government's SilverLine semi-high speed railway corridor and declared the outlawed outfit's solidarity to the people opposing the project.

The posters, allegedly put up by the CPI Maoists, also termed the state government as "anti-people" and equated the policies of the ruling LDF to that of the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre.

Following the appearance of posters, the local police and Kerala Thunderbolts, an elite commando force of the state police, carried out searches in and around the area for gathering information about the Maoists.

"We are monitoring the situation and have begun investigation," Kozhikode Rural SP Dr A Sreenivas told PTI. He, however, refused to give more details.

The posters, allegedly handwritten by the extremists in A-4 size papers, called for a people's agitation against the state government, sources said.

They said as many as 17 posters were seen in and around a bus stop shed at Mattikkunnu.

# Cong indispensable; not interested in becoming UPA chairperson or leading anti-BJP front: Pawar

PTI ■ PUNE

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar on Sunday said he won't lead an anti-BJP front and is also not keen to become the chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Speaking to reporters in Kolhapur in western Maharashtra, Pawar also said that Congress cannot be excluded from any initiative aimed at providing an alternative to the BJP at the Centre.

"I am not going to take up any responsibility to lead any front comprising various parties against the BJP," he said.

In the same breath, Pawar also said that he won't lead the UPA, currently helmed by Congress.

"Recently, some youth workers of our party (NCP) passed a resolution asking me to become the chairperson of the UPA.

But I am not at all interested in that position. I am not going to get into that. I will not take up that responsibility," the former Union minister said when asked about his stand if he is asked to lead the anti-BJP bloc.

If an attempt is made to provide an alternative (to the BJP), I am ready to co-operate, support and strengthen such bloc, Pawar said, adding "we have been doing it".

"When it is said that the Opposition should come together then some facts need not be neglected. Mamata Banerjee's TMC is the strongest party in West Bengal and they enjoy people's support. At the same time, regional parties are also strong in their respective states," Pawar said.

He said Congress has a pan-India presence even though the Grand Old Party is not in power currently.

"You will find Congress

workers in every village, district and state in the country. Reality is that the Congress, which has a wide presence, must be taken on board while providing an alternative (to BJP)," the NCP chief said.

Queried on BJP leader Nitin Gadkari's statement that Congress needs to be strong, Pawar underlined the need for a strong opposition party for a healthy democracy.

"If only one party is strong then it will become like (Russian President Vladimir) Putin. He and the Chinese president have resolved to lead their countries till they are alive. I hope India should not have such Putin," he said.

Taking a dig at the BJP-led Central government, Pawar said that allegations were raised that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is used for extorting money. "Before and after raids (are conducted) there are talks about settlements (with ED officials). If this is true and the government is not reining the agency, then the Centre should answer if anyone asks whether they are involved in corruption," Pawar added.

He said inflation is a major issue in the country.

He said prices of fuel are being raised every other day under the BJP rule, which is not only affecting the common people's finances but also contributing to the price rise and the higher cost of transport.

"I am not saying that fuel prices were not hiked in the past but now they are being increased every day. This is a major issue but the government is looking the other way," Pawar alleged.

Speaking about "The Kashmir Files", Pawar said the movie is made in such a way that the people of other religions will become angry.

He reiterated that VP

# Objects falling from sky? Iron ring, cylinder-like thing found in 2 Maha villages

PTI ■ NAGPUR

A metal ring and a cylinder-like object were found in two villages in Sindewahi tehsil in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra where unidentified burning objects had fallen from the sky, an official said on Sunday. Chandrapur district collector Ajay Gulhane told PTI that local people spotted an iron ring lying in an open plot in Ladbori village in Sindewahi tehsil around 7.50 PM on Saturday.

"The metal ring was not there earlier so it can be said that it fell (from the sky) yesterday," he said. Gulhane said the disaster management control room in Mumbai was informed and a team may visit the spot in the Chandrapur district. He said a cylinder-like object was found in Pawanpar village, also in Sindewahi tehsil, on Sunday morning.

"It is a cylinder-like thing measuring 1 to 1.5 feet in diameter. It has been collected for examination. We had sent talathis (junior revenue officials) to every village in the district to find if more parts of objects, if any, are lying scattered," the collector said.

On Saturday, several social media users had reported seeing unidentified burning objects falling from the sky in parts of Maharashtra as well as in some districts of Madhya Pradesh. Officials had said that an "aluminium and steel object" reportedly fell at Ladbori village in Sindewahi tehsil around 7.



Singh's government, and not Congress, was in power at the Centre during the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley.

"Mufti Mohammad Sayeed had become the home minister of India at that time with the support of BJP. A section inclined towards Pakistan then started attacking Muslims who wanted to stay with India and also Hindus. It was the responsibility of the then ruling party to protect these people. But instead of protecting them, they asked Hindus to leave the Valley," Pawar claimed.

He said the film was not based on facts but it will promote racism and hatred. "If such film is promoted by the head of the nation and his party started distributing free tickets, this only means that they want to divide people and derive a political mileage," Pawar said without taking the names of PM Narendra Modi and BJP.

He said the situation in Gujarat was worse than in the Valley (during the post-Godhra communal riots in 2002).

"Many people lost their lives but I never heard the then head of Gujarat coming forward to explain," Pawar said in a veiled swipe at Modi who was the chief minister of Gujarat at the time of the riots.

Talking about Swabhimani Shetkari Paksha (SSP), Pawar said no party should walk out of the Maha Vikas Aghadi.

"If they (SSP) have any misunderstanding then it's our responsibility to clear their doubts," he added.

# Govt mulls tourism network along Ganga

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is planning to create a tourism network to promote not only sites of historical and mythological importance along the Ganga, considered holy among the Hindus, but also to boost the economy of the regions surrounding the river, officials across Ministries working on the project told PTI.

The 2,520-km-long Ganga flows through major cities such as Varanasi, Haridwar, Prayagraj, Kolkata, Patna, Kanpur and Ghazipur, and since 2014, the government through its Namami Gange Programme has pumped in funds to clean up the river.

Declared a flagship scheme, the programme has a budget outlay of Rs 20,000 crore.

"Looking at the tourism part of it, the Ganga river is blessed with a lot of historical places, and whether it was Ramayana or Mahabharata,

many of it happened in the Ganga basin. Then there is Kashi and Prayagraj, which are mythologically and religiously very important," a senior official in the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) said.

"Then there are products unique to these regions like sarees and special cuisines. We can integrate all these and can conduct a tourism festival as part of the 'Azadi Ka Mahotsav'. We are trying to do that. So, we will provide all the information, and tourism department would be doing it. The NMCG has proposed such a festival," the official said.

Sources indicated that the tourism ministry's proposed Ganga Circuit to develop and promote sites along the Ganga in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Bihar is still on the drawing board and not ready for approval.

However, officials said that meetings have been held with the NMCG and a blueprint will

be finalised soon.

Under the Namami Gange Programme, the plan is to encourage self-sufficiency and create an environment for the maintenance of the river to which livelihoods are linked, the officials at the NMCG said.

"We have constructed many ghats along the river. One hundred and sixty four ghats have been built but there is no one to manage and maintain these. Then we thought why don't we link these ghats to local livelihoods? We can ask some unit to conduct 'aartis' there every day so there is something to attract tourists. Then we can also have 'haats' (markets) there. Farmers can come every week to sell their produce at these ghats. We are calling that programme 'ghat mein haat'," the official said.

He also said once footfall of tourists rises, revenue can be generated even from car parking. Informal employment can also be generated through ven-

dors, the official said.

States too have started working to ensure that areas around the river become hubs of activity.

While Bihar has committed to promote production and marketing of organic products under their 'State Organic Mission', Uttar Pradesh is working on promoting organic plantation in urban areas and developing 'mandis' in urban residential colonies to encourage people to buy organic products.

Uttarakhand has started 20 big and 410 small outlets to promote organic products along the Char Dham Yatra route and Jharkhand has started an organic farming authority to promote organic farming in the state, especially along the Ganga.

West Bengal has started a massive plantation drive in the Sunderban area, and about 15 crore trees will be planted in three districts covering 10,000 acres of land.

# Bengal civil society members write to Didi on law & order

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A group of civil society members from Bengal that had once backed Mamata Banerjee during her Singur and Nandigram movements --- which finally catapulted her to power --- have now shot off a letter to the Chief Minister drawing her attention to the deteriorating law and order situation of the State.

Civil society members including film personalities --- like Aparna Sen, Parambrata Chatterjee, Dhritiman Chatterjee, Kaushik Sen, Riddhi Sen, Santalita Mukhopadhyay, Suman Mukhopadhyay, singers like Rupam Islam and poets like Srijata have endorsed the letter to the Chief Minister in which they have urged the Chief Minister to ensure

peace and democracy in the State.

The letter, comes days after nine people were hacked and then burnt alive --- at Bagtui village in Rampurhat sub-division of Birbhum district --- by rival gangs of the ruling Trinamool Congress in a retaliatory attack in the wake of the murder of a TMC deputy pradhan of a local panchayat.

Under pressure from the media to raise their voices as they did after the Nandigram police firing the members of the civil society wrote in an open letter: "As representatives of civil society, which desires democracy and a healthy political atmosphere, we hope --- you may as well call it our demand --- that the long and nasty history of Bengal's political violence stops."

Wondering why the police could not act on time despite the fact that the situation demanded timely action at Rampurhat, the letter questioned "why were the police and administration not active and prompt before the incident occurred?" They also expressed their concerns at the murder of two municipal councilors --- one from the Congress and the other from the Trinamool Congress. Bengal had between March 15 and 21 witnessed 26 murders. The writers further appealed to the Chief Minister to instill democracy and peace in the State. "Please ensure this under your leadership and through your administration. We hope that this letter will be received in the context of the well-being of the state and of the people of this state."







FIRST COLUMN

DO THE RUSSIANS HAVE WAR IN THEIR BLOOD?

Conflict is Putin’s only pitch to his constituency for power



GWYNNE DYER

The geopolitical views of my grandmother, Florence O’Driscoll, could have been summed up in seven words: ‘The Germans Have War in their Blood’. Even as a child I suspected that the world must be more complicated than that, but I never contradicted her. She came by those views the hard way. Most Irish Catholics of her time hated England, but she reserved her hatred for Germany because half the young men she had known were killed in the First World War. During the Second World War she ran a boarding house where naval officers on the North Atlantic convoy run stayed between trips. The only surviving baby picture shows me in the lap of a young Canadian lieutenant who was dead less than a month later, torpedoed by a U-boat right outside the harbour-mouth. Germans again. She never forgave them. She was wrong, of course, and nobody talks about the Germans



like that nowadays. Well, some Russians still do, but a lot of people in the West are in the process of transferring that slander to the Russians themselves. They now believe - largely thanks to the invasion of Ukraine - that it’s the Russians who have war in their blood.What dragged this growing conviction out into the light was Joe Biden’s unfortunate remark that Russian President Vladimir Putin “cannot remain in power.” That was widely interpreted as an incitement to regime change in Moscow, which would be a good idea but is not a permissible comment in terms of international diplomatic discourse.The White House duly issued denials that Biden was threatening to overthrow Putin, and the news cycle moved on to the next topic. However, public discussion of the possibility that Putin might be toppled has raised a different and more fundamental question: would getting rid of Putin actually make any difference?

There are doubtless another dozen people writing articles about this right now, but the first one to catch my attention was in the ‘i’, the London paper which claims to be for “lapsed readers of quality newspapers.” Its title was ‘Getting rid of Putin is not the answer - this runs deeper’, and it is fairly representative of its kind. It was written by Mark Wallace, chief executive of the ConservativeHome blog, who asserts that “the uncomfortable truth behind (Putin’s) retention of power, and what he chooses to do with it, is that a large and powerful portion of Russian society actively likes what he does.” “Putin assessed what would make him a popular leader and set about doing it. The bloody trail of conflict he has drawn from Moscow through Georgia, Syria and Ukraine...is inherent to his pitch to his constituency, both at the top of Russia’s economic, military and political establishments and to the man and woman on the street.” In other words, the Russians have war in their blood. The Russians are deluded, but it’s a delusion that has struck almost all the former European colonial powers after they lost their empires. You might call it ‘post-imperial muscle memory’, like the phantom sensation that an amputated leg is still there even after it’s gone. It generally involves several foredoomed wars. The Russian empire died (1991), partly because it was a land empire, with lots of Russians settled in all the colonies, and partly because it pretended not to be an empire for its last seventy years, calling itself the Soviet Union instead. So, most Russians don’t even grasp the connection with decolonisation elsewhere. But it is really the same transitory phenomenon, with the same inevitable outcome. The Russians don’t really have war in their blood permanently. No more than everybody else does, anyway.

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

# Weapons programmes to blame for invasion?

Kremlin has accused the Americans of carrying out a host of biological weapons development programmes in Ukraine, posing an existential threat to Moscow

The genesis of the Russia-Ukraine crisis is the biological weapons programmes being run by the US agencies in Kyiv is not only posing an existential threat to Moscow but is also a cause of concern for the entire region. The Russian advances in Ukraine were slow as a result of the existence of bioweapons laboratories as also as also nuclear plants. The development of tactical bioweapons in Ukraine at the behest of the US led to the precipitation of the crisis between the Kremlin and Kyiv.

In the evolving fast charging geopolitical game post Russia-Ukraine crisis, the Kremlin has accused the Americans of carrying out a host of biological weapons development programmes in Ukraine posing existential threat to Moscow.

The Chief of the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation has carried out a detailed analysis of the military-biological activities of the Pentagon in Ukraine.

The Russian embassy in New Delhi has been on record saying the Russian Ministry of Defence continues to analyze documents revealing the military-biological activities of the Pentagon in Ukraine.

“The involvement of entities close to the current US leadership, notably the Rosemont Seneca Investment Fund run by Hunter Biden, is noticeable in the funding of these activities. The Fund has significant financial resources of at least \$2.4 billion,” the Russian embassy said, adding The Seneca Foundation is closely linked to key contractors of the US military department, including Metabiota, which, along with Black and Veach, is a major supplier of equipment to the Pentagon’s bio-labs around the world.

Incidentally, the Americans have already acknowledged finding the Wuhan Labs in China which is suspected to be behind the leak of the deadly novel coronavirus. According to the Russian assessment, the scale of the biological weapons programme of the US is “impressive.”

The US Agency for International Development, the George Soros Foundation and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention are directly involved, in addition to the military department. Scientific supervision is provided by leading research organisations, including the Los Alamos National Laboratory, which is developing nuclear weapons as part of the Manhattan Project, the Russian military’s analysis has exposed. All these activities, according to the Russian expose, are carried out under the full control of the Pentagon.

The registration card of the US-enlisted biological firms has confirmed that as many as 30 Ukrainian laboratories, located in 14 settlements were involved in full-scale military-biological activities in Ukraine.

Russia has attributed the assessment related to the US-backed weapons pro-



THE NUMBER OF BIOLOGICAL LABORATORIES IN THE US IS NOT COMPARABLE WITH OTHER COUNTRIES. ACCORDING TO THE CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY, THEY CONTROL 336 LABORATORIES IN 30 STATES OUTSIDE NATIONAL JURISDICTION, ACCORDING TO MOSCOW’S ASSESSMENT

*(The writer is Special Correspondent, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)*



gramme in Ukraine to a document signed by Viktor Polishchuk, Deputy State Secretary of the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers. The legal basis for its signing the document was the Agreement on Cooperation to Prevent the Spread of Technologies, Pathogens and Information that could be used for the development of biological weapons.

The registration card of the firms identifies the customer of the work, the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency, as well as a list of bio-objects.

As previously reported by the Kremlin, the funding for 2018-2020 alone was around \$32 million. The text of the document states that the United States, its personnel and contractors are exempt from the obligation to pay taxes or other similar fees that are levied in Ukraine, elaborates the assessment by the Kremlin.

The Russian Ministry of Defence has disclosed and summarised the flow of biomaterials. Funding for military-biological activities in Kyiv has enabled the US and its allies to export at least 16,000 bioassays outside Ukraine.

Under the UP-8 Project funded by the Pentagon in Lvov, Kharkov, Odessa and Kiev, blood samples were taken from 4,000 servicemen for antibodies to Hantaviruses and from another 400 military personnel for antibodies to the Congo-Crimean fever virus, reveals the Russian analysis.

This large-scale screening of the natural immunity of the population was probably carried out in order to select the biological agents most dangerous to the population of a particular region.

A document review by the Russian agency revealed that not only human tissue and serum

samples, but also dangerous pathogens and their transporters were exported. Thus, more than 10,000 samples were sent to Lugar Centre in Georgia. Other recipients include reference laboratories in the UK and the Loeffler Institute in Germany.

“All this creates risks for the transfer abroad of sensitive genetic information, as well as threats to biological security,” underscores the Russian assessment. One of the US customers’ priorities is the anthrax pathogen, which is highly susceptible and persistent in the environment.

The slide shows’ documents from the UP-2 Project, one of the tasks of which was to identify dead animal burial sites and taking soil samples from anthrax animal burial sites. The interest of US military biologists in studying insect vectors in animal burial sites is also not accidental. Apparently, they analysed the results of an outbreak of anthrax disease in Yamal in 2016, during which cases of vector-borne transmission through flies and gadflies were recorded.

Given that the situation with anthrax in Ukraine remains positive, it raises the question of the need for the Pentagon’s research and its true purpose. There are examples where the US military departments’ work with anthrax has ended in biosecurity emergencies.

The biological researches like the one involving Ukrainian military personnel are prohibited within the US and such studies are carried out by the American military department outside the US.

Earlier, under another project styled as UP-8 research involved more than 4,000 people for experiments. Attributing figures published in the Bulgarian media, the Russian assessment has pointed

out that some 20 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in experiments in the Kharkov laboratory alone and another 200 were hospitalised.

The documents analysed by Russian agency have confirmed the American attempt to test previously untested medicines on them. This is the Deep Drug screening system for unlicensed pharmaceuticals in the United States and Canada.

What makes the US sponsors particularly cynical is that the developer, Scymount, offered to purchase the system in question on a commercial basis, despite the fact that Ukrainian Ministry of Defence officials were engaged as volunteers.

Such unacceptable approaches, with the tacit approval of the US administration, are the norm for big pharma companies. For example, the US Naval Medical Centre in Jakarta was shut down by Indonesian authorities in 2010 because of numerous irregularities, says Moscow.

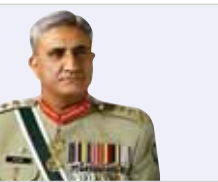
The number of biological laboratories in the USA is not comparable with other countries. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, they control 336 laboratories in 30 states outside national jurisdiction, according to Moscow’s assessment.

Russia has also demanded that clarification should be sought from Washington regarding the true objectives of the US biolaboratories as part of the international investigation, especially in the context of the incoming information relating to biological researches backed by Washington.

The US has not responded so far to the Russian allegations, giving credence to the Russian analysis that biological programmes are patronized by Washington.

## POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE MOVE TO OUST ME IS A BLATANT INTERFERENCE IN DOMESTIC POLITICS BY THE UNITED STATES.  
— PAKISTAN PRIME MINISTER  
IMRAN KHAN



WE SHARE A LONG HISTORY OF EXCELLENT AND STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES.  
— PAKISTAN ARMY CHIEF  
GEN QAMAR JAVED BAJWA

# Why are Russia’s oil and gas important to the world?

Sanction will accelerate transition to renewable energy and redesign energy geopolitics

Russia is an energy powerhouse, producing the world’s third-largest amount of oil and second-largest amount of natural gas.

As the world’s largest combined exporter of oil and gas, Russia has direct energy relationships with more than two dozen European nations, as well as China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and others. If coal exports are added, a dozen more countries, including India, are relevant. Russia has used these exports for political leverage since Soviet times.

When it comes to natural gas, Europe is more dependent on Russia than Russia is on Europe. Russia provides 34-38 percent of Europe’s current natural gas consumption. Currently, gas plays an important role in European energy



KOMAL KUMAR SINGH

*(The writer is an energy expert with Global Energy Company in Houston, Texas. The views expressed are personal.)*

security, providing flexible capacity for peak winter heating and industrial production. In a nutshell, Russia is in charge of Europe’s energy security.

It is hard to predict how the situation and markets will unfold, but it appears that we are on the verge of a period of high energy prices driven by war and combined with tight market fundamentals.

Consumers are paying higher prices at the pump, as well as on their gas, heating, and electricity bills. Inflationary expectations are fueled further by high energy prices, which raise the cost of virtually all goods and services.

High energy prices contribute to increased cost of virtually all goods and services further fueling inflation expectations.

Some governments may



implement measures to cushion consumers from the impact of this increase. Taxes on diesel and gasoline account for more than half of the price paid by consumers at the pump in many countries, indicating that there is clearly room for government intervention. However, all (or nearly all) of this cost will have to be borne by consumers. Unfortunately, it appears that we are in for a prolonged period of high energy costs.

How is the United States assisting Europe in overcoming

its energy crisis?

American energy is a positive force in difficult times, assisting Europe in maintaining stability and security. As events in Europe unfold, we see this again and time again.

Vladimir Putin’s use of energy as a weapon is predictable, but America has Europe’s back, just as it did during World War II and previous crises. Export facilities for liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the United States have significantly increased LNG supply bound for Europe. America is well-positioned to play this role due to its abundant natural gas and leadership in the technologies and innovations required to develop and export LNG. Not long ago, experts predicted that America would run out of natural gas. A dozen facilities were constructed to

import it. America became an energy powerhouse as a result of the shale revolution and the development of modern hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling. Plans to import LNG have been shelved. Instead, US facilities were set up to export LNG.

What impact do Russia’s sanctions have on Europe’s energy supply strategy?

Major western nations including the UK and the EU have agreed to phase out their use of Russian oil and gas in retaliation for the country’s war on Ukraine, while the US banned their import completely. The European Union unveiled a new energy strategy to “scale up renewable energy in Europe by mobilizing additional investments, removing barriers to renewables roll-out, and

empowering consumers to play an active role in the energy market.” The strategy, which aims to reduce the EU’s reliance on Russian gas by two-thirds this year and completely eliminate reliance on Russian gas supplies “well before 2030,” includes accelerated deployment of solar energy and renewable hydrogen, rapid implementation of far-reaching energy-efficiency measures, and production of 35 billion cubic meters of biogas per year by 2030. European citizens will be called upon as well: they will be asked to lower their thermostats by one degree Celsius, which could save Europe about 7% of its gas consumption.

These sanction will accelerate transition to renewable energy and redesign energy geopolitics. History has shown that the

most consequential energy reforms of the past 50 years have been born out of conflict and high prices.

On India’s 75th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to make the country energy independent by 2047, when the country will celebrate its 100th year of independence.

Energy independence and Energy security are different. Energy security refers to a more resilient energy system, which is better able to withstand shocks with minimal disruptions in economic functioning, human health, and environmental quality.

Energy security is just as important as national security. The energy policy of a country is also the security policy of that country.



# Ukraine documents alleged atrocities by retreating Russians

AP ■ BUCHA

Ukrainian troops are finding brutalised bodies and widespread destruction in sub-urbs of the capital as Russian soldiers withdraw and Moscow focuses its attacks elsewhere, including missile strikes Sunday that targeted fuel and ammunition supplies in southern and eastern Ukraine.

Associated Press journalists in Bucha, a small city northwest of Kyiv, saw the bodies of at least nine people in civilian clothes who appeared to have been killed at close range. At least two had their hands tied behind their backs. The AP also saw two bodies wrapped in plastic, bound with tape and thrown into a ditch.

Authorities said they were documenting evidence as Ukraine's military reclaims territory and discovers indications of execution-style slayings to add to their case for prosecuting Russian officials for war crimes.

Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said scores of killed civilians were found on the streets of Bucha and the Kyiv suburbs of Irpin and Hostomel in what looked like a "scene from a horror movie." Arestovych said some people were shot in the head and had their hands bound, and some bodies showed signs of torture, rape and burning.

The capital city's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said civilians were "shot with joined hands" and told German newspaper Bild that "what happened in Bucha and other suburbs of

Kyiv can only be described as genocide."

A day earlier, AP journalists witnessed Ukrainian soldiers gingerly removing at least six bodies from a street in Bucha with cables in case the Russians had booby-trapped corpses with explosives before their withdrawal. Local residents said the dead people were civilians killed without provocation, a claim that could not be independently verified.

Klitschko called on other nations to immediately end Russian gas imports, saying they were funding the invasion of Ukraine, now in its 39th day.

"Not a penny should go to Russia anymore. That's bloody money used to slaughter people. The gas and oil embargo must come immediately," the mayor said.

Charles Michel, president of the European Council, wrote on Twitter that he was shocked by the "haunting images of atrocities committed by Russian army" in the capital region. The EU and non-governmental organizations were assisting in the effort to preserve evidence of war crimes, according to Michel, who promised "further EU sanctions" against Russia.

On Sunday morning, Russian forces launched an airstrike on the Black Sea port of Odesa, in southern Ukraine, sending up clouds of dark smoke that veiled parts of the city. The Russian military said the targets were an oil processing plant and fuel depots around Odesa, which is Ukraine's largest port and home to its navy.

"I live in that eight-floor building. At six in the morning,

Russia launched an attack, and this piece of rock reached my house," said Maiesienko Ilia, who lives near one of the targeted facilities.

The Odesa city council said Ukraine's air defense shot down some missiles before they hit the city. Ukrainian military spokesman Vladyslav Nazarov said there were no casualties from the attack.

The smaller port of Mariupol, located to the east on the Sea of Azov, remained cut off from the rest of the country as Russian and Ukrainian soldiers fought for control of the besieged city. About 100,000 civilians - less than a quarter of the prewar population of 430,000 - are believed to be trapped there with little or no food, water, fuel and medicine.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it hoped a team of nine staffers and three vehicles it sent Saturday to help evacuate residents would reach Mariupol on Sunday but cautioned, "The situation on the ground is volatile and subject to rapid changes."

Ukrainian authorities said Russia agreed days ago to allow safe passage from the city, which has been the site of some of the worst attacks and greatest suffering, but similar agreements have broken down repeatedly under continued shelling.

Mariupol is in the mostly Russian-speaking Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian troops for eight years. Its capture would create an unbroken land corridor from Russia to Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine

in 2014.

With Mariupol squarely in Russia's crosshairs, Ukraine insisted it had gained a leg up elsewhere in the country. As his country's troops retook territory north of the capital of Kyiv from departing Russian troops, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on all Ukrainians to do whatever they could "to foil the enemy's tactics and weaken its capabilities."

"Peace will not be the result of any decisions the enemy makes somewhere in Moscow. There is no need to entertain empty hopes that they will simply leave our land. We can only have peace by fighting," Zelenskyy said late Saturday.

Zelenskyy and Ukraine's Western allies believe Russia has shifted its forces from the capital region and the country's north in order to build strength in the east and south. The Ukrainian leader again urged the West to supply his military with warplanes and more anti-missile systems.

"Every Russian missile that hits our cities and every bomb dropped on our people, on our children, only adds black paint to the history that will describe everyone on whom the decision depended - the decision of whether to help Ukraine with modern weapons," Zelenskyy said.

While the geography of the battlefield morphed, little changed for many Ukrainians more than five weeks into a war that has sent more than 4 million people fleeing the country as refugees and displaced millions more from their homes.

The regional governor in Kharkiv, said Sunday that



Russian artillery and tanks performed over 20 strikes on Ukraine's second-largest city and its outskirts in the country's northeast over the past day. Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said a missile strike on the city of Lozovo wounded four people and that Russian tanks bombed a hospital in the town of Balakliia.

Zelenskyy alleged Saturday that Russian troops have left mines around homes, abandoned equipment and even the bodies of the dead as they withdraw from around Kyiv. Those claims could not be independently verified, but Ukrainian troops were seen heeding the warning.

In towns and cities surrounding Kyiv, signs of fierce fighting were everywhere in the wake of the Russian redeploy-

ment. Destroyed armored vehicles from both armies lay in streets and fields along with scattered military gear.

Ukrainian troops were stationed at the entrance to Antonov Airport in the suburb of Hostomel, demonstrating control of the runway that Russia tried to storm in the first days of the war.

Inside the compound, the Mriya, one of the biggest planes ever built, lay wrecked underneath a hangar pockmarked with holes from the February attack.

The head of Ukraine's delegation in talks with Russia said Moscow's negotiators informally agreed to most of a draft proposal discussed during face-to-face talks in Istanbul this week, but no written confirmation has been provided.

## Ukraine urges more sanctions on Russia over atrocities

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's top diplomat has called for tougher sanctions on Russia over growing evidence of a massacre of civilians in the suburbs of the Ukrainian capital Kyiv.

Ukrainian officials said earlier Sunday that scores of killed civilians have been found on the streets of Kyiv's suburbs of Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel after the withdrawal of Russian troops. They said that some of the victims were shot in the head and had their hands bound.

Ukrainian Foreign

Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweet-ed Sunday that the killings were "deliberate," adding that "Russians aim to eliminate as many Ukrainians as they can." He urged the West to impose an oil, gas and coal embargo, and close all ports to Russian vessels and goods.

He also called for all Russian banks to be disconnected from the SWIFT international payment system.

In Germany President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in Berlin that "the war crimes committed by Russia are visible before the eyes of the world."

## UK PM congratulates Ukrainian President over Kyiv pushback

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson congratulated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for successfully pushing back Russian forces from key regions in the country, including the capital city of Kyiv.

In a telephone call on Saturday evening amid reports of Ukrainian forces gaining control of Kyiv, Johnson noted that huge challenges remain in other parts of the country in the ongoing conflict with Russia.

Both leaders agreed on the importance of continuing to ratchet up sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin to increase the economic pressure on his "war machine".

"The Prime Minister spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy again this evening. He congratulated Ukraine's brave armed forces for successfully pushing back Russia's invading army in a number of areas, but recognised the huge challenges that remain and the immense suffering being inflicted on civilians," a Downing Street



spokesperson said.

"The Prime Minister updated President Zelenskyy on the progress made at last week's military donor conference, convened by the UK with 35 countries, and committed to continue to step up defensive support. President Zelenskyy underscored the urgency of Ukraine's fight for its survival as a free and democratic nation and the importance of international assistance," the spokesperson said.

Zelenskyy is also said to have updated Johnson on the status of peace negotiations and welcomed further UK involvement in the ongoing diplomatic efforts.

"Both leaders agreed on the importance of continuing to ratchet up sanctions to increase the economic pressure on Putin's war machine, so long as Russian troops remain on Ukrainian territory," the official added.

## Russia says too early for more Ukraine talks

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia's top negotiator in talks with Ukraine said it was too early to talk about a meeting between the two countries' president.

Vladimir Medinsky, who led the Russian delegation in Tuesday's talks in Istanbul, Turkey, said "there is still a lot of work to do" to finalise a draft agreement before Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy could meet. Speaking on Sunday in remarks carried by the Interfax news agency, Medinsky reaffirmed that the parties reached a tentative agreement on the need for Ukraine to adopt a neutral status and refrain from holding foreign military bases in exchange for international

security guarantees.

Asked about Ukrainian negotiator Davyd Arakhamia's claim that Moscow's negotiators had informally agreed to most proposals by Ukraine during the talks in Istanbul this week and the two presidents could discuss the draft deal, Medinsky said he did not share Arakhamia's optimism.

He said the talks will continue online on Monday.

Medinsky emphasised that Russia's stand on Crimea and rebel regions in Ukraine's east remained unchanged.

The Kremlin demands that Ukraine acknowledge Russia's sovereignty over Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014, and recognise the independence of Russia-backed separatist regions in Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland.

## Russian missiles strike oil plant near Odesa port

AP ■ LVIV

The Russian military on Sunday said it had struck an oil processing plant and fuel depots around the strategic Black Sea port of Odesa.

Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Maj.-Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Russian ships and aircraft on Sunday fired missiles to strike the facilities used to provide fuel to Ukrainian troops near Mykolaiv.

Konashenkov also said Russian strikes destroyed ammunition depots in Kostiantynivka and Khresyshche.

## Drug shortages persist in Russia after start of Ukraine war

AP ■ MOSCOW

First came the warnings, in messages among friends and families and on social media, to stock up on vital drugs in Russia before supplies were affected by crippling Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

Then, some drugs indeed became harder to find at pharmacies in Moscow and other cities.

"Not a single pharmacy in the city has it now," a resident of Kazan told The Associated Press in late March about a blood thinner her father needs.

Experts and health authorities in Russia say the drug shortages are temporary — due to panic-buying and logistical difficulties for suppliers from the sanctions — but some remain worried that high-quality medicines will keep disappearing in the Russian market.

"Most likely there will be shortages. How catastrophic it will be, I don't know," said Dr. Alexey Erlikh, head of the cardiac intensive care unit in Moscow Hospital No. 29, and a professor at the Moscow-based Pirogov Medical University.

Reports that Russians could not find certain medications in pharmacies started surfacing in early March, shortly after Moscow unleashed a war on Ukraine, and sweeping sanctions left Russia increasingly isolated from the rest of the world.

Patient's Monitor, a

patients' rights group in the Russian region of Dagestan on the Caspian Sea, began getting complaints in the second week of March.

Ziyautdin Uvaysov, head of the group, told AP he personally checked with several state-run pharmacies in the region on the availability of 10 most-wanted medications and "they didn't have a large number of these."

Uvaysov added that when he asked about when supplies would be restocked, the pharmacies replied that "there aren't any and it's unclear when there will be."

Despite assurances from authorities that hoarding of supplies was to blame for the quickly emptying shelves, reports about shortages persisted throughout March.

Vrachi.Rf, one of Russia's biggest online communities for medical workers, surveyed more than 3,000 doctors in mid-March, and they said they had run into shortages of more than 80 medications: anti-inflammatory, gastrointestinal, antiepileptic and anticonvulsant drugs, as well as antidepressants and antipsychotics.

About a dozen people contacted by the AP in different cities in late March said they had spent days searching for certain thyroid medications, types of insulin or even a popular pain-relieving syrup for children. Some said they were unable to find them at all.

"Patients I treat have lost some blood pressure medica-



tions," Erlikh said. "A number of doctors I know are reporting problems with certain very expensive, very important medications (used in) certain surgical procedures."

Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko has repeatedly given assurances that drug availability is not a problem in the country and has blamed any shortages on panic-buying.

He said the demand for certain drugs has spiked tenfold in recent weeks, and he has urged Russians not to hoard the medications.

Experts agree that panic-buying has played a role in creating drug shortages.

"People rushed to stock up, and in some cases, supplies that were supposed to last a year or a year and a half were bought out within a month," Nikolay Bespalov, development director of the RNC Pharma analytical company, told AP.

Bespalov also pointed to logistical problems that occurred early in the crisis. While major Western pharmaceutical companies pledged

not to withdraw vital medications from the Russian market, sanctions cut Russia's key banks from the SWIFT financial messaging system, hindering international payments. Dozens of countries halted air traffic with Russia, disrupting supply chains.

The expert stressed the logistical issues have been largely resolved, but panic-buying, prompted by fears that foreign companies will halt supplies, may continue fueling shortages for some time.

"Clearly, until the emotions calm down, it will continue," Bespalov said.

Local news sites — from Vladimir, just east of Moscow, to the Kemerovo region in Siberia — reported shortages of various medications in the final days of March amid continued panic-buying.

Russia's health care watchdog Roszdravnadzor, however, said in a statement Friday that "the situation on the drug market is gradually returning to normal, panic-buying of pharmaceuticals is decreasing."

**Directorate of Urban Local Bodies, Jammu**

Panama Chowk, Narwal Road, Adjoining Architect Organization (Near Canal)

Email : dlbjammu@gmail.com; Phone: 0191-2470051 Website : <https://jktenders.gov.in>

**Notice Inviting Tender (NIT)**

1. Director, Directorate of Urban Local Bodies, Jammu (DULBJ) invites online bids for the following works:  
NIT Reference No. :- DULBJ/NIT/11/2021-22  
Name of Project/ Work(s) :- Request for proposal for "Rate Contract for Empanelment of Agency for Supply & Installation of MRF Equipment for 36ULB's of Jammu Division."  
Cost of Document/ Tender Fee (Rs.) :- Rs. 1000/- (Rupees One Thousand)  
Contract Period :- 12 Months  
2. Important RFP timeline is as mentioned below:

Name of Project/Work(s)	Online availability of Tender for Bidding From To	Last Date & Time for Online Submission of Bid	Date & Time of opening of Bid
Request for proposal for "Rate Contract for Empanelment of Agency for Supply& Installation of MRF Equipment for 36 ULB's of Jammu Division."	29-03-2022 18:00 Hrs	19-04-2022 15:00 Hrs	19-04-2022 16:00 Hrs

3. Online Pre-Bid meeting schedule is as mentioned below:  
Request for proposal for "Rate Contract for Empanelment of Agency for Supply & Installation of MRF Equipment for 36ULB's of Jammu Division."  
Date: 08-04-2022; Time: 1500 Hrs  
Empanelment of Agency for Supply & Meeting Link: <https://meet.google.com/ata-cpci-wtu>

4. For additional details such as important date, detailed information, qualification and eligibility criteria, visit website <https://jktenders.gov.in> for downloading of RFP.

5. For participating in the above e-tender, the bidders shall have to get them registered with <https://jktenders.gov.in> and get user ID, password, Class 3, digital signatures Certificate (DSC) is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering process. For any clarification/ difficulty/ regarding e-tendering process bidders can contact on the given phone number 0191-2470051.

6. The bidders should keep checking the website for any addenda/corrigenda and the bidder should incorporate the same in their bid documents. No addenda/corrigenda shall be published in the newspaper.

Sd/- Director

Urban Local Bodies, Jammu

No. DIP/J-15046/21

Dated :- 31-03-2022

**FORM A**

**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT**

(Regulation 14 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Voluntary Liquidation Process) Regulations, 2017)

**FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE STAKEHOLDERS OF**

**TABLEAU SOFTWARE INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED**

1. Name of the Corporate Person	TABLEAU SOFTWARE INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED
2. Date of Incorporation of the Corporate Person	January 9, 2014
3. Authority under which Corporate Person is incorporated/ registered	Registrar of Companies, Delhi under the Companies Act, 2013
4. Corporate Identity Number of corporate person	U72300DL2014FTC263304
5. Address of the Registered Office and Principal Office (if any) of the Corporate Person	16/13, BASEMENT, WEST PATEL NAGAR, NEW DELHI 110008
6. Liquidation Commencement Date Of Corporate Person	March 31, 2022
7. Name, address, email address, telephone number and the registration number of the liquidator	<b>Vinod Sunder Raman</b> 318, 19 th Main, 41 st Cross, 5th Block, HSR Layout, Bengaluru 560043 Email: <a href="mailto:vinod@vrcconsulting.biz">vinod@vrcconsulting.biz</a> Telephone number +91-9845884410 Regn no. IBB/IIPA-002/IP-N00075/2017-2018/10206
8. Last date of Submission of Claims	April 30, 2022

Notice is hereby given that TABLEAU SOFTWARE INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED has commenced voluntary liquidation on March 31, 2022.  
The stakeholders of TABLEAU SOFTWARE INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED are hereby called upon to submit a proof of their claims, on or before April 30, 2022, to the liquidator at the address mentioned against item 7.  
The financial creditors shall submit their proof of claims by electronic means only. All other stakeholders may submit the proof of claims in person, by post or by electronic means.  
Submission of false or misleading proofs of claim shall attract penalties  
**Date: April 4, 2022**  
**Place: Bangalore**  

Vinod Sunder Raman

Liquidator of TABLEAU SOFTWARE INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED

Reg No. IBB/IIPA-002/IP-N00075/2017-2018/10206

## Lithuania cuts off Russian gas imports, urges EU to do same

AP ■ VILNIUS

In a move to break its energy independence upon Moscow, Lithuania has cut itself off entirely of gas imports from Russia, allegedly becoming the first of the European Union's 27 nations that use Russian gas to do so, a statement said.

"Seeking full energy independence from Russian gas, in response to Russia's energy blackmail in Europe and the war in Ukraine, Lithuania has completely abandoned Russian gas," Lithuania's energy ministry said in a statement on Saturday. According to the statement, the measure took effect in the beginning of April.

Lithuania managed to reduce imports of Russian gas to zero on Saturday, a move seen a milestone in achieving energy independence in the former Soviet republic of 2.8 million, the ministry said.

"We are the first EU country among Gazprom's supply countries to gain independence from Russian gas supplies, and this is the result of

a multi-year coherent energy policy and timely infrastructure decisions," Minister of Energy Dainius Kreivys said.

Lithuanian President posted an upbeat tweet on his account and urged other European nations to do the same.

"From this month on — no more Russian gas in Lithuania. Years ago, my country made decisions that today allow us with no pain to break energy ties with the aggressor. If we can do it, the rest of Europe can do it too!"

In 2015, nearly 100 per cent of Lithuania's gas supplies derived from imports of Russian gas but the situation has changed drastically over the past years after the country built an off-shore LNG import terminal, launched in 2014, in the port city of Klaipeda.

The energy ministry said from now on all gas for Lithuania's domestic consumption would be imported via Klaipeda's LNG terminal.

Last year, some 26 per cent of Lithuania's gas supplies derived

from deliveries from a Russian gas pipeline while 62 per cent came via Klaipeda's LNG terminal and the remaining 12 per cent were imported from a gas storage in neighbouring Latvia.

Baltic neighbours Latvia and Estonia are also heavily dependent on Russian gas but the operator of Latvia's natural gas storage said none of the three Baltic states were importing Russian gas as of April 2.

Uldis Bariss, the CEO of Conexus Baltic Grid, told Latvian media on Saturday that the Baltic gas market was currently being served by gas reserves stored underground in Latvia.

Last month, Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte said Klaipeda's LNG terminal wouldn't have enough capacity to provide gas for all the three Baltic countries.

As a solution, Estonia's government has proposed building a LNG terminal jointly with Latvia and Nordic neighbour Finland in the Estonian port city of Paldiski, which is not far from capital Tallinn.



# Pak PM sacks Punjab Guv; election of new CM deferred

**Lahore:** Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday sacked Punjab province's Governor Chaudhry Sarwar while the election of the new provincial chief minister has been deferred.

Following in the footsteps of the National Assembly, Punjab Assembly's Deputy Speaker Sardar Dost Muhammad Mazari, citing the "international conspiracy" to topple the Imran Khan government, refused to conduct election of the chief minister and deferred the session until April 6.

Later, the Speaker's office said that since there was ruckus

in the House, it deferred the proceedings to conduct the election of the chief minister.

Chaudhry Parvez Elahi was the candidate of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) coalition while the joint opposition's candidate was Hamza Shehbaz, who is the son of PML-N president and Opposition leader in National Assembly Shehbaz Sharif.

The Punjab Assembly session took place at the same time as the National Assembly session.

Earlier in the morning, Prime Minister Khan sacked Punjab governor Sarwar and

replaced him with Umar Sarfraz.

Sarwar, in a press conference, claimed to be in possession of "many secrets of Imran Khan", saying he should not force him to reveal them.

He said that Khan had selected an "inept chief minister Usman Buzdar" despite the Opposition from his party.

Sarwar said that Khan had asked him to convene the Punjab Assembly session at midnight in violation of the Constitution.

He further claimed that he had tendered his resignation two days ago. **PTI**

# Lankan Opp protest Govt's decision to impose state of emergency across country

**Colombo:** Defying curfew orders, lawmakers from Sri Lanka's principal opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) on Sunday staged an anti-government protest here against President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's move to impose a state of emergency and other restrictions amidst the worst economic crisis in the island nation.

A majority of Sri Lankans were unable to access social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram on Sunday after the Sri Lankan government decided to block them after they alleged that these were

being used to organise demonstrations against the government.

NetBlocks, a watchdog organisation that monitors cybersecurity and the governance of the Internet reported that real-time network data collected from over 100 vantage points across Sri Lanka showed restrictions coming into effect across multiple providers from midnight.

"We will protect #democracy in #SriLanka," opposition legislator Harsha de Silva said.

Opposition lawmakers marched towards Colombo's Independence Square, chanting slogans and carrying plac-

ards that read: "Stop Suppression" and "Gota go home."

Police officials set up barricades leading up to the Independence Square, which was built to commemorate Sri Lanka's independence in 1948.

Additionally, the Sri Lankan police on Sunday have arrested 664 persons in the country's Western Province for violating the curfew, the Colombo Page newspaper reported.

The arrests took place during an operation between 10 pm on Saturday night and 6 am this morning, the newspaper said, quoting police officials.

They said that more operations were being carried out across the country to nab people violating the curfew, the report said.

The Sri Lankan government on Saturday imposed a 36-hour curfew as a nationwide public emergency has been enforced ahead of a planned anti-government rally over the worst economic crisis in the island nation that has hit the common man badly.

The nation-wide curfew has been imposed with effect from 6 pm Saturday to 6 am Monday (April 4), the information department said.

President Rajapaksa has

given the directive under the Public Security Ordinance regulations, it said.

The move came as the island nation braced for country-wide protests on Sunday against the government's poor handling of the ongoing economic crisis where people currently endure long hours of power outages and scarcity of essentials. The imposition of curfew would prevent citizens from holding protests.

Rajapaksa issued a special gazette notification late on Friday night, declaring a public emergency in Sri Lanka with immediate effect from April 1. **AP**

# Talks on new UN climate report going down to wire

**Berlin:** Negotiations between scientists and governments over a key United Nations climate report were going down to the wire on Sunday as officials from major emerging economies insisted that it should recognise their right to development.

The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a UN-backed science body, is meant to show the paths by which the world can stay within the temperature limits agreed in the 2015 Paris accord.

The agreement aims to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) this century.

However, with temperatures already more than 1.1C higher than the pre-industrial baseline, many experts say that is only possible with drastic cuts to greenhouse gas emis-



sions.

The closed-doors meeting was meant to wrap up on Friday so that the report could be presented to the public on Monday.

But several observers, who spoke only on condition of anonymity because of the confidential nature of the proceedings, told The Associated Press that the talks were still far from finished with less than 24 hours to go before the publication deadline.

One senior climate scientist said about 70 per cent of the text had so far been agreed and there was still hope the negotiations might finish on Sunday.

India has emerged as a key voice pushing for recognition in the report that developing countries have contributed a far smaller share of the carbon dioxide emissions already in the atmosphere than industrialised nations and should therefore not need to make the

same steep cuts.

India, which remains heavily dependent on coal, also wants poor countries to receive significantly more financial support to cope with climate change and make the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Others, such as oil exporter Saudi Arabia, argue that fossil fuels will still be needed for decades to come and phasing them out too quickly could hurt the world's poorest.

The text being negotiated is a summary for policymakers that will serve as the basis for government talks at international climate meetings such as the upcoming UN summit in Egypt this fall.

The underlying science report outlining the world's progress in cutting emissions is not subject to negotiation, but it cannot be published until the summary is agreed. **AP**

# French far-Right leader Le Pen softens image for polls

**Paris:** French nationalist leader Marine Le Pen has softened her rhetoric and her image to broaden her appeal in next week's presidential election — but is under threat from a provocative rival who has broken her monopoly as the watchdog of the country's identity that they claim is under threat. For more than a decade, Le Pen has been known for her fierce anti-immigration stance, seeing herself as standing guard at the parapets of French civilisation.

She is now honing in on consumers' buying power, the top concern for voters.

"I obviously consider that immigration and insecurity are serious problems which need urgent answers, but there's not just that," said Le Pen, head of the National Rally party, during a TV show fea-

turing voters' questions.

"I worry about making ends meet as much as the end of France."

Meanwhile, Eric Zemmour, 63, a political novice running under the banner of his newly created Reconquest! party, is now portraying himself as the protector of old France, with bold proposals on immigration and Islam.

He has proposed a "Remigration Ministry", equipped with airplanes to expedite the expulsions of what he says are undesirable migrants.

Their rivalry illustrates France's increasing tilt toward the hard right and how that has set the agenda for the presidential election, held in two rounds on April 10 and 24.

While polls suggest centrist President Emmanuel Macron is

the front-runner, nearly half of respondents say they're ready to vote for a far-right candidate in the decisive runoff.

And that's despite the fact that Zemmour, a TV pundit who models himself after former US President Donald Trump, has been convicted three times of inciting racial or religious hatred.

Zemmour, who said he entered the race to "save France" has made the conspiracy theory known as the "great replacement" the centrepiece of his campaign.

The term evokes a false white supremacist claim that immigrants and other people of colour — notably Muslims — are supplanting natives of Western countries and will one day erase Christian civilisation. He recently alleged that without a stop to immigration,

France will become "an African nation, an Islamic nation" in 10-20 years.

A large majority of French people are white Catholics, and immigration evolution statistics contradict his claim.

Zemmour's political goal is to create a "union of the right", bringing together conservatives, including traditional Catholics, and far-right parties.

Le Pen, who also decries "migratory submersion" says her goal is the "union of France".

Polls of voters suggest that Le Pen's focus on pocketbook issues may be working. They show her consistently second to Macron, with Zemmour in third or fourth place. That could put her in a runoff against Macron, a repeat of their 2017 standoff, which she lost 66 per cent-34 per cent. **AP**

# First fuel ship allowed in Yemen's Hodeida as part of truce

**Cairo:** A tanker carrying badly needed fuel arrived in Yemen's blockaded port of Hodeida on Sunday, as a ceasefire meant to stop the fighting in the war-torn country for two months entered its first full day.

The truce agreement, which took effect on Saturday evening, allows for shipments of fuel to arrive in Hodeida and for passenger flights to resume from the airport in the capital of Sanaa. Both Hodeida and Sanaa are held by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

The agreement comes after a significant escalation in hostilities in recent weeks that saw the Houthis claim several attacks across the country's borders, targeting the UAE

and Saudi Arabia. Essam al-Motwakel, spokesman for the Houthi-run oil corporation, said the Saudi-led coalition allowed the vessel — carrying mazut, a low-quality fuel oil — into the port at Hodeida.

The port handles about 70 per cent of Yemen's commercial and humanitarian imports.

He called on UN envoy Hans Grundberg to work with the coalition and accelerate the arrival of other vessels to ease a longtime fuel crisis in Houthi-held areas.

During the two-month truce, the Saudi-led coalition will allow 18 vessels carrying fuel into the port of Hodeida, and two commercial flights a week from the Yemeni capital

to Jordan and Egypt, according to a copy of the truce obtained by The Associated Press.

The UN envoy has called for both sides to agree on opening roads around Taiz and other provinces, the ceasefire document said.

Taiz, which remains partially held by the forces fighting on behalf of the internationally recognised government, has been blockaded by the Houthis for years.

"The success of this initiative will depend on the warring parties' continued commitment to implementing the truce agreement with its accompanying humanitarian measures," Grundberg said on Saturday. **AP**

# Shanghai lockdown triggers complaints as Covid cases rise

**Beijing:** COVID-19 cases in China's largest city of Shanghai are still rising with millions isolated at home under a sweeping lockdown, as the draconian "zero tolerance" approach to the pandemic increasingly draws complaints from residents fed up with the restrictions.

Health officials on Sunday reported 438 confirmed cases over the previous 24 hours, along with 7,788 asymptomatic ones.

Both figures were up slightly from the day before, while the northeastern province of Jilin posted a combined 4,455 cases Sunday, also marking an increase from Saturday.

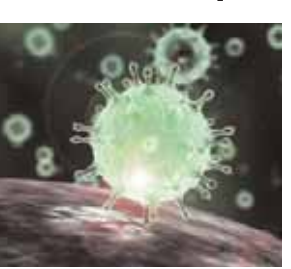
While small by the standards of some countries, the daily increases are some of the largest since the virus was first

detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Shanghai with its 26 million people last week began a two-stage lockdown, with residents of the eastern Pudong section supposed to be allowed to leave their homes Friday, while their neighbours in the western Puxi section underwent their own four-day isolation period.

Despite that assurance, millions in Pudong continue to be confined to their homes amid complaints over food deliveries and the availability of medications and health services.

Notices delivered to residents said they were required to self-test for COVID-19 daily and take precautions including wearing masks at home and avoiding contact with family members — measures not



widely enforced since the early days of the pandemic.

While Wuhan endured a 76-day lockdown in 2020 with relatively little complaint, Shanghai residents — many of whom were in isolation even before last week's lockdown began — appear to be growing increasingly fed up with the measures and methods being used to enforce them.

Although coverage in China's entirely state-controlled media remains overwhelming-

ly positive, complaints have been appearing online, including in the form of videos and sound recordings purporting to show heavy-handed practices by officials and volunteers and alleging that sound medical advice has been ignored in favour of political expediency.

"Whereas there was little societal resistance to the lockdown once it was imposed in Wuhan, resistance in Shanghai is palpable now," Dali Yang, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago tweeted on Sunday.

Given that the vast majority of cases in Shanghai are not life threatening, "it is not surprised that the imposition of the lockdown and forced quarantine of the infected in harsh conditions are meeting resistance," Yang tweeted.

A city official last week apologised in response to complaints over the government's handling of the lockdown, and a vice premier made sweeping demands for improvements during a tour of Shanghai on Saturday.

Sun Chunlan, who sits on the ruling Communist Party's Politburo, urged "resolute and swift moves to stem the spread of COVID-19 in Shanghai in the shortest time possible," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

However, Sun stressed "unswerving adherence" to China's hard-line "zero-COVID" approach, mandating lockdowns, forced isolation of all suspected cases and mass testing, even while acknowledging the social and economic toll that is taking. **AP**

# Bangladeshi woman professor says harassed by 'police officer' for wearing bindi

**Dhaka:** A woman professor of a private college in Bangladesh has alleged that she was harassed and threatened to kill by a "man in police uniform" for wearing a bindi, a media report said on Sunday.

Lota Sumaddaer, a theatre and media studies lecturer at Tejgaon College here, said that she has been feeling unsafe since the incident took place on Saturday morning near her college, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

In her complaint to the police, she said that a "police officer" on a parked motorcycle harassed her for wearing a bindi -- a decorative mark applied on the forehead by

women in the Indian subcontinent.

The professor said that she was "threatened" when she protested his "verbal abuse".

Sumaddaer said the "police officer" also tried to run her over with his bike when she protested. She then saved herself by quickly moving aside, but sustained some injuries as she fell on the street.

Senior officer of the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police station Utpal Barua said that the professor could not recall the name of the "police officer". However, she provided the registration number of his motorcycle. **PTI**

# S Korea's incoming Prez nominates his PM

**Seoul:** South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol on Sunday announced his intent to name a seasoned former prime minister and economic expert to serve as the country's No. 2 official under his incoming government.

Yoon's pick of Han Duck-soo for prime minister is the first major nomination in his government, which is set to be inaugurated on May 10. South Korea's executive power is concentrated with the president, but the prime minister leads the country if the president becomes incapacitated. The National Assembly must approve the president's choice.

Han, 72, held a string of top spots such as trade minister, finance minister and prime minister when South Korea was governed by back-to-back liberal presidents, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, from 1998 to 2003. During the next conservative government of President Lee Myung-bak, Han was South Korea's ambassador to the United States.

Yoon called Han "the right person" to lead his Cabinet citing his vast administrative experience at a time when South Korea faces "grave environments" at home and abroad. Han said he feels both honored and burdened by the nomination. Yoon, a conservative former top prosecutor who won the March 9 election, will replace current liberal President Moon Jae-in. Key tasks facing Yoon include how to revive pandemic-hit livelihoods, address runaway housing prices and income equality, and deal with North Korea's growing nuclear threats and an intensifying competition with the United States and China. **AP**

# 15 wounded in explosion in Af

**Kabul:** An explosion in the centre of the Afghan capital of Kabul on Sunday wounded at least 15 people, according to witnesses.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the blast and no one immediately claimed responsibility. Taliban authorities didn't immediately comment. Associated Press TV showed wounded being removed from the site, carried by passersby.

Wais Ahmad, a money changer, said the explosion happened inside a market where money changers operate. However, the market was closed at the time of the explosion.

The blast was the first in the Afghan capital in months. Afghanistan's Taliban rulers

have stepped up security throughout most of the country since sweeping to power in August.

Taliban troops man dozens of checkpoints throughout the city.

The greatest threat facing the Taliban comes from the Islamic State group affiliate known as Islamic State in Khorasan Province, or IS-K.

The Taliban have cracked down on the affiliate in its stronghold in eastern Afghanistan.

In a statement, IS-K said late Saturday they targeted a Taliban vehicle in Kabul, killing everyone inside the vehicle. However, there was no confirmation from the Taliban rulers or signs of an explosion on Saturday. **AP**

# Af Taliban Govt announces ban on poppy production

**Kabul:** Afghanistan's ruling Taliban announced a ban on Sunday on poppy production, even as farmers across the country began harvesting the bright red flower that produces the opium used to make heroin.

The order warns farmers that their crops will be burned and they can be jailed if they proceed with the harvest.

The ban is reminiscent of the Taliban's previous rule in the late 1990s when the religion-driven movement outlawed poppy production.

At that time, the ban was staggered and implemented countrywide within two years.

The UN verified that production had been eradicated in most of the country.

However, after their ouster in 2001 farmers in many parts of the country reportedly



plowed over their wheat fields — which had been almost impossible to bring to market because of the lack of roads and infrastructure — and returned to poppy production.

During the last years of the Taliban rule, wheat was rotting in fields because the farmers were unable to bring it to market to be sold and ground into flour. **AP**

# Daniel Craig tests positive for Covid

**Los Angeles:** "No Time To Die" star Daniel Craig is among one of the members of the Broadway production of "Macbeth" to have tested positive for COVID-19, following which performances of the show been cancelled through April 7. According to The Hollywood Reporter, the positive diagnosis results were detected among the company on Saturday.

"Performances of MACBETH on Broadway are being cancelled through Thursday, April 7th due to the detection of

a limited number of positive covid test results within the company," the statement on Macbeth On Broadway's official Instagram page read.

The production also offered an apology for the inconvenience caused to the ticket holders.

"All tickets for the cancelled performances will be refunded at the original point of purchase," they said.

Initially, show cancellations were limited to a matinee and evening performance on April 2,

which was announced on the production's Twitter account. "Macbeth" began previews on March 29 and will officially open on April 28 for a 15-week limited engagement at the Longacre Theatre, New York. This adaptation of the classic Shakespearean drama is directed by Tony Award winner Sam Gold. Former Bond actor Craig stars in the play opposite Oscar-nominee Ruth Negga in her Broadway debut.

Phillip James Brannon, Grantham Coleman, Asia Kate

Dillon, Maria Dizzia, Amber Gray, Emeka Guindo, Paul Lazar, Bobbi MacKenzie, Michael Patrick Thornton and Danny Wolohan are also part of the cast.

The ensemble is rounded out by Che Ayende, Eboni Flowers and Peter Smith, with Stevie Ray Dallimore serving as the standby for Craig.

The show is produced by Bond movies producer Barbara Broccoli, The Shubert Organization, Michael G Wilson, and Frederick Zollo. **PTI**

# Serbs vote in triple election set to keep populists in power

**Belgrade:** Voters in Serbia cast ballots Sunday in a triple election likely to keep in power a populist government in the Balkan country that has refused to impose sanctions on Russia over the war in Ukraine.

Some 6.5 million voters are choosing the president, a new parliament and local authorities in the capital, Belgrade, and over a dozen other towns and municipalities.

Opinion surveys ahead of the vote have predicted that President Aleksandar Vucic will win another five-year term and that his right-wing Serbian

Progressive Party will yet again dominate the 250-member assembly. But opposition groups stand a chance to win the majority in Belgrade, analysts say. This would deal a serious blow to the populists' decade-old unchallenged rule in Serbia.

Vucic, a former ultranationalist who has boasted of close ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, has sought to portray himself as a guarantor of stability amid the turmoil raging in Europe.

In a country that went through a series of wars in the

1990s and a NATO bombing in 1999, fears of a conflict spilling over have played into Vucic's hands. Though Serbia is formally seeking European Union entry, Vucic has fostered close ties with Russia and China, counting on the Serbs' resentment of the West over the NATO air war.

Serbia has supported a U.N. Resolution that condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but Belgrade has not joined the sanctions against Moscow, a historic Slavic ally.

Beleaguered opposition groups have also mostly

refrained from publicly advocating a tougher line on Moscow. Russia has supported Serbia's claim on Kosovo, a former province that declared Western-backed independence in 2008. After boycotting the previous vote in 2020, main opposition parties have said this vote is also far from free and fair because of Vucic's domination over the mainstream media and the state institutions. Vucic's main opponent in the presidential election comes from a centrist-conservative coalition, United for Victory of Serbia. **AP**



# India exports rise to record high of \$418 bn in FY22

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's merchandise exports spurted to a record high of \$418 billion in the 2021-22 fiscal on higher shipments of petroleum products, engineering goods, gem and jewellery and chemicals, according to official data released on Sunday. Outbound shipments touched an all-time high of \$40 billion in a month in March 2022, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal told reporters here. Exports stood at \$34 billion in March 2021. Merchandise exports were worth \$292 billion in FY2020-

21. India's merchandise exports had breached the targeted \$400 billion mark on March 23 this year. The key export sectors, which contributed to record healthy growth, include petroleum products, engineering, gems and jewellery, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. The top five export destinations are the US, UAE, China, Bangladesh and the Netherlands. Hailing the country's success in achieving the goods export target, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that this is a key milestone in India's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' journey.

# India on cusp of major eco recovery; talks of stagflation 'overhyped': Niti Aayog VC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is on the cusp of a major economic recovery and talks of possible stagflation are "overhyped" as a strong economic foundation is being laid with the reforms carried out by the government over the last seven years, Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar said on Sunday.

Notwithstanding economic uncertainties triggered by the Russia-Ukraine war that is also impacting global supply chains, Kumar asserted that it was quite clear from all accounts that India will remain the fastest growing economy in the world.

"Given all the reforms that we have done in the last seven years, and given that we are seeing the end of the COVID-19 pandemic hopefully, and the 7.8 per cent rate of growth that we will get this year (2022-23), a very strong foundation is now being laid for further rapid increase in economic growth in the coming years," Kumar told PTI in an interview.

Asia's third-largest economy is projected to grow 8.9 per cent in 2021-22, according to recent government data. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has pegged the economic growth rate for 2022-23 at 7.8 per cent.

"So, I think India is on the cusp of a major economic recovery and economic growth," Kumar said even as he acknowledged that because of the Russia-Ukraine war, India's GDP growth projection could be revised. "But even then, India will remain the fastest growing economy and all the other economic parameters are actually quite within the range," he said.

Russia started its military offensive against Ukraine on February 24. Western nations, including the US, have imposed major economic and various other sanctions on Russia following the offensive.

On rising inflation, the Niti Aayog Vice Chairman said that RBI is keeping a close watch as per its mandate.

"I am sure that the RBI is well in control of it (inflation) and will take the necessary steps if and when required," he said. Retail inflation hit an eight-month high of 6.07 per cent in February, remaining above the RBI's comfort level for the second month in a row while wholesale price-based inflation soared to 13.11 per cent on account of hardening of crude oil and non-food item

has increased from 7,05,344 units in March last year. Inventory overhang, which is defined as estimated time period builders likely to take to sell off their unsold stock based on current sales velocity, has declined to 42 months as against 47 months a year ago, primarily because of higher demand for housing.

Delhi NCR has the highest inventory overhang while Bengaluru and Kolkata have lowest. According to data, the unsold housing stocks stood at 62,602 in Ahmedabad with an inventory overhang of 42 months. Bengaluru and Kolkata have unsold stocks at 66,151 units and 23,850 units as of March 31, 2022. Builders in

# Petrol above ₹100 in major cities

# Diesel crosses ₹100 in MP, AP, Raj in less than 2 weeks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Petrol prices on Sunday were above ₹100 a litre mark in all major cities across the country after its rates and that of diesel were hiked by 80 paise a litre each - the 11th increase in less than two weeks that took the total to a record ₹8 per litre.

Petrol in Delhi will now cost ₹103.41 per litre as against ₹102.61 previously while diesel rates have gone up from ₹93.87 per litre to ₹94.67, according to a price notification of state fuel retailers. Rates have been increased across the country and vary from state to state, depending upon the incidence of local taxation.

This is the 11th increase in prices since the ending of a four-and-half-month long hiatus in rate revision on March 22. In all, petrol prices have gone up by ₹8.00 per litre.

Petrol prices are above ₹100 a litre mark in all major cities from Srinagar to Kochi.

Diesel is above that mark in Thiruvananthapuram (₹101.83 a litre), Hyderabad (₹103.3), Mumbai (₹102.62), Bhubaneswar (₹100.1), Raipur (₹100.74) and several cities of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Telengana and Andhra Pradesh.

Diesel rates in Chennai and Bhopal are above Rs 99 per litre. Diesel is the costliest in Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh (₹105.52 a litre), while petrol at ₹120.65 a litre is the costliest at the border town of Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan. Prices had been on a freeze

since November 4 ahead of the assembly elections in states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab -- a period during which the cost of raw material (crude oil) soared by about USD 30 per barrel.

The rate revision was expected soon after the counting of votes on March 10 but it was put off by a couple of weeks.

The increase in retail price warranted by crude oil prices rising during the 137-day hiatus is huge, but state-owned fuel retailers Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) are passing on the required increase in stages.

Moody's Investors Services last month stated that state retailers together lost around USD 2.25 billion (₹19,000 crore) in revenue for keeping petrol and diesel prices on hold during the election period. Oil companies "will need to raise diesel prices by ₹13.1-24.9 per litre and ₹10.6-22.3 a litre on gasoline (petrol) at an underlying crude price of USD 100-120 per barrel," according to Kotak Institutional Equities.

Crisil Research said a ₹9-12 per litre increase in retail price will be required for a full pass-through of an average USD 100 per barrel crude oil and ₹15-20 a litre hike if the average crude oil price rises to USD 110-120. India is 85 per cent dependent on imports for meeting its oil needs and so retail rates adjust accordingly to the global movement.

# Foreign investors withdraw ₹41,000 cr in March on Fed rate hike anticipation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing their selling spree for the sixth consecutive month, foreign investors pulled out a massive ₹41,000 crore from the Indian equity market in March on anticipation of rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve and deteriorating geopolitical environment amid the Russia-Ukraine war.

Further, flows from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) are expected to remain volatile in the near term given the headwinds in terms of elevated crude prices and inflation, experts said. According to data available with the depositories, FPIs were net sellers to the tune of ₹41,123 crore in the equity market last month. This was way higher than net withdrawals of ₹35,592 crore in February and ₹33,303 crore in

January. Foreign investors have been withdrawing money from equities since the last six months, pulling out a net ₹1.48 lakh crore between October 2021 and March 2022.

Commenting on the latest outflow, Atanu Aggarwal, co-founder, UpsideAI, said "the primary reason remains the changing interest rate environment and the Fed's signal to end the stimulus."

"There are multiple other reasons -- India is expensive, crude has shot up, INR is weak, Russia-Ukraine conflict leads to flight to safety. But all things being equal, if the Fed had signalled a delay in raising rates, we may not have seen a sale of this scale," he added. Making similar arguments, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India, said the outflows can be attrib-

# ONGC to see \$3bn rise in earnings, Reliance \$.15 bn from gas price hike

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is likely to see a \$3 billion (about ₹23,000 crore) rise in its annual earnings from the more than doubling of the price of natural gas it produces, while Reliance Industries may get \$1.5 billion (₹11,500 crore) more in revenue, a report has said.

The government from April 1 increased the gas price paid to producers of oil and regulated fields from \$2.9 per million British thermal units to \$6.10, a record high. For difficult fields, such as deepsea fields of Reliance, the price has gone up by 62 per cent to \$9.92 per mmbtu.

"A three-pronged deficit in oil markets (inventory, capex and spare capacity) combined with rising domestic gas production after nearly a decade of declines sets the stage for a super-cycle in profitability," Morgan Stanley said in a note.

Gas accounts for 58 per cent of domestic gas production for ONGC and every \$1 per mmbtu change in gas price affects ONGC's earnings by 5-8 per cent. "We foresee \$3 billion earnings increase in FY23 (April 2022 to March 2023) and, more importantly,

improving ROCE to above 20 per cent after more than a decade," it said. Gas prices for difficult fields (deepwater, ultra-deepwater and high-pressure high-temperature areas) have risen by USD 3.8 per mmbtu to \$9.9 and will be applicable to ONGC's production from KG-DWN-98/2, which is expected to contribute about 14 per cent of domestic gas production by FY24.

Reliance's gas production from its deepsea KG-D6 field has reached 18 million standard cubic meters per day, which is expected to increase to 27 mmscmd by FY24 (March 2024), with a ramp-up in production from new and existing clusters.

"We expect \$1.5 billion earnings increase with gas price hikes in F23," it said. Morgan Stanley predicted a further hike of 25 per cent in the next revision scheduled for October 2022 as tight supplies keep four global benchmark prices at elevated levels. India fixes domestic gas rates based on a formula using prices in the previous 12 months at global gas hubs NBP, Henry Hub, Alberta and Russia Gas. In a note, IIFL said that despite the price reset, domestic gas prices are lower than

landed prices of imported LNG by 45-50 per cent. "Political will be tested in 2HFY23 (October 2022 to March 2023), when a similar price rise is expected."

The gas price hike bodes well for ONGC, OIL and Reliance, which account for the bulk of domestic gas production in India. Hetal Gandhi, Director, Crisil Research said with the improvement in investments in production infrastructure, domestically produced gas currently helps meet almost 50 per cent of the annual domestic demand.

Basis an allocation system followed by the government, the city gas distribution sector (including CNG and domestic PNG), fertilisers and power are the main recipients of domestic gas. "The hike is expected to impact city gas distribution (CGD) entities as it will push up domestic prices of CNG and piped natural gas to kitchens. We do not expect any substantial demand erosion from the transportation sector as CNG will still be competitive compared with petrol and diesel. We also expect domestic PNG to remain competitive vis-a-vis domestic LPG despite any price hike. However, margins of CGD entities will be

impacted significantly, contracting by 300 bps in fiscal 2023," he said. Higher gas prices will also swell the government's fertiliser subsidy bill further from ₹14,000 crore last fiscal, which saw a significant increase.

"The hike, coming at a time when relations between Russia and Europe on gas supply have deteriorated, will be monitorable for natural gas prices and, thereby, the imported portion of the fuel, which impacts sectors such as industrial PNG, refineries and petrochemicals," he added. IIFL said fertiliser subsidy will go up, while gas-based power producers are at risk of being mothballed unless electricity boards purchase the expensive power (variable cost of ₹4 a unit).

"While to remain margin neutral, CGD companies need to raise CNG prices by Rs 12-14 per kg, hikes to us are likely to be gradual," it said, adding that even post this surge, CNG will be cheaper than diesel/petrol by 35-50 per cent, on a running cost basis. The higher realisation for difficult fields should encourage operators, such as Reliance and ONGC, to fast-track their deep-water production schedules, IIFL added.

# 'Wheat exports likely to cross 100 lakh tonnes'

## India in talks to start wheat export to countries like Egypt, Turkey, China and Iran

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's wheat exports are likely to cross 100 lakh tonnes (10 million tonnes) during 2022-23, due to increasing demand for the commodity in the world market.

India is in final talks to start wheat export to Egypt, while discussions are going on with countries like China, Turkey, China and Iran to begin the outbound shipments of the commodity. Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal informed this on Sunday.

The exports have crossed 70 lakh tonnes in 2021-22 (worth over ₹15,000 crore) as against 21.55 lakh tonnes (over ₹4,000 crore) in 2020-21. It was only two lakh tonnes (₹500 crore) in 2019-20.

The minister said wheat exports have helped several countries in meeting the requirements of food security. "We will continue to export wheat in a big way and meet the needs of the countries that are not getting their supplies from the conflict areas, and my own sense is that this time we

will probably exceed our wheat exports (of) over 100 lakh tonnes comfortably," he said. Russia and Ukraine together account for almost a quarter of the global wheat supply. Their wheat crop will mature in August and September this year. Farmers are focused on increasing production also, and regions like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh are exporting in a big way from last year, he added.

Officials said the external affairs ministry is being roped in to help with government-to-government orders, whereas the shipping ministry is being asked for warehousing facilities at ports and preference for wheat consignments.

Director-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said that there is also an effort on the part of the departments of commerce and food and public distribution to facilitate exports from other ports. Maximum exports are routed through Kandla port.

Discussions are on with railways for facilitation of wheat exports from different ports, such as Vizag, Kakinada, and Nhava Sheva, Sarangi added. India exports wheat mainly to neighbouring countries, with Bangladesh having the largest share of more than 54% in both volume and value terms in 2020-21. It has entered new wheat markets such as Yemen, Afghanistan, Qatar and

Indonesia. The consumer affairs, food and public distribution ministry is working to provide adequate storage facilities at five or more ports identified by the Central Warehousing Corporation.

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), a body under the commerce department, has set up a 15-member task group including representatives of various states to draw up a roadmap for promoting wheat exports.

Wheat exports to Bangladesh have crossed 3.5 million tonnes in 2021-22. The top ten importing countries for Indian wheat in 2020-21 were Bangladesh, Nepal, United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Afghanistan, Qatar, Indonesia, Oman and Malaysia. India accounts for even less than 1 per cent of world wheat export. However, its share has increased from 0.14 per cent in 2016 to 0.54 per cent in 2020. India is the second-largest producer of wheat. It had contributed around 14.14% of the world's total production in 2020.

India produces around 107.59 million tonnes of wheat annually, while a major chunk of it goes towards domestic consumption. Major wheat growing states in India are Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Gujarat.

# Peak power demand up 12% at 198.47 GW, may cross 200 GW-mark in April

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day rose by 12 per cent to 198.47 GW on April 1 compared to the year-ago same day, showing impact of early onset of summer and improvement in commercial and industrial consumption after easing of lockdown curbs by states.

According to the power ministry data, the peak power demand met was 177.20 GW on April 1, 2021. The data shows that during the entire month of April in 2021, the peak power demand was recorded at 182.37 GW. It was 132.73 GW in April 2020, a tad lower than 176.81 GW in April 2019. Experts are of the view that the quantum jump in peak power demand met shows recovery of economic activities through rising commercial and industrial demand of electricity especially after easing of

lockdown restrictions by states for curbing coronavirus infections.

They also stated that apart from surge in economic activities, the early onset of summer has too perked up the demand for power as people especially in the northern part of the country have started using desert coolers and air conditioners to beat the scorching heat especially during the day. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had said on Thursday that there would not be any respite from heat in the coming months.

Northwest and central India and parts of the northeast are expected to experience above-normal maximum temperatures in April, the weather department had said. The power demand was affected in April 2020 mainly due to lockdown restrictions imposed in view of rising coronavirus infections in the country.

# Mcap of top-10 valued firms soars ₹2.61 lakh crore; HDFC Bank, RIL lead gainers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The top 10 valued domestic firms added a whopping ₹2,61,767.61 crore to their total market valuation last week in tandem with a buoyant trend in equities, with HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries emerging as biggest gainers.

Last week, the Sensex zoomed 1,914.49 points or 3.33 per cent. From top-10 pack, the market valuation of HDFC Bank zoomed ₹41,469.24 crore to reach ₹8,35,324.84 crore. Reliance Industries added ₹39,073.7 crore to take its valuation to ₹17,95,709.10 crore.

The market valuation of Hindustan Unilever Limited jumped ₹29,687.09 crore to ₹4,88,808.97 crore and that of Bharti Airtel zoomed ₹27,103.16 crore to ₹4,16,625.19 crore. HDFC added ₹26,851.9 crore to ₹4,44,363.28 crore in its valuation.



# HOCKEY JR WOMEN'S WC: INDIA STUN GERMANY, SEAL QF BERTH

PTI ■ POTCHEFSTROOM

The Indian women's hockey team stunned formidable Germany 2-1 to register its second consecutive win in pool stages and assure its place in the quarterfinals of the FIH Junior World Cup here on Sunday.

India, who thrashed a lowly Wales 5-1 in its opening Pool D match on Saturday, scored through two penalty corner conversions by Lalremisiami (2nd minute) and Mumtaz Khan (25th) to emerge winners. Germany's lone goal was scored by Jule Bleuel in the 57th minute.

The Indian will finish off their pool engagements against Malaysia on April 5 before the quarterfinal round which starts on April 8.

The Indians are currently atop Pool D with two wins from as many games ahead of second-placed Germany. Two teams each from pools will qualify for the knock-out rounds.

Against Germany, the Indians took the lead as early as in the second minute when Lalremisiami scored from a rebound after Deepika's dragflick from a penalty corner was saved by German goalkeeper Mali Wichmann.

Thereafter, Germany proceedings and earned a handful of penalty corners by putting relentless pressure on the Indian defence, which stood firm.

India goalkeeper Bichu Devi Karibam had an excellent match as she not only denied the Germans from penalty corners on number of occasions but also pulled off a brilliant save to keep out a penalty stroke



by Jette Fleschutz in the second quarter. The Indians mostly relied on counter attacks and from one such move secured back-to-back penalty corners, the second of which was deflected in by Mumtaz in the 25th minute.

The Germans were the attacking side for major part of the first half but have been wasteful in converting penalty corners as they wasted as many as six set pieces.

The Indians, on other hand, scored from two of the three penalty corners they managed in the first two quarters.

Down by two goals, the Germans continued to attack after the change of ends but as has been the case they failed to find the back of the Indian net despite creating numerous chances.

The Indians also upped their game a bit in the fourth and final quarter, making inroads into German circle on quite a few occasions but to no avail.

Germany lived up the game three minutes from the final hooter through a reverse hit field goal by Bleuel.

But the Indian defence did enough in the remaining minutes of the game to pocket full points from the game.

The quadrennial tournament, which was originally scheduled for last December, was postponed due to the threat posed by the omicron variant of COVID-19 in South Africa.

India, who have appeared in four editions of the junior global event, claimed their best finish in 2013 with a bronze. The team did not qualify for the previous edition.

## Lazio beats Sassuolo 2-1; Spezia wins relegation battle



AP ■ MILAN

Lazio boosted its bid for a European spot and put its derby nightmare behind it after a comfortable 2-1 win over Sassuolo in Serie A.

Manuel Lazzari and Sergej Milinkovic-Savic scored to send Lazio to fifth, a point above Atalanta and Roma, who play on Sunday.

An unmarked Hamed Traorè pulled one back for Sassuolo deep into stoppage time on Saturday.

Lazio was still reeling from a hefty 3-0 defeat to city rival Roma before the international break. That had a negative effect on attendance, too, with less than 20,000 fans at the Stadio Olimpico.

It was also a poor moment for team captain Ciro Immobile, who has received a lot of criticism following Italy's failure to qualify for the World Cup because of his poor scoring record for the Azzurri.

### RELEGATION BATTLE

Spezia celebrated wildly after a last-gasp goal earned what could prove to be a crucial 1-0 win over fellow strugg-

ler Venezia.

Venezia - as it has done on several occasions this season - gifted the goal to Spezia when visiting defender Mattia Caldara's header went straight to Rey Manaj. His attempt was saved by Venezia goalkeeper Niki Maenpää but Emanuel Gyasi bundled in the winner in the fourth minute of stoppage time.

Spezia moved 10 points above the relegation zone. Venezia remained three points from safety.

Bottom club Salernitana lost at mid-table Torino 1-0 after Andrea Belotti converted a penalty at the second time of asking.

Torino was awarded its first penalty of the season when Belotti was pulled down by Salernitana defender Federico Fazio. Belotti's spot kick was saved by Luigi Sepe but he was told to retake it after encroachment. He fired towards the same corner and this time Sepe went the other way.

Fazio was sent off five minutes from fulltime following a second yellow card for another foul on Belotti, who also hit the post in stoppage time.

Salernitana remained nine points from safety.

## Kenya's Jeptum breaks women's record at Paris marathon

AP ■ PARIS

Judith Jeptum of Kenya broke the Paris marathon record while Deso Gelmisa of Ethiopia won the men's race on Sunday.

Jeptum finished the 42.2-kilometer (26.2-mile) race in 2 hours, 19 minutes and 48 seconds in chilly conditions with a temperature of 2 degrees Celsius (36 degrees Fahrenheit) at the start of the event.

The 2021 Abu Dhabi marathon winner pulled away in the 28th kilometer to run a personal best and break the course record of 2:20:55 set by Purity Rionoripo of Kenya in 2017. Fantu Jimma of Ethiopia was second, more than three minutes behind Jeptum. Her compatriot Besu Sado, a former



1,500-meter runner, completed the podium. American runner Lindsay Flanagan, who was seventh in the 2019 Chicago marathon, finished 10th in 2:26:54, a personal best.

In the men's race, Gelmisa outprinted fellow countryman and 2021 Chicago marathon winner Seifu Tura to finish in

2:05:07. Frenchman Morhad Amdouni, the 2018 European champion in the 10,000 meters, took third place in 2:05:22 to break the French record set by Benoit Zwierniewski in 2003.

The fastest man in the field, Asefa Mengstu of Ethiopia, finished 10th, more than three minutes behind Gelmisa.

## Wrestlers to undergo three-month camp at SAI centres ahead of CWG and Asiad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic medallists Ravi Kumar Dahiya, Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik will be among a host of top wrestlers who will undergo a three-month training camp at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Sonepat and Lucknow centres to prepare for this year's Commonwealth Games and Asian Games.

A total of 124



wrestlers (freestyle and greco-roman), 23 coaches and support staff will participate in the camp which started on April 1 and is set to continue till

June 30. While 75 men wrestlers will train at SAI Sonepat, 49 women grapplers will be based at SAI Lucknow.

Other high-profile wrestlers who will be part of the camps are world championships bronze medallists Anshu Malik and Vineesh Phogat.

According to a SAI statement, the camps will consist of athletes who recently won the selection trials for the upcoming Asian Championship, winners of the Open National Ranking Tournament and the medallists of last year's Senior Nationals.

## India's Minakshi bows out of Thailand Open after close defeat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Minakshi bowed out of the Thailand Open after a close first-round defeat to local boxer Jutamas Jitpong in the women's 51kg event in Phuket on Sunday.

Minakshi fell short in a hard-fought bout as the boxer from Thailand won by a 3-2 split verdict.

In the first round, both the boxers played from a distance and gauged each other's strategy before upping the ante in the second round, which saw a lot of clinching and exchange of punches.

The final round witnessed some fierce and attacking boxing between both the pugilists. Minakshi landed some clear punches but that was not enough in the end.

Six Indian boxers, including five women, will be in action on Monday.

In the women's section, Monika (48kg) will face two-time world championships medallist Josie Gabuco of the Philippines in the opening round, while Renu (54kg)



will square off against Sirine Charaabi of Italy.

The 2019 Asian Championships bronze medallist Manisha (57kg) will take on Pornpit Buapa of Thailand, while Monika (63kg) and Bhagyabati Kachari (75kg) will be up against locals Panpatchara Somnuek and Pornnipa Chuttee respectively.

Last edition's gold medallist Ashish Kumar will

open his campaign against local boxer Aphisit Khankhokhruea in the 81kg quarterfinals. It will be the Indian's first international tournament since the Tokyo Olympics.

In the last edition of the Thailand Open, held in 2019, the Indian contingent signed off with a haul of eight medals, including one gold, four silver and three bronze.

## Shuttler Mithun enters final at Orleans Masters Super 100

PTI ■ ORLEANS (FRANCE)

India's Mithun Manjunath made it to his maiden Super 100 final with a straight-game win over Indonesia's Christian Adinata at the Orleans Masters badminton tournament here.

The 23-year-old, a product of the Prakash Padukone Badminton academy, Manjunath prevailed 21-18 21-14 over Adinata in a 47-minute showdown at the Palais des Sports here late on Saturday night.

The world No. 79, who had reached the semi-finals of Syed Modi International Super 300 event and quarter-finals of Odisha Super 100 in January, will next face fourth seeded local hope Toma Junior Popov, who is ranked world No. 32, in the summit clash.

It was a tight battle with Manjunath and Adinata moving neck and neck initially before the Indian managed to go three-points up at the interval. However, the Indonesian came back to level the scores at 16-16.

Manjunath then stepped



up his game and grabbed five points on the trot to earn the bragging rights.

The second game also started on an equal footing but Manjunath managed to lead 11-9 at the break and then kept his nose ahead to eventually seal the contest in 47 minutes.

In other results, women's doubles pair of Ashwini Bhat K. And Shikha Gautam put up a gallant fight before going

down 16-21, 21-18, 22-24 to Germany's Stine Kuspert and Emma Moszczynski in the semifinals. Manjunath has been impressive throughout the tournament as he stunned world No. 22 Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus of Denmark in the quarterfinals to keep the Indian flag fluttering following the early exit of top seed B Sai Praneeeth.

Manjunath claimed four

All-India ranking titles, including the All India Senior Ranking Badminton tournament in December last year.

The shuttler from Bengaluru was rated highly during his junior days and he also had one or two odd performances in the circuit like reaching the quarters at 2018 Czech Open and back-to-back semi-finals finishes at Vietnam Open and Russian Open in 2018.

## Iga Swiatek to be new World No.1 after beating Naomi Osaka in Miami



AP ■ MIAMI

Iga Swiatek continued her wonderful start to 2022, beating Naomi Osaka 6-4 6-0 to win the women's title at the Miami Open and extend her winning streak to 17 matches.

Swiatek will replace the now-retired Ashleigh Barty at number one in the women's rankings when the points are updated on Monday.

Swiatek broke Osaka for a 3-2 lead in the first set on Saturday, hanging on from there to win a 52-minute set that saw the opening game - on Osaka's serve - feature seven deuces and go for 10 minutes.

The second set was a completely different story as Swiatek finished off her ninth consecutive straight-sets victory.

It was her third title of 2022 and her sixth consecutive win in a final, a streak that started at the delayed French Open in 2020.



# PBKS beat CSK by 54 runs

Dashing Livingstone, rookie Arora star in Punjab Kings’ 54-run win against CSK

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Twenty20 nomad Liam Livingstone justified his Rs 11.50 crore price-tag with a smashing all-round show while rookie seamer Vaibhav Arora announced his arrival on the big stage during Punjab Kings’ comfortable 54-run decimation of Chennai Super Kings in an IPL match here on Sunday.

Livingstone with a 32-ball-60 laid the platform but Chennai Super Kings bowlers made a brilliant comeback as if he owned the stage, dismissing Robin Uthappa and Moeen Ali with CSK managing only 126 in 18 overs at the end of the chase.

After his batting, Livingstone (3-0-25-2) then became man with a “golden wrist” as his leg breaks got him a couple of wickets and he also took the final catch to cap off a dream night.

This is CSK’s third defeat in as many games and unless Deepak Chahar makes a speedy comeback, things aren’t looking great for the ‘Yellow Brigade’ and its de-facto



skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni. A couple of more defeats could really put them under huge pressure and within a sniffing distance of point of no return.

Arora got good support from his former SD College Chandigarh teammate Arshdeep Singh (2/13 in 2 overs) during the initial period in which his skipper Agarwal bowled him out. Rahul Chahar (3/25 in 4 overs) was steady during back-10 and his three wickets included the wicket of Dhoni. Arora didn’t do anything fancy apart from pitching it fuller with the hint of away seam movement occasionally.

Uthappa tried a flick while

balls), who did entertain the Brabourne crowd with lusty blows but it was always a game of catch-up for them.

Dhoni’s oft-documented struggles didn’t do any good for CSK either as Dube had too much to do in too little time.

Fittingly, it was Livingstone, who capped off a fine day, removing Dube with an away going delivery and then dived full stretched off his own bowling to remove Dwayne Bravo.

Before his exploits with the ball, Livingstone, one of the most destructive T20 batters across global leagues, finally came good with five fours and an equal number of sixes, sending the CSK bowlers on a leather-hunt during the initial overs.

Deepak Chahar’s absence has severely handicapped Dhoni’s (the ‘real skipper’) options as rookie left-arm seamer Mukesh Choudhary (4-0-52-1) paid dearly for his inexperience coupled with jangling nerves. There were 100 metre plus sixes off length balls and Livingstone would often shimmy down the track to disturb the length as he did with the wily Bravo. Even the thick edges went for six with CSK bowlers looking clueless till he was there at the crease.

# LSG relying on batting prowess to come good against Sunrisers

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Their campaign back on track after a poor start, new entrants Lucknow Super Giants will rely on their batting prowess to get past Sunrisers Hyderabad in an Indian Premier League match here on Monday.

LSG did not have the best start to their debut season, losing by five wickets against fellow IPL debutants Gujarat Titans.

But they roared back in style by beating defending champions Chennai Super Kings six wickets in a high-scoring affair in their second match.

In skipper KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock, LSG boast of formidable opening pair, and they proved their worth against CSK by scoring 40 and 61 in a 99-run first-wicket stand.

West Indian Evin Lewis smashed unbeaten 55 off 23 balls in a steep chase of 211 against CSK while, in Deepak Hooda, LSG possess a dependable middle-order batter.

Young Ayush Badoni, who has taken the ongoing IPL by storm with his six hitting prowess, is a treat to watch and would be looking to carry on his fine form.

Badoni struck an 41-ball 54 in his IPL debut against Titans and followed it up with yet another entertaining nine-ball unbeaten 19-run knock against CSK.

But the form of Manish Pandey will be a cause of concern for LSG, who also boasts of hard-hitting all-rounders like Krunal Pandya and Jason Holder among others.

On the bowling front, Avesh Khan, Sri Lankan Dushmantha Chameera, Andrew Tye and Ravi Bishnoi were the main wicket-takers for LSG in the two matches so far, but they need to be more disciplined to contain the run flow.

Sunrisers, on the other hand, were blown away by the batting effort of Rajasthan Royals in a 61-run defeat in their opening match.

Comprising a mediocre squad, Sunrisers players need to punch above their weight.

Lucknow Super Giants

KL Rahul (captain), Manan Vohra, Evin Lewis, Manish Pandey, Quinton De Kock, Ravi Bishnoi, Dushmantha Chameera, Shahbaz Nadeem, Mohsin Khan, Mayank Yadav, Ankit Rajpoot, Avesh Khan, Andrew Tye, Marcus Stoinis, Kyle Mayers, Karan Sharma, Krishnappa Gowtham, Ayush Badoni, Deepak Hooda, Krunal Pandya, Jason Holder.

Sunrisers Hyderabad

Kane Williamson (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Rahul Tripathi, Aiden Markram, Nicholas Pooran, Abdul Samad, Priyam Garg, Vishnu Vinod, Glenn Phillips, R Samarth, Shashank Singh, Washington Sundar, Romario Shepherd, Marco Jansen, J Suchith, Shreyas Gopal, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Sean Abbott, Kartik Tyagi, Saurabh Tiwary, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Umran Malik, T Natarajan.

# B’desh fights back in 1st test, SA 157-5

AP ■ DURBAN

Bangladesh dragged itself back into contention in the first test by taking four wickets for 32 runs to leave South Africa teetering on 157-5 at tea on the fourth day on Sunday.

South Africa appeared set for a big lead after going to lunch on 105-1 in its second innings to move 174 runs ahead with plenty of wickets in hand.

But Bangladesh roared back in the afternoon and South Africa’s lead was precarious at 226 with just the tailenders to come.

Pacer Taskin Ahmed got South Africa captain Dean Elgar lbw for 64 soon after lunch for the critical breakthrough.

Spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz added two wickets and Bangladesh could have been in an even better position but for two dropped catches to twice let Wiaan Mulder off the hook in the space of six balls.

At tea, Mulder was 6 not out and Ryan Rickelton, who is on his test debut, was 18 not out with him.

South Africa made 367 batting first at Kingsmead and Bangladesh was 298 all out in reply. Bangladesh’s bowlers had just one breakthrough in the day’s first session after South Africa resumed on 6-0. Ebadot Hossain had Sarel Erwee lbw for 8 after Bangladesh successfully reviewed. South Africa scored 99 runs and lost just one wicket in the first session, but managed just 52 runs for the loss of four wickets in the second session to indicate how Bangladesh had changed the complexion.

# Bid for cricket’s inclusion in Olympics is about getting exposure in non-popular markets: ICC CEO

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

ICC CEO Geoff Allardice on Sunday said the ICC’s bid for cricket’s inclusion at the Olympics is not aimed at making money but it’s about taking the sport to non-cricketing markets to grow its global reach.

Allardice made the statement following the ICC’s push for inclusion of the sport in the Olympics after women’s T20 cricket is set to make its debut at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

The men’s competition has already made its debut at the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur. “In many of our members, being seen as an Olympic sport and having an association with the government and the national Olympic movement is something that is going to be really beneficial in terms of facilities and high-performance assistance,” Allardice was quoted as saying in SEN Radio show ‘This Is Your Journey -



thanks to Tobin Brothers.’

“It’s certainly not a money-making exercise from our point of view, it’s about getting exposure for cricket in markets where we may not be popular.

“And the other one is about giving all of our 106 members the opportunity to engage more closely with their governments.”

The ICC top official said being a part of the Olympics is key to building strong relationship with respective governments in many of its member nations.

“In some countries, being an Olympic sport gets you closer to your government than not being an Olympic sport,” Allardice said.

The ICC had last year confirmed its intention to bid for cricket’s inclusion in the Olympic Games and is working towards becoming a part of the Olympic family for the 2028 Los Angeles, 2032 Brisbane Games and beyond.

# Dravid will do remarkable job as India coach, says Ganguly



PTI ■ KOLKATA

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly believes his former teammate Rahul Dravid has all the attributes for becoming successful in his current role as the coach of the Indian cricket team. Ganguly feels Dravid’s “intense, meticulous and professional” attitude are just the ingredients a coach needs to be successful in the high-pressure India job.

“He (Dravid) is as intense, as meticulous and as profes-

sional as he was during his playing days,” the former India captain said on the sidelines of a promotional event here on Saturday. “The only difference is that now he does not have to bat at No. 3 for India which I feel was harder since he had to face the best bowlers of the world which he also did exceptionally well for a long period of time,” he added. “As a coach also he (Dravid) will do a remarkable job as he honest and he has the talent.

Being the BCCI chief, Ganguly was instrumental in roping in Dravid as India coach, replacing Ravi Shastri after the T20 World Cup last year. “He will make mistakes as everybody does but as long as you try doing the right things you will achieve success more than others,” Ganguly said.

# CJI N V Ramana inaugurates CJI-XI vs SCBA-XI cricket match

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India N V Ramana on Sunday inaugurated a T-20 cricket match here which the CJI-XI won by defeating the SCBA-XI by 72 runs.

The CJI inaugurated the match by facing a few deliveries bowled by Vikas Singh, senior advocate and president of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA).

In the match, which was played at Modern School ground here, the CJI-XI batted first after winning the toss and scored 160 runs for the loss of four wickets in allotted 20 overs.

Chasing the target of 161, the SCBA team were all out for 88 in 12.4 overs.

# Nortje is 4-5 spells away from being match ready, says Ponting



PTI ■ PUNE

Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting feels South African pacer Anrich Nortje is just a couple of spells away from being match ready and expressed optimism over his availability for their next IPL game against Lucknow Super Giants on April 7.

Nortje has been out of competitive cricket since last

November’s T20 World Cup due to a back and hip injury.

“Nortje bowled 100% this morning (Saturday) in the warm-ups. He has to get through another maybe four or five-over spell at 100% capacity and then I think if he gets clearance from Cricket South Africa, he should be right to go.

“We have got a few more days before our next game, so hopefully he is available for selection for that one,” Ponting said at the virtual post-match press conference after losing by 14 runs against Gujarat Titans here on Saturday night.

Asked about the availability of Australian duo of David Warner and Mitchell Marsh, who is nursing a hip injury, Ponting said: “David Warner has arrived in

Mumbai. He left early yesterday morning I believe, so he should be there when we get back to Mumbai tonight.

“Mitchell Marsh has been in Mumbai for a few days, obviously getting his quarantine done. I think he might be out of quarantine tomorrow actually,” he said.

“We are hoping that he (Marsh) is going to be available for the game on 10th (against Kolkata Knight Riders). He picked up that slight hip flexor strain in Pakistan. So we need to get a lot of treatment work into him and obviously a few good training sessions before he is available for selection.

“But fingers crossed, Davey should be there for the next game and Mitch Marsh for the game after.”

# Riding on Healy special, Australia annex record-extending seventh WC title

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

Australia bossed their way to a record-extending seventh Women’s World Cup title with a crushing 71-run win over traditional rivals England, stamping their undisputed dominance in the tournament after a breathtaking hundred from Alyssa Healy in the final here on Sunday.

Playing the innings of her life, Healy put England attack to sword with a sensational 170 off 138 balls that powered Australia to a massive 356 for five.

Defending champions England needed something more than special to pull off the record chase but kept losing wickets throughout the innings which ended at 285 in 43.4

overs.

Natalie Sciver, who scored an unbeaten 148 off 121 balls for her second successive hundred against Australia in the competition, eventually ran out of partners.

Australian pacer Megan Schutt (2/42) bowled a brilliant new ball spell removing last match centurion Danielle Wyatt (4) and Tammy Beaumont (27) with her lethal in-swingers before leg-spinner Alana King (3/64) turned the ball on a batting beauty to end with three crucial wickets including that of England skipper Heather Knight (26).

Healy, who was dropped on 41, toyed with the English attack in her mesmerising knock, which is now the highest-ever



Australian players celebrate defeating Eng in the final of the ICC Women’s Cricket WC match in Christchurch, NZ

AP/PTI

individual score in a World Cup final across men’s and women’s cricket.

Adam Gilchrist (149, 2007), Sciver (148 in this game), Ricky Ponting (140, 2003) and Viv Richards (138, 1979) are behind Healy in the elite list.

Healey’s opening partner Rachael Haynes (68 off 93) and Beth Mooney (62 off 47) also batted with confidence as Australia put on board the highest team total in a World Cup final in women’s cricket and second-highest behind the Australian men’s team’s effort of 359 for two against India in 2003. To put Australia’s achievement in perspective, it was their sixth win in seven World Cup finals, making Meg Lanning’s unit one of the greatest teams of

all time. Australia had won their first trophy on points back in 1973.

Though England ended runners-up, it was still a remarkable campaign for the defending champions that came into the final after five wins in a row following defeats in its first three games. They always had run rate under control in the massive chase but the lack of partnerships cost them the game.

Sciver, who smashed 15 fours and a six in her epic knock, fought till the end alongside number 10 batter Charlotte Dean (21 off 24) but they were left to do too much in the end. The duo shared a 65 run-stand for the ninth wicket to take the game deep. Earlier, Healy forged a 160-run stand with Haynes

before sharing 156-runs with left-handed Mooney who was sent in ahead of skipper Meg Lanning to maintain the left and right combination.

A packed and a neutral crowd at Hagley Oval was in for a treat with Healy showing devastating form en route to her second consecutive hundred in the knock-out stage, having scored 129 against West Indies in the semifinal.

Healy flaunted her 360 range of strokes in a sensational effort, scoring runs at will against a bowling line-up that had no answer to her brilliance.

For the major part of her innings, Healy exposed all her stumps to make room for herself and hit bowlers over the mid-off fielder.